

COMMUTERS, CARS, AND BICYCLES

Introduction

Focus

With the cost of fuelling up vehicles reaching record levels, bicycle sales are soaring as many Canadians opt to pedal to their destinations. This *News in Review* story examines the pros and cons of cycling in Canada.

It is a rite of passage: a parent stands behind their child, keeping them from tipping over, mindfully watching the wheels of the bicycle turn. With the training wheels taken off the two-wheeler, the child pedals onward, balanced over the bicycle, free of parental intervention and able to conquer new territory at an unprecedented speed. The bicycle is a symbol of independence, a symbol of freedom for youngsters seeking to show their parents that they can do things on their own. So it is no wonder that many people who mastered the bicycle as children continue to ride through their adolescence and become avid cyclists when they are adults. But cycling in Canada is no easy task since roads are designed for cars, with bicycles playing second fiddle to their four-wheel cousins. However, this situation may be about to change.

As fuel prices continue to soar, Canadians are looking for alternatives to their gas-hungry cars. The bicycle is often the first option that comes to mind for most Canadians. The vehicle is familiar and can be relatively inexpensive, with a good bike costing between \$300 and \$500. For the affluent cyclist, there are high-performance bikes that cost thousands of dollars. No matter what the cost, bikes are available, easy to ride, and a reasonable option as a mode of transportation for Canadians during at least three seasons of the year.

By the end of the summer of 2008, bike dealers reported that sales were up six per cent, and Statistics Canada reported that the number of bike commuters across Canada rose by 18 per cent to close to 200 000 riders.

However, the number of Canadians using the bicycle as their primary

mode of transportation is still modest, accounting for only 1.3 per cent of the commuting population. So what's stopping people from jumping onboard en masse? Canadians cite problems like distance, weather, time, and inconvenience as factors affecting their decision whether or not to cycle. Another significant factor is bike theft. Over 44 000 bikes are stolen in Canada each year. Stealing a bike is easy (with most taken from people's garages and storage sheds), and law enforcement does not usually treat bike theft as a major priority. As a result, Canadians are forced to consider whether it is worthwhile to invest in a bike that might be stolen and never recovered.

The extent of bike theft in Canada garnered national attention in the summer of 2008 with the arrest of Igor Kenk in Toronto. Kenk is accused of leading a bike-theft ring that stole bicycles for decades. By the time the police caught up with him, he had 3 000 bikes stored in eight different locations around the city. With that many bikes recovered, there is no telling how many bikes were sold or traded over the years that the bike-theft ring was in operation.

Beyond bike theft and excuses, a major shift in the mentality of most Canadians will need to take place if Canada hopes to become more bike-friendly. Overall, the bicycle is seen as a leisure toy. While many Canadians own and ride their bikes at least occasionally, (over 50 per cent of Quebecers fall into this category) only a few use their bikes as their main source of transportation. If bikes are to become more numerous on our roads, the leisure-toy mentality needs to be replaced by a transportation-vehicle mentality. More than anything, motorists will have

to begin to see cyclists as legitimate commuters on an equal footing with them and not as a nuisance that slows them down.

After decades of lobbying by cycling advocates, Canadian cities are starting to get on board. Every major city has a bike plan that calls for more bike lanes and

pathways. In the province of Quebec, all infrastructure development has to include a bike plan. Perhaps in the not-too-distant future, every new road will include a bike lane, and the commuting landscape will be a sea of cars, trucks, scooters, and bicycles. Time will tell.

Questions

1. What is fuelling the recent surge in bike riding?

2. What reasons do Canadians cite for not riding their bikes as their main mode of transportation?

3. How big a problem is bike theft across Canada? What news story brought national attention to the problem of bike theft in the summer of 2008?

4. What shift in mentality needs to take place among Canadians if Canada hopes to become more bike friendly?

5. Do you have a bike? How often do you use it?

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Video Review

Further Research

If you wish to learn more about cycling in Canada or receive more training and information, consider a visit to the CAN-BIKE site organized by the Canadian Cycling Association at www.canbike.net.

Watch the video and answer the following questions.

1. Why are bike sales up across Canada?

2. What keeps many Canadians from choosing a bicycle as their primary mode of transportation?

3. What is meant by the expression “there just isn’t the infrastructure to support biking” in most Canadian cities?

4. What plans does Saskatoon have to improve things for bicyclers in their city?

5. Why is cycling such a tough sell for city politicians?

6. Is cycling a big business in Canada? Be specific.

7. How significant a problem is bike theft in Canada?

8. According to the video, how easy is it to steal a bike?

9. Why do many bike thefts go unreported?

10. Why isn’t bike theft a priority for police?

11. Why does Kevin steal bikes in Vancouver? How do the stolen bikes benefit him?

12. What do you think of the bike rental program mentioned at the end of the documentary? Do you think the people of Montreal will embrace renting bikes from the city’s 300 rental stations?

