

## Getting connected

**As trails develop, cyclists and pedestrians see hope for non-traditional transportation routes spanning the city**

Sat Oct 13 2007

By Ian Tizzard

ADVOCATES of what has become known as "active transportation" are trying to change the way we think about trails.

Active transportation, a recent buzzword, refers to non-motorized ways to commute, such as walking to the store or riding a bike to work. Many people see pedestrian and bicycle trails as a better, greener way to get around the city than traditional transportation routes.

They are encouraged by the recent opening of the first phase of the Northeast Pioneers Greenway linking Sturgeon Road and Herbert Avenue in Elmwood, and from the ongoing extension of the Bishop Grandin Greenway in southeast Winnipeg. And beyond those projects, they imagine a linked system of active commuter routes covering the entire city.

"People should be able to get from one side of the city to the other, safely, by bike, in under an hour," says Anders Swanson.

With "a lot of help from a lot of people," Swanson runs the website ongreencity.com.

On his website, he takes suggestions for future trail development in Winnipeg, assesses them and maps them. Based on likely usage patterns, his map lays out what he believes would be an ideal system of paved trails, roadside bikeways and bike lanes that rivals our system of roads in number and range.

"People like to have a visual, to give them an idea of what's possible," says Swanson.

Coun. Jeff Browaty, chair of the mayor's environmental advisory committee, suggests Swanson's 60-minute ride across the city on dedicated active commuter trails and routes might be too much to expect.

But Browaty says new road and bridge projects will consider active transportation concerns.

"We're making walking and bicycling a priority on the Disraeli rehabilitation," he says. "And we'll look at opportunities as they present themselves."

City planner Kevin Nixon serves as Winnipeg's new active transportation co-ordinator. He promises an active transportation plan within two years. Nixon, who is being advised by groups such as Bike to the Future, the Winnipeg Trails Association and the Manitoba Cycling Association, says he will devise "a detailed action plan with specific projects and timelines" before his two-year appointment as co-ordinator ends.

"It's unprecedented," says the Winnipeg Trails Association's Janice Lukes. Her group co-ordinates the efforts of dozens of groups of trail builders and users around the city. She marvels at the support that three levels of government have offered active transportation initiatives over the last two years.

"They're listening to us, and they're giving money," she says. "Winnipeg's never been so focused on connectivity."

If all goes well, she looks forward to the Northeast Pioneers Greenway one day connecting the Forks with Birds Hill Park. In the meantime, the Bishop Grandin Greenway continues to extend east and west from the Seine River. Volunteer planners behind that project expect huge growth, envisioning a 12-kilometre corridor across the south of the city between FortWhyte Alive and the new Sage Creek housing development.

"It will be a south-end spine, with 22 communities feeding into it," says Lukes.

Like others involved in the movement, Lukes explains the momentum simply.

"People are concerned about obesity and environmental sustainability," she says. "And the best solution for that is to leave the car at home and walk or ride a bike instead."

"People are getting excited about it because it solves some important problems," says landscape architect Glen Manning, who helps with volunteer planning for the Bishop Grandin Greenway. But he points out local challenges to future greenway building, including flooding, land ownership and right-of-way concerns, and long distances.

"We have no mountains or a large body of water to rein us in, so we spread out a lot for a city of our population" says Manning.

Yet, he hopes that Winnipeg's strong, but late, switch into active-transportation mode will help us catch up to cities already pursuing the goal of transportation by any means. With growing emphasis on physical activity and environmental sustainability, the rustic luxury of a trail is becoming an urban necessity.

"Victoria, Calgary or Minneapolis -- they all take their trails very seriously," says Manning.

And despite her elation over the current rate of progress, Lukes wants more. She notes that the money being offered for trail development still comes nowhere close to what governments spend on roadways for cars.

"I'm grateful," she says, "but I guess its human nature to want more of a good thing."

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