

Question: can more traffic actually mean *fewer* major collisions?

Manitoba leads the country with the highest number of injuries per ten thousand registered vehicles

Last week I was out of town, presenting at the Western Canada Traffic Association's annual road safety conference in Vancouver. The conference's main purpose was to gather road safety professionals from the western provinces together to meet and discuss the newest technologies, techniques and research.

It was the first time I had been "home" since my move to Winnipeg in March. I'm glad to say that "home" isn't Vancouver any more.

I found it impossible not to compare the two, now that I've lived here for six months.

Here you can buy a home and actually go downstairs because no one is living there but your teenagers and your unused exercise equipment. In Vancouver, odds are pretty good you'd have renter or two living down there. You need all the help you can get when a 50-year-old "starter" home runs you \$375,000.



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Vancouver, I must admit, has the lock on amazing views. There aren't many places in the world where you can stand on a beach, look up at snow-capped mountains, decide they look pretty good, and be on the hiking trail 20 minutes later.

"Rush" hour?

Twenty minutes later, that is, assuming you aren't caught in the snarl that is Vancouver traffic. Which is one of the big negatives of the West Coast. As I was told when I first moved here—it doesn't matter where you live in Winnipeg, nothing is more than 20 minutes away.

As anyone who as been to Vancouver can attest, it's pretty much

rush hour 24 hours a day, and during the pre and post work hours, it's not unusual to sit in stalled traffic and not move for a half an hour or more.

It's enough to make you crazy, especially if you're used to a traffic environment like the one in Winnipeg, where waiting a nanosecond behind someone at a light is a massive inconvenience.

Yes, heavy traffic is infuriating. But, it's also statistically safer than a wide stretch of road. That's what my presentation was all about.

It may seem logical that the more cars there are on the road, the more accidents there will be. And that's true. The trick, however, is in understanding the differences in collision types.

Lots of bumper to bumper traffic means lots of fender benders. But, since drivers simply don't have the room to speed or drive aggressively, the serious injury or death rates are relatively low. It's hard to be a jerk when you're hemmed in on all sides.

However, the study that I worked on and presented to the conference illustrated that while the number of vehicles on the road went way down in the wee hours of the morning, the number of serious injuries and deaths per number of vehicles on the road went way up. More room to speed, more room to take chances, more ambulance calls.

Space to take chances

A variation of those findings can be applied to Manitoba, and Winnipeg (the major traffic centre) in particular.

You would think that a province the size of Manitoba would have its fair share of traffic injuries and deaths, but nothing compared to heavily populated provinces like Ontario and B.C.

Wrong. According to Transport Canada statistics, Manitoba leads Canada with the highest number of injuries per ten thousand registered vehicles. We're also the third highest in Canada for traffic fatalities per ten thousand registered vehicles.

The problem most certainly isn't the direct result of any one factor. But I'm convinced, and I have the stats to prove it, that some of our traffic problems are the direct result of having too little traffic. It's simply too easy to speed, and speeding dramatically increases numbers of and severity of injuries.

There were roughly 27,000 collisions reported to police in Manitoba in both 1997 and 1998. However, in 1998, 383 more people were injured. Same number of crashes per year, but almost 400 more people hurt.

The number of serious crashes in Manitoba is increasing. Next week, we'll talk about why.

That's it for now. Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

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