



Vermont Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition

February 18, 2000

Governor Howard B. Dean, M.D.
109 State St.
Montpelier, VT 05602

Chair:

George Plumb
305 Plumb Lane
Washington, VT 05675
802-883-2313
plumb@together.net

Vice Chair

Richard Bernstein, MD
1962 Prindle Rd.
Charlotte, VT 05445
Rbernstein@zoo.uvm.edu

Secretary:

Bud Haas
South Road
Bradford, VT 05033
802-439-5397
budh@sover.net

Treasurer:

David Jacobowitz
9 Andrews Ave.
So. Burlington, VT 05403
802-658-6536
david.jacobowitz@uvm.edu

Dear Governor Dean:

The Vermont Bicycle and Pedestrian Coalition (VBPC) would like to voice its concern about the rash of collisions occurring on Vermont roads between motorized vehicles and those using other forms of transportation for practical and recreational purposes. Bicyclists and pedestrians are being killed and injured in increasing numbers on Vermont highways, and the VBPC is extremely alarmed by this situation because of the ever-growing number of people using our roads for bicycling, walking, and running. We ask the State of Vermont to act on this life-and-death issue.

According to Agency of Transportation data for 1998, sixty collisions occurred on Vermont roads between bicycles and motor vehicles, and one hundred fifteen collisions between pedestrians and motor vehicles! It is worth noting that these numbers are likely to be inaccurate (and low) because many collisions go unreported.

Vermont's largest bicycle club, The Green Mountain Bicycle Club (based in Williston) reports that during 1999 eight of its members were involved in crashes with motor vehicles. The club says that this is alarming because the number is usually one or two per year. Even more troubling is that more of its members are recalling accounts of motor vehicle incidents occurring on our public roads. According to club officials, common complaints are: driving recklessly, passing too closely, passing at speed with oncoming traffic, cutting in after passing (especially trucks with trailers), yelling obscenities, and throwing items.

Motorists often disregard or do not understand the rights that bicyclists and pedestrians have on our public roads. State resources are needed to educate *all* road users and to enforce

our highway laws. The VBPC requests the State create a *comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian safety program* aimed educating motorists on how to share the road with bicyclists and pedestrians, and at educating bicyclists and pedestrians about their responsibilities and promoting safe practices.

There is also a need to update some of our legislation related to many of the current laws as they apply to bicyclists and pedestrians, because many are left to interpretation. It is extremely difficult to educate people when the laws do not clearly state what is applicable to any given situation.

The VBPC also requests better record keeping by the Department of Public Safety on bicycle and pedestrian collisions with motor vehicles, better enforcement of our highway laws, and more aggressive prosecution of offenders. For example, why didn't the driver who pulled out in front of a bicyclist (who had the right away) in Williston last July receive a traffic ticket? The police report said that the driver "failed to yield to oncoming traffic." The bicyclist suffered a broken back.

The VBPC feels that the Governor's Highway Safety Program, the Agency of Transportation, and the Department of Health should initiate programs to educate the public, raise awareness, and to address (and make changes to) laws pertaining to bicyclists and pedestrians. In order to help bring about change, the VBPC feels that the public must be repeatedly exposed to safety and sharing the road information. Some ideas on how to reach and educate people are to:

- Expand the section on bicycles and pedestrians in the Vermont DMV Driver License Manual, and have questions on the licensing exam pertaining to this section.
- Require schools to incorporate into the driver's education curriculum a significant component on bicycle and pedestrian safety.
- Use public service announcements, T-shirts, bumper stickers, and presentations to "get the word out."
- Require dealerships, shops, and stores to disperse literature on safety and sharing the road to purchasers of new or used motor vehicles, bicycles, and running shoes.

These are just a few of the many ideas that exist. Other states have embarked on programs to raise awareness, and Vermont can benefit from looking at these programs. The State of Maine, for example, has a highly successful public awareness campaign. For more information about the Maine program visit the Bicycle Coalition of Maine website at www.acadia.net/bikemaine.

Vermont has many beautiful roads and vistas for residents and tourists alike to explore by bicycle or by foot. They should not have to risk death or crippling injury to enjoy such peaceful settings. The VBPC would like to become a partner with the State of Vermont in developing a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian safety program to help make our roads a safer place for all. We would welcome the chance to meet with you and/or appropriate agency secretaries, commissioners, and other staff to discuss this.

The VBPC hopes that we can work together to achieve a higher level of education and awareness for all users of Vermont roads. Our sincere hopes are that this will lead to a greater tolerance and acceptance of all forms of transportation for practical and recreational purposes on our public roads.

Thanks for your help with this issue.

Sincerely,

George Plumb
Chair

C/ Brian Searles
Patricia MacDonald
Jan Carney
Jeanne Johnson
Douglas Racine