

Cycling: Make sidewalks, streets safe

by Jackie Chow - Maple Ridge News

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Maple Ridge's new Active Transportation Advisory Committee is looking for a solution to the cycling-on-the-sidewalk problem in our downtown, a frequently recurring topic of discussion among council members for years already.

At its March meeting, Ineke Boekhorst of the Downtown Maple Ridge Business Improvement Association, Don Mitchell of the Seniors Society, as well as a lady who owns a business on 224th Street all told the committee that elderly people are often afraid to walk on the sidewalks, as people on bikes could knock them off their feet, with serious consequences.

It's a problem that needs to be addressed.

The fear alone of being hit will keep seniors from going out for a walk to exercise or do errands. They should feel safe to do so.

The problem is not unique to Maple Ridge, though our city distinguishes itself from everywhere else in B.C. by having a bylaw that allows cycling on sidewalks anywhere in town. New Westminster allows cycling on certain sidewalks only.

I agree, kids should be able to ride their bikes on the sidewalks if the roads are too dangerous. But in the downtown, it's rarely kids biking on sidewalks.

Legitimate cyclists are considerate. They slow down for pedestrians and politely use their bells, which people walking would be able to hear if only they didn't plug their ears with headphones to listen to music.

So why are people on bikes on the sidewalk in the first place?

Simple: they fear for their lives, having to share the road with speeding cars and inconsiderate drivers.

If people can't safely ride on the road, either they'll ride on the sidewalk, or they won't ride at all.

Bicycles are obviously not welcome on Lougheed Highway and Dewdney Trunk Road. There are some designated east-west bike routes. All have been designed to accommodate car traffic, but discourage through-traffic with stop signs at every intersection.

Stop signs discourage cycling, as stop-and-goes waste energy and time.

Drivers who stop and wave bikes through unintentionally make crossing intersections more hazardous for cyclists as driver behaviour becomes less predictable.

The purpose of these designated bike routes is mostly to keep cyclists out of the way of cars so they don't have to slow down.

But wait, we want them to slow down.

That's the other problem that the Active Transportation Committee wants to find a solution to: speeding throughout the town core.

Posted limits are not going to do it, as drivers will continue to drive at the speed that feels safe to them, even if it doesn't feel safe to others.

And speed is pretty hard to control on an arterial if you have two lanes in each direction.

The question that needs to be answered is: what do we want our downtown to be?

Right now, Dewdney and Lougheed are traffic sewers, the purpose of which is to accommodate the fast and efficient movement of cars on our streets.

Fact is, people on bikes don't feel safe on some of our roadways and pedestrians don't feel safe on our sidewalks.

The ATAC committee first wants to focus on 224th Street, where speeds are already lower than most.

It'll be a good start. Hopefully before long, other roads will follow and we'll slowly, but surely see our downtown transformed into a more people-friendly place.

– Jackie Chow is a member of the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows chapter of HUB: Your Cycling Connection.