

The Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Chapter of the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition is pleased with and excited about the new direction that the Districts of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows are planning to take, with the implementation of a revised Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plan, towards a more sustainable future. We are looking forward to be able to – in tandem with the Bicycle Advisory Committee - assist both Districts in finding ways to make cycling in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows a more safe, convenient and pleasant alternative to transportation by the private automobile in our communities.

Please find below the comments of our local chapter on the Parks Master Plan.

- So far, it seems that cycling infrastructure has been mostly the responsibility of the Districts' Engineering departments. However, all types of cycling, also for transportation, should be regarded as a prime responsibility of not only the Engineering but also the Parks, Recreation and Culture- as well as the Planning departments. Cycling offers huge potential in improving health, livability, and recreation in our communities. It supports many of the values that the Parks Master Plan is based on, and therefore we feel that all these departments should work closely together to optimize the potential of cycling for our communities.
- We would like to emphasize the unique cost/benefit advantage that cycling has. As stated multiple times in the draft Master Parks Plan, it is important to provide low-cost and improved access to programs for seniors, youth and those hard to reach. The emphasis is generally placed on providing programs. Cycling offers a unique combination of multiple benefits. It is extremely low cost – which is especially important to many residents in our communities who are having trouble making ends meet in these tough economic times. It is accessible to anybody who has a bike and has access to safe cycling infrastructure, and it combines multiple purposes: exercise (low impact – which is a perfect type of exercise for the rapidly increasing number of baby boomers among us), transportation, and it actually helps people to save money on transportation, which can be spent on other things. Once safe cycling infrastructure is in place, there is minimal cost involved to the city.
- In the previous paragraph it was pointed out that cycling has multiple benefits to individuals. The same goes for the different levels and areas of government. Building cycling infrastructure is an amazing bargain compared to building infrastructure for the private passenger car. On top of that, safe and attractive cycling infrastructure has the added benefit that once the investment has been made, cost savings are going to be achieved in multiple ways: health care costs will go down due to improved health of the population, less investments will be needed for car infrastructure/parking lots (According to ICBC's Way to Go School Program, each automobile in the Lower Mainland imposes about \$2,600 per year in external costs such as road repairs and policing costs paid by all taxpayers, whether they drive a car or not. A switch to walking, transit or bicycling will reduce these costs for everyone). Companies whose employees bike to work will experience less absenteeism because their employees will be healthier. Better cycling conditions in our downtown area will help to revive the local economy, as cyclists tend to

shop locally. Cycling infrastructure will make our municipalities a much more attractive place to live, and as a result real estate values will go up. Attractive cycling infrastructure for all ages and abilities will also bring tourism to our area, which means \$\$\$ for the local economy. Cycling is a win-win deal for everybody.

- Further to the tourism aspect mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Chapter of the VACC strongly supports the construction of a riverfront trail in Maple Ridge along the Fraser. This would be an excellent choice as one of the “6 to 10 tourism products to be developed to attract and retain visitors and investment”. (The District of Pitt Meadows has done an excellent job so far capitalizing on its rich natural assets, by building many kilometres of trails on the dikes along the Pitt-, Alouette- and Fraser Rivers, trails which are very popular with both local residents and visitors from near and far). Maple Ridge should strive to be ready to showcase its fantastic river views when its future riverfront trail becomes part of the “Experience the Fraser” project. There is no time to lose!
- The Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Chapter believes that it is time to leave behind the slogan “we have no money”. It is clear that for a good part we depend on political will. Choices have been made in the past, and will be made in the future. In the past and the present we have chosen to keep accommodating cars as much as possible by building more and more, and wider and bigger, roads and parking lots. In the process we have basically made it impossible for many people in our community not to own and drive a car. Many adults used to bike and walk to school when they were kids, but we think this is no longer possible for many of today’s kids. We have gotten to the point that we seem to be saying now:

“We can only afford to drive, but we cannot afford to bike. We can only afford to drive our kids to school, but we cannot afford to let our kids bike to school. We can only afford parking lots for cars, but we cannot afford bike racks for bikes. We can only afford to clear the roads of snow for cars, but we cannot afford to clear the bike lanes and sidewalks for cyclists and pedestrians. We can only afford to drive and get unhealthy and pay dearly in obesity-related health care costs, but we cannot afford to bike for transportation and get healthy”.

