

# Birth of world-class cycling infrastructure

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During an unexpected two-week visit to my birth country, the Netherlands, in March, I was once again drooling over the fantastic cycling infrastructure in my parents' home town, Lelystad.

Contrary to most towns and cities in Europe, it's a rather young city with about 80,000 inhabitants.

[Lelystad](#), about an hour's drive from Amsterdam, was born in the late '60s on land reclaimed from the sea, and originally served mostly as a bedroom community for people who worked in Amsterdam. I moved there with my family when Lelystad was only four years old.

At the time, it had only 4,000 inhabitants, but it already had four-lane arterial highways. Cyclists and pedestrians have always been prohibited from using these highways. In order to cross them, numerous pedestrian/cyclist bridges were built. The rest of the road network consisted of fairly narrow collector and residential roads with low traffic speeds, so that these roads could easily be shared by cars and cyclists.

Since I left Lelystad about 30 years ago, a fabulous cycling network – much of which is completely separated from roads – has been developed. Presently, it consists of 60 kms of separated bike paths (this is the main bicycle network only and doesn't include the many kilometers of secondary and recreational bike paths).

The city is working on providing the entire main network with a red asphalt layer over the next few years.

The highway arterials have seen considerable changes over the years. Various roundabouts have been added as well as traffic lights in the downtown area. Interestingly, the routes for cars have been changed to make them less direct, whereas cycling has become even more direct and convenient.

Many bike/pedestrian-only bridges also help to make cycling and walking more appealing by providing shorter routes for bikes and pedestrians than for cars.

Lelystad now has train service, and many hundreds of bikes can be seen parked at the train station each working day. At about 230 locations throughout the country, the Dutch railways offer cheap and convenient rental bikes for commuters to complete their trip.

Now that Lelystad is approaching its 50th anniversary, it has matured considerably and has become fairly self-sufficient. It has three main shopping centres, all entirely car-free, with paid car parking on the periphery, and bicycle parking throughout. Well-stocked neighbourhood grocery stores, for most people at walking or biking distance, have modest, free car parking. Many people use their bikes to do their groceries, since the route by bike is often shorter and faster than by car. My parents' nearest grocery store is only five minutes away, by bike or by car.

The population densities of Maple Ridge and Lelystad are very similar: 308/km<sup>2</sup> for Lelystad, and 287/km<sup>2</sup> for Maple Ridge.

Because Lelystad is so spread out compared to older cities in the Netherlands, relatively less people commute by bike: 'only' about 20 per cent of trips are made by bike, whereas the average in the Netherlands is about 25 per cent. This compares to 0.7 per cent in Maple Ridge.

How much does it cost the Dutch to have such a world class cycling infrastructure? Approximately \$40 per person annually.

Quite a bargain, I'd say.

- The VACC will be at the Earth Day celebrations in Pitt Meadows with an information booth, on April 19, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., at Hoffman Park.

In Maple Ridge, Earth Day is celebrated on April 21, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The VACC, together with [Ridge Meadows Recycling Society](#), is organizing a bike-give-away. Do you have an unused bike – still in reasonable condition – gathering dust in your garage? Consider donating it for the give-away.

You can drop off the bike at the Recycling Depot, 10092 – 236th Street (off River Road). If you're not able to drop it off, send me an e-mail ([jchow23708@yahoo](mailto:jchow23708@yahoo)), and we'll arrange to have it picked up. Visit our website <http://www.rm cyclist.info/> the week before Earth Day to view pictures of the bikes.

During the Earth Day celebrations, we will hold two draws to determine the winners of the selected bikes, one at 10am, one at noon. The winners of three of the bikes will get the assistance of a personal coach in doing some minor repairs on their bikes after each draw.

Maple Ridge Cycle has graciously offered the services of a bike mechanic for our “Cycle Recycle” station, and there will also be several VACC volunteers on hand. This is also a great opportunity for anyone interested in the mechanics of a bike to learn more about bicycle repair and to ask questions.

Even if you don't need a bike, you may want to drop by to practice putting a bike on a bus bike rack or pick up a free Translink bike map, after parking your bike in our gated bike parking area.

Jackie Chow is a member of the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows Chapter of the [Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition](#).