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Bicyclists ask Royal Oak for safety plan, bike lanes

Group wants city to be more friendly to non-motorists, reduce number of car crashes.

Jennifer Chambers / The Detroit News



ROYAL OAK -- Tom Regan calls it "the self-righteous rage" of motorists: the sound of a driver screaming at a bicyclist to get out of the street.

"Around Royal Oak it's very common for motorists to scream at you to get out of the road and onto the sidewalk. They think they are helping you, but bicycles and cars can share the street. It's the safest place for me. The motorist is bound to see you when you are in the road," said Regan, who travels from home to his office on a recumbent bicycle.

Yet many cyclists are too scared to use the road so they move onto the sidewalk where more collisions happen. Statistics from the Michigan State Police Office of Highway Safety Planning show Royal Oak leads Oakland County in the number of car accidents involving bicyclists with 30 such crashes.

That news prompted Regan and nearly 40 Metro Detroit cyclists Monday night to ride their bikes to Royal Oak and ask the City Commission to develop a safety plan for bicyclists.

The group wants Royal Oak to create a non-motorized transportation plan that will set goals to increase safety for bikers and walkers by adding bike lanes and signage to roads that remind everyone streets are meant to be shared by cars, bicyclists and pedestrians.

"The situation is bad here. We have to plan change carefully. Cyclists are riding on the sidewalk; they are getting struck crossing driveways or at corners," said Regan, a Royal Oak resident. "We want that to change. Motorists need to know that they are legally entitled to be there."

At the meeting, commissioners appointed Regan and two other cyclists to a task force to write up some recommendations. A meeting between the task force and City Manager Tom Hoover is being planned, Regan said.

Todd Scott, a Royal Oak bicyclist who is also a task force member, said Ferndale is an excellent example of a bike-friendly community. Residents there formed a bicycle committee and then created a bicycle network in the city that led to new bike lanes and signs along Hilton Road in 2005.

"Hilton has a bike lane on both sides. They painted lines and used a road diet where they made a four-lane into a three-lane, and added the bike lane. The road could still handle the same level of traffic," Scott said.

"People perceive roads unsafe to ride on. If we built safer roads you can make some big improvements for riders," he said.

Other communities with bike lanes include Walled Lake, Ann Arbor and Detroit.

In September, the Detroit City Council approved two resolutions for a non-motorized transportation master plan. Funded by the Michigan Department of Transportation and developed by civil engineering and surveying firm Giffels-Webster, the plan calls for various improvements for walking and biking safety in Detroit, including adding nearly 400 miles of bike lanes on city streets.

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