

E-mail Mayor and Council Maple Ridge

Date: Feb. 26, 2011

Re: cycling on sidewalk / review Highways & Traffic bylaw

Mayor and Council,

After attending the Council workshop on Monday Feb. 21st, I'm hoping to be able to offer you a little more insight in the issues regarding cycling on the sidewalk.

Some food for thought:

- Councillor Hogarth: Many of the "mental midgets" who break the law when riding on their bicycles are often pretty hard or impossible to educate, and enforcing the helmet law will do nothing to stop them from riding on the sidewalks in an irresponsible manner.
- "Cracking down" on cyclists will do nothing to solve the homelessness problems and all related issues in Maple Ridge.
- Confiscating a bicycle if a cyclist - especially if his primary mode of transportation is his bicycle - does not wear a helmet (which may endanger his own but not other people's safety) is a pretty severe punishment if you think about the fact that many drivers routinely exceed the posted speed limit in their motor vehicles and thereby possibly endanger not only their own but also other people's lives, rarely resulting in confiscation of the car. In fact, the majority of them simply get away with it without even being fined, since this offence has basically turned out to be socially quite acceptable.
- Some figures from ICBC:

In 2007 in BC speeding was the cause of 18,683 car accidents resulting in injuries, and 158 resulting in death.

- Enforcing the helmet law will make some law-abiding people decide to stop cycling.
- Excessive speeds of motor vehicles will make some law-abiding people decide to stop cycling if they need to share the road with cars.
- Emphasizing the danger of cycling will make some people stop cycling.
- Statistics show that in cities/countries with helmet laws, considerably less people tend to cycle than in those without helmet laws. From 1996 to 2006, in cities with a helmet law cycling grew on average 3%, in cities without a helmet law cycling grew on average 40%. This means that helmet laws act as barriers.
- Encouraging people to wear helmets may make more people wear helmets.
- Bicycle helmets are only made for simple falls: e.g. a child falls off a bike and his head hits the pavement. A bicycle helmet does not adequately protect a cyclist from a collision with a car moving at 50 km/h. Proper helmets (comparable to those used by motorcyclists) would be too heavy and uncomfortable for cyclists.
- Some more figures from ICBC:

In 2007 in BC there were 896 reported collisions involving hospitalization of cyclists. There were 888 cyclist victims, of which 10 were killed. 5 of these were wearing a helmet, 5 were not.

**48.6% of injured cyclists were wearing helmets
36.9% of injured cyclists were not wearing helmets**

19.8% of non-helmeted injury victims suffered head injuries or injuries to the entire body or were killed

15.1% of helmeted injury victims suffered head injuries or injuries to the entire body or were killed.

Note that according to the UBC Cycling in Cities study cyclists in North America are 2 times more likely to be killed and 8 times more likely to have serious injuries than cyclists in Germany, and 3 times more likely to be killed and 30 times more likely to have serious injuries than cyclists in the Netherlands, despite the fact that there is no helmet law in Germany and the Netherlands.

I think these figures tell us that (enforcing) the helmet law is most likely not the answer to the real problem, which is that our roads are not quite safe enough for cyclists. It would seem to make more sense to put more focus on improving our infrastructure to make it safer to cycle, especially for children, women and seniors, than to focus on enforcing the helmet law.

- More people cycling will mean improved health. More and more health professionals are realizing that the health benefits of cycling outweigh the risks.
See <http://www.dft.gov.uk/cyclingengland/health-fitness/health-benefits-of-cycling/>
- Here's a study that indicates that more walking and cycling results in safer streets: <http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/9/3/205.abstract>. This would indicate it is helpful to encourage more cycling.
- Statistics do show that cycling on the sidewalk leads to more accidents.
- However, where roads are not safe, people (including myself - and I believe I can speak for Councillor King as well) will still continue to bike on the sidewalk, because we know we do so responsibly. You can't really argue with kids, women, seniors and others that they'll be fine, as long as they wear their helmets, decorate themselves and their bikes with lights as if they were christmas trees, wear reflective vests, and take the lane (ride in the middle of the lane) if they need to. If they are not comfortable riding on certain roads, then they won't.
- Apparently there were 3 officially reported incidents (or accidents???) involving cyclists biking on the sidewalks over the past year since the new bylaw came into effect where presumably there was at least some type of conflict with a pedestrian. No mention was made of any injuries, or how many incidents there were in previous years. Wouldn't this be important information to know before jumping to conclusions?

