

## Cycling: Help designing a better 'multi-use' path

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Since the installation of the multi-use path along Lougheed Highway between 216th and Laity streets, I've heard various comments from cyclists about its design and safety.

The strong-and-fearless-type road cyclists mostly said they'd rather be on the road with the cars than on the path, which actually makes them feel less safe.

One of the main concerns was that the path is bi-directional. If you install a bi-directional path – with relatively little traffic – along a highway with a massive amount of car and truck traffic, there may be some problems. Especially if the path is interspersed with driveways, where cars entering and exiting have to cross the path. And in particular when drivers exiting the driveways have to try and merge into an unending stream of fast moving cars.

First of all, since drivers don't expect relatively fast moving bikes to come from the right, they won't be looking out for them. They're also likely to stop right on the path waiting to merge with traffic, while blocking the path of cyclists, who do have the right of way, by the way.

Unfortunately, having a path on both sides of the highway was out of the question because of the cost, we were told.

Our HUB committee made suggestions that we hoped would help prevent problems. One of those suggestions was to paint the bike/pedestrian crossings on all the driveways green.

Coloured bike paths and crossings have been proven effective and are being used more and more to alert drivers to the presence of cycling facilities. Unfortunately, we were told that provincial standards do not allow for painted driveways. What we got instead is driveways with a grooved surface, which causes problems for the thin tires of road bikes.

Fortunately, we did get a painted crossing at the exit to the parking lot at the Alouette Animal Hospital and the daycare operation next door.

Another thing HUB asked for was signs, alerting drivers exiting the driveways to cyclists coming from both directions. I noticed that signs were placed at a number of driveways, telling drivers to yield to cyclists. No warning though to expect cyclists to also come from the right.

Interestingly, at the Alouette Animal Hospital some signs were installed, alerting cyclists and pedestrians to the crossing— which is obvious to them even without the signs – and warning signs to “only cross when safe.”

But no signs were installed for drivers exiting the parking lot, warning them to watch out for cyclists and pedestrians coming not only from the left, but also from the right. It’s rather strange that, instead of on drivers, in this case the onus is on cyclists to watch out for their own safety and be prepared for error or inattentiveness on the part of drivers.

Some shrubbery impeding the view of cars exiting the parking lot when traveling west on the path doesn’t help, either.

I would urge drivers to keep your eyes open for people on bikes coming from left and right when you have to cross this, or any multi-use or bi-directional path.

All too often, drivers claim that cyclists and pedestrians just seem to ‘come out of nowhere’.

At this particular crossing, the curb let-downs were poorly designed. One of them is only about half the width of the path. This problem was rather inelegantly ‘solved’ by installing reflective posts, so that cyclists won’t crash into or off the curb.

Some of the push buttons for the pedestrian lights have been oddly placed. I still haven’t figured out the best way at the north-east side of the Laity St. intersection to maneuver between all the obstacles (concrete barriers, lamp posts, electrical box) to position myself so that I can push the button.

On the northwest side, it works best for me to ride a circle around the lamp post to reach the push button.

Sometimes the button is on the wrong side of the lamp post, and it’s not that easy to reach around to push it.

Apart from all the other users (after all, this is a multi-use path), this path is obviously meant for not-so-fearless cyclists. That’s why HUB had asked for barriers along the section of path that directly abuts the roadway, so that parents wouldn’t have to worry about their kids accidentally falling off the curb. Recently, some flimsy plastic reflective posts have been installed. With the massive amount of fast moving traffic and big trucks on the highway, we do feel that a concrete barrier would provide a much better sense of perceived and actual safety.

Nevertheless, there’s no doubt that the path is a big improvement to what we had before.

It's one of the first examples in Maple Ridge of separated infrastructure specifically designed to make vulnerable road users such as cyclists safer, and it's an example that we should learn from.

Designing infrastructure is not an exact science. Every traffic situation is unique and needs its own solution.

Input and feedback from those who use the infrastructure is useful, to help avoid design errors like the ones mentioned.

It's time for the province to recognize the urgent need to modernize its standards and guidelines, which will help our engineers to better design infrastructure that's as safe and convenient as it can be for the most vulnerable on our roads.

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