

# ECONEWS

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## CYCLING TO PLANETARY HAPPINESS

Two wheels on the road, the summer air in your face - it's a wonderful way to travel!

When we look at the urgent need to eliminate our carbon emissions, plus the end of cheap oil and the benefits of being healthy and fit, cycling has to be one of the most important transport initiatives we should be investing in.

Coaches, transit, light rail, electric vehicles, ride-sharing, walking - these are all part of the answer.

But cycling should have a special place on the list, because it brings so many benefits. In Copenhagen, where 36% of the population commutes to work by bike, cycling has become such a style that they have invented a verb, "Copenhagenize", to capture what's happening. ([www.copenhagenize.com](http://www.copenhagenize.com))

And just look at the economics of it. They know from their health statistics that physically active people live five years longer and have four fewer years of lengthy illness than those who are non-active.

They know that cycling for four hours a week - 10 km a day, a typical Copenhagen bike ride - makes a person physically active.

They know that if Copenhageners cycled 10% more kilometres each year, their health system would save \$12 million a year, and their economy would benefit from \$32 million a year of production not lost to illness. There would be 57,000 fewer sick days in the workplace each year, 61,000 more person-years enjoyed, and 46,000 fewer person-years lost to lengthy illness.

They know that each additional kilometre of bike lane attracts 170,000 more cycle-kilometres a year, 19% more bikes on that stretch of road, a 9-10% drop in the number of cars, accidents and injuries, \$51,000 in saved health care costs, and \$134,000 in saved production costs. For every dollar they invest in the bike lane, they save 5 dollars. Knowing this, Copenhagen has

set a goal that 50% of all work trips should be by bicycle by 2015.

Copenhagen has a 36% rate of bicycle-commuting, while Victoria has a 6% rate - and we boast that we are the cycling capital of Canada. And yes, it rains just as much as in Victoria. They get 71 cm a year; we get 66.5 cm.



So what would it take for Victoria - and other North American cities - to reach a 36% level of cycling, with all the multiple benefits it brings?

If I was the Premier - a game we all love to play - I would first ask all my Ministries to adopt integrated long-term co-budgeting, so that a \$100 million investment in cycling that was known to generate long-term savings of \$500 million in health care and business costs would win immediate approval from the Treasury Board mandarins.

Secondly, I would ask every municipality to prepare a long-term plan to increase the commuter cycling rate to 25% by 2020, drawing on the best examples from around the world.

What would such a future look like? Every major road would have a cycle lane, separated from traffic by a yellow rumble strip, like the ones that we have on highways to tell you when you're veering off the road. Throughout the city, there would be a network of

safe cycle routes where most traffic was not allowed, using a mixture of railway rights of way, back lanes, and quiet residential streets.

At every major intersection, cyclists would be allowed to gather in front of the traffic, and given 30 seconds to advance with all lights on red, before cars were allowed to go.

All over the city, there would be safe, sheltered, bicycle parking places.

As in Paris, where 24,000 VeLib bikes were placed on the city streets last year, there would be city-bikes for rent by the half-hour, using a smartcard. To guard against theft, you would lose a \$150 deposit if you didn't return the bike to a bike station after use.

Every community would hire bicycle planners. Davis, California, which has a 17% cycle-commute rate, has two full-time cycling staff for a population of 64,000. A region of 300,000 people would employ ten full-time cycling staff.

For those not fit enough yet, or who can't make the hills, electric bikes would become the norm, costing only one cent per 20 kilometres.

Every school would have its Safe Routes to School, and all parents would be strongly encouraged to stop driving their kids to school.

The magic of this is that the more cycling there is, the safer it becomes, because - from Denmark's experience - when more motorists are also cyclists, they are better able to understand the cyclist's needs.

And not just here, but all over the planet. When such a simple technology already exists with so many benefits, how foolish could we be not to make the most of it?

June 2<sup>nd</sup> to 8th is Bike to Work Week in BC - so let's celebrate it, knowing that we are biking not just for our pleasure, but also for our planet, our health, and our children's future.

Guy Dauncey