

Peaceful solutions to bicycle menace

By DEAN H. BRAILEY

After reading what I hope was a tongue-in-cheek article by Tim Zetterholm ("Unite against the bicycle menace!", The State News on May 14,) I felt that a response was in order.

Zetterholm illustrated some current problems, but failed to outline any realistic solutions. The following are what I feel to be the important problems and the possible solutions to those problems.

The MSU bicycle path system has been described by Alex Sorton (who teaches the Federal Highway Administration's course — Bicycle Considerations) as the worst mess he has ever seen. I fully agree. The present campus system creates confusing intersections with no legally defined right of way for either the roadway, sidewalk or path user. Pedestrians are put in danger because they are forced to mix with vehicles, which a recent FHWA study concluded should not occur. Bicycles were considered more compatible with other vehicles using the roadway.

The current paths place the bicyclists in a position where they are neither predictable nor visible to the motorists using the roadway. Loss of visibility and predictability is a major factor in many of the cycle path/roadway intersection accidents. To make matters even worse, many cyclists ride as if there were no rules of the road. They lack even a small show of respect for the rights of others. This aspect can be directly traced to cyclists' lack of education. Bicyclists are the only roadway users

not tested before they are allowed to use the public roads. Therefore, you have cyclists running stop signs, riding the wrong way and making illegal left turns from the right edge of the road, all of the common "child-like" activities you see on campus.

The last area that has helped to create this mess is the lack of enforcement of traffic laws as they relate to bicyclists. Do not jump on the Department of Public Safety though! Currently MSU has an ordinance stating that cyclists must use the paths and not the road. If a cyclist is using the roadway, according to the Michigan Vehicle Code and is harassed or injured by a motorist, the motorist can get off scot free because the cyclist was not supposed to be using the road. DPS is forced to police a path system that does not follow the established safety practices of the MVC. Nor are they allowed to ticket motorists who abuse a cyclist's right to use the road, but they are supposed to enforce an ordinance which forces cyclists to use the unsafe bicycle paths. How is that for a catch-22? Recently DPS has attempted to crack down on the major violations committed by cyclists (wrong way riding, illegal turns, etc.), but due to the apathy of the public and MSU's administration, it has neither the power, support or the funds to do much. With the massive cyclist population on campus, the poorly designed paths and the general lack of cycling skill, the DPS can do very little.

If anything is to be done about the above problems, it will take a major

shift in attitude toward the bicycle. It is not a toy, but a vehicle that must be driven as any other vehicle on the road. To help solve the problems the administration should initiate the following:

- Change the campus ordinance that makes use of the paths mandatory. This will not only give the cyclists the muscle they need to assert their right to safely use the road, but it will also save the University from a law suit when an injured cyclist and a smart lawyer sue, based on the system that creates accidents.

- Establish a mandatory cycling education course for incoming freshmen. Teach the proper use of the bicycle and ingrain the idea that violators will be fined.

- Give the DPS sufficient encouragement, funds, and personnel to ticket cyclists who violate the law. Establish a bike patrol, similar to the one used in East Lansing, that will educate as well as enforce.

- Ban bicyclists from the sidewalks, as Lansing has done in the central business district. (Pedestrians and vehicles do not mix.)

- Stop all new construction of bicycle paths. Do not continue a mistake just because "That's the way we've always done it."

- Establish a group to re-evaluate the current bike path system, and to propose changes that will reduce the high number of accidents. Members to this group should be from the DPS, Grounds Department, Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, Citizens Non-motorized Advisory Council, Local Bicycle Clubs, and the student population.

We should not tolerate the bicycle menace, but I hope people will refrain from using Zetterholm's rather violent "solutions." The solutions I have outlined may not be popular with cyclists, who for reasons of perceived convenience, want to continue to endanger themselves and every pedestrian on campus. It is the duty of a society to protect itself from those who would endanger others, as the Kamikaze cyclists do. Cyclists have rights, but they also have responsibilities.

As a graduate of MSU, I suffered the problems first hand. "I have seen the enemy, and it is us." Until sufficient pressure is placed on the powers that be, by fed-up citizens, conditions will remain the same, and the ambulances will continue to cart away the injured.

Brailey is the chairperson for the League of Michigan Bicyclists

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