

Active Transportation Infrastructure Program: Making Sustainable Transportation Choices Easier

Organization

District of Saanich, BC

Status

Ongoing, initiated 1991

Overview

Since 1991, the District of Saanich has been actively engaged in encouraging walking and cycling by providing enhanced infrastructures for both activities.

Through various plans and policy initiatives municipality is committed to diversifying its transportation choice by restraining road expansions and providing mixed-use trails, boulevard sidewalks, greenways, and bike lanes on major roads.

Today, the municipality continues to encourage and support active transportation choices. Most recently, the municipality has adopted a Commuter Bicycle Network that identifies and prioritizes streets which will eventually be modified to accommodate cycling.

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Resources

- www.gov.saanich.bc.ca
- Information on the region's two multi-modal trails, the Galloping Goose and Lochside, can be viewed at www.crd.bc.ca/parks/galloping_goose.htm and www.crd.bc.ca/parks/lochside.htm

Community Context

The District of Saanich is a community of 110,000 people immediately adjacent to the provincial capital of Victoria on Vancouver Island. With an area of 11,179 hectares, it is the largest in terms of area of the core municipalities making up the Capital Regional District and is considered the gateway community to Victoria.

As a community, Saanich is roughly half urban and half rural and agricultural. This dual role is a major factor influencing its character and the municipality is recognized for its progressive land use planning that seeks to preserve both the area's urban-rural balance and its significant natural features, including one of Canada's most threatened ecosystems, the Gary Oak savannah.

With 817 hectares of fresh water lakes and 30 kilometres of marine shoreline, Saanich's physical setting is also greatly influenced by water.

Policy context

Saanich's Active Transportation Infrastructure Program supports and builds on the directions and policies established in a number of regional and municipal plans.

On a regional level, the program directly supports the Capital Regional District's Regional Growth Strategy (2003). Saanich is one of thirteen municipalities making up the Capital Regional District (CRD). The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) identifies transportation mode change as one of the main strategies to achieve its goals. As part of the RGS, a regional transportation strategy called the TravelChoices Strategy is currently under development. Its principal aim is to "increase walking, cycling, transit, carpooling and other alternatives to driving alone."

The Saanich General Plan (1994) also supports diversifying the municipality's transportation choice by restraining road expansions and providing mixed-use trails, boulevard sidewalks, greenways, and bike lanes on major roads. The Plan has been the major policy impetus behind the Active Transportation Infrastructure program.

The General Plan's corresponding Zoning By-law also supports active transportation choice through bicycle parking requirements. Bicycle parking must be provided with all new multi-unit residential, commercial, institutional and industrial developments, and in all new automobile parking structures.

Saanich has also developed a Bicycle Master Plan that identifies cycling network deficiencies and recommends and prioritizes improvements. The plan was developed with the assistance of an active Bicycle Advisory Committee.

Finally, since 2002 Saanich has been working on a joint project with the Saanich Police and the Insurance Corporation of B.C. (ICBC), the province's public insurance agency, on the Safer City program. Safer City is a systematic framework and process for developing a road safety plan for motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and all other road users. The plan incorporates road safety into all city initiatives and aims to make road safety a priority in Saanich. One part of the program is the development of Pedestrian master plan that will identify network deficiencies and recommend and prioritize improvements.



A portion of the well-known and used Galloping Goose trail, a major multi-use recreational/commuter trail that is an integral component of Saanich's bicycle and pedestrian networks.

Rationale and objectives

As a community, Saanich is committed to integrated, environmentally responsible land use planning that recognizes the critical role of transportation choice and balance in maintaining the municipality's much valued quality of life.

In working to reduce automobile dependence, the municipality also understands that its mild climate makes Saanich one of the very few places in Canada where year-

round bicycle and pedestrian commuting is practical and realistic.

The objective of Saanich's Active Transportation Infrastructure program is to make more sustainable transportation choices even easier to make for residents and visitors alike and to increase walking, cycling, transit, carpooling and other alternatives to driving alone.