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Bicycling in Canada and the World

Did you know . . .

The province of Quebec has over 7 000 km of bikeways. In fact, all provincial infrastructure development must include a bike plan.

Canadians are avid recreational cyclists. For the most part, if Canadians are going to ride a bike, they will do so on their leisure time. However, there is a growing number of Canadians choosing to pedal to work. Statistics Canada reports an almost 18 per cent increase in bicycle commuters since the 2001 census.

Overall, cyclists account for 1.3 per cent of people commuting to work daily. So what are Canadian cities doing to make room for the bikes on their roads? Take a look at the following information.

Montreal

- 210 km of bike paths
- 95 km of bike lanes
- 66 km of bike routes on lightly travelled roads
- two-directional bike lanes on the same side of the road in some areas

Quebec City

- 220 km of bike paths
- 121 km of bike lanes
- 66 km of bike routes on lightly travelled roads
- 28 km of bike lanes are two-directional (like the ones in Montreal)

Ottawa

- 511 km of bike routes on arterial and secondary roads (83 km have separate bike lanes, 81 km have paved shoulders designed specifically for cycling, and 35 km have extra-wide shared lanes for both motorists and cyclists.)
- 311 km of off-road bike routes
- Ottawa's bikeways combine as part of the city's National Capital Pathway, a web of bikeways, many of which run along Ottawa's waterways, parks, and greenways.

Toronto

- 252 km of bikeways, including 154 km of off-road paths, 63 km of bike lanes, and 35 km of shared roadways
- Toronto's official Bike Plan sets a goal of 1 000 km of bikeways by 2011

Vancouver

- 1 347 km of bike routes
- Vancouver plans to expand the network of bike routes, focusing on lightly travelled side streets to reduce traffic congestion on the busier roads.

Victoria

- 377 km of bike routes of which 67 km are mixed-use off-road trails
- 62 km of bike lanes
- 131 km of roadways with paved shoulders designed for bikes
- The city plans to expand the region's bike route network to 550 km.

Source: "Cycling trends and policies in Canadian cities," John Pucher and Ralph Buehler, Rutgers University (www.tino.ca/canada.pdf)

So how do Canadian cities compare with other cities around the world? Take a look at this:

Amsterdam, Netherlands

- 40 per cent of the vehicles on the city's streets are bikes.
- Cars and bikes share virtually every road, with 600 000 bikes making their way around the city.
- The city plans to build a bike parking garage for 10 000 bikes at their main train station.
- Amsterdam calls itself "the bike capital of the world."

Did you know . . .

Many Canadian cities are now seeing increasing numbers of people using E-bikes. These are bikes equipped with electric motors, thus making it easier for a wider range of people to consider cycling as a form of transportation.

Copenhagen, Denmark

- 32 per cent of the population cycles to work every day.
- Cyclists outnumber motorists on the city's streets.
- Bike networks are so extensive that some bike lanes have their own traffic signals.
- Copenhagen calls itself the "city of bikes."

Source: "11 most bike-friendly cities in the world" (www.virgin-vacations.com/site_vv/11-most-bike-friendly-cities.asp)

Paris, France

- The city has a bike rental program involving over 20 000 bikes.
- The city is outfitted with almost 1 500 rental stations located less than a kilometre from each other.
- Bike renters can ride for free for the first 30 minutes and pay a modest fee for longer stretches on the bike.
- When bikers are finished riding they can drop off their bike at any of the 1 500 rental stations.

Source: "Paris embraces plans to become City of Bikes," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2007

Analysis

1. In your opinion, how are Canadian cities doing in their efforts to become more bike friendly? Which city seems the most bike friendly? How could Canadian cities improve?
2. How do Canadian cities compare with the international cities cited above? Which ideas or attitudes do you think Canadian cities need to adopt to become more bike friendly?

Follow-up

How is your community doing in terms of promoting cycling? Go to your community's Web site or contact the local civic authorities and inquire about your community's bike plan. Does your school encourage cycling? Explain.

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Bike Theft – Big Problem

Definition

Carbon footprint refers to the impact our activities have on the environment, especially climate change. It refers to the quantity of greenhouse gases produced in our daily lives through burning fossil fuels for electricity, heating, and transportation. Most experts believe that immediate measures are needed to shrink the carbon footprint of humankind.

Cyclists have complained for decades that police across Canada haven't taken bike theft seriously. Maybe this is because, by and large, people view the bike as a leisure toy or exercise machine. In other words, bikes tend to be devalued in the eyes of many Canadians and, as a result, police services adopt this mentality and treat bike theft as petty crime. Cyclists claim bike theft is hardly petty with a decent bike running close to \$500 and a high-end bike stretching into

the thousands of dollars. Couple this with the fact that cycling is environmentally friendly and it becomes clear that bike theft needs be dealt with seriously. If Canadians are going to reduce their collective carbon footprint, the bicycle is a logical, time-tested option that needs to be encouraged. Not dealing with bike theft in a serious way acts as a disincentive for would-be riders. Check out the following statistics on bike theft across Canada.

