

## The Trans Canada tour – biker makes Yorkton stop



EDMUND AUNGER stopped in Yorkton recently as part of his effort to ride the Trans Canada Trail and work to complete the project. He says that the trail within Saskatchewan is in dire need of a provincial government plan to get it up to spec and safe for riders.

**AUGUST 14, 2014**

**DEVIN WILGER**

In 2012, Elizabeth Sovis was killed on a PEI highway after being struck by a drunk driver. She was there because of a gap in the Trans Canada Trail, the biking trail originally announced with the intent of linking the country together with paths for biking and hiking. Now her husband Edmund Aunger is taking up her cause and working to raise awareness of the current state of the Trans Canada Trail. Aunger is lobbying to get governments involved to finish the system. He has been riding part of the trail each year, this year biking from Edmonton, AB, to Winnipeg, MB. Last week he stopped in Yorkton along his journey.

Aunger says that he and his wife were always enthusiastic supporters of the Trans Canada Trail project, because they enjoyed walking and biking. They felt it was a great thing for the country to have a trail system. He says his wife's plan, after retirement, was to spend the first few years working to get the trail system complete in Alberta, where they lived.

"Safety was huge for my wife, because she wanted a place where she could walk and ride her bike safely and did not want to go anywhere there were motorized vehicles."

They made the decision to vacation in PEI because it was the most complete system, Aunger details, but on the first day they had to travel on a highway with no shoulders in order to reach their destination.

They only made it ten minutes before she was struck by traffic.

"I have to do it for her, because this was her project, but I have to do it for myself. I have to find some meaning in my life and do something for her, that's what it boils down to."

The trail is in a bad state, Aunger says, especially in Saskatchewan. With only 500km of the 1,500km target met, Aunger says the province is the worst in the country for actually building and maintaining the trail.

One of the main problems is a lack of resources allocated to maintaining and building the trail, whether it's money or manpower, with the majority of the burden placed on municipalities Aunger says. The Yorkton area is representative of that problem, while he praises the city for having a beautifully maintained and marked trail within city limits, he says the trail just a short distance away at York Lake is unusable.

"It's an overgrown nature trail, it's marshy, the grass is up to my chest, you can't see it, it would be hard with my hiking boots on but it's impossible with my bike," Aunger says.

This inconsistency shows that each part of the trail is being left up to the municipalities to maintain and develop, Aunger says, which is not an acceptable way to build and maintain a national trail network.

"The province should be putting planning and money into this project, they shouldn't be asking municipalities to carry the burden," Aunger says.

He says that among the Canadian provinces, Saskatchewan has the worst network as far as completion goes, and he is calling on the provincial government to take leadership in the Trans Canada Trail program.

"Usually when there is a complete failure, as there is in the province of Saskatchewan for building the Trans Canada Trail, it is usually, I believe, a failure of the provincial government. There is a complete indifference, if not hostility, towards the Trans Canada Trail on the part of the provincial government."

Aunger is raising money through the ride, and \$25,000 has been raised through the ride. However his focus has changed to lobbying the provincial and federal governments of Canada to put more effort into getting the trail complete.

"I realize it's not a question of money, people have donated lots of money, but it can't be done by individual donations. The Trans Canada highway was not built by people with shovels and private donations. The provincial governments have to plan this and they have to put their resources and legislative powers at work to get this done."

He invites people to sign a petition at [www.ridethetrail.ca](http://www.ridethetrail.ca) to call on the government to complete the trail.