

No more half-baked efforts

by [Jackie Chow - Maple Ridge News](#)

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Last month, HUB ran a cycling course at Yennadon elementary for students in grades 6 and 7.

It was a five-day course, with one block of instruction per class per day. Two days were spent on the rules of the road, helmet use, different types of roads and intersections, and how to plan a route.

During the outdoor classes, kids learned some simple bike mechanics, such as how to pump tires, check brakes and make simple adjustments, and how to clean and lube chains.

They also spent a day improving their cycling skills, such as using gears, making turns while shoulder checking, using hand signals, and making emergency stops.

The third outdoor day, the kids got to go for a fun, though wet, ride in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Cycling education is important. Learning this basic life skill should be part of every child's education.

Of even greater importance is providing safe infrastructure so that kids can get into the life-long habit of active transportation. You can teach kids how to ride, but if the available infrastructure is not, or is perceived not to be safe, most parents will not allow their kids to ride to school, to the store or to visit friends.

The need for safe cycling infrastructure around and to all schools is something that should be first and foremost on the minds of planners and engineers in both Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows when approving any development application or upgrading existing roads.

It's not just up to our HUB committee, but to parents and neighbourhood associations to push for improvements, so that more kids will be able to get to school by bike safely.

Many students are chauffeured to school daily, leading to traffic chaos around some.

Kids who travel to school on their own are more focused and perform better at school.

It's great for kids to make their way to school with friends as opposed to with parents, when they're a little older. It's a powerful feeling to be in control when you're a kid.

If we want to have any hope of changing our car-obsessed culture and to make cycling an accepted and valued mode of transportation, we have to make it work for kids.

So what are the barriers that keep many North American cities from building a complete, safe, multi-modal transportation network?

I think people don't like change.

There are inspiring examples of countries and cities all over the world that show that it's possible to change.

It's possible in Sweden and Finland, despite the fact they have to deal with lots of snow in the winter, just like in Canada. It's possible in the Netherlands, despite the fact they get lots of rain, just like in Canada. It's possible in Switzerland and Austria, despite the fact that they have mountains and hills, and snow too, just like in Canada.

It's happening in an amazing way in Seville, Spain, where it's pretty darn hot in the summer, hotter than in most of Canada.

It's happening in properly designed, newer, lower density suburbs such as Houten, a suburb of Utrecht, Netherlands.

Often excuses about improving cycling routes are about costs. But studies have shown that investments in cycling infrastructure result in increasingly significant savings in health care costs as time goes on.

Health benefits alone are said to outweigh the costs on average by as much as 5-1.

If we build our cities to be truly multi-modal instead of being satisfied with a half-baked effort, it can help reduce sprawl, which will help cities save in the future.

Often people say that cyclists don't obey the law, and therefore they don't deserve bike lanes. If we'd use that same argument when it comes to building roads for cars, we wouldn't have any.

Often you hear there's no space for bikes. But look at how much space we're sacrificing for our cars.

I'd like to add that the rules of the road were made for cars, as are the roads themselves. They don't always work too well for cycling, and anybody who frequently cycles for transportation knows that it's sometimes safer to break a rule than to follow it.

Nobody wants to teach kids to disobey the rules.

Let's build better infrastructure instead.

The City of Maple Ridge has made a great start with the cycling course at Yennadon. Our HUB committee hopes that more schools will follow.

<http://www.mapleridgenews.com/community/351858211.html#Vk-Lelw2Z4k.facebook>