

Towards a Bicycling Based Strategy

EUROCHAMTT and the Port of Spain Corporation hosted “*The Green Urban Transport Solutions for a Revitalised POS and Healthier Communities*” Workshop on June 22, 2016 at the Murchison Brown Auditorium, City Hall. One of the topics addressed was bicycling.

The Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chapter 48:50 includes the following on bicycling:

- Section 76. (1) It shall not be lawful for more than one person to be carried on a road on a bicycle not propelled by mechanical power unless it is constructed for the carriage of more than one person.
- Section 77. (1) It shall not be lawful for more than two persons to ride abreast on a road either upon motorcycles or upon bicycles not propelled by mechanical power; but a person shall not be convicted under this section in respect of the overtaking of two persons so riding and in the absence of other traffic on the road at the point of overtaking.

Contrary to popular opinion by bicyclists, I did not see the following in our road traffic laws, “*When passing, motorists must move into an adjacent lane to the right if possible. If not, you must pass with at least 3 feet [1 m] of clearance between your car and the bicycle. Safe passing is the motorist’s responsibility.*”

Nevertheless, bicyclists are legal road users! And, according to the law, two can ride abreast of each other on roads where bicycles are permitted ... if you dare!

The first issue is that the authorities need to treat bicyclists as legal drivers of vehicles, through inclusion in driver testing in the regulations and on the roads, and grant them rights and responsibilities accordingly. However, motorists often feel that bicyclists have no right to be on the road, especially if a bicyclist’s presence on the roadway requires the motorist to wait behind them before overtaking. Bicyclists often feel that they should not block

traffic. They think travel lanes are ‘*car lanes*’ and try to keep out of them as much as possible.

The root of these perceptions is that bicyclists are not really treated as drivers. The basic principle of traffic flow should apply: first come, first served. If a driver is traveling in the roadway, an approaching driver must overtake only when it is safe to. The driver has to make it easy for another driver to overtake, but only to the extent that traffic and road conditions make overtaking possible.

A second key rule for drivers is that intersection positioning depends on one’s intended destination. A driver must move as far to the left kerb as possible before turning left, and as far to the centre line as possible before turning right (except where there are exclusive turning lanes). Motorists sometimes ignore this rule in passing a bicyclist and turning left at the same time. Driver training apparently fails to emphasize that one should slow and merge behind a bicyclist before turning left. Some left-turning drivers end up stopping in the middle of the road waiting for the cyclist they have just passed to pass on their left. This is unsafe, slow, and avoidable by the simple expedient of waiting first, then turning.

Another problem of public perception is the belief that cycling on the road is inherently dangerous. Cycling can be dangerous, but much more so when the traffic rules are ignored. This belief may deter some from cycling, and may encourage others to take illegal and discourteous actions toward cyclists on the road, on the theory that such cyclists deserve what they get. When cyclists are injured or killed, people often think of the inherent risk of cycling, rather than errors committed by cyclists or motorists hitting them.

My research into cycling and bike lanes has revealed information that might be useful for planners and

decision-makers. Caitlin D. Cottrill (2015) ‘Social Cycling: Exploring the use of social networks to overcome barriers to cycling, Transportation Research Board 94th Annual Meeting, Washington, DC’, suggested that “specific barriers [to cycling] may include the following:

- Inadequate infrastructure: Such factors include lack of adequate cycle lanes and bike-parking facilities and inadequate protection from the elements;
- Policy limitations: Many transport policies focus primarily on the provision of adequate infrastructure and regulations for the efficient movement of motorized transport, which may directly conflict with the needs of non-motorized travellers;
- Environmental considerations: Includes elements of the physical environment, including topography and climate;
- Inadequate information: May include lack of cycling maps and information regarding safe connections between origins and destinations;
- Individual factors: This refers to elements such as an individual’s fears of crashes or personal attacks, or uncertainty regarding appropriate routes, rules of the road, or expectations of effort expenditure; and
- Societal norms: Uncertainties regarding the acceptability of cycling in terms of both general perception (how one’s status is regarded by peers using motorized transport) and in the view of other cyclists (i.e. will one feel excluded from the cycling “community” due to such factors as physical appearance or abilities).

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