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Maple Ridge is spending about a million dollars on repaving roads this year.

— *Image Credit: News Files*

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Traffic on 132nd Avenue just keeps getting heavier as more commuters from the growing suburbs of Rock Ridge and Silver Valley take the quickest way west.

Meanwhile, busy 240th Street still needs more sidewalks and downtown still needs bike paths, says a cycling advocate.

That's to say nothing about improving bus routes or thinking about rapid transit.

However, Maple Ridge's new strategic transportation plan, if it's approved in the next few months, should answer all such questions, and set the rough direction for the next quarter century.

Maple Ridge is revising its plan from the 2003 version to reflect major changes that have already taken place, such as the new Pitt River and Golden Ears bridges.

After getting public input over the last year, consultants Urban Systems already have an idea of what people want, and rapid transit is on the list, along with more sidewalks, bike paths and roads.

“What we’ve heard from the community is [the desire for] enhanced West Coast Express service,” said Brian Patterson, with Urban Systems.

“We heard it pretty strongly.”

Expanding that service beyond the five trips during rush hours, however, is a TransLink decision, he pointed out.

The local plan also includes a Rapid Bus route on Lougheed Highway to downtown of Maple Ridge. That could be a precursor to a light rail line into downtown Maple Ridge, which is already identified in the district’s long-term plan.

But light rail transit itself isn’t included in the draft transportation plan, Coun. Al Hogarth pointed out at a council meeting earlier this year.

TransLink’s own long-term plan also identifies a RapidBus route along Lougheed Highway to connect with the Evergreen Light Rail line in Coquitlam.

Following input from the open house Wednesday, staff will make the final tweaks to the transportation plan and send it to council for approval.

Cycling advocate Jackie Chow pointed out there are still no detailed plans for bike lanes in the downtown, due for more residential growth with another 10,000 people, adding that bike lanes need to be located near stores to make it possible to shop.

But she likes the plan to put a separated bike path on the north side of Lougheed Highway from downtown west to Pitt Meadows, calling it a “positive.” Funding and design is already in place for one leg of that path, from Laity to 216th streets, due for construction this summer.

Kids also need to have safe routes to schools to encourage them to get to school on two wheels, Chow said.

Coping with commuters from the growing suburbs of Silver Valley and Rock Ridge subdivisions will be another task for the new plan.

Residents who live on 132nd Avenue say westbound commuter traffic from those suburbs makes the road dangerous.

Two years ago, the Alouette Valley Association asked Maple Ridge council to turn 132nd Avenue between 216th and 232nd streets into a “recreation roadway.”

The speed controlled road would have a separate horse trail on the south side and a multi-use bike path on the north. The trails would connect with existing horse and bike trails in the area, and create a safe corridor between Maple Ridge Park, Horseman’s Park, and Jerry Sulina Park.

But progress is slow, says Terri Dumas with the AVA.

“We get so much traffic now. It’s worse on weekends.

“We’re working on it, but it has to be a priority project.”

Residents say they can’t get in and out of their driveways because of commuters doing 20 or 30 km/h over the speed limit, seeking a quick way west on to 128th Avenue.

Motorists instead should be encouraged to use Abernethy Way, which turns into 128th Avenue, in order to continue west.

Some of the goals of the long-term plan include:

- widening Dewdney Trunk Road to four lanes from 240th to 248th street
- widening Abernethy Way to four lanes as far east as 240th street and creating a new two-lane extension to 256th Street.
- one of the near-term projects is widening 128th Avenue to four lanes from 210th to 224th streets.
- creating a connection between 112th and 108th avenues in Thornhill and widening to four lanes the Lougheed Highway between 272nd and 280th streets are two other projects in the plan.