

Manitoba Eco-Network Environmental Awards nomination – Anders Swanson

Background

Anders Swanson was born in Flin Flon, Manitoba. He has lived in all the provinces west of New Brunswick. Anders' passionate love of nature was inspired by previous years spent working in the BC backcountry and is presently satiated by canoe and hiking trips in Manitoba. He is a bicycle mechanic as part of Natural Cycle Worker Co-op and is proud to be contributing to the subversion of car-culture. Anders does not own a motor vehicle and practices what he preaches. He is an avid all-season cyclist who exemplifies active transportation as a lifestyle. Artist, bike mechanic, and environmentalist Anders Swanson is leading the way in building a comprehensive network of cycling routes throughout Winnipeg.

The Genesis of the Project

The City of Winnipeg is an anomaly in Canada when it comes to on-road cycling infrastructure. With just over 750,000 people in the Capital Region – there was only a few kilometres of on-road cycling infrastructure in the City of Winnipeg just two years ago. City administration has been a 'slow adopter' in embracing the Active Transportation concept. In recent years, the global focus on healthy living and environmental awareness has initiated a momentum within Winnipeg. A small but strong group of champions has emerged and are promoting the many benefits of Active Transportation through their various networks and with a variety of tools. Anders Swanson is one of these champions, and through his innovative website, www.OneGreenCity.com, he is adding significant value to the development of Active Transportation, healthy living, and environmental awareness in Winnipeg. Anders designed the website, www.OneGreenCity.com in 2006. One Green City was created to build lines of communication and to provide support for a simple idea: the creation of a comprehensive network of safe and efficient bikeways spanning all of Winnipeg. The site includes routes throughout the city of Winnipeg and information for both experienced and novice cyclists. The website is updated on an ongoing basis as the cycling network evolves in the city. It is a volunteer project run by Anders for the betterment of our community. As One Green City will adapt and evolve over time; there is no completion date for the project.

The Innovation and Distinction of the Work

The website is intended for all age groups and experience levels of cycle commuters. It aims to improve conditions for cyclists in and around the city of Winnipeg, by networking with various stakeholders. The site has a variety of uses, from determining optimal routes via maps to connecting with other interested parties. Anders has utilized technology as an outreach tool which is convenient and available to many. The website is a model which can be adopted by any community, large or small to encourage active transportation leading to healthy living and the reduction of the carbon footprint of area residents. Anders has authored a detailed plan describing how the City of Winnipeg can create a first-class cycling route network ASAP that is safe and fun for everyone. This plan is available on the website, providing a handy reference document for all Active Transportation stakeholders in our city.

Tangible Environmental Benefits and Effectiveness of the Project

The website route map alone has received thousands of hits since its inception and is listed as a link on numerous Winnipeg environmental and active transportation websites. Although it is difficult to measure how many more residents are cycling or utilizing the route maps for active transportation, there certainly has been a great deal of interest and movement toward Active Transportation in the city of Winnipeg during the past 2 ½ years. Anders has been instrumental in bringing his passion to the attention of the local government; as such he has been selected to be an active member of the Mayor's Environmental Advisory Committee (www.winnipeg.ca/Interhom/GreenSpace/MEAC.stm). Anders' maps are very visual and have had a definite influence on the public, politicians and stakeholders. He has a large 8' x 6' folding version that is very effective at engaging people at meetings.

Scope and Impact of the Project

Anders' project is bigger than just the website itself; rather the website is a means of creating a comprehensive network of safe and efficient bikeways spanning all of Winnipeg. Anders is a member of a number of groups in the city promoting healthy, sustainable living; these include:

- Bike to the Future
- Natural Cycle Co-op
- River East Neighbourhood Network – Trail Committee (RENN-TC)
- Physical Activity Coalition of Manitoba
- North Winnipeg Commuter Cyclists (NWCC)

- West Central Commuter Cyclists
- BIZ Transportation Committee
- Winnipeg Trails Association

He was a key organizer of the inaugural Bike to Work Day in 2008 (www.biketoworkdaywinnipeg.org) -- and again this year, and a member of the committee that produced the all-new Winnipeg Cycling Map 2009 (www.biketothefuture.org/news/archives/2009/05/03/winnipeg-cycling-map-2009). He is also a member of the City of Winnipeg's Active Transportation Advisory Committee. (www.winnipeg.ca/publicworks/MajorProjects/ActiveTransportation/committee.asp), and the recently announced Provincial Active Transportation Advisory Group (www.news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?archive=&item=5783).

