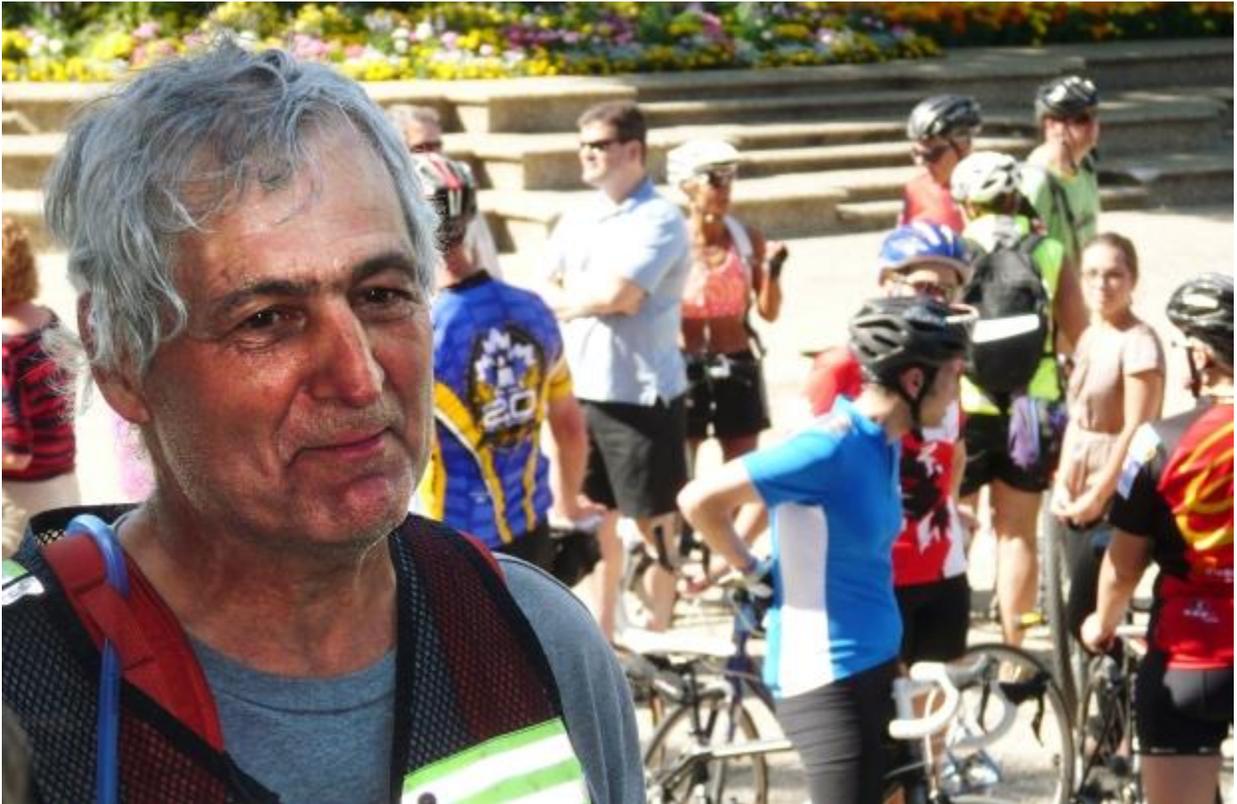


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Husband of cyclist killed in PEI calls for Trans Canada Trail plan

Rides in support of wife's dream of safer biking routes

By Cailynn Klingbeil, Edmonton Journal August 25, 2013



Edmonton's Edmund Aunger, whose wife, Elizabeth Sovis, was killed last summer while cycling in PEI, is calling on the Alberta government to keep its promise to build the Trans Canada Trail. He spoke at a rally at the legislature grounds in Edmonton on Sunday, August 25, 2013. Photograph by: Bruce Edwards, Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - An Edmonton man whose wife was killed last summer while cycling in Prince Edward Island urged Albertans attending a rally Sunday to help support his wife's dream of safer cycling trails.

Every summer for more than a decade, Edmund Aunger, 64, and his wife Elizabeth Sovis, 63, spent their vacations on cycling tours, often riding on the Trans Canada Trail.

For Sovis, who didn't like to cycle in traffic, the trail meant safety. The couple ventured onto roads only when absolutely necessary, Aunger said.

Sovis was a strong advocate for the Trans Canada Trail, which will stretch nearly 24,000 kilometres through every province and territory when it's completed in time for Canada's 150th birthday celebrations in 2017.

But the couple's cycling trips had taken them to parts of the trail system that were impassable and incomplete.

Sovis planned to work on the development of the trail in Alberta after she retired, and had begun recruiting friends to support her project.

Last July, a drunk driver hit and killed Sovis as the couple cycled in Prince Edward Island.

Aunger and Sovis had been riding along the Trans Canada Trail when they discovered the only route to their bed and breakfast was a two-lane highway with no paved shoulders. They had ridden only 2.5 kilometres on that road when Sovis was killed.

Now Aunger is advocating for cycling safety on his wife's behalf, and is urging the province to adopt an action plan to ensure completion of the Trans Canada Trail in Alberta by July 1, 2017.

"We need a plan. Without a plan, it won't get done," Aunger told about 100 people gathered outside the Alberta Legislature building Sunday afternoon.

The rally marked the end of a cycling trip that began July 1 in Victoria, B.C., the same day Sovis was set to retire and start her project.

Aunger plans to ride the Trans Canada Trail in five summers, raising money along the way and promoting the completion of a trail that will be accessible, passable and safe.

Alberta has one of the worst records in Canada for building the trail, Aunger said Sunday, with only 44 per cent of the proposed 2,100 kilometres of land trail complete.

Aunger invited Richard Starke, Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, to speak at the rally and explain the government's plans to finish the trail.

Ashley Warnock, Starke's press secretary, said the minister was travelling Sunday and unable to attend.

"We understand and respect and admire (Aunger's) passion to making the trail safe for cyclists," she said, adding the government supports the trail through Alberta TrailNet Society, a non-profit organization.

David Parker and Margaret Marean joined Aunger for 33 days of his cycling trip. Marean was Sovis's best friend, and the couples had cycled together in Ireland, Quebec and Alberta.

“I think (Elizabeth) would be really pleased that her dream is moving forward,” Marean said. “A lot of times, it felt like she was with us on the trail, there to keep us safe.”

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