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# Rough ride on the TC trail

By [Ben Leeson](#), Sudbury Star



Photo supplied. An improvised bridge on the Kelly Lake Trail was a bit of trick to traverse for cyclist Edmund Auger

An Alberta man whose wife was killed while cycling the Trans Canada Trail in Prince Edward Island four years ago has serious concerns about the safety and accessibility of the Sudbury section of the trail.

Edmund Auger lauded the "herculean efforts" of the Rainbow Routes Association to build the 93-kilometre Sudbury section of the trail, but said the undertaking is too big for volunteers.

"Volunteers lack the financial resources and the physical capacity and the political power necessary to accomplish an ambitious trans-Canada project of this magnitude," Aunger said in a press release issued last Tuesday. "It requires much more than eager workers with hand shovels and gravel buckets. As with the construction of the Trans-Canada Highway, the federal government needs to establish minimum standards and then provide money directly to the provinces to get the job done."

Aunger, 67, made a rest stop in Sudbury last week while cycling the fourth leg of a 12,500-kilometre bicycle journey, riding the Trans Canada Trail from Victoria, B.C. to Charlottetown, P.E.I. in honour of his wife, Elizabeth Sovis, who was killed on the first day of a cycling holiday on July 14, 2012.

"She wanted to see a Trans Canada Trail that was a true greenway, not a motorized roadway," Aunger recalled. "She complained bitterly that the existing trail was not only incomplete, it was often inaccessible and unsafe. And she was right."

They carefully followed the province's guidebook, Aunger said, which led them from a hard-packed gravel trail to a two-lane highway.

"Several minutes later, she was struck by a full-size van. The impact threw her body 50 metres."

In Sovis' memory, Aunger is working to restore the trail's "original objectives."

"When it was first announced in 1992, the goal was to get pedestrians and cyclists off dangerous roadways, and away from motorized vehicles," he said.

But now, Aunger said, 45 per cent of the land-based trail is on roads and highways and around 30 per cent is used by off-road motor vehicles.

"This is absolutely perverse," Aunger said.

When he pedalled the 340-kilometre Trans Canada Trail route from Sault Ste. Marie to Sudbury, he said he was forced to ride almost entirely on roads and highways.

Even when shoulders of Highway 17 are widened, he said, "who would be crazy enough to take their family on a walk or a bicycle ride along a highway?"

Once in Greater Sudbury, Aunger rode the Kelly Lake Trail, north of the Trans Canada Trail Pavilion in Fielding Memorial Park. He was not impressed with its condition.

The trail is off-road, but Aunger said it took more than two hours to cycle four kilometres "up and down rocky ruts and through shallow ponds."

"It's spectacular, but it doesn't meet the standards for a national spine trail."

Aunger's campaign, Ride the Trail for Elizabeth, calls on the Ontario government to intervene and, in collaboration with the federal government, to set minimum standards for the trail, abandon "a 24,000-kilometre maze of roads, ruts and rivers," and build "an 8,000-kilometre cross-country trail that is safe and accessible and passable."

It all comes down to funding, said Ursula Sauve, president of Rainbow Routes. While new money may be available to build trails, she said, the group cannot use it to fix previously built sections.

Once trails are planned, developed and built, the city operates and maintains them.

Sauve actually encountered Aunger on the trail last week and rode with him for a time, so she was aware of his concerns and said she shares many of them.

"The section from Fielding Park right through to Southview (Drive), it's really in bad shape," Sauve said. "I cycle it once in a while and it's easier to walk than to cycle. Some sections are very difficult to cycle and Edmund had his bike and all the packs, a very heavy bike, so some sections were very difficult to cycle. Along Kelly Lake Road, that section is really wet and muddy. It would need boardwalks and there's just no money to retrofit. This is a project in the making since the late '90s and some of those trails would really need to be retrofitted – boardwalks rot away, gravel needs to be replaced, there are washouts and erosion."

She also shares Aunger's concerns about places where the trail meets roads or streets. In the city, the trail crosses several streets in residential areas, and even busy thoroughfares such as Regent Street, but there are no crossings for cyclists or pedestrians.

"Some of the sections are very challenging," Sauve said. "It's not a safe, smooth ride throughout. Certain sections are great and other sections are really not safe."

Daniel Barrette, executive director for Rainbow Routes, agreed that the trail in Sudbury, as in other communities, is a work in progress.

"We're one of the players in trying to make the vision happen of connecting everything," Barrette said. "The approach that was done by TCT national was to work with local partners to establish it, which is a good thing, because we're the people who know the connections that are needed the most and who have an idea of the lay of the land. Now, the goal is to connect it, but by no means is that the end product."

"Now that the connections are taking place and things are moving along, there's still a lot of work that needs to be done to develop more greenways where possible and enhancing it so it becomes a better experience."

Barrette hopes the city's plan to hire an active transportation coordinator will help in developing better, safer infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians.

Sauve said city council has not always been so committed to developing and maintaining trails in the city, but she believes the current mayor and council are moving in the right direction, citing their recent allocation of money for trail-building.

Addressing trail standards will take a concerted effort, she said, from the city, province and federal government.

"Some provinces are much further ahead than others," Sauve said. "Ontario is just slowly coming on board with providing funding for cycling infrastructure, but it seems like things are moving in the right direction. Sudbury has always been lagging behind other cities, and even though the new council says they are trying to change things, it's a very slow process."