

# LIVABLE ROADS FOR RURAL SAANICH: ADVOCATING FOR SAFE ROADS IN A RURAL SETTING

Horse Council BC had the honour of interviewing Livable Roads for Rural Saanich (LRRS) to discuss their advocacy work, and specifically challenges and successes for equestrians.

LRRS was formed in January 2017, with a group of residents spearheading a public meeting to voice their concerns over several roads in Rural Saanich, all of which are narrow, winding and being used as commuter cut-throughs. For one of these roads, advocacy had already been ongoing for a decade. From the beginning, the group has advocated for neighborhood safety and livability. LRRS believes in upholding Rural Saanich's Local Area Plan: a vision for quiet roads that embody the slower pace of rural living and protect all vulnerable users – pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians alike.

Here are the interview questions and the insights gained into the equestrian perspective.

## **Why are equestrians an important asset when forming a group of road users to advocate for road safety?**

Representation of all vulnerable user groups in common cause gives LRRS the strongest possible voice in addressing city council decision-makers. The cause of equestrians was raised strongly from the beginning of our campaign. They are a valued and visible part of rural life.

## **How does using the rural roads in Saanich benefit you as an equestrian?**

The roads in Rural Saanich benefit the local equestrians in a multitude of ways. For many, roads provide the only way to access trailheads without needing a truck and trailer to get there. Riding off property offers a therapeutic approach for both horse and rider by allowing them to enjoy long relaxed walks. The introduction to different sights and sounds aids in the horses' training, and exercise over varied terrain improves their conditioning. In years past, when the roads were safer, one LRRS member shared that she would ride her horse to go grocery shopping, with stops at the farm stands along her road to pick up produce, flowers and once even a frozen chicken!

## **What do you think equestrians and horses bring to Rural Saanich by being visible road users?**

Equestrians and horses offer a living representation of the history and heritage of rural Saanich and a characteristic of a rural lifestyle. Members mention that many people they meet on the roadways slow down, smile and wave while passing their horses. The sight of an animal can bring such joy to people if they truly slow down on the roads to take a breath and enjoy this change from the urban setting. Rural living embodies slower paced activities such as farm stands, markets, vineyards, and farm cafes.

## **What are some positive things that have happened for equestrians being part of LRRS?**

Members of LRRS speak highly of the rural Neighbourhood Gateway signage that they designed, and Saanich installed. The sign depicts a pedestrian and dog, cyclist with child, and equestrian, with the heading Welcome to Rural Saanich and a bold Slow Down, over a winding road. However, LRRS would have to say that there have been few other tangible or lasting changes for equestrians as a direct result of their work. (Outside of and well before LRRS, equestrians themselves had achieved some paths and two equestrian friendly crossings.)

Pam Harrison, a founder of LRRS, says she "is saddened that there is little in concrete change after 5 years –but the work continues and LRRS remains dedicated to its goals of safety for all vulnerable users on roads where the pavement needs to be shared. Being discovered and interviewed by Horse Council BC is testimony to the impact of LRRS beyond Saanich municipality."

The equestrian members give praise to LRRS in feeling supported and are happy to be part of a group that has a dedicated voice with the municipality. Keeping road safety at the forefront of the councilors' and mayor's minds is important work.

## **What are some of the barriers that are getting in the way of making roads safer in rural Saanich?**

Unfortunately, the barriers to making Rural Saanich roadways safer are complex and seemingly endless. LRRS is looking for more support from the municipality. They expect Saanich to uphold and commit to the Local Area Plan that is already in place. Being in a rural setting there are less people, so less voter impact, making buy in to support and fund rural projects an ongoing challenge. A wish that LRRS has is for more communication between municipal departments, working in a more interconnected way towards concrete traffic calming solutions.

Pressures of increased traffic from commuters and local industry, as well as google maps suggesting rural Saanich roads as a time saving alternative, play a big role in the issue of unsafe roads. The status quo approach focuses on traffic efficiency. In rural areas with no vulnerable user amenities this largely benefits vehicle operators, even though the municipality promotes Active Transportation. This maintains a car-centric culture where, unfortunately, some drivers fail to appreciate the necessity of slowing down on rural roads. These historic roads were built with little to no shoulder or large ditches on either side, making it impossible to escape dangerous drivers. Lack of police presence and effective enforcement leads to less accountability with drivers.

## **What are some strategies to help improve roads for equestrians and other user groups?**

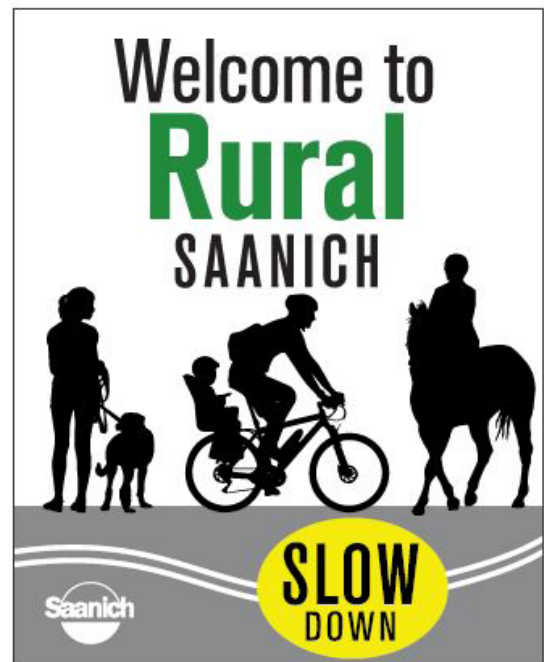
Strategies range from influencing municipal decisions to driver education. LRRS believes that official speed reduction has to be the starting point on these rural roads, and stays focused on that goal. It is important to keep up the pressure for speed reduction and traffic calming by having these issues consistently in front of elected officials and municipal staff.

LRRS also believes that a cost-effective strategy would be to commit to incremental road improvements for vulnerable users, like equestrians, in conjunction with regular maintenance. Examples would be regularly removing shoulder vegetation so riders can get to path networks safely, increasing signage, and improving useable shoulders instead of increasing pavement width.

A municipally supported event to partially close a rural road for part of a weekend day could celebrate the safe use of a rural road for all different modes of Active Transportation.

## **What, above all, do we need to make the lives of horses and their owners/ riders better?**

Equestrians, above all, want visibility! Figuratively speaking, they want to be heard by local government, to have speeds reduced, and for roadways to be safer. In a literal sense riders and horse owners want to be seen on the roads and respected by drivers. Education, traffic calming measures and advocacy will help LRRS reach their goals.



Horse Council BC hopes that the work of LRRS helps inspire HCBC members who have road safety concerns in their own communities. We want to thank LRRS taking the time to meet with us to and share their insights into the road safety concerns in their community. If you're interested in getting involved in an organization like LRRS check your community newsletter and learn about and get involved with the committees at your local municipality. That's how equestrians found out about and got involved with LRRS! LRRS believes in reaching out to everyone to advocate for their cause. This includes councillors, mayors, municipal staff, and neighbouring municipalities. They also believe in thinking outside the box and are happy to have interviews like this one to spread their message far and wide.

If you would like to learn more about the LRRS please visit their website [lrrs.org](http://lrrs.org)

or you can find them on Facebook @ Livable Roads for Rural Saanich.

If you would like to subscribe to their bulletin or provide input you can do so by email: [lrrscontact@gmail.com](mailto:lrrscontact@gmail.com).

