

Cyclist pedalling support for completion of Trans Canada Trail



Following a rally in Penticton on Friday, Edmund Aunger prepares to set out on the next leg of his marathon bike trip.

Joe Fries/Western News

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One year after his wife was killed on a cycling trip, an Alberta man has again taken to the road to carry out her wish to see completion of the Trans Canada Trail.

The Trans Canada Trail was conceived in 1992 as a 25-year plan to build a non-motorized link, using a mix of new and existing trails, right across the country.

With just five years to go, B.C. alone still has 721 kilometres left to do, according to Edmund Aunger, 64, who visited Penticton on Friday to rally support for his cause.

“Some people think it’s a federal government project,” said Aunger, “but roads and highways and trails are provincial matter, so nothing is going to happen without provincial leadership.”

In most provinces, however, “including B.C., there’s a real lack of provincial leadership, and they leave it to the municipalities and the regional districts to do something.”

Aunger, a retired University of Alberta political science professor, has planned a five-year series of summer rides across Canada that will end on the same day and spot his wife, Elizabeth Sovis, was killed.

The two discovered cycling later in life and decided to attempt the Prince Edward Island portion of the Trans Canada Trail, because it was the first stretch completed. Neither felt comfortable cycling on roads, so they were also glad to see the P.E.I. route billed as among the safest anywhere.

On July 14, 2012, however, the two had no choice but to venture four kilometres off the trail on a two-lane highway to reach a bed-and-breakfast where they planned to spend the night. Halfway to their destination, Sovis was struck and killed by a drunk driver.

She had intended to spend her retirement, due to begin July 1, 2013, riding the trail and pushing governments to complete the 17,000-kilometre route.

Sovis envisioned the trail as “someplace you can go where you (can feel) safe and not have to be an Olympic athlete to cycle on it,” Aunger said, adding he’s committed now to making that a reality.

The first leg in his five-year series began in Victoria on July 1 and is expected to end in Edmonton on August 25. He maintains a five-days-on, two-days-off schedule and spent his most recent break in Penticton.

Throughout the ride, he’s planned rallies at which he’ll share his message and encourage people to visit his website [to sign an online petition](#). Doing so will also trigger emails to Premier Christy Clark and two ministers.

Aunger wants Clark to publish an action plan to outline how her government will complete the B.C. portion of the trail by 2017. He also wants to province to give priority to rerouting the trail in areas where it joins highways, like between Penticton and Summerland.

Penticton MLA Dan Ashton noted the South Okanagan has benefitted from recent improvements to the KVR Trail, which forms part of the Trans Canada Trail, and is confident the Liberal government will find a way to get all of the B.C. portion done.

“I know that there are opportunities that will come forward in the future,” Ashton said. “The Trans Canada Trail is a wonderful entity for the whole country.”