Province	# of bikes stolen	Bikes stolen / 100 000 residents
Newfoundland and Labrador	316	62.42
Prince Edward Island	251	181.06
Nova Scotia	731	78.26
New Brunswick	781	104.16
Quebec	9268	120.36
Ontario	16 360	127.77
Manitoba	2052	172.92
Saskatchewan	1815	182.07
Alberta	4455	128.24
British Columbia	7668	175.06
Yukon	104	335.61
Nunavut / North West Territory	n/a	n/a
Canada	44 103	133.47

Source: "Hey, that's my bike!" cbc.ca; Statistics Canada

Experts believe the number of stolen bikes to be at least double the number of thefts reported to police—with some claiming the number of stolen bikes to be higher than 100 000. Two options have emerged recently to help catch bike thieves. First, more and more bike owners are registering their bicycles with the police. This helps the police to return stolen bikes to owners when they are recovered from bike thieves.

Second, global positioning satellite (GPS) technology is making its way into the bike world. Some manufacturers are planning to put a GPS chip into their bikes so that police can easily track stolen bikes. GPS technology is already being used by police forces in "bait bikes" that investigators can track to find the location of stolen bikes and, hopefully, the thieves who stole them.

Inquiry

1. Find your province on the chart. How does your province compare with other provinces in Canada in terms of bike theft? Explain your findings.
2. Multiply the number of stolen bikes in your province by two. This is probably a more accurate indication of the number of stolen bikes in your province. Does the number of stolen bikes surprise you? Explain your answer.
3. Would you be more likely to buy a bike equipped with a GPS chip? Explain your answer.
4. Have you ever had your bike stolen? Do you know someone who has had their bike stolen? How did it feel for you or your friend to be a victim of theft? Did you ever get the bike back?
5. What steps do you take to protect your bike from theft?

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How to Protect Your Bike

To protect your bicycle from theft, you should take the following precautions:

1. Buy the best lock you can afford. The best locks are the U-bolt, kryptonite locks. In fact, many cyclists advocate two U-bolt locks so that you can secure both wheels to the bike frame and an immovable object like a bike rack or steel railing.
2. Lock it whenever you park it. Even if you are parking your bike in your own garage or a backyard shed, lock it up. Thieves know that many of us don't lock our bikes up at home.
3. Avoid dark, hidden, or isolated parking spots where thieves have access to your bike without being observed.
4. If your front wheel has a quick-release lever, remove the front wheel and lock it to the frame and back wheel.
5. Remove bags, lights, or any other quick-release parts. Often bikes are sold with a quick-release lever for the seat as well as the front wheel. If you don't remove these parts, thieves will be able to steal them easily.
6. Consider replacing quick-release fasteners with regular bolts. This might mean you have to carry a wrench around with you if you want to release the seat and the front wheel, but it could mean saving those parts from theft.
7. Register your bicycle with your local police department.
8. Report a stolen bike to the police.
9. Don't buy stolen bikes—that makes you part of the problem.

Source: Adapted from the City of Toronto's bike safety guide.
(www.toronto.ca/cycling/map/theft_racks_lockers.htm)

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the precautions listed above do you take to protect your bike from being stolen?

2. Do you think the precautions are reasonable? Explain.

3. Have you registered your bike with the police? Do you think this is really necessary to deter bike theft? In fact, do you even know where to find the serial number on your bike?

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IV A Massive Bike-theft Ring

Definition

A *bait bike* is a bike planted by police to lure thieves—just like a person who is fishing baits their hook to lure a fish.

It was as if they had found the place where bikes go to die. Toronto Police slowly entered a west-end garage where hundreds of bikes were allegedly stashed by Igor Kenk—a longtime used bike dealer who police believe was the leader of a massive bike-theft ring. By the time the police had finished emptying the garage, a new lead popped up pointing to another garage—and then another. By the time the leads had dried up, Kenk was associated in some way with over 3 000 stolen bikes stored in eight locations throughout the city.

Things turned sour for Igor Kenk when police began investigating the theft of 95 bikes within a six-week period in Toronto's west end. A determined Toronto Police Service had had enough. Toronto was once identified as “the bike theft capital of the world,” and it was time to turn its reputation around. Police officers parked a “bait bike” on Queen Street West and waited for thieves to come along and steal the bike. To their surprise, they witnessed Igor Kenk walk out of his used bicycle store across the street from the police stakeout and allegedly direct an associate to steal a nearby bike. The man cut off the bike's lock and brought the bike back to Kenk, who paid him for his services. Then he allegedly sent the man after another bike. That's when the police moved in, arrested Igor Kenk, and then shut down his store, The Bicycle Clinic.