Anders is a strong advocate of sustainable living and brings knowledge, expertise, passion, talent, and understanding to all those with whom he interacts. He actively works on all of the abovementioned committees to promote cycling as a healthy choice for individuals and the environment. Anders created the *Marconi Line Project* document for RENN-TC. He was the founder of NWCC, a group that is promoting cycling in the North End of Winnipeg, which is home to a large population of at-risk youth. To this end the group provided valet bicycle parking at the annual Picnic in the Park event where Anders and others provided free bicycle repairs to attendees. He has also been instrumental in creating a bike building program for inner city children, teaching them how to build and repair their own bikes. On May 3, 2007, he convened the first ever meeting of the North Winnipeg Commuter Cyclists. Since then the group has gone from strength to strength, beginning with the development of proposed routes for dedicated bikeways throughout northwest Winnipeg and beyond. While there are many people involved in NWCC, Anders was the catalyst for the establishment of this dynamic group of community leaders and commuter cyclists. His innovative approach to the establishment of easy *Green Routes* and advanced *Purple Routes* is a concept easily understood and accepted by the community at large. Anders has brought enthusiasm, passion and commitment for the work of the NWCC. In just six short months, the group has developed a website, online notice board, raised funds and built awareness with the community through presentations to groups and participation in events such as the first ever St John's Picnic in the Park bike valet and tune up, a program to Build Bikes With Kids For Kids, and the establishment of a community bike shop at Ralph Brown Community Centre in Winnipeg's North End, which is hoped will be the first of many. The momentum behind NWCC is infectious and driving other groups to adopt ideas for similar projects, which help build momentum and awareness about cycling with an aim of making it safer and more convenient for more people, particularly in northwest Winnipeg, which has the highest concentration of people who rely on public transportation.

Anders recently volunteered his online mapping skills to develop a very visual graphic map for the southeast quadrant of Winnipeg. This map is being used both in electronic and print format as a key tool in presentations with levels of government to raise awareness and funding for active transportation.

The Viability and Sustainability of the Work

Anders works tirelessly at this project; it is difficult to imagine that one person can do so much for so many when there are only 24 hours in a day. However, he does it all and he does it with integrity and tremendous sensitivity. Anders is able to adapt to any audience from young children to politicians and the elderly; he is helpful and genuinely concerned for the interests of one and all. Anders is a true advocate of green living via active transportation. In late 2007, Anders organized discussion groups to pull all members of the community together around the idea of cycling as a form of transportation. To this end he has formed Google Groups for various areas of the city "to identify and address the conditions that discourage people from choosing cycling as a form of active transportation". In as much as this is a relatively new endeavour One Green City has already had a tremendous impact on many and it will continue to have an even greater impact on many more as more people become aware and involved.

What Is Impressive About Anders

Anders is a living example of the difference one individual can make. He inspires others by his positive attitude and his "can do" approach to issues. Anders "walks the talk"; he not only uses active transportation on a daily basis, he helps others to contribute in any way they can. He is not at all judgemental; rather he is kind and understanding, supporting all he comes in contact with to live an active lifestyle in whatever capacity is available to them. Anders takes every opportunity available to him to help young and old, experienced and inexperienced, to contribute to the greening of the City of Winnipeg. He is level headed and non-confrontational and open to discussing the viability of active transportation; in doing so he has earned the respect of politicians, city administrators, and community groups. Anders is dedicated to working closely with numerous stakeholders in developing a network that will ultimately provide the residents of the City of Winnipeg with an alternative way to get around the city.