

Cycling is safer with separate lanes

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Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows are working on an updated transportation plan, including an update of the 1994 bikeways plan.

The bikeways plan was based on the assumption that cyclists are safest if they behave as if they're driving a car. In North America, separated bike paths were for decades considered to be more dangerous for cyclists than sharing the road with cars.

Statistics seemed to show that cyclists were more likely to be involved in collisions with cars at intersections when using separated bike paths.

More recent research, such as the UBC research program *Cycling in Cities*, shows that most cyclists prefer separation from car traffic, especially when traffic volumes and speeds are higher.

It makes sense to compare statistics of cyclist fatalities and injuries in North America with those in the Netherlands, for example, where often cyclists use bike paths that separate them from car traffic. Such statistics show that separation doesn't need to pose insurmountable problems, as long as the intersections are well designed.

Per kilometer traveled, cyclists in North America are three times more likely to be killed and 30 times more likely to have serious injuries than cyclists in the Netherlands, despite the fact that in the Netherlands they often use separate bike paths, and few cyclists wear helmets.

In recent years, more and more cities are realizing that the North American approach has mostly appealed to young, fearless men. Groups that don't like to take risks, such as women and seniors, don't feel that safe on our roads.

In Maple Ridge, we are uniquely allowed to bike on the sidewalk. This is a practice frowned upon in countries where cycling is popular, because pedestrians and cyclists don't mix very well. The population in our town core is going to double in the next decade or so. The result? More cars and congestion on our roads, and more pedestrians and cyclists on the sidewalks, and likely cyclists being banned from the sidewalks.

Having more people bike instead of drive is good for everyone. It leaves more space for those of us who need to drive, and those who don't want to bike. If we want to entice more people to bike, we have to make it more appealing to them by providing a safe and comfortable space. That means that on roads with higher traffic volumes and speeds, cyclists need either bike lanes or separated bike paths. We only need to look at Vancouver, where the popularity of cycling is exploding, to see what happens when people are given a safe place to bike.

In recent years, it's been encouraging to see the addition of bike lanes in north-south direction in Maple Ridge. The biggest challenge, though, is to provide safe east-west routes. It's in the

interest of all residents of Maple Ridge to support and encourage the district's efforts to provide safe and convenient bike routes, so that not just the strong and fearless cyclists, but also children, seniors and women can get around safely on their bikes.

Our Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition chapter has asked cyclists over the past few years to assist with assessment rides for the engineering departments of both municipalities, to evaluate the existing network, and to come up with ideas to improve and expand it. We have more than 20 volunteers, including several members of the Bicycle Advisory Committee, working hard on this. We are trying to complete our work by mid September.

We are also involved in the upcoming GETI Fest in Memorial Peace Park on Sept. 24.

GETI (Golden Ears Transition Initiative) aims to raise awareness about global warming, peak oil and sustainability issues.

GETI Fest highlights: an artisan fair; bike decorating/rodeo; People in Motion Parade (anything non-fossil-fuel-powered is allowed – bikes, uni-cycles, walking, jogging, roller blading, pogo-sticking; live music, dinner and dance. We also provide free bike parking, and will have a bus bike rack for people to practice with.

Everyone is invited.

Volunteers are still needed.

• For more info and for meal tickets (\$8/person), contact info@ceedcentre.org. To volunteer: jchow23708@yahoo.ca. To register for the parade: blakehandford@shaw.ca. Check out GETI's site at www.goldenearstransitionsinitiative.ning.com.