- How do these 3 incidents compare with the number of accidents involving cars and cyclists in Maple Ridge, and the severity of these accidents? I know that the Bicycle Advisory Committee has information on the number and location of such accidents. Why do car/cyclist accidents not prompt a discussion regarding enforcement and education measures among drivers, in the same way that these 3 incidents which involved cyclists and pedestrians lead to discussion regarding enforcement (of the helmet law??) and education among cyclists? Don't get me wrong: I think education of cyclists is a good thing. But the real danger on our roads comes from thousands of pounds of steel moving along our roads at considerable speed in the form of cars.
- Councillor Morden: yes, Maple Ridge has been getting more bike lanes, however most of these bike lanes are in north-south direction. Connectivity, lack of east-west routes and lack of direct routes is still a problem for cyclists, and cyclists are not always prepared to add considerable distance or unnecessary hills to their trips by making detours to avoid dangerous roads. Back in the days that you rode your bicycle everywhere, I'm sure there was a whole lot less traffic on Maple Ridge's roads.
- Councillor Ashley: you mentioned the pedestrian that stepped off the curb and got hit by a cyclist, illustrating the fact how dangerous cyclists can be. Shouldn't this pedestrian have looked first to make sure it was safe to step off the curb? The way you described it, it seemed to me the pedestrian was at fault. I was surprised that nobody at the meeting made a comment on that. There seems to be a common misperception that more often than not cyclists are at fault in case of a collision, whether it involves a cyclist and a car, or a cyclist and a pedestrian.
- Some information to shed some light on who's most often at fault in case of bicycle/car accidents:

<http://www.bikeradar.com/news/article/drivers-at-fault-in-majority-of-cycling-accidents-28489>

http://www.research.utoronto.ca/behind_the_headlines/smart-cycling/

I believe that in principle cyclists belong either on the road (on residential roads, with slow motor vehicle speeds, i.e. max. 30 km/h), or on their own bike lanes/bike paths where car speeds are higher. If it is not possible to provide cyclists with their own space, it would make sense to lower (and enforce!) speed limits in the town core. Ideally, cyclists do not belong on sidewalks. Hopefully through more investment in cycling infrastructure, improving connections and convenience for cyclists, and by taking advantage of the experience in designing safe cycling infrastructure elsewhere, it will be possible to ultimately "ban" cyclists off the sidewalks again. But for now, I hope that you will continue to allow us to use the sidewalks in a responsible manner, whenever necessary. I must say that I personally have not had any problems whatsoever, and pedestrians most often politely step out of the way when I approach, and I thank them politely for that.

As long as it is necessary for cyclists to use certain sidewalks, I believe that it makes more sense to fine cyclists who ride on the sidewalks "without due care and consideration", if needed or appropriate.

Finally, I am pleased to let you know that for those of you who would be interested in learning more about cycling safety - and I would strongly recommend it because it will help you understand cycling issues better - I will be happy to try to get you registered for a free (for Mayor and Council!) Streetwise Cycling Workshop in New Westminster on May 1, 11 am - 3:30 pm. I'm sure we can arrange for transportation of your bike if you don't have a bike rack, or even supply you with a bike if you don't have one. If this date and time doesn't work for you, there may be workshops later on in the year that will be more convenient for you. Please let me know if you're interested, and I will make the arrangements.

Yours sincerely,
Jackie Chow
Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Chapter
Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition