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Aunger on a mission to make cyclists safe

ROB DRAL, The Standard

UXBRIDGE: An Alberta man is on a mission to make cycling safer for everyone. Edmund Aunger is embarking on a 12,500 km cross-country journey from Victoria, British Columbia, to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, to raise awareness of the dangers cyclists face when riding the Trans Canada Trail.

Mr. Aunger's wife, Elizabeth Sovis, was killed four years ago, in a tragic cycling accident. The trail took them off hard-packed gravel onto a two-lane roadway. Minutes later, Elizabeth was hit by a full-size van.

"She wanted to see a Trans Canada Trail that was a true greenway, not a motorized roadway," said Mr. Aunger, in a press release. He dubbed his awareness campaign, "Ride the Trail for Elizabeth."

The original plan for the Trans Canada Trail, when it was first released in 1992, was to get pedestrians and cyclists off dangerous roadways, away from motorized vehicles. "I have taken up her cause, and I am working to restore the trail's original objectives," said Mr. Aunger.

Recently, Mr. Aunger made his way through Uxbridge and met with Uxbridge Mayor, Gerri Lynn O'Connor. Mr. Aunger told The Standard, while he applauds the efforts of the mayor, he understands the commitment, the Township has to do what is best for the local community, which can sometimes be at odds with what is best Nationally.

Recently, a group of cyclists presented a plan to Uxbridge Council, outlining their desire to expand the current cycling trail, deeper into the heart of Uxbridge, to promote the town, and bring in more tourists. This cycling plan consists of more roadway trails, on busy high-speed roads. The group plans to educate the community, about the dangers of sharing trails with motorized vehicles, and wants to add more signs to highlight potential danger zones. "The Trans Canada Trail was originally meant for everyone, not just avid cyclists. They even wanted it to be wheelchair accessible," said Mr. Aunger. He reiterates the trail should be separate from the road, and the public should not just accept this is the way it is.

One idea Mr. Aunger proposed, when speaking to The Standard, was to connect the Trans Canada Trail next to the railway system.

Mr. Aunger believes it is time for the Federal government to work with the Provinces to produce a united plan of action. "The Federal government needs to step in and work with the provinces and set certain standards for the trail, that must be followed, just like they did with the Trans Canada Highway," said Mr. Aunger.

His cross-country journey has already garnered the support of one Senator and he hopes his campaign can draw more attention to the cause. “If the public wants to help, I urge them to contact their local MPP’s and let them know they want to see real changes to the Trans Canada Trail. I am the voice of the general population that wants to use the trail,” said Mr. Aunger.

Mr. Aunger was in Tweed, Ontario, when speaking to The Standard. You can follow up with him and learn more about his cause, at www.ridethetrail.ca.