

NEWScomment

Vote for pedal power

Bicycle-friendly Singapore is first step to Renaissance City

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THE last time I rode a bicycle in Singapore, I narrowly missed hitting a pedestrian. The man had veered onto the East Coast Park bike track directly into my path, forcing me to stop so abruptly that I fell off my bike, in the most ungainly way possible. Yet to add insult to injury, I was the one called a “road menace”.

As road users, cyclists, especially so in Singapore, are much maligned people – resented, bullied or ignored in turn by pedestrians and motorists alike.

Kept off the roads by rude and aggressive motorists, they find no reprieve in turning to the pavements, with the law being ambiguous in that regard and pedestrians unwilling to yield what they perceive to be their exclusive turf.

Only the very brave take to the unfriendly road, but at high risk of becoming an accident statistic.

Given these difficulties, Singaporeans may be well advised to forget about cycling at all or to confine themselves to the stationary bike at the gym or the odd outing at East Coast Park.

Yet in many other cities, cycling is actively promoted to improve air quality (no noxious fumes), health and well-being (as a simple means to combat the rising tide of stress and obesity-related diseases), and to ease traffic congestion and parking space shortages.

Cycling can also be an important social leveller. It closes physical and social distance. It is for this reason that the police started patrolling on bicycles. How much nicer and friendlier our roads and public spaces would be if more of us pedalled around on bicycles instead of sitting high and aloof in our four-wheeled steel boxes.

Clearly, cycling’s numerous benefits – social, health, environmental and economic – make it an important form of



transport that planners and policy-makers sideline at their peril.

European cities are world leaders when it comes to accommodating bicycles on the road. Cities in Australia, Canada and the United States too, have been embracing bicycling. It would not be merely a coincidence that most of these cities rank consistently at the top of the *Economist* survey of the world’s most “liveable” cities.

For Singapore to succeed in becoming a Renaissance City, we need to take a leaf from the books of these bicycle-friendly cities and reclaim our roads and public places from the malaise of motorised traffic.

Shared paths for recreational cycling and jogging in parks are good – the National Parks Board should be applauded for its commitment – but we need to go beyond that.

It will require a national cycling strategy integrated into the national transport, health and environmental policy. Such a

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shops, eating places and recreational spots within a stone’s throw of one another – making it ideal for bicycle trips.

We already have cycling/jogging tracks in the form of the exten-

master plan will provide for necessary infrastructure such as traffic signs and bicycle parking, redesign of roads, and “traffic calming” measures in built-up areas and school zones to slow down motor traffic.

It will require some changes in the law, to better define the rights and responsibilities for different road users and to remove unnecessary restrictions on cycling.

Most importantly, it will require safety education and training for all road users – motorists, pedestrians and cyclists.

What it does not require is for us to start from scratch, because the conditions are already in place for the promotion and adoption of cycling here.

We have an excellent public transport system, a requisite first-step for weaning people off car dependence. We are small and densely-built – residential areas,

sive Parks Connector network, which can be linked to appropriately segregated roads for greater island-wide connectivity. There really is no need to reinvent the wheel when it comes accommodating bicycles on Singapore roads.

After that close encounter at East Coast Park, I did not ride a bicycle for seven years. It is impossible, however, to resist the lure of cycling, especially in a bicycle-friendly city.

Cycling is now my main form of exercise and transport – I have tasted the freedom of mobility, the sense of community with fellow cyclists and the interaction with thoughtful and considerate motorists – not on the roads of Singapore but in Melbourne, Australia.

The writer, who lives in Melbourne, holds a Masters of Environment. Do you agree with her? Tell us at news@newstoday.com.sg