

Cyclist's Death Renews Call for Car Accident Prevention Program

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

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Avid cyclist and biking advocate Sharon Bayler was killed in a [car accident](#) while on a group ride in Tennessee in early May. Bayler's death occurred shortly before Mayor Tommy Battle's 2nd annual Mayor's Bike Ride, where Huntsville's Bicycle Advisory and Safety Committee was distributing safety information. Bayler served on that committee and was past president of the Spring City Cycling Club.

As part of her many bicycle safety initiatives, Bayler had been lobbying Mayor Tommy Battle to adopt a "Complete Streets" policy -- part of a national campaign to ensure public streets are designed to be safe for walkers, bicyclists, transit passengers and people with disabilities, as well as for drivers. Now, many of Sharon Bayler's friends are carrying on the campaign.

"She wanted the streets to be for everyone," said avid Huntsville cyclist Leela Pahl, in a recent Huntsville Times article. "Sharon's death has stirred up a lot of feelings that there's something fundamentally wrong with how people are driving carelessly."

Huntsville Streets "Not Very Friendly" to Bicyclists

According to Pahl, many Huntsville streets are currently "not very friendly" for bikers, pedestrians and people with disabilities. Some city curbs don't have wheelchair ramps. Sidewalks aren't always interconnected, and dedicated bike lanes are rare.

The "Complete Streets" policy could change that, as well as widen sidewalks and road shoulders, add bus-only lanes and add raised medians to help pedestrians cross roads in high traffic areas.

Preventing bike- and pedestrian-car accidents needs to be a priority for everyone, according to Pahl. "We all need to be more aware of each other" on the roads, she said.

"Complete Streets" Policy Could Reduce Car Accidents, Improve Quality of Life

Bayler and Pahl presented Mayor Battle with a petition in January requesting that the city pass a "Complete Streets" policy. About 1,400 people signed that petition, and local biker Jim Garvin continues to collect signatures.

"If we want to be one of the best places to live and raise a family," Pahl told the Huntsville Times, "then we should also be one of the best places to walk and ride a bicycle. It would only help the city go forward."

Battle's Green 13 task force on environmental sustainability supports the idea. The task force recommended in February that the city "update street standards and adopt policies consistent with those outlined by the national campaign for 'Complete Streets.'"

Mayor Battle announced on Friday that he agrees with the "Complete Streets" campaign, but says that Huntsville doesn't have the money to retrofit existing streets with bike lanes and wider shoulders. He prefers a plan to design those elements into new roads.

Daphne, Fairhope and Chickasaw have already adopted the "Complete Streets" concept, as have Tupelo and Pascagoula, Mississippi, and Cobb County, Georgia.

Related Resource:

["Cyclist's death spurs renewed push for a "Complete Streets" policy in Huntsville"](#) (The Huntsville Times, June 21, 2010)