



Fast

# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

there is an alternative.

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## Under-investment and over-policing: safe biking for whom?

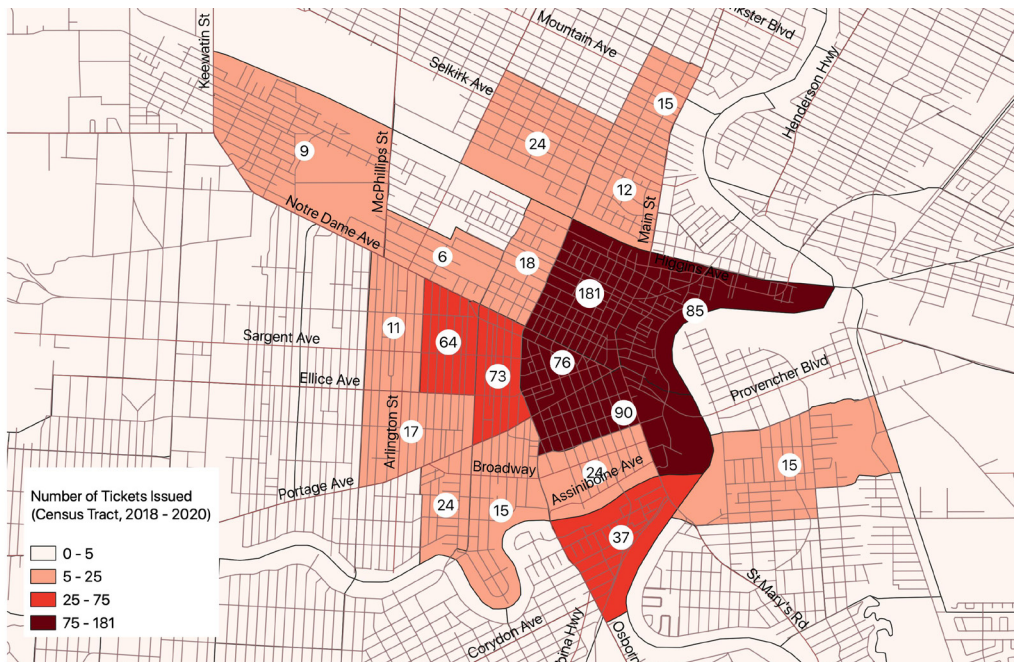
In Winnipeg, hundreds of tickets have been issued for cycling on the sidewalk or “failing to exercise due care”. The vast majority of these have been in central neighbourhoods where there are few safe bike routes. The huge differences in where tickets are issued – primarily in low-income and racialized communities – means it is critical that these neighbourhoods are prioritized for investments that make cycling safer.

When drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists share public space, safety is often a key issue. Street improvements, such as protected bike lanes that separate bicyclists from cars, can improve safety for more vulnerable road users. However, discussions of safety rarely address whose safety is prioritized and how disparities

in investments impact different communities. Few safe bike routes means that people may be forced to use sidewalks or other strategies to avoid collisions. While this likely happens throughout the city where bicyclists must use busy arterial roads, only in some areas does this expose them to police tickets.

To better understand the impact of policing on cyclists, we used a freedom of information request to the Winnipeg Police Service for all tickets given to bicyclists from 2018 to 2020. We then mapped where tickets were issued and for what types of offenses. The vast majority of tickets (96%) were issued for either ‘operating a bicycle on a sidewalk’ or ‘failure to exercise due care and attention’.

Of all the tickets we studied, 20% were issued to bicyclists in one census tract, an area with only 0.5% of the city’s population. The vast majority



map 1

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of tickets were issued in the north and west of the central core including Central Park, Centennial, and South Point Douglas. While there are some protected bike lanes north of downtown, there are none on Main Street, where hundreds of tickets were issued (Map 1). Where protected bike lanes do exist, such as on Sherbrook St in West Broadway, there is a pattern of tickets issued along the busy arterial roads that intersect with it (such as Portage, Ellice and Sargent Avenues) (Map 2).

In 2015, the City of Winnipeg adopted the award-winning Winnipeg Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies, one of few plans at the time to explicitly address equity in how bike lanes are prioritized. This plan identified communities that had potentially higher need (such as areas with more youth, recent immigrants and lower income households) and fewer bike lanes, noting specifically that areas north of downtown have high equity need and a low number of bike facilities. As the plan states: “The combination of low bicycle network coverage and a high equity score indicates a vulnerable community with limited access to safe bicycle facilities. This is a strong justification to connect these areas into the Winnipeg bicycle network with future infrastructure improvements.” Despite this, the majority of areas identified for prioritization have received no new bike investments.

While recognizing that bicycles on the sidewalk present a hazard for pedestrians, it is understandable that a cyclist may choose to use a sidewalk instead of navigating multiple lanes of fast-moving traffic. However, in some areas of the city, these strategies to protect physical safety can result in interactions with police and tickets. This is not necessarily because bicyclists in those areas of the city engage in “riskier” behaviour, but rather they travel in neighbourhoods with high police presence. Importantly, we don’t know the broader impacts of this type of enforcement in discouraging cycling and on health and wellbeing.

While investments in bicycle infrastructure cannot overcome over-policing, it can begin to address the chronic underinvestment in some Winnipeg communities. The sheer number of tickets issued where there are no safe alternatives for bicyclists demands that the City prioritize investments in these neighbourhoods.

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map 2

Map Credit: Aaron Snider