

# Investing in the benefits of cycling

By [Jackie Chow - Maple Ridge News](#)

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Much continues to be written about the obesity epidemic that's plaguing the western world.

According to the Maple Ridge Healthier Community Action Plan report by Fraser Health, presented to council in 2011, Maple Ridge scores worse than average in B.C., as well as the Fraser Health area, when it comes to the incidence of diseases, such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, cancer and cerebrovascular diseases, which are all linked to obesity.

We're also less physically active than average. We're apparently doing slightly better than average when it comes to healthy eating habits.

A 2001 study by GPI Atlantic shows that rates of overweight more than doubled throughout Canada from 1985 (13 per cent) to 2001 (29 per cent).

It points out that, even though B.C. still compares relatively well to other provinces, these rates are rising more sharply in B.C. than in the rest of Canada.

More than 2,000 British Columbians die unnecessarily each year due to being overweight.

There's an annual \$730-\$830 million drain on the British Columbia economy due to obesity-related illness.

Government spending on health care in 2011-12 will be almost 42 per cent of the total provincial budget, accounting for \$17.5 billion (this amounts to about \$3,900 per capita).

Dr. Marco Terwiel recently pointed out that this figure increases by about \$0.5 billion annually. He also suggested, as a long-term solution to the skyrocketing cost, to "coach people to take much greater responsibility for maintaining their own health."

Studies show that countries with the highest rates of active transportation show the lowest levels of obesity, whereas countries with extreme auto-dependency show the highest levels of obesity.

This is a critical piece of information that should not be ignored.

When a retailer tries to convince me to buy his product and save money, I know that this means I won't actually be saving any money, as in putting money in the bank. Instead, I might just be spending a bit less if buying it from this particular retailer instead of somewhere else. In the case of investing in walking and cycling infrastructure, the real potential net savings to communities and the province are huge. A 2010 study in the U.K. found that economic benefits of investments in walking and cycling are 20:1.

Apart from health related benefits, this also includes other benefits such as savings in travel time, congestion and accidents.

An ounce of prevention is definitely better than a pound for a cure.

Investing in active transportation is a wise, long-term investment in the health of our citizens, our communities, as well as the health of our planet.

## **Earth Day**

As part of Earth Day in Maple Ridge – still six weeks away – the Ridge Meadows Recycling Society will be celebrating its 40th anniversary.

As well, the VACC is helping organize a bike give-away for the event.

Those of you who have an unused, unwanted bike tucked away in the garage, please consider donating it for this purpose.

Maple Ridge Cycle, as well as some VACC volunteers, will be on site to assist those who are looking for a 'new' ride, with some minor repairs. We'll do our best to find your bike a new, loving owner.

Bikes can be dropped off at the Ridge Meadows Recycling Depot (10092 – 236th Street, off River Road). If you're unable to drop off your bike, send an e-mail to [jchow23708@yahoo](mailto:jchow23708@yahoo), and we'll arrange to have it picked up.

As well, we'll provide bike parking and will have cycling maps and other information at Earth Day. And back by popular demand, our bus bike rack – a big success at GETI Fest last September – will be back. Learning how to use the bus bike-rack can vastly increase the scope and distance of your biking travels by integrating with the bus system. Taking your bike on the bus to Coquitlam, or Braid Street

in New Westminster, for instance, can connect you to SkyTrain, which then gives a rider access to most of Burnaby and Vancouver, without a car.

So if you haven't had chance to practice putting a bike on a bus rack, mark the day: April 21 – 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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