

# Don't waste your vote; enough sprawl

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According to a recent United Nations report on population growth, research shows that “an extra child born today in the United States, would, down the generations, produce an eventual carbon footprint seven times that of an extra child in China, 55 times that of an Indian child, or 86 times that of a Nigerian child.”

An extra child born in our communities today likely would be just as taxing on the environment as one in the states.

Are we trying hard enough to reduce our footprint? After barely any debate, Maple Ridge council seemed easily convinced that this was not the case, and committed early last year to a very aggressive greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 33 per cent (overall, not per capita) from 2007 levels by 2020.

Ninety-nine per cent of our emissions are generated by the community, and only one per cent is from the district's corporate emissions, so a LEED certified fire hall and hybrid cars for the district are only a minute drop in the bucket.

About 58 per cent of emissions in Maple Ridge are from transportation. So it would seem to make sense to find ways to reduce our auto-dependency.

Is council working to make that happen?

It's great to see how our downtown is slowly being transformed. It will still take many years to complete, but we're on the right track there.

Outside the core, it's a totally different story. We keep allowing the development of pockets of car-dependent neighbourhoods scattered all over east Maple Ridge, and isolated Silver Valley, far from the downtown and no amenities close by.

We keep allowing more houses to be built close to schools that are way over capacity, so that kids have to be bussed elsewhere to go to school.

Clearly, separated neighbourhoods are designed by developers whenever a land owner is ready to cash in on his nest egg.

Even today, these neighbourhoods often consist of a loop or dead-end off the main road, without connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists. This is the same type of design that, as urban designers all over the world have known for quite some time, has caused our neighbourhoods to become unwalkable and made us rely on cars to get around.

The most recent statistics on GHG emissions on the district's website are from 2007. It will be interesting to see the numbers for Maple Ridge for 2010 in the community energy and emissions inventory, still to be released by the Ministry of the Environment. I'm afraid we all have a pretty good idea where those numbers are heading: way up, instead of way down. This will not be surprising, since our population is growing, our community keeps sprawling, we keep relying on our cars to get around, we keep building big houses – so that we have space for all the stuff that we buy – and we keep eating food that has been grown far away.

The majority on council are of the opinion that our OCP will help us reduce our emissions without any further measures. Hopefully, we'll see some proof of that soon, but I strongly suspect that we'll be very disappointed.

The Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition is advocating for cycling for transportation. But obviously –even though cycling is the most efficient way of transportation ever invented and, as such, deserves a better treatment than just being relegated to the gutter – improving cycling infrastructure is only part of the bigger picture. Without more responsible development, most of us will continue to rely heavily on cars, while having to build and maintain the costly infrastructure required for these two-ton-plus vehicles, often merely used to transport our bodies around – once considered to be a luxury, now a basic need, while in many places not being able to afford to build sidewalks and bike paths for those who walk or cycle (once considered a basic need, now a luxury).

Spending on cycling constitutes a tiny fraction of tax dollars spent on car infrastructure. Isn't it sad that we feel we can't afford any more than the equivalent of the cost of a cup of Starbucks coffee per year on cycling infrastructure to allow our children to cycle to school safely, while most of us individually spend on average about \$6,000-7,000 a year to own and operate a car?

Maple Ridge is spending only about a fifth of what it should be spending to adequately maintain our road system, which is about \$530 per person per year.

Even with one per cent added to taxes for reducing the infrastructure deficit, in 25 years we'll still have reduced this deficit only about half of what it is now.

We're living way beyond our means with all this sprawl and our car addiction, and our kids will be the ones paying for it.

Sometimes people say that cycling is not feasible in Maple Ridge, and possibly to a slightly lesser extent in Pitt Meadows, because of the long distances as well as the hills. With the world-wide rapidly increasing popularity of the electric-assist bicycle, this no longer should be a problem. As our communities create more and safer routes for cyclists, the potential for growth in the use of e-bikes on roads and paths will be huge.

With the planned public bike share system in Vancouver, commuters will have the option to cycle to a transit station in Maple Ridge or Pitt Meadows, park the bike in a bike locker, take the bus or [West Coast Express](#), and complete their trip at the other end with a bike rental.

These PBS schemes have become very successful in many cities all over the world in recent years. Less people will need to drive, and there will be more space on the road for those of us who still do. A win-win for everyone.

We need more connected, convenient and safer bike routes –and more bicycle parking – to make it work.

We sent out a list of questions regarding cycling to municipal candidates in both Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. Replies have been posted on our blog: <http://www.rmclist.info/>.

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