

Cycling: A commitment to a new direction

Residents of 123rd Ave. residents were not happy with the bike lane option.

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Now that Maple Ridge's first cycle track on 203rd Street is complete, the focus is on improvements for 123rd Avenue.

After 123 Ave. residents complained about speeding cars, city staff, last year at an open house, explored curb bulges and traffic circles, then this year separated bike lanes as a way to slow cars down and improve safety.

The first solution would make cycling more dangerous, while the second would enable people on bikes of all ages and abilities to ride along 123 Ave. safely and crossing distances for pedestrians would be shorter.

Both should slow down car traffic.

123rd Ave. residents were not happy with the bike lane option, to say it mildly. Their issue is that all street parking would have to be removed.

More students will hopefully bike, so less parking should be needed.

Extra parking at Volker Park would provide more parking for Laityview elementary students. Some parents might have to park their cars on a side street to drop off or pick up their children.

Residents on 123rd Ave. would have to park their vehicles on their own property or perhaps park on a side street. When residents organize large family gatherings at Christmas, or big birthday bashes, there may not be enough parking space on everyone's driveway and residents will have to become a little more creative.

Along much of the south side and some of the north side of the street, parking is already not permitted by the way.

Due to considerable opposition, the city is now looking at widening the sidewalk to create a multi-use path, so that parking can be preserved.

First of all, a good question to ask ourselves: is it the city's job to make sure that people of all ages and abilities can safely and efficiently use our roads to get around, whether they travel by car, bike or on foot?

Or is it more important to satisfy peak parking demand during half an hour or so on school days and a few evenings of the year, and provide ample free storage space at all times for private vehicles, including trailers, boats and RVs?

If landlords don't wish their tenants to park on their driveways, should that become the city's problem?

All homes along 123 Ave. have enough space for three cars, but the majority of homes have more parking spaces, whether on driveways, in carports or garages. Quite a few households have RVs or boats parked on their driveways that are not used on a regular basis and could potentially be stored elsewhere.

Many people could empty their garages of 'stuff' to make room for their cars.

Multiple drive- or ride-bys have shown many un- or under-used driveways while cars are parked on the street.

So now the city is looking at the option of a multi-use sidewalk. I did a few more ride-bys to get an idea what a multi-use path would look like.

A strip of asphalt would be added, sometimes on the right side, sometimes on the left of the sidewalk, which together with about 50 driveways on each side of the road would result in a patchwork path.

Large trees would probably stay, as would nice, tall hedges.

Where any vegetation of value needs to be saved, the path would likely be narrower than the minimum required 2.5 to three metres. There would be many other obstacles, such as Hydro poles and lamp posts, as well as traffic signs in the middle of the path.

The slanted driveways would give cyclists a roller-coaster ride.

Both pedestrian and cyclist safety on multi-use paths would be compromised.

Multi-use paths are classified as 'less safe' route types for cyclists, according to UBC's Cycling in Cities research.

The parked cars between the path and the car lanes would reduce visibility of people on bikes. With bikes being allowed to travel in both directions on any multi-use path, there's significantly more danger of a cyclist being hit by a car entering or exiting a driveway or turning into or out of a side street.

As more experienced cyclists are aware of the dangers of a multi-use path like this, and do not like to be slowed down by pedestrians walking in the middle of the path with their ears plugged listening to loud music, or to have to swerve around lamp- and Hydro poles or to slow down for the many dipping driveways, they will continue to ride on the road, leading to increased road rage by drivers, who will feel even more entitled as cyclists are, after all, accommodated on the multi-use path.

I understand that many people are unhappy with the bi-directional cycle track along 203rd St., and some worry that bike lanes along 123rd Ave. would look similar.

On uni-directional bike lanes, green paint would be applied only at intersections, not at every driveway. The low raised curbs used to separate the bike lanes from the roadway are nothing like what's been installed on 203rd St.

Bike lanes would undoubtedly be used by cyclists of all ages and abilities. Multi-use paths will not. It's obvious which gives a greater return on investment.

The section of 123rd Ave., between 203rd and Laity streets, will be the test case that will have to prove mayor and council's commitment to a new direction with regard to transportation.

Do they truly support equitable, sustainable transportation choices such as cycling? Do they truly understand the importance of a well connected, safe and convenient cycling network, not only for short local trips, but also for combining cycling with transit?

Will they be able to look at the bigger picture and understand that continued prioritization of cars over people will result in continued worsening of sprawl and congestion and further degradation of our (sub)urban communal living room and consequently continued worse health outcomes for our population than many other communities that are moving towards a more equitable, truly multi-modal transportation network?

Time will tell.

- HUB is running a free family cycling safety course at Hammond elementary on Sept. 30. There is still space for a few more families. For more information, contact Alyshia at alyshia@bikehub.ca.

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