

e-mail to Mayor and Council Maple Ridge

Re: HUB Bike to School program / Complete Streets

Date: March 22, 2013

Dear Mayor and Council,

Maple Ridge residents are interested in cycling, as evidenced by the highly successful Albion Elementary cycling training in 2011. The Province is investing in cycling as they recognize its importance in healthy, safe and connected communities. We have outlined here ways that the District of Maple Ridge can use this interest to gain the many benefits that cycling brings to a community, including cost-savings and increased livability that attracts investment and residents.

The Principal at Albion Elementary School, Ron Lanzarotta, reported, "I thought the program run at Albion two years ago was great.....we had a lot of parents and students participating, and the level of engagement was very high. Albion does not have a lot of students biking to school because there is such heavy traffic flow on 240th and surrounding main streets."

After the very successful program at Albion Elementary, the District chose to discontinue working with HUB last year and was instead considering TransLink's (free) TravelSmart program, which as I understand is more about traffic safety in general and includes only a minimal cycling component. At schools throughout Metro Vancouver cycling education through HUB is increasing and improving. New Westminster provides Bike to School education for all sixth grade students, while Surrey has also committed to educating all the grade 4 and 5 students through an extensive plan, covering the next 2 years.

The program at Albion Elementary has shown that there is lots of interest among kids, and parents, in biking to school, and HUB is committed to do our part and continue to raise awareness and promote cycling. Ultimately, though, it comes down to perceived safety. Most neighbourhood streets are quite safe for cycling. However, eventually kids biking to school are funneled onto the main traffic routes leading to the schools, where traffic volumes are especially high at drop-off and pick-up times. If no separated facilities for cycling are provided on these roads, they will have to share the busy sidewalks with many kids and moms with strollers walking to school, which is not exactly a recipe for success.

We need to start providing options for our kids (and parents) in the way they get around. The number one place to start is of course schools. Many adults often reminisce about the good old days when we all biked or walked to school, and in the same sentence express their regret about how that no longer seems to be possible for our kids these days. There are two simple reasons for that:

1. we continue to expand our built environment in a leap-frog manner with many car-dependent subdivisions, mostly consisting of single family homes without amenities close by and with poor cycling/walking facilities and connectivity
2. we build our infrastructure to move cars as efficiently and quickly as possible, while the people that need to get around are most often an afterthought.

With the Transportation Plan presently undergoing a thorough review, we feel this is probably a good time to again encourage the District to draft and adopt a Complete Streets policy for our community.

Much development is going on in Maple Ridge, with more people being added all the time. We continue to focus on cars as our main mode of transportation. We have a Master Equestrian Plan, however we don't have a proper Master Cycling Plan to benefit the 60% of the population that would consider cycling if conditions for cycling were improved. Such a Plan would prescribe consideration of the needs of people on bicycles - of all ages and abilities - when building new roads or upgrading existing ones. In the absence of a Complete Streets Policy that requires us to consider the needs of all road users instead of just cars, and without inclusion of these requirements in the Transportation Plan, nothing will change in the way people get around, and parents will continue to drive their kids to school.

It's tremendously exciting to see the growth of cycling around the world, thanks to the fact that planners and decision makers are starting to realize that cities need to plan for people, not just cars. We are looking forward to seeing continuing change in our community as well!

To summarize, we recommend:

- Providing Bike to School education for elementary schools in Maple Ridge in the near future
- Developing a Master Cycling Plan
- Developing a Complete Streets Policy in the Transportation Plan
- Construction of separated cycling facilities on arterial roads to connect residential areas with schools. For example 240th Street at Albion Elementary

Yours sincerely,

Ivan Chow, co-chair
HUB: Your Cycling Connection
Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Chapter