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Cyclist tells people NOT to ride the Trans Canada Trail



With much of the trail following the shoulders of busy highways, Edmund Auger says the trail is dangerous and should not be promoted as a tourist attraction.

Edmund Auger has a message for anyone thinking about coming to Canada this year to cycle the Trans Canada Trail: "Do not come!" The trail is supposed to be completed by July 1, 2017, just in time for Canada's 150th birthday, but Auger fears it isn't what people expect it to be, based on misleading advertising. Much of the trail is along the shoulders of highways, with motor vehicles racing past at dangerous speeds. It is not safe.

In an interview with CBC radio host Jim Brown, Aunger, an avid cyclist and political science professor at the University of Alberta, explained how the original intent for the trail was to provide a safe transportation network for non-motorized travelers – cyclists, runners, and hikers in summertime, cross-country skiers in winter. Canadians realized the importance of having non-motorized trails after a horrific cycling accident in 1985 killed three children and injured six others.

Unfortunately, what's now being touted as the Trans Canada Trail, or "The Great Trail," has strayed dangerously far from its original vision.

"[The current trail] is 8,500 kilometres (5,280 miles) of roads and highways, it is 5,000 kilometres (3,100 mi) of ATV trails, it is 7,000 kilometres (4,350 mi) of waterways including Lake Superior. Of course you can't walk and ride your bicycle in it, and people who walk or cycle through that area still have to go on the Trans-Canada Highway. This, compared to the dream and the promises that were made, this is absolutely horrible."

If anyone understands the dangers of mixing cars and bicycles, it is Aunger. On July 14, 2012, his wife Elizabeth was struck and killed by a vehicle while cycling on a highway in Prince Edward Island. She had always refused to ride on roads, saying they were far too dangerous, but when their guide suddenly left the trail and took them onto a highway, they had no choice but to ride the short 2.9-kilometer (1.8 mile) distance to reach the next section of trail. Within minutes, Elizabeth was dead.

Aunger is completing a cross-country cycling trip this summer, traveling the final leg from Ottawa to Charlottetown, PEI. (He divided it up into five stages over five years.) He cycles in honor of Elizabeth and to promote a safe, accessible, and consistently passable trail. His website, RideTheTrail.ca, states:

"Elizabeth believed passionately in the dream of a cross-country greenway that would ensure safe travel, connect diverse communities, foster healthy lifestyles, preserve green space and encourage active transportation."

Aunger continues to be an outspoken critic of the trail, which he thinks failed because there was no government oversight; its construction was left to volunteers, which would never be done for highways or other important transportation infrastructure. He is petitioning the government to create minimum standards for safety and quality on the Trans Canada Trail, and to ensure that it is a "genuinely non-motorized and world-class greenway."

You can add your name to the petition here. Learn more at www.ridethetrail.ca, where you can also find a heart-wrenching blog post containing driver excuses for striking cyclists.

© The Great Trail — PR team is working overtime to keep up its image as a safe, welcoming destination.