

Businesses can benefit from bike lanes

Vancouver cyclists start Businesses for Bikes program

by Phil Melnychuk
staff reporter

Businesses in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows are being asked to jump on to the bicycling bandwagon and say how they think cycling is good for sales.

"Business should realize that improved cycling infrastructure in the downtown area will benefit business - because it makes the downtown more accessible for everybody - not just people with cars," said Jackie Chow.

Chow, with the local branch of the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition, launched the Businesses for Bikes program Tuesday.

It's a plan to gather a group of businesses who support cycling, who in turn can help other businesses attract the two-wheeled set.

The Downtown Maple Ridge Business Improvement Association sent out the notice as an information item, but it's too soon to say what kind of encouragement, if any, cycling will get in Maple Ridge.

"It's just something to see how or what kind of support," said Ineke Boekhorst, executive-director with the BIA.



James MacLennan/THE NEWS

Jackie Chow of the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition sits amongst cars on Lougheed Highway near 224 Street.

One of the main objections to bike lanes is that it takes away parking spaces and impedes access to local shops.

But Boekhorst pointed out there's lot of parking in the downtown, although it may not be on Lougheed Highway or 224th Street. "I think we need to see what the businesses think about it and what is their reaction to it."

She sees a steady increase in people getting around on two wheels. "I just see in the future, people are going to bike."

However, bike lanes aren't even included in the newly renovated parts of downtown.

"Our problem is a lot of our shops are on Dewdney Trunk Road and Lougheed Highway," on TransLink's major road networks, said Chow. The transportation agency is reluctant to give up space on those roads for bike lanes.

What could happen in the future, though, once the Haney Bypass is widened its entire length to four lanes, traffic volume could be

reduced on Lougheed Highway through downtown. That could allow angle parking to be installed on Lougheed, leaving room for a bike lane from 222nd Street to 228th Street, says Chow.

"All this money is being spent on beautifying the downtown area and we still have all these cars going through there and they're not slowing down too much."

It's not a pleasant place for people to be, she adds.

"If you make the shopping streets more people friendly, it will help the shops."

Herman Thind, owner of Opa Souvlaki in Meadowntown Centre in Pitt Meadows, says

cyclists are a big part of his business.

They arrive from the suburbs surrounding the mall and via the bike path along the south side of Lougheed Highway.

"We find we get a lot of traffic from people who ride in from the surrounding areas."

The mall has easy access for cyclists and there are bike stands at points around the mall with management considering adding more.

One problem, though, is bicycle access from Maple Ridge. Thind suggests just a bike lane on Lougheed Highway from Maple Ridge would help.

People who join the Businesses for Bikes program (there's no

cost) will get a guide showing how to market their business to cyclists and get noted in the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition's newsletter.

According to the coalition, information from Metro Vancouver's bike to work week shows:

- average wage of a bike-to-work week participant is \$50,000;
- 27 per cent of those participating earn more than \$75,000;
- fastest growing segment of cyclists are women and those approaching retirement;
- cycling is the fastest-growing method of travel, according to the City of Vancouver;
- removing parking spots increases visibility for stores nearby.