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Dr. Dan Cass
Regional Supervising Coroner
Toronto West Region
Office of the Chief Coroner
26 Grenville Street
Toronto ON M7A 2G7
Occo.inquiries@ontario.ca

Dear Dr. Cass

RE: PROVINCIAL INQUIRY INTO CYCLING DEATHS

I am writing on behalf of Norfolk Pathways for People – a community coalition in Norfolk County. Our mission is to promote pathways for walking and cycling in Norfolk County for health, recreation and active transportation. Our objectives include building a healthier, accessible and connected community; and promoting the safe use of local trails and pathways. Our coalition was very pleased to hear the Chief Coroner's plan for this provincial inquiry into cycling deaths and we are grateful for the opportunity to provide comments.

Norfolk County is a predominantly rural community, in southern Ontario, with an extensive paved road system ideal for cycling and the number of cyclists on our roads is growing. With this increase, our concern for rider safety also increases. We have recently launched Share the Road messaging and signs along some of our roads and look for support from the province to raise awareness for drivers and cyclists alike.

We wish to share with you some considerations for rural cyclists, as their needs and concerns are often different from those in urban areas.

1. Higher speeds of traffic and volume of heavy trucks on rural roads necessitate a separate, designated space for cyclists (i.e. paved shoulders) to increase safety. However in many rural areas, paved shoulders are non-existent, or inconsistent. This is true of provincial, county and municipal roadways. Also, while many counties and municipalities are paving shoulders on their roads, there is no provincial policy for paving shoulders on King's highways. This makes for inconsistent and disconnected cycling routes.

2. In rural communities, the transportation system includes both locally and provincially managed roadways. Therefore, there is a need for provincial and local governments to work closely in rural communities to facilitate safe routes and intersections within and between their respective transportation networks in order to safely accommodate the needs of all road users, especially where provincial highways also function as main streets in small town Ontario.
3. There is a significant “car culture” in rural areas. While most motorists are generally accommodating towards cyclists, they may be less accustomed to sharing the road with them. Therefore, there is a need for education about sharing the road safely for all road users - motor vehicle drivers, cyclists & pedestrians. When each road user’s behaviour is predictable, crashes and injuries will decrease.
4. Lower population densities mean that urban cycling infrastructure solutions such as separated bike lanes and paths are often impractical and/or unaffordable.
5. Many rural areas do not have public transit systems. Cycling as a transportation option is an economic necessity for some in order to access employment, education and necessary services.
6. Cycling is a critical part of the solution needed to address the continued rise in chronic diseases, cancer and air quality that are putting a huge financial strain on our health care system.

We look forward to your final recommendations and hope that your report will provide direction for the province on how improvements can be incorporated into the ongoing policy revisions and infrastructure renewal that is happening across our communities.

Sincerely,

Gordon Mason
Member of Norfolk Pathways for People



Health Action is funded by the Ministry of Health Promotion and supported by the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit. Health Action partners with 30 individuals and organizations, and promotes integration, communication and support environments that encourage people in our communities to live healthy lives.