



The Daily Gleaner

July 5, 2008

Our Future's on a Bike

“The bicycle is the most efficient machine ever created: converting calories into gas, a bicycle gets the equivalent of three thousand miles per gallon.” - Bill Strickland, Bicycling magazine

Now that's fuel efficiency! With the urgent need to reduce our carbon emissions, the end of cheap oil, and the societal desire to be healthy and fit, cycling is one of the most important transportation alternatives we have.

In Copenhagen – the so-called bicycling capital of the world - 36 percent of the population commutes to work by bike. And they've actually figured out how to measure the astounding economic and social benefits of the bike-commuting phenomenon.

They know that cycling for 4 hours a week - or 10km a day - is a typical Copenhagen bike commute. They know that if Copenhageners cycled 10 percent more kilometers 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. They know that each additional kilometer of bike lane attracts 170,000 more cycle-kilometers a year, 10 percent more bikes on that stretch of road, a 10 percent drop in the number of cars, accidents and injuries, and \$51,000 per kilometer in saved health care costs. They know that for every \$1 they invest in a bike lane, they save \$5! With this striking data in hand, Copenhagen has set a goal that 50 percent of all work trips should be by bicycle by 2015.

Victoria, which boasts of being Canada's cycling capital, only has a 6 percent bike commute rate. So what would it take for a city like Victoria – or say, Fredericton – to reach a 36 percent level of cycle commuting? Well, in addition to significant Federal and Provincial tax incentives and budgetary support for cycling initiatives, each municipality should have a long-term plan to increase the commuter cycling rate to 25 percent. Every major road would have a bike lane, separated from traffic by a yellow rumble strip. There would be a network of signed 'safe cycle' routes using a mixture of trail, quiet residential streets and bike lanes. All over the city, there would be safe, sheltered bicycle-parking areas. Every school would have its 'Safe Routes to School' identified for biking and walking purposes. And every community would hire bicycle planners. For instance, Davis, California, which has a 17 percent cycle-commute rate, has two full-time cycling staff for a population of 64,000.

Fredericton is beginning the journey towards a cycling culture. We have our extensive trail system and now, starting in July, our city is coming of age with designated bike lanes. There will be two kinds: reserved bike lanes and signed-only routes. Both will be clearly identified with signage and found on both sides of the street. Reserved bike lanes will also feature pavement markings. Motor vehicles are not permitted to park or drive in the reserved bike lanes. Share-the-road signage for cyclists and motorists

will also be installed. For details on the streets that will have bike lanes go to www.fredericton.ca and search on the term 'bike lanes'.

So, let's get on our bikes! Go to work, to the store, to the park, out to eat. But remember, Fredericton is a 'work in progress' for cyclists. Cycle defensively, and to gain the respect and acceptance of motorists, we must all follow the rules of the road: bike in direction of traffic, not against; wear a helmet; use hand signals to indicate turning. And if you are driving your car – please make 'Share the Road' your new mantra. As the number of cyclists in the city increases, so too will acceptance of this perfectly green transportation choice, as well as the infrastructure and services to support and promote it.

And as an added benefit, just maybe as you ride to work your mind will slow down, breathe and expand. It worked for Albert Einstein, who famously said of his theory of relativity: "I thought of that while riding my bike".

Sonya Hull is project manager for Fredericton Green Matters campaign, and yes, she rides her bike. If you have questions or comments e-mail greenmatters@fredericton.ca. For more information on the Copenhagen bike study check out www.copenhagenize.com.