

Walking and cycling more risky in B.C. than driving a car, SFU study says

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BY ZOE MCKNIGHT, THE VANCOUVER SUN FEBRUARY 28, 2013

true



Cyclists ride along the Burrard St. bike lane in Vancouver. Contrary to popular belief, it's just as dangerous to walk down the street in British Columbia as it is to cruise around on a bicycle, and driving a car is still safer than both, according to a new study from Simon Fraser University.

Photograph by: Gerry Kahrman, PNG

Contrary to popular belief, it's just as dangerous to walk down the street in British Columbia as it is to cruise around on a bicycle, and driving a car is still safer than both, according to a new study from Simon Fraser University.

"A lot of people have preconceptions about what the safest way to travel is," said Meghan Winters, a health sciences professor who studies mobility and population health in cities.

"A lot of people talk about how many pedestrians are dying and how many cyclists are dying and they have perceptions that prevent them from taking certain travel modes."

The study, published in the February edition of the Canadian Journal of Public Health, found on average more people die in cars than on bikes or on foot.

Adjusted for trip frequency and time using TransLink's annual trip diary, the researchers found the risk undertaken by cyclists and pedestrians was roughly the same: 15 deaths per 100 million "person-trips" by pedestrians versus 14 deaths by bicycle and only 10 by car. Adjusted for distance, there would be seven deaths per 100 million kilometres walked

versus 3 deaths for every 100 million kilometres cycled, and less than one by car.

"Cycling and walking fatality rates and injury rates were quite similar to each other and they were more dangerous than driving, so they could be considered vulnerable road users and our data supported that," she said.

Two hundred deaths could be avoided if Canada's fatality rates were closer to the Netherlands or Belgium, the researchers found.

Car death rates could also be lowered if we followed the lead of Iceland, Ireland, or Sweden

Using U.S. data, they also found that using public transportation was 20 times safer than any of the other modes of transportation, and motorcycle riding was 25 times more dangerous.

Exercising and driving by car is even better!

But Winters said it's not necessary to stop biking to work or walking to school.

"On the whole, consistently studies show the health benefits of walking and cycling far outweigh the health risks of injury. So on the whole, from an individual and public health perspective, cycling and walking should be promoted and encouraged," she said, adding safety for vulnerable road users can be enhanced by public policies to slow down traffic and to make drivers more aware, such as sidewalks, well-lit streets, crosswalks at frequent intervals and segregated bike lanes, "rather than take an intervention each individual has to adopt, like wearing a flashing vest as you walk down the road."

Two women who had taken extra precautions were out jogging in Surrey wearing headlamps and reflective gear in December when they were struck by a car during a hit-and-run. The crash, which severely injured one woman and led to numerous charges for the driver, happened during a spate of similar incidents last fall when least five pedestrians in Metro Vancouver were hit in one night alone. Two others were killed in Vancouver and Abbotsford.

Vehicle drivers and passengers have the highest number of fatalities overall at an average of 300 per year and 22,274 reported injuries, using B.C. data from 2005 to 2007.

Pedestrians were second, with an average of 70 deaths and 1,884 injuries per year, followed by 46 deaths and 1,061 injuries on a motorcycle and 10 deaths and 982 injuries for cyclists.

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