Actions

Since 1991, the municipality of Saanich has been actively engaged in encouraging walking and cycling by providing enhanced infrastructures for both activities. In 1991 Saanich created the region's first Bicycle Advisory Committee and in 1992 approved plans for an integrated Commuter Bikeway Network. At that time there were no roads with bike lanes or regional trails in existence in the urban parts of the Capital Regional District (CRD).

In 1993, Saanich built the region's first dedicated bicycle facilities, adding just over 3 lane-kilometres of paved shoulders to a major arterial road. The improvements were the first phase of providing cycle-friendly access to Camosun College, one of the region's major post-secondary institutions. Camosun College partnered with the municipality in funding the capital improvement.

Working with the newly established Bicycle Advisory Committee, Saanich completed a Bicycle Master Plan that identified a municipal bicycle network and prioritized on-street and off-street improvements, such as bike lanes, improved crossings, off street trails and mid-street refuges. In the same year, following successful negotiation of a recreational lease to convert an abandoned rail right of way to a mixed-use trail, Saanich improved and paved 1.5-kilometres of the Galloping Goose Downtown Connector. That trail is now part of an inter-regional trail suitable for commuter use that stretches almost 100 kilometres and connects Victoria to the main ferry terminal linking southern Vancouver Island to the Mainland.

Through the Bicycle Master Plan, both local connector routes and commuter routes have been identified and signed. Local connector routes are located on low traffic volume streets and link neighbourhood amenities such as parks, schools and other institutions and services, or link to regional trails or other external destinations. These routes are intended for the recreational or inexperienced cyclists, and also cyclists who seek a quieter route that avoids major roads. Local connectors are identified in the Local Area Plans when they are updated.

Commuter bicycle routes, on the other hand, provide for direct access within and through the municipality to link major employment destinations. They have higher volumes

of vehicle traffic and are intended for the experienced cyclist. They are also signed and include pavement striping and warnings for automobiles.

In 2003, Saanich Council formally endorsed the Centennial Trails project as part of its 2006 centennial celebration, a multi-phase initiative that will expand public access to the regional trail network by establishing new loops and connector trails.

Most recently, in June 2004 Saanich was awarded funding from the Green Municipal Funds managed by the Federation of Canadians Municipalities to convert 4 kilometres of the abandoned Interurban rail corridor for trail use, and to develop additional trail connections to the overall network.



A new bicycle and pedestrian trail crossing over the Trans Canada

Results

Since 1993, Saanich has constructed over 50 kilometres of on-road cycling infrastructure. Pedestrian linkages have also been improved through this period through the construction of new sidewalks and the multi-use trail system.

Saanich's 1994 Bicycle Master Plan and a 2001 project that included streamside improvements as part of an on-street bike lane project have won a number of provincial environmental awards. All of Saanich's bike lane and major trail projects are evaluated regularly with post-construction utilization counts conducted annually in summer.

Saanich's recently completed Travel Behaviour Survey indicates that "to and from work" bicycle travel has increased from 4 per cent in 1999 to 11 percent in 2004. "It sounds cliché," says Colin Doyle the director of Saanich's Engineering Department, "but the survey results support the idea that if you build it, they will come. There's a lot of latent demand for cycling that has been brought out by our on and off road improvements."

Participants

In developing and implementing its Active Transportation Infrastructure Program, Saanich has worked with a number of government and non-government partners, including the Capital Regional District, surrounding municipalities, the province, BC Transit (the regional transit provider), ICBC (the province's public insurance corporation), Camosun College, University of Victoria, the Greater Victoria Cycling Coalition and SmartGrowth BC (a Vancouver-based environment and land use NGO).

Saanich also has a Bicycle Advisory Committee, which has developed, helped guide and review elements of the Active Transportation Infrastructure Program. The committee is made up mainly of commuter cyclists and municipal staff from Engineering, Planning, Parks and Police, and is chaired by a councillor.

