

Sharing the road

There have been too many pedestrian/vehicle and cyclist/vehicle tragedies over this past year. Our hearts ache for all concerned, and we wish that somehow we could turn back time and prevent these nightmares from occurring. It seems that these were good drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians, whose paths tragically crossed. As we try to drive less, and bike or walk more, is there anything we can do to keep our paths separate, and share the roads more safely? Perhaps as a way of dealing constructively with the painful events of the past year, we can take a look around our community, and see what we can do to improve safety for those on foot or on two wheels.

Here are some possibilities we might think about in Alliance.

We could:

- install “Walk”/ “Don’t Walk” signs at our traffic lights which lack them.
- improve striping for crosswalks – the broad white bars used internationally are more eye-catching for drivers than the thin white double lines that are typical here, particularly at mid-block or school-front crossings, where there is no traffic light.
- construct sidewalks where they are missing throughout the city, so that pedestrians have no need to be in the street. Let’s separate the paths of vehicles and pedestrians where we can. I’ve seen some near misses at the Alliance Middle School, where stir-crazy students who walk home after school share the AMS driveway with buses and cars. Why not designate a pathway separate from the driveway? – it could be gravel if the budget doesn’t allow for paving right now.
- continue to develop bike and pedestrian trails, or designated bike lanes. Could we develop a bike trail on the abandoned rail line through town? Could we come up with a bike plan for the city, with striped bike lanes on some of our wider, less-traveled streets?
- better educate our population, especially young students, in pedestrian and biking safety. We could all use reminders: walk or jog on the sidewalk, or, if there is no sidewalk, at the left side of the road, facing traffic; if you use headphones or earphones while walking or jogging, be aware that you won’t be able to hear the traffic moving around you; at night, wear light or reflective clothing, and consider holding a flashlight to make yourself more visible. Legally, bikes are supposed to share the road. When biking on the road, full knowledge of traffic laws, as well as use of hand signals, reflectors, a bike headlight and a helmet are mandatory. Young children, however, should ride on the sidewalks until they can ride with good judgment, and without swerving. Light or reflective clothing also greatly improves safety. Watch for unevenness in the paving, and for storm drain openings – ideally, the bars covering these openings should run perpendicular to the path of travel, so that bike tires do not slip between the bars and cause an accident.

- educate our driving population to be more aware of sharing the road with bikes and pedestrians. Sharing the road makes it doubly important to avoid using cell phones while driving. Also, all of us could benefit from the reminder that the school season has begun, and we need to watch for young pedestrians, cyclists, and for students boarding and exiting buses. We also need to be particularly conscious that we are a college town, where we have an influx of young drivers, cyclists and pedestrians who are new to the area each year. Perhaps billboards with safety messages, or “share the road” programs at the high school and college, would help to raise awareness for us all.

Our hearts, minds and prayers are with all of the families who are grieving, or are facing a long road to recovery this year. Our thoughts are also with the drivers, knowing that it could have just as easily been us behind the wheel. Sadly, sometimes accidents just happen – terrible coincidences that occur despite all of the good training and careful driving practices of those involved. After such an accident, there must be time for mourning losses, celebrating lives, and for healing. But as time passes, let’s turn our community’s grief into action; let’s do all we can to make sharing the road in Alliance a little safer for the future.

Check it Out:

Complete the Streets movement website, with examples of pedestrian and biker-friendly communities, funding links, and more: www.completestreets.org

Ohio Bicycle Federation: Info on making your community “bicycle-friendly.”
Scroll to the bottom of the page for links to educational information for families and teachers, adults, and government officials: <http://www.ohiobike.org/cyclist-friendly.html>

AARP Bulletin article “Street Smart: Cars dominate American roadways, but walkers, bikers and the disabled want more access,” by Barbara Basler:
http://www.aarp.org/bulletin/yourlife/street_smart.html

Federal Highway Administration’s Bicycle Safety Education Resource Center:
<http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/ee/bestguide.cfm>

The National Center for Safe Routes to School: <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/index.cfm>