Our municipality is fortunately coming to the understanding though that we need to change our ways, which is hugely encouraging. Many of the improvements made in recent years are improvements for those who are already biking (according to Translink’s “Setting the Context” Report: those who are “strong and fearless” and “enthused and confident”). We have seen the addition of multiple north-south bike lanes, as well as bike symbols to indicate east-west bike routes. This is a good start. The key is to focus on the 60% of the population that would like to use their bikes to get around, but they are concerned about their safety.

- With regard to transportation for seniors, youth, as well as Katzie, the Parks Master Plan Report mentions the need to provide improved transit. However, the potential of cycling seems to be completely overlooked for these groups, in fact for the population as a whole.
 - In the Netherlands, 24% of all trips by seniors are made by bicycle. With the right kind of infrastructure, there is no reason why many seniors , as well as youth and Katzie (and everybody else), cannot get around by bicycle quite efficiently, safely, pleasantly, and independently, for most short trips.
 - The obesity rates in the Netherlands are significantly lower than in North America. It has long been known that obesity is the cause of many illnesses. Now that obesity has been declared a greater threat to public health than smoking in a U.S. study, according to an article in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, all levels of government should be doing all they can to get people moving. The best way is for people to use human-powered transportation methods, such as cycling and walking, for their everyday short trips.
 - For those who do not like to exercise or think they do not have the time, it helps if they can build it into their daily routine and give it a purpose, like going shopping or visiting a friend. Dutch or Danish people are no more energetic or sporty than Canadians. They bike because it's convenient, fast, fun and cheap.
 - As long as car traffic continues to be given priority over active transportation, which for many years has been and still is reflected in the amount of funding it gets compared to the investments made to improve cycling and walking infrastructure - which means the car will continue to be more convenient, fast and comfortable than walking and cycling - the majority of people will continue to choose their car as a means of getting around.
 - As to the kind of infrastructure needed, we would again like to refer to Translink's "Setting the Context" report, mentioned in the Parks Master Plan report. The 60% of the population that is "interested but concerned", to which group especially most seniors belong, would like to see more separated infrastructure on those roads where traffic speeds and volumes make them feel unsafe/uncomfortable and unwelcome.
 - Often all that is needed on roads where volumes are lower but speeds can be too high for comfort, is to reduce and enforce maximum speed limits or, if needed, provide traffic calming and possibly divert car traffic to make sure that residential roads are not being used as rat runs.
 - Maximum traffic speeds are routinely ignored **by most drivers**. As a consequence, potential cyclists are less likely to venture out onto the roads, because it makes them feel less safe.

- It is clear that safe and convenient cycling infrastructure benefits not only seniors and youth, but also all those inbetween. Cycling is more inclusive than any program the municipalities can offer their residents.
- In order to provide the needed infrastructure for especially the focus groups mentioned above, special efforts need to be made to improve safety around areas where most seniors reside, as well as schools, and possible destinations such as the Senior Centre and shopping malls.
- One of the main reasons why people feel less connected with their neighbourhoods, is the use of the car. By building the types of streets that discourage the use of the car, while encouraging alternative transportation, people who walk and bike to nearby destinations will start to feel more connected to their neighbourhood and its people. Many cyclists and pedestrians know that you're much more likely to get a friendly "hello" or a smile from, and possibly a chat with, a fellow cyclist or pedestrian than from a driver zooming by at 60 km/h. It should be noted that we are well aware that it takes more than only infrastructure to create connected neighbourhoods – such as mixed zoning and increased density- however this is beyond the scope of the mandate of our local chapter of the VACC.
- We would like to point out that there are a number of criteria to consider for good cycling infrastructure which will encourage people to bike. Good cycling infrastructure needs to:
 - be direct;
 - be convenient;
 - be comfortable and smooth;
 - be attractive;
 - be safe (the subjective safety – the feeling of being safe – is important here)*;
 - have good connectivity;
 - have as few hills as possible;
 - be free of road debris and well maintained;
 - have as few stop signs and traffic lights as possible;
 - be well lit!

