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# Pedals power green dream

By: **Chris Rose**Posted: **03/2/2013 1:00 AM** | **Comments: 0**

VANCOUVER -- Maybe it's all that cleansing water from too many rain storms, but this city at the bottom of the Coast Mountains and on the edge of the Pacific Ocean has always been a bit of a dreamer.

The latest dream of Vancouver, the birthplace of the international environmental group Greenpeace, is to become the "greenest city in the world" by 2020, a plan that increasingly incorporates the use of low-tech wind-in-your-helmet bicycle power to encourage residents to take back the streets by turning off their car engines.

Conor Murphy, a 49-year-old Vancouver teacher who commutes year-round to and from work on his bicycle, is living proof that getting out of the car makes him, and the city he enjoys as he pedals about, have a lower carbon footprint.

"I have always been attracted to the idea of wheeling around the city on my bike. However, before the development of bike lanes in Vancouver, it was difficult to commute in the city without ending up on major arterial roads. I would arrive at work spitting mad and shaken by what seemed like a daily brush with death," said Murphy, who used to attach a trailer to his bike so that his young daughter could ride along with him at a gloriously greenhouse-gas-emissions-free pace.

"Now I ride my bike on quiet tree-lined streets with little car traffic and other like minded pedal pushers. The community of cyclists is growing rapidly. There is a zen quality to the self-propelled life style."

Vancouver's modern-day love affair with bikes began in 1993 when it established the city's first local street bike route and four years later when the first dedicated bike lane went into effect. This interconnected network of bike lanes, routes and paths now totals approximately 250 kilometres and city plans call for an even larger, more extensive network.

Cars, carbon and congestion are bad, the city has decided, and bikes are a very high-profile signal that the unfettered age of the automobile, at least in Vancouver, may well have reached its peak. Indeed, data collected by the regional transit authority indicates about 72,000 bike trips occurred daily in Vancouver in 2011, up 35 per cent from 2008.

But not everybody appreciates this civic foray into the biking world. Car enthusiasts who shake with road rage at having to slow down for two-wheel traffic complain that bike riders don't obey traffic signs and the expanding network of bike lanes makes movement more difficult for automobiles. Downtown merchants moan that bike lanes interfere with car parking and result in fewer sales.

Despite those concerns, Vancouver is pressing ahead with its laudable plans to encourage as much bike riding as possible. After all, it's not as if bicycling can't become a major, and affordable, healthy

urban pastime: just think of those moving armies of bike riders in Amsterdam or Copenhagen, all with rosy cheeks and mostly low blood pressure.

Bike commuters like Murphy speak enthusiastically of cycling as a triple win -- a quiet part of their day that gives them exercise, often allows them to travel as fast as cars and buses confined to clogged traffic corridors, and the chance to be a free-wheeling kid again out exploring a world far away from stress.

There are other benefits, too. Aging baby boomers who just can't bear to go to an expensive gym, with its soulless punishment camp ethic, don't need to feel guilty as being a committed bike commuter neatly lets them off the health fitness hook. And, like all exercise, the more you bike, the more you want to bike. It's also free.

Vancouver Coun. Geoff Meggs, a long-time biking aficionado, believes cycling is critical to improving transportation in the city.

"It's one of the solutions," Meggs said. "We can't put new roads and highways into Vancouver."

The city wants to see bike traffic reach 10 per cent of all transportation trips by 2020, he said, adding safe infrastructure, especially separated bike lanes, is necessary to attain that goal.

"Cycling is one of the critical choices people are going to be glad to have down the road."

The city's website boasts that while Vancouverites already reside in the most liveable city in the world, the community proportionately uses, and wastes, far too many of Earth's diminishing resources.

To that end, the city has come up with a 10-part 2020 action plan to address three major issues -- carbon, waste and ecosystems. As a way of eliminating fossil fuel dependence and unclogging many of the city's rush-hour-blocked roadways, more biking, walking and public transit usage are a major part of the city's plan.

That plan notes Vancouver is aiming for more than 50 per cent of all trips to be taken by bike, foot and public transit. This would, it is hoped, help reduce the average distance driven per resident by 20 per cent from 2007 levels.

For all those who say Vancouver's moderate-weather bicycle revolution could never happen on the Prairies or other parts of Canada that have to fight with snow, ice and other brutish winter hurdles, Clinton Cuddington begs to differ.

As a starving University of Manitoba student taking an undergraduate degree in architecture, Cuddington was known for riding his bike in Winnipeg year round -- complete with a ski mask, goggles and a big hat.

"It was the only way I travelled," he remembers. "I often had icicles coming down my nose. I wore this total World War Two getup as I pounded to school every day."

Cuddington, 45, added Vancouver's plan to use biking to help make it the greenest city in the world is a noble cause. "We've got to get people out of cars, that's for certain."

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