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Fewer young people are buying cars

By **Jackie Chow - Maple Ridge News**

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Something interesting that I read about this week: according to a survey done in the Netherlands earlier this year, nine per cent of respondents got rid of their cars last year to save money, to cope with the effects of the financial crisis.

Like in many other countries, the car is a bit of a status symbol in the Netherlands, so I think this is quite amazing. But a car is such a money guzzler, and not having one makes a huge difference to your pocketbook. Isn't it nice if you have options other than the car, like the Dutch do?

Here in North America we have a long way to go before we can (or want to) ditch our cars.

There is, however, an interesting development, even on our continent, that fewer young people are choosing to spend their money on a car, which was, until not too long ago, considered their ticket to freedom.

This decision is made for a variety of reasons, such as the fact that many of them prefer to live in an urban setting, where more frequent transit, better cycling infrastructure and shorter distances for walking and biking make it easier to get around than in the suburbs. Also, much of their socializing is done on-line, so they can just stay home and meet their friends that way.

Many young people also choose not to get a driver's licence and buy a car because of the huge cost involved. The cost of insurance for young drivers has skyrocketed, and the cost of gas is steadily going up as well.

On average, Canadian households spend about 20 per cent of their income on owning and operating automobiles. The car takes an even bigger chunk out of the average income of young people, so it makes sense that they're not as interested in their 'ticket to freedom' as the older generations once were.

If future generations are to be able to cope with the many challenges ahead, one would hope that these trends are considered in the way we allow our cities to grow, so that people are able to make the choice not to own a car.

In Maple Ridge, we've been hearing lots about the success of the Town Centre Incentive Program in absolute numbers. But percentage-wise, in 2012, only 11 per cent of growth took place in the town core, and much of the rest is car-dependent. The district's goal is to have 50 per cent of all development happen in the core.

It's a good idea for youth to start thinking about these and other issues that affect the way they will live in the cities of the future, and to get involved and make their voices heard. And this is just what is starting to happen right now in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows.

In recent months, a number of youth have been working with Gerry Pinel, founder of GETI (Golden Ears Transition Initiative), which serves as an umbrella for various action groups in the Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, with a focus on making the necessary changes to be able to deal with future challenges related to climate change, the global financial meltdown and peak oil.

Together with Gerry, an enthusiastic group of youth is setting up their own GETI Youth Action Group.

This year's GETI Fest, on Sept. 21 (10 a.m. to 3 p.m.), has "Youth in our Community" as its theme.

There will be displays and activities showcasing local youth, community groups, artisans and local businesses working towards reducing oil dependence and building resilient local communities that are economically, socially and ecologically sustainable. So I would encourage any youth who are not already planning to be involved in GETI Fest, through their school or youth groups, to come out to the event and see what it's all about.

If you don't want to depend on a parent (and on oil) to get yourself to the event, just use your bike. HUB is providing bike parking in the enclosed area beside the day care room in the Leisure Centre.

We will also have a bike decorating station (10-11 a.m.), to get ready for this year's bigger and better People in Motion parade. Anything non-fossil-fuel powered goes.

Staging for the parade starts at 10:30 a.m., and we'll start walking, dancing, cycling, rollerblading at 11 a.m.

Between 12 p.m. and 2 p.m. HUB will run a bike rodeo to teach kids the rules of the road. We have two small bikes (and two helmets) for kids who are not able to bring their own.

New for this year: the RCMP Crime Prevention Unit will be at the event, engraving names and driver's license numbers on bikes for identification if ever stolen.

Jackie Chow is a member of the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows chapter of HUB.