

# The key word for cycling is separation

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By **Jackie Chow - Maple Ridge News**

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Both Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows are working on transportation plans.

The City of Pitt Meadows is conducting an on-line survey to get input on its plan, which builds on the pedestrian and cycling master plan that was completed last year.

Meanwhile, Maple Ridge held an open house on May 22 to get input on an update of its transportation plan, which dates back to 2003.

The old bikeways plan from 1994 is now scrapped, and there's no plan for a new one. But there will be a section in the new transportation plan on cycling.

What we got to see at the open house were maps of the planned infrastructure improvements, one each for the different modes.

No specifics are given as to priorities or desired time lines. The display boards dealing with cycling show some vague promises: photos of bike lanes and shoulders, green paint on the asphalt, bike racks, signage, and cyclist on the sidewalk?

More about that later.

It's great to see that separated infrastructure is planned for Lougheed Highway, from 222nd Street to Maple Meadows Way. Also, well before the Lougheed pathway will be complete, we'll have a separated path along 128th Avenue between 210th and 224th streets, connecting with the existing section along Abernethy Way up to 232nd Street.

Other than these improvements, there will be several more bike lanes here and there, and shoulders along arterials in east Maple Ridge.

What really matters most when it comes to our transportation plan for the future is not just some lines on a map, it's the commitment of our mayor and council, as well as municipal staff and residents to true Smart Growth – which means a lot more than just densification in the town core.

Without applying Smart Growth principles in our growth areas of east Maple Ridge and Silver Valley – mixed zoning and densification along arterials, neighbourhood commercial hubs and other local amenities – the expanse of mostly single-family homes there will remain soul-less and people will continue to rely on their cars for pretty much everything.

Much has changed in our town over the past 10 years, so an update was definitely needed. Four years after the opening of the Golden Ears Bridge, municipal engineers now have a better idea of its impact on local traffic patterns.

What has also changed, dramatically, is the understanding and knowledge that has been gained over the past 10 years about what is needed to get more people on their bikes. The big word these days is “separation,” because we know now that that’s what convinces less confident people to venture out more on their bikes. That is actually a complete turn-around from what was the basis of our 1994 bikeways plan, and also the 2003 draft transportation plan. At the time it was still thought that it was better for cyclists to bike on the road, with cars.

We now also know that the biggest gains to be made are in shorter trips in town. Not everybody can or wants to zip down the highway on a road bike at a speed of 40 km/h all the way to Vancouver.

### **Here’s what I think should be emphasized in the cycling section of the new plan.**

- Safe cycling to school for kids, separated from car traffic on arterials or busy, higher speed roads in general, and separated from pedestrians in school zones. If we don’t get our kids to establish active transportation habits now, we’ll have lost a generation, and it’s going to be so much harder to get their kids to bike. Safer infrastructure and education go hand-in-hand.
- We need a complete streets by-law. This will ensure that when new roads are built or existing roads are upgraded within the urban boundary, the needs of all users will be considered, including cyclists.
- A proper cycling plan for the town core. If cycling is ever to become mainstream, it needs to be taken seriously. Relegating cyclists to streets with few destinations and stop signs at every single intersection, just to get them out of the way of drivers, is going to make even the most law-abiding cyclist behave like any old bike bandit.

- A 30 km/h speed limit throughout the town core. I think it's perfectly fine for everyone who drives a car into downtown Maple Ridge to show some respect for those who live, work or shop there. The town core needs to be a place where people feel welcome, not just cars. Shops will benefit when lower speed and noise levels encourage more pedestrian traffic on the sidewalks, and drivers are more likely to notice their signs or window displays.
- A transportation plan can't be seen in isolation from a parking plan. Providing ample free parking for cars has a huge impact on people's transportation choices, and also, unfortunately, on the livability and vibrancy of our town.
- Fewer younger people now want to drive a car to get around. Young, well-educated professionals increasingly want to live in places that offer transit, as well as possibilities for a more active lifestyle, which includes cycling for transportation and recreation. Companies are looking to relocate to cities that offer that kind of lifestyle. Maple Ridge already offers much more affordable housing than most other parts of Metro Vancouver, and has the potential to deliver on the active transportation part as well.
- Sooner or later Vancouver will have a bike share system set up. That will open up more possibilities for Maple Ridge residents to combine transit with cycling (at both ends).

Now let's get back to the sidewalk cycling.

Allowing little kids to bike on the sidewalk makes sense.

For the rest of us, it should only be considered a temporary measure, until changes are made that will make the roads safe for cycling.

None of the successful bike-friendly cities around the world allow cycling on the sidewalk.

So please, let's not make cycling on the sidewalk part of the plan.

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