Resources

Projects have been funded through regular departmental capital budgets, including streets and streetscape improvements. Some projects were cost-shared under the now defunct provincial Cycling Network Program which provided \$1.4-million in funding between 1995 and 2001. Additional funding has been provided through the provincial Ministry of Transportation and the Provincial Capital Commission Greenways Fund, which was cancelled in 2001.

A new provincial funding program, the Cycling Infrastructure Partnership Program was launched in 2004. Saanich is seeking funding for 2005/2006 from the fund for two major projects. Both will be seeking the maximum per project ask of \$250,000 from the program.

In 2004, Saanich was awarded green municipal infrastructure funds for a \$2.1-million project to convert 4 kilometres of the abandoned Interurban rail corridor for trail use, and to develop a connector to the Lochside Trail across the Blenkinsop Valley, part of the Centennial trail network project.

Staff participate in BAC meetings, which are every other Wednesday for two hours. Staff also participate in rides and walkabouts.

Lessons learned

Some of the lessons learned in developing the Active Transportation Infrastructure Program include:

- **Develop an integrated network over time.** Saanich has concentrated on slowly developing an integrated active transportation network over time. Improvements are coordinated and linked to the overall system, rather than being developed in isolated, unconnected parts.
- **Designated single purpose bike lanes are more attractive to cyclists.** Saanich and CRD staff have noted that bike lanes that form part of a connected network induce higher levels of cycling, while wider curb lanes appear to have less effect on the level of cycling.
- **Properly designed multi-purpose bicycle/pedestrian trails attract higher usage.** Staff observations indicate that properly constructed trails (surfaced, minimum 3-metre, preferably 4-metre wide) that offer destination access induce increases in walking and cycling.
- **Bicycle Advisory Committees or other local organizations can help advance an active transportation agenda.** Created in 1991, the Saanich Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC) began advocating for dedicated line items in capital budgets applicable to roads and trails, without which new infrastructures cannot be funded. The BAC was modeled on a successful BAC in Eugene, Oregon where the focus was placed on fixing commuter routes and creating linkages with major off-road trails. According to staff, Saanich's BAC has become an important staff resource who use the committee as a sounding board for funding and design issues. Staff have also found that having actual cyclists involved in infrastructure design has been helpful in a field where there is a relatively limited body of technical information and standards.



Improved sidewalks and cycling lanes with dedicated bike turning bays near the University of Victoria.

Next steps

Saanich has begun to ask developers to include a transportation demand component to their development proposals and has started to link measures to improve access on foot or by bike with reductions in parking standards. These measures will help improve pedestrian and cycling facilities in the private realm and support the municipality in its efforts to increase investment over time in active transportation infrastructure to induce more people to walk and ride to their destinations.

One of the major planned projects is the Saanich Connector Cycle/Walk Project. This project will connect suburban neighborhoods in Saanich and the University of Victoria to the regional commuter trail network by building a three-metre wide, mixed-use trail along a currently impassable road allowance. This project will dramatically expand trail access, sponsor new patterns of trail use, and provide a tangible symbol of potential connectivity from trail development. The \$1.6 million project is part of the Centennial Trails Project and will be completed by 2007.

A related project will retrofit adjacent portions of a major road with a shoulder trail and bike lanes, and provide a safe intersection for the new connector trail. Creation of the connector will involve naturalizing a stream channel that currently serves as a farm ditch, relocating utility poles, introducing safe crossing points and providing a compacted-aggregate running surface that supports commuter use. A Local Connector route between the university and the trailhead will be also be designated and signed as part of this project.

In 2005, Saanich will be retrofitting a section of a busy four lane arterial road that serves the University of Victoria. The project will be the first that requires the purchase and demolition of three houses along the right of way in order to achieve the needed space for bike lanes. The \$500,000 project will also incorporate a wider sidewalk for pedestrians with naturalized boulevards in many sections.
