

Cyclists allowed on sidewalks in Maple Ridge

New bylaw meant to improve
bike safety for kids

by **Phil Melnychuk**
staff reporter

Cyclists pedalling their way through Maple Ridge don't have to be petrified of riding on the road.

They can ride on the sidewalks, legally, thanks to a new highways bylaw passed by council earlier this year.

"The intent was to make it safe for small kids to ride on sidewalks," said Coun. Linda King, who also sits on the bicycle advisory committee.

But anyone of any age can pedal with pedestrians.

"The rule is you have to ride in a way that is slow and respectful of pedestrians," King said.

"You have to ride with respect and carefully."

The new Highway and Traffic Bylaw came into effect last January, said bylaws director Liz Holitzky, who doesn't know of any other city that has a similar law.

"It's not that common."

She pointed out the local bylaw over-rides the Motor Vehicle Act, but applies only in Maple Ridge.

Part of the impetus for the change was to support the school district in encouraging kids to walk or bike to school.

The district's website says cyclists can ride on sidewalks providing they yield to pedestrians and dismount when required.

If they don't do that, they can still be fined under the bylaw or Motor Vehicle Act.

The district says the reason for the bylaw is to give "a safer alternative to those bicycle riders out there who may not have the skills or confidence to join the normal flow of traffic.

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Sidewalk still for pedestrians

Sidewalks from front

"With traffic congestion becoming more of an issue in the Maple Ridge area, our east/west corridors are full of commuter traffic."

It also says commuter cyclists can use the sidewalks while recreational cyclists can ride "without the worry of thinking they are breaking some law."

But the district also wants pedestrians to know, the sidewalk is primarily theirs. Any cyclist-pedestrian accidents will be investigated thoroughly and charges could be laid if needed.

Rick Halas, with the Maple Ridge branch of the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition, said his group didn't lobby for the bylaw, it just happened. But he's glad to see the bylaw in place.

"I would say in the absence of separate infrastructure, in some situations, we feel bikes integrate better with pedestrians than cars."

The intent, though, isn't to open up the sidewalks to cyclist commuters so they can speed along at traffic speed on pedestrian pathways.

Halas said the bicycle advisory committee is debating how to publicize the new bylaw so people understand it correctly.

"I think there should be some debate as to how this should be promoted. People should be told this."

One area such a bylaw would help would be stretches on Dewdney Trunk



Colleen Flanagan/THE NEWS

Barb Pope cycles with her son, Edward.

Road where heavy traffic and narrow road makes it risky for cyclists.

Cyclist Barb Pope wants more people to know about the change. She'll ride on the sidewalk if she has her four-year-old son Edward with her. He rides alongside on a "run bike," a bike with no pedals, or catches a ride in the carrier she tows behind her bike.

With few knowing about the bylaw, pedestrians get angry and tell her she belongs on the road. But motorists don't welcome bikes either.

She doesn't know of any other city in Metro Vancouver that allows bikes and points out that bikes are not allowed on sidewalks in Vancouver.