

Bike Winnipeg Recommendations to the PUB On Road Safety Program Review Process for Next Year

Charles Feaver
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Background

Bike Winnipeg (BW) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving bicycling conditions in the city and encouraging more Winnipeggers to cycle more often for their everyday trips.

Survey after survey shows that the biggest barrier to more people cycling more often in Winnipeg is that **most Winnipeggers don't feel safe cycling amongst automobiles in this city.**

Bike Winnipeg strives to deal with that issue in two ways:

1. Encouraging municipal and provincial roadway authorities to build infrastructure that separates cyclists from automobiles, and
2. Promoting measures that will improve safety for cyclists who share the roadway with automobiles.

In the long run, we hope for a future where most people can make most trips by bicycle on separated infrastructure. The city approved a well researched Pedestrian and Cycling strategies document in 2015. It is a good plan, but implementation has stretched out well beyond even the "long term" envisioned in the plan.

Therefore, people travelling by bicycle will need to ride on roads to get to most destinations for many more years.

One very important way to address on-road safety is to ensure that automobile drivers know how to drive safely when they encounter bicycles on the road.

Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI) is the lead provincial Government authority responsible for training automobile drivers.

BW is concerned that MPI's past road safety education programs and expenditures have been insufficiently effective to make Manitoba roads safer for all users. Motor vehicle occupant fatality and major injury numbers decline as motor vehicles are better built to protect their occupants, but vulnerable road user injuries are increasing.

The cost of MPI's programs for educating drivers is part of the rate base for MPI, and therefore a consideration in determining the revenue requirement for MPI.

Bike Winnipeg is not participating as an intervenor in the current MPI rate hearing, because road safety is "deferred from the 2024 GRA to future applications, or will be the subject of a technical conference or another process" (Order 64/23, p.15).

In this submission, Bike Winnipeg offers recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the road safety review process in the next hearing cycle.

The Road Safety Technical Conference

The Board's Rules of Practice and Procedure allow:

(2) Where, in the opinion of the Board, the amount, level of detail and complexity of material so warrants, the Board may direct the parties to participate in a non-evidentiary technical conference for the purpose of considering:

- a) a tutorial presentation for interested parties;
- b) a discussion or workshop style conference to gain an understanding or clarification on a matter; or
- c) any other presentation or conference style arrangement that will assist the understanding of the Board and interested parties.

In order 130/17, the PUB stated:

As is clear from the significant amount of evidence filed and input from interveners in this and previous applications, road safety and loss prevention is a complex, multi-faceted area involving multiple stakeholders, with challenging emerging issues such as drug-impaired driving and distracted driving. Given this complexity, the Board finds that, for the purposes of future GRAs, road safety and loss prevention would be best addressed by devoting a Technical Conference to the many issues involved in reviewing road safety and loss prevention... (p. 90)

The PUB further stated:

The Board expects that addressing road safety and loss prevention matters in this venue will invite productive discussion and collaboration such that significant progress in that regard will be demonstrated in the 2020 General Rate Application. (P.91)

The first Road Safety Technical Conference (RSTC) was held in 2019, and a second was held in 2022.

At both conferences, MPI went to great lengths to lay out their road safety plans to the road safety and discuss them with the stakeholders who came to the meetings.

The technical conferences met the goals (a) and (b) in the list above, but not goal (c).

This has resulted in concern among road safety stakeholders and MPI staff about the effectiveness of Road Safety Technical Conferences in supporting the PUB's hearing process.

What is lacking is a channel for the information generated from the discussion at the technical conference to get back to the PUB panel to assist in the hearing process.

1. The mandate of the PUB-appointed chair of each RSTC did not require the chair to produce a report that would assist the panel in understanding road safety program issues raised at the RSTC.
2. The PUB has not engaged technical advisors on road safety programming to participate in the technical conference and assist the PUB panel to understand current road safety programming issues.

Recommendations

Bike Winnipeg has found that progress on road safety programming requires dealing with MPI at two levels:

1. Collaborating with MPI as a “road safety stakeholder” at every opportunity, and
2. Making arguments as intervenors before the PUB to seek regulatory decisions which push MPI to make changes to their programs which they are not motivated to make on their own.

We expend the effort required to be meaningful intervenors on road safety with the goal making MPI’s road safety programs more effective.

A technical conference is of value to us to the extent that it “assists the understanding of the board” with respect to key road safety program issues of the day, so that “technical” aspects of road safety programming can be properly understood and considered in the hearing process.

For the PUB to derive value from future Road Safety Technical Conferences, Bike Winnipeg recommends:

1. It sets a mandate for an independent expert chair of the conference to provide a report to the PUB prior to the first round of interrogatories that assists the panel in understanding current road safety program issues, including both a summary of the road safety program matters on which there is agreement among RSTC participants, and issues where there is disagreement between MPI and stakeholders. AND/OR
2. The PUB engage a road safety expert consultant to attend the RSTC on the Board’s behalf and assist the panel during the hearing process in understanding road safety programming issues.

There is room for a great deal of improvement in road safety programming in Manitoba. We believe that the PUB can accelerate the rate of progress by clarifying what outcomes it requires from the Road Safety Technical Conference to assist the panel in considering controversial road safety education issues at the hearing.