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Want to ride more, but afraid of drivers?

A Burlington-based cycling advocacy group says more Ontarians would ride bicycles if they weren't afraid for their safety.

Share the Road cycling Coalition says a survey commissioned for the opening of the Ontario Bike Summit in Waterloo this morning indicates over 60 per cent of Ontarians would like to ride more often but the main reason the don't is fear.

Others cited lack of bike trails that go where they want to as a major reason for not riding.

The bike summit is intended to be a two-day dialogue between international experts, policy makers, politicians, transportation specialists and cycling advocates organizers hope will help build provincial standards for cycling and a more defined role for the provincial government.

The survey was done by Strategic Communications Inc. Aug.14-20.

Eleanor McMahon, who founded the Share the Road Cycling Coalition in honour of her late husband OPP Sergeant Greg Stobbart who died after he was clipped by a truck's side mirror outside Milton in 2006, says the survey provides "a snapshot of who is riding a bike, and who is not – and why."

"If we can address the issues this data highlights, it should help us to encourage more people to cycle -- thus contributing to the health and well being of Ontarians," she said.

"This data quantifies what many people who don't bicycle now tell us they don't ride their bike because they are too frightened to do so.

"If people don't feel safe, how can we expect them to cycle?"

The poll sample of 1,000 respondents included Ontarians who cycle now, as well as those who do not. For those who cycle now, their motivation and cycling habits were explored.

The survey found:

* 60 per cent of those surveyed would prefer to cycle more often.

* 55 per cent indicate the primary reason they do not is they are worried about safety.

* 39 per cent do not ride because there are insufficient bike routes.

* Although 94 per cent of respondents rode bikes as children, only 6 per cent still ride frequently.

* 24 per cent of Ontarians ride their bikes occasionally (either weekly or monthly) while 70 per cent say they never or rarely cycle.

* Asked why they ride 33 per cent say they ride for a variety of reasons, both utilitarian (shopping, commuting, errands) and for pleasure;

* The majority, 63 per cent, say they ride for pleasure and recreation.

* Who rides a bike? Ontarians in the 34-49 age range are the most likely to have a bike, but also are most likely to say they rarely or never ride it.

Men are more likely than women to ride bikes frequently or even occasionally.

McMahon said the survey data points to possible areas for focus and attention.

“We now know that Ontarians in the 34-49 age range are the most likely to have a bike, but also are most likely to say they rarely or never ride it.

“Given that many of these Ontarians have families, the likelihood that their children do not ride regularly nor are they encouraged to ride (given the fear factor) is very high,” she said

“We know that obesity rates in our children are growing. Cycling is a potential solution to this growing public health concern and designing safe routes to school programs which include cycling and or enhancing cycling education for our children must, as a consequence, be on all or our radar screens.”