

Bill 93 proclamation speech delivered by Jamie Lamb on behalf of BNS at the steps of Province House, Granville St., Halifax, June 1st, 2011

Written by Lawrence Plug and Jamie Lamb

Thank you Bill Minister,

Good afternoon, everyone; my name is Jamie Lamb, and as the president of Bicycle Nova Scotia, I'm thrilled to stand before you on this great day for cyclists, and for our province.

On behalf of Bicycle Nova Scotia [BNS], I wish to thank our provincial NDP government for first drafting Bill 93, passing it in the legislature last fall, and most importantly, proclaiming it in force today.

All three major political parties supported bill 93, suggesting that support for safe cycling, and active transportation in general, is pervasive across the political landscape in Nova Scotia. For those working for healthier, more sustainable communities—let alone for the cyclists—this is encouraging!

Even more gratifying is to see cyclists among our elected officials and staff within government departments supporting Bill 93, and even riding in legs of the relay. Notably, staff from Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, and the Department of Health and Wellness, participated in legs across the province including the challenging Parrsboro, Yarmouth, and Peggy's Cove routes.

This level of support can be compared to what has happened in some other Canadian provinces and in some US states, where legislation similar to Bill 93 was unsuccessful. In many of those areas, similar such laws proved contentious, provoking polarized 'us' and 'them' responses.

In being the first provincial government to pass "1-metre" bicycle legislation, as it is colloquially known, the NDP have shown remarkably progressive drive and foresight, and with luck, Nova Scotia may in the future be seen as a catalyst; a legislative inspiration across the country as amendments similar to Bill 93 pass the political tipping point.

With Bill 93, the government has not only solidified an extant cyclist's right to safe use of our streets and highways, but has recognized that facilitating the sharing of the road between bicycles and cars is an essential component to addressing some of our most pressing and most looming social problems.

As a society, we hear daily about the physical and psychological perils of our sedentary lifestyles, from the increasing incidence of disease to the poor management of increased stress in our ever more demanding working and family lives.

In the face of an epidemic of health problems which stand to be alleviated through increased physical activity, Bill 93 is more than timely. It's facilitation of cycling for sport, recreation, and active transportation—commuter cycling—will serve to both increase the quality of life for many and ultimately lessen the demand placed on our over-stressed health care system.

Through facilitating cycling, Bill 93 also stands poised to address some difficulties with our

transportation system. As a society, we can only expect higher fuel prices, the impact of which is exacerbated by increasing congestion. Getting more people out of their cars and onto bikes for short trips stands to improve not only a person's health and carbon footprint, but the health and vibrancy of our communities as a whole.

In encouraging more people to ride their bikes, Bill 93 has taken the essential step of setting out the rules of the road between bicycles and cars. People need to feel confident, safe, and that they belong on the road when cycling. Too many people simply feel cycling for transportation is too dangerous. It is my hope that this will mean not just safer roads, but more cyclists on the road. In that light, these amendments are essential first steps.

There is, of course, much more to do; we should congratulate ourselves on Bill 93 as an essential step forward, but we also need to recognize our next challenges. Nova Scotia, like many other regions, faces a situation where there have been decades of public and private investment in a transportation system -- roads, parking lots, and so on-- that have made it relatively easy and inexpensive to use 'inactive' methods of transportation such as driving, but which simultaneously have made active methods such as cycling and walking more difficult.

Going forward, it's important to make investments in road designs needed for better cycling. That said, the proclamation of Bill 93 and the cooperative spirit that has occurred around it makes both me and Bicycle Nova Scotia extremely hopeful for the future of cycling in our province.

For everyone from the 5y old on her first two wheeler, to the urban commuter, to retirees enjoying country roads, and for our young athletes training to represent our province and country, I say thank you to all involved in making Bill 93 a reality, and wish you many years of great riding in Nova Scotia.

Thank you.