

# Missing link should evolve quickly

A safe cycling route to UBC Okanagan from the south is now at least a decade away, possibly longer. CN Rail's refusal to provide the City of Kelowna with a right-of-way along the railway tracks for a new biking and hiking path has founded plans to improve access to the campus.

Right now, biking to the university involves a perilous trip along Highway 97. It's bad enough for cyclists using the shoulder, but that little strip disappears entirely when the road goes over the railway tracks. In an apparent bit of ridiculous cost-cutting, the bridge wasn't built wide enough to accommodate full cycling lanes.

When council heard Monday that CN was refusing to sell the right-of-way, Coun. Robert Hobson asked staff what the alternatives were for providing better cycling access to the university.

Duplicating a Rails-with-Trails project elsewhere is no easy feat, staff said, with the complicating factors of topography, the Agricultural Land Reserve and dealing with a

number of different property owners.

Councillors were full of righteous indignation that CN was balking at providing the right-of-way, when the railway did so — for a payment of nearly \$1 million — for the first Rails-with-Trails link from Gordon Drive to Spall Road.

But the plain, if irritating, fact is the railway is acting within its rights to deny access. The city and provincial government should never have trumpeted the initiative without first securing the railway's support.

A planned extension of Hollywood Road to the campus, with the new link likely to include a separate pedestrian and cycling path, isn't on the books until at least 2020.

But there may be a bright side to CN's stubbornness. The railway's opposition should further help elevate the priority of a new road link

to the campus from the west side, connecting to Glenmore Road.

I humbly suggest that road should have been built a long, long time ago. After all, the university has been up there since the early 1990s. Since then, the city has built new roads, or widened existing ones, all

over Kelowna, but the missing university link has remained just that, missing.

One plan to build the new road, in partnership with a developer, founded a few years ago when the

Agricultural Land Commission refused to approve a modern redesign of existing rural lots near the dump.

Now, with an updating of the Official Community Plan underway, expectations are that the Glenmore-UBCO link will be transferred from a Wish List and put on the To Do list.

With the Rails-with-Trails plans

apparently now going nowhere, the city should focus its energies on building the Glenmore-UBCO road, cycle and pedestrian link. Instead of being a project that might pop up on the radar in a few years time, why not make it the main transportation improvement goal for 2010?

A quicker and more convenient connection to UBCO would reduce travel times and get more vehicles off Highway 97. And even though the city dump is going to be a feature of the Glenmore Valley for decades to come, overall, the new link would offer a far more pleasing drive to the campus than is afforded by the highway's routing through industrial areas.

Largely hidden in hills and not visible from many areas of Kelowna, UBCO is something of its own little island within the city. It's time to build a new link to the campus, taking it from being out of sight and bringing it into the mind's eye.

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