* Note that noise from big trucks, SUV's and pick-up trucks is definitely an intimidating factor in a town like Maple Ridge, with its two busy main arteries going right through the downtown area. Much better use can be made of the Haney Bypass to lead through car/truck traffic around the downtown area.

- When improving cycling infrastructure, it is important to look down the road. If there is going to be a multi-use, bi-directional separated path along Lougheed Highway between 222nd Street and

Laity, there needs to be continuity. Will it eventually be possible to continue this bi-directional multi-use path west of Laity and east of 222nd, or are cyclists going to have to keep crossing Lougheed at various locations? If the path is going to be extended in both directions, it is also very important to look at the safety aspect at intersections, with cyclists moving in both directions on the north side of the highway.

- If cycling participation is to be increased, the biggest gain is to be expected from short trips and in the less hilly areas. Many potential destinations are in the Maple Ridge Town Centre, where many of the shops are. According to the present Bicycle Network Plan, cyclists are encouraged to stay off roads like Lougheed Highway and Dewdney Trunk Road, where the shops are, and to take “ring roads” around the downtown area, as if they would be bypassing the area. Cyclists are being told to get off their bikes and walk on the sidewalk if they want to visit shops on Lougheed or Dewdney. This is not conducive to cycling. We would like the District to look at what has been done on Columbia Street in New Westminster, and explore the possibility of doing something similar on Lougheed Highway. We feel that the downtown area should be made into a more people-friendly area. Lowering speed limits and making cycling safer for people **of all ages and abilities** on the very roads that they would like to visit would be a huge improvement. Not only to cyclists, but also for pedestrians it would make for a much more peaceful, inviting shopping experience.
- With respect to the section in the Park Master Plan report on Trails and Greenways, we would like to point out that it appears probably not only Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, but the whole region is in need of a clear set of standards as well as terms used for different types of trails and pathways and such. Only if there is uniformity in the terms being used, will it be possible to make a proper inventory of the bike lanes, recreational pathways and trails in each municipality. E.g. clearly the term “trail” has not been used properly in this report.
- As to the related documents, we would like to point out that the (outdated) Bikeways Plan is not included. As is the case with the previous Parks Plans, the Bikeways Plan is in urgent need of updating.
- We would like to see the distance measured to parkland to be not in straight lines - which is clearly not very useful - but along roads/pathways. Especially in a municipality like Maple Ridge, where there are numerous dead ends/cul-de-sacs without pathways to cut through.
- Re: p. 43: Advocacy/Facilitation: “... Continue to work with e.g. ...MR/PM Chapter of the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition, who assist in development and stewardship of trails.” The Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition primarily promotes cycling as a way of transportation. It strongly supports cycling in general, but its focus is definitely on cycling as a means to get around town. The bike-lane “trails” are part of the Maple Ridge highway network, which is maintained by the city’s road crews and we assume that these are not the ones the VACC is

being asked to develop and maintain. Generally the trails in the rural areas around Maple Ridge are more for horse back riding and/or mountain biking. We would strongly encourage those cyclists in our community who make use of these trails to form a group that can assist in developing and maintaining trails. The VACC would like to continue to work with the city to improve and increase cycling infrastructure for commuter and utilitarian cycling - which at the same time has a strong recreational component - for the benefit of all.