Wild Side to the Safe Side

You hold a firm grip on your handle bars heading alongside the rushing traffic. A car honks its horn as it carelessly races past you. You gasp in fear almost falling off your bike. Your heart beats faster than the wings of a hummingbird. The glossy, vibrant, red car swerves dangerously close to you. Your muscles tense up and a surge of panic washes through you. Is this really worth the risk? Should I just drive my car to work instead? With bike lanes you wouldn’t need to worry about the cars zooming by and all the reckless drivers. Bike lanes promote cycling and cycling has plenty of health benefits. They make the road a safer place and reduce the number of cars on the road.

What’s the hold up? The price? Although bike lanes may be costly to install, they will save the city money in the long run on health care costs because cycling has so many health benefits. For instance, cycling protects people from diseases such as cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular diseases include stroke, high blood pressure and heart attacks. Research has shown that if you cycle, the chances of bowel cancer is reduced. Cardiovascular disease and cancer alone cost the Canadian health care system over $25 billion per year. Dr. David Nieman said, “People can knock down sick days by about 40 percent by exercising aerobically on most days of the week while at the same time receiving many other exercise-related benefits.” Also, cycling reduces anxiety and depression. In addition, it improves strength, balance and coordination. So, if you are that clumsy friend who always seems to bump into everything – you might want to consider cycling.

Climate change is a *huge* problem worldwide. Unfortunately, Canada’s temperature is rising faster than the global average. That means change is required because the smallest change can make the biggest difference. For instance, a 2010 study found that if 20 percent of people used bikes instead of cars for short trips in Milwaukee and Madison, Wisconsin, 57,405 fewer tons of carbon dioxide would be emitted. However, studies have shown that most people physically feel that they can’t or just won’t bike to work if they need to travel more than 15 miles each way, but nobody said they need to bike the whole distance. They could easily bike to a local bus stop - park their bike and catch the next bus because traveling on busses or trains also helps reduce the number of cars on the road.

Feeling unsafe is a reason why a lot of people choose not to ride their bikes on the streets. You may say they’re “overreacting”, however, according to a Statistics Canada report that looked at deaths related to cycling between 1994 and 2012, a total of 1 408 deaths were recorded — an average of 74 accidents a year. That doesn’t include the other 7 500 people with serious injuries related to cycling. You can’t tell me that they’re overreacting now, can you? Bike lanes allow cyclists to ride at their preferred speed without the fear of cars not seeing them or just not giving them a respectable distance.

The bright sun beats down on your already tanned face and the fresh autumn air fills your lungs as you bike down the freshly paved road. The colourful leaves on the trees wave back and forth. A large smile is spread across your face from ear to ear as you bike in your own lane enjoying the beautiful morning without the burden of cars getting in your way. What a difference bike lanes can make!