

Monday Mag



What's so bad about DIY sharrows?

To DIY or Not to DIY

Posted By: Anna Kemp
09/02/2009 8:00 AM

Cycling activists paint the town

Tired of feeling unsafe on the roads, and sick of waiting for help from the City, a group of vigilante cycling activists has taken to the streets with paint cans.

Working under cover of darkness, the Other Urban Repair Squad, OURS, have twice painted shared-use symbols on Hillside Road. While their first attempt was interrupted by neighbours calling the police, on their second attempt, they managed to paint the whole corridor between Quadra and Cook Streets. Both times the City painted over the symbols in less than 24 hours.

The shared-use markings OURS paints are “sharrows,” internationally recognized symbols approved by the Transportation Association of Canada.

“Under the Motor Vehicle Act both cyclists and motorists are entitled to equal sharing of the roads,” says OURS spokesperson Yukon Duit, using a pseudonym because of the group’s illegal actions. “This means that in order for sharrows to be placed we don’t need to rezone the streets or widen curbs the way they do for bike lanes.”

Despite the City’s swift reaction, Duit says public reaction has been positive.

“After our last action there were tons of supportive letters sent to the Times Colonist which is a real indication that people are interested in seeing better, safer cycling in Victoria.”

Duit says the group’s goal in painting the sharrows is to “light a fire under the butts of the

municipalities” to make the roads safer for cyclists.

“Victoria has touted itself proudly as being Canada’s cycling capital,” says Duit. “It took 20 years for the Henderson bike lane to be put in. It took seven years for that Finlayson bike lane and four years for Fort Street. It doesn’t need to take that long, especially if we really want to lead the way to being a sustainable transportation city.”

OURS hopes to show the City how easy it can be. “It’s just a case of getting a can of paint and putting on road markings. We paid for it quite cheaply and we did the labour. There’s no reason the city can’t do so.”

Municipalities of the CRD are clearly not opposed to sharrows; the symbols, which depict a cyclist topped with two chevrons, have been used on Finlayson Road, around Saanich, and Esquimalt also has plans to implement them. The problem, says bicycle advocate and Victoria city councillor John Luton, arises because OURS acts without proper planning and design.

“People seem to think they can design bike facilities on the back of a napkin and go out and do it themselves and you can’t,” says Luton. “You have to analyze a road in context of its surroundings.”

Duit argues that the guerrilla road paintings are not random acts, but the product of thoughtful consideration.

“The locations for the sharrows were carefully selected, painted using actual traffic paint and actual measurements as specified by the Transportation Association of Canada . . . Ultimately, the cyclist community knows where these markings are best laid.”

Luton disagrees, saying that the sharrows painted on Hillside were done incorrectly.

“They did the sharrows backwards. If we were going to consider implementing the scheme they did on Hillside we would most likely paint sharrows on the downhill and try and make space for bike lanes on the uphill where the speed differential between bikes and vehicles is more significant.”

While liability is the main issue for the City, says Luton, his biggest concern stems from an advocacy standpoint.

“I’ve worked for the last 10 or 15 years to educate engineers and municipalities that we need to put tax dollars and public resources into designing and providing for cyclists as much as we do for cars and trucks . . . If you allow people to go out and paint the roadway, you are signalling to the community that if you want bike facilities, you have to hold a bake sale and do it yourself.”

OURS is part of an international network with groups across North and South America and Europe.

“The Urban Repair Squads encourage citizens to reclaim stewardship of their cities through direct action,” says Duit. “The point of tapping in to that network is to show we’re not just flying solo here. There are people all over the world working on similar things.”

While the actions of URS groups around the world have met varied reactions, Duit says many cities’ responses have been more progressive than Victoria’s. “Toronto left guerrilla-painted sharrows to become part of the urban infrastructure,” she says.

Despite the rejection of their actions by the city, Duit says the group is not discouraged. Though she suggests they may do things a little differently next time, they have some action plans for the near future.

“Keep your eyes open for sharrows,” says Duit. “And if you agree with what we are doing call the city and let them know.” M

Spinning Wheels

The committee’s still out on direct cycling action

While the Greater Victoria Cycling Coalition does not support illegal actions, GVCC president Darren Marr says they do understand the reasons behind the guerrilla road painting.

“There hasn’t really been any action by the City on cycling infrastructure, particularly toward sharrows or new bike lanes, because of the recent demise of the Cycling Advisory Committee.” The Cycling Advisory Committee was disbanded when Victoria city council decided to shut down all the committees and redesign the committee structure. The decision to restructure followed the Cuff Report, a commissioned review of council decision-making processes.

City councillor John Luton calls shutting down the Cycling Advisory Committee, a group he says functioned effectively, as “throwing the baby out with the bathwater.”

Cycling concerns were absorbed by an Environment and Infrastructure Committee who will address a range of issues and perspectives, a move which has some cycling advocates feeling unrepresented.

“We lost some of the functionality of what the Cycling Advisory Committee was doing,” says Luton. “We need to get back on track with some of that work . . . You need that sounding board and focus group to make sure things are done well and have a feedback loop from the people who use them.”

Luton has hope that when the new committee begins meeting in a few weeks they will be able to carve out some time within the schedule to focus on cycling and pedestrian issues.

—A.K.

Comments [Post a comment](#)

1. Geez, its about time SOMEONE started to do something about biking safety round here. The city (including advocate Luton) isn’t doing their job. If the city erased the sharrows and then put up new ones themselves the next day, I would start to listen to them. But I still bike up Hillside on my way to school worried about the fast moving cars beside me. STILL!

Posted By: Jen McMullen

Date: [02/09/2009 11:12 PM](#)

Last Modified: [11/11/2009 7:24 PM](#)

2. Something definately needs to be done!Motorist need to be continually reminded that cyclists have as much rights as they do.Anyone who cycles knows motorist are going WAY TOO FAST and ROAD RAGE is rampant.When a motorist goes speeding by sometimes I'll call out SLOW DOWN and on a few occasions I have been chased/ attacked /verbally abused.TOTAL INSANITY! I know there are bad cyclists(which set back the cycling community-OBSERVE THE RULES OF THE ROAD!) but come on folks-you want to run me over because you've had a bad day-GET A GRIP!!

Posted By: Steve McMillan

Date: [05/09/2009 1:57 AM](#)

Last Modified: [11/11/2009 7:24 PM](#)

3. That's all well and fine, except when the dudes ride right out in the middle of the road going like 15 mph. I mean, come one dude.

[DWI lawyer new jersey](#)

Posted By: **Date:** [06/09/2009 7:33 PM](#)

Last Modified: [11/11/2009 7:24 PM](#)

4. I'm all for road safety for motorists & cyclists. But when I see cyclists not obeying traffic laws & bitching about motorists lack of respect for them, I find their (Cyclists) attitudes hypocritical.

Posted By: Shawna K.

Date: [09/09/2009 4:41 AM](#)

Last Modified: [11/11/2009 6:32 PM](#)