

# MCA Position Statement on Mandatory Helmet Legislation

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## MCA Purpose

The Manitoba Cycling Association's purpose is to develop excellence, participation and interest in cycling throughout Manitoba.

## Vision:

The MCA's sees Manitobans of all ages continuing to choose cycling whenever possible as a fundamental activity in their lives.

The MCA believes that competitive cycling and active transportation are activities that promote physical fitness, mental health, and social well-being of participants.

The MCA recognizes the concepts of long-term athlete development, the linkages among participation, transportation and sport, and the need for effective and pro-active injury prevention initiatives.

The MCA believes that the development of innovative transportation policies and programs by government and non-government entities will lead to the prevention of motor vehicle-related injury and deaths.

## MCA Position on Helmets:

Each year cycling deaths and injuries occur within Manitoba, leading to lost years of life, debilitating injuries, and increased health care costs for the public and individuals. Yet participation in cycling activities reduces the overall burden of disease upon our population and creates significant fitness and mental health benefits for individuals. The MCA supports effective actions, programs and legislation that optimizes the beneficial aspects of cycling, while preventing or minimizing the impact of traumatic injuries.

Yet the MCA must stress that the reduction of injuries and deaths of cyclists is fundamentally related to the improvement of driver behavior.

Manitoba's leaders must not lose sight of the fact that motor vehicles continue to be leading cause of injury and death to cyclists and pedestrians. Cyclists and pedestrians are at an even greater risk of severe injury or death from crashes than motor vehicle occupants.

**No other factor**, including the development of mandatory helmet legislation, will lessen the annual burden of devastating injury or death among cyclists as much as increased cooperation and consideration by drivers towards cyclists on the roads.

The MCA recognizes that both motorists and cyclists make judgment and control mistakes on the road. That's why the MCA has programs to develop the skill and knowledge level of cyclists. However, cyclists and pedestrians will always be the most vulnerable populations that share Manitoba's roads. "Fault" no longer has a place in the vocabulary of traffic accidents in Manitoba; yet, insufficient change in the knowledge and culture of motorists, police, and insurers has perpetuated a culture of fault, triviality and complacency when it comes to driver-cyclist accidents.

Regardless of the cause of the accident, no cyclist deserves to pay for a mistake with his or her life.

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The MCA implores Manitoba's leaders to:

- **Develop policies, programs and media campaigns designed to improve driver behavior with regard to cyclists;**
- Strengthen legislation and enforcement of driving laws, for both drivers and cyclists, regarding alcohol and distractions;
- Address roadway safety issues from the point of view of bicycles with skinny tires, cycling routes that are connected, and the physics and control aspects inherent in riding a bicycle;
- Require active transportation infrastructure in the development and re-development of roadway infrastructure whenever such projects happen throughout Manitoba;
- Examine the key active transportation and training routes in both urban and rural locations to lessen the frequency of dangerous, interactive situations among cyclists, pedestrians and drivers;
- Understand that cycling is the new golf: 400,000 Manitobans have bikes; 200,000 actively use them - and these numbers are increasing each year.
- Consider our collective transportation development: Only 20,000 cyclists are commuters. Manitobans view participation in walking and riding to school or work as unsafe because of inadequate rules, programs and investment in traffic, shoulder, sidewalk, crosswalk and active transportation initiatives.

**For MCA members, helmets are the obvious, simple and a relatively inexpensive means to lessen the impact of accidents. Helmets are required in all MCA programs and races.**

However, MCA members remain divided about the effect mandatory legislation will have in this area. Personal views about political theory, philosophical approach to life, and the effectiveness of legislation have led to vigorous debate among the MCA's membership about mandatory helmet legislation.

Despite this legislative debate, the MCA Board of Directors is fully supportive of

- provincial health and education programs that promote cycling and helmet usage;
- provincial health programs that provide low cost helmets for low-income participants;
- effective and imaginative communications and marketing campaigns that promote helmet usage in all age groups.

Finally, the MCA commends the leaders in health care, government, and business for their effort and investment in the health and wellness of Manitoba's cyclists.

Bicycles have been part of Manitoba's culture for well over 100 years. With your help, we can expect continued development, understanding and cooperation to make cycling a significant and realistic part of Manitoba life.