

Times & Transcript  
Moncton, New Brunswick. July 10, 2017

## Cyclist rallying for safer Trans Canada Trail after wife's death

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Edmund Aunger gets ready to pedal away from Moncton City Hall on Monday. Aunger stopped in Moncton on his cross-country trip from Victoria B.C. to Hunter River P.E.I. in honour of his wife who was killed five years ago in P.E.I. on the Trans Canada Trail.

Photo: Sarah Seeley/Times & Transcript

Edmund Aunger's wife, Elizabeth, had a dream of making the Trans Canada trail safe for cyclists.

Elizabeth Sovis, an avid cyclist, seldom went on parts of the trail that coincided with the Trans Canada highway because of the danger of colliding with a vehicle. She told her husband that when she retired, she was determined to rally for the cause of making the trail a safe place.

Sovis wasn't able to reach her goal. She was killed on July 14, 2012, after being struck by a car while cycling in Hunter River, P.E.I.

Aunger said he had convinced his wife to bike with him from Moncton to P.E.I. on the trail. Aunger spent several of his childhood years going to school in Moncton at Queen Elizabeth Elementary School before moving to Edmonton.

"I wanted to show her where I had grown up."

The couple had made it to Hunter River and were pedaling on the road to their accommodations for the evening on a section of road that was not on the Trans Canada Trail. They had only made it three kilometres when Sovis was hit by an impaired driver.

Aunger said her body was thrown about 50 metres as a result of the collision.

"To be there and see her die at the side of the road was horrific for me," he said.

During the summer months for the past five years after Sovis's death, Aunger has been making progress on the 12,500 km trek from Victoria, B.C. to Hunter River on the Trans Canada Trail raising awareness about safety concerns for the trail.

"When she died, I quit my job 10 days later and I took that up. That was her project," he said.

He said he plans to speak on the steps of every legislature from British Columbia to P.E.I. He has already organized two rallies in Ottawa trying to get minimum safety standards implemented on the trail. Aunger started a petition and on his journey, he is gathering names of the people who support his cause. So far, he has collected 1,800 names.

On the front steps of Moncton City Hall, Aunger told the Times & Transcript that only about a third of the trail through the Maritimes is on an actual trail. The rest is on the other roads and highways, some of which, have limited shoulders. Part of it even goes through the St. John River.

"As I have cycled, I have discovered that the trail is much worse than I have expected."

The trail is also badly damaged in some areas from ATVs that use the trail.

"There should be no motor vehicles on anything that is called the Trans Canada Trail," he said.

"What is the point of having a trail that is motorized?"

Victoria Leenders-Cheng, a spokeswoman with the Trans Canada Trail, said an email that representatives from the trail have been in contact with Aunger.

She said the trail is an “enormous project,” which is being built and improved in phases.

Leenders-Cheng said although some of the sections of trail are on a roadway, they are currently the only feasible routes.

She said the website indicates higher risks, so users can make an informed decision.

“No decision to use roadway was made lightly or hastily and without the safety of users being a prime directive, either through reduction of risk or alerts to users where we are aware of those risks. On the contrary, these decisions were made cautiously and in consultation with partners and the appropriate authorities,” she said.

Aunger left Moncton on Monday morning for the last leg of the trip to P.E.I. with a group of friends and relatives cycling with him.

A memorial service is planned for his wife on Friday at the Central Queen's United Church.