The police probably realized something shady was going on when they started to clean out Kenk's store. As bike after bike was brought out of The Bicycle Clinic and loaded into waiting vans, local residents cheered on the police. Officers involved in the clean-out were both puzzled and amused by

the neighbourhood's response. Many members of the biking community shared the neighbourhood's sentiments. According to Gary Duke, the owner of the nearly-century-old Duke's Cycle, the Toronto cyclers' mantra was, if your bike is stolen, “your best bet is to go to Igor's within two to four hours” (*The Globe and Mail*, July 26, 2008). While this sounds like a joke, many people did just that. Grant Downey had his bike stolen in 2005. He went to Kenk's store to check things out. He reported that The Bicycle Clinic was jam-packed with bikes, but he couldn't find his bike amid all the clutter. After Kenk's arrest, Downey found his bike among the 3 000 that Kenk is alleged to have helped to steal. A relieved Downey took his bike home but expressed frustration that a massive and apparently well-known bike theft ring was able to operate for so long without the police catching the mastermind and his thieves.

Several weeks after Kenk's arrest, the public got a snapshot of how the alleged bike-theft ring operated. Freelance documentary maker Lewis Farell was investigating the stolen-bike market in Toronto. His street-level research led him straight to The Bicycle Clinic, where he was able to secure and record a lengthy audio interview with Igor Kenk. In the interview, recorded just days before his arrest, Kenk claimed that Toronto is “the most affluent city on the planet” and that bike theft continues unabated because the authorities are too lazy to do anything about it. He said that his role in buying used bikes from anyone coming in off the streets was almost a moral calling. “I've invested my blood, my money, my . . . time into salvaging because it's immoral to throw [the bikes]

out,” claimed a self-assured Kenk. From his perspective, he was following the law. Bikes were brought into his shop where they would sit for three weeks. If someone claiming their bike was stolen showed up with a police report, and their bike was in his shop, he promptly returned the bike to the victim. In fact, Kenk often returned bikes directly to police when they came searching for stolen two-wheelers. When pressed on the efficacy of denying someone without a police report access to their stolen bike, a defiant Kenk said, “You have no force, you have no right, you have nothing . . . I agree that it’s . . . wrong, but that’s what it is. The bike is mine unless you have a police report” (*The Globe and Mail*, July 26, 2008).

This story is a kind of morality play for a complacent society. Here an alleged villain used the law to obtain stolen merchandise. He stored the bicycles in a variety of locations around the city because he believed that it was immoral to just throw them away. As the years passed, thousands of bikes went missing. Police and society maintained a belief that a stolen bike was akin to a child losing a toy. By the time the stakeout on Queen Street led to an arrest, 3 000 bikes lay orphaned in garages around Toronto, with many more allegedly sold as “used bikes” to customers at The Bicycle Clinic. So many victims; so many bikes. There must be something we can learn from all of this.

Inquiry

1. Describe the events that led to the arrest of Igor Kenk.

2. What evidence did police have that “something shady” must have been going on at The Bicycle Clinic?

3. How did the bike-theft ring work?

4. What can we learn from the bike-theft-ring story?

5. How serious a problem is bike theft in your community. Describe fully.

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Sharing the Road

Canada has been so car-friendly for so long that it is hard to get people to shift gears and seek alternative travel options. When Environics (a polling firm) asked

Canadians why they opt for driving their car over riding a bicycle to work, people cited the following barriers to choosing the bike option:

Reason for not cycling to work	Percentage of respondents
It's too much distance for me to cover	31
The weather is too harsh and unpredictable	27
It would take too much time for me to commute	17
I don't feel that cycling to work is safe enough	14
It's too inconvenient	12
I have too much to carry	7
I have children	4

Source: National Survey on Active Transportation Summary Report, Environics International on behalf of Go for Green in Ottawa, 1998 (www.cite7.org)

Thus, the car becomes the vehicle of choice, and this choice is endorsed by almost everyone in society. In fact, most city planning decisions revolve around automobile traffic. However, with the move toward reducing each Canadian's carbon footprint, many people are seeking alternatives to the car. In 2008, bicycle sales jumped six per cent, with many people purchasing bikes as their main mode of transportation to work. This marks a significant shift in the mentality of a growing number of Canadians.

The problem with this shift is that car drivers need to learn to share the road. In a society that has declared the car the king of the transportation world, many motorists feel it is their right to dominate the road and that any other vehicle had better move over. Cyclists have been the main victim of this mentality as car drivers, in a hurry to get to their destinations, see them as a roadway nuisance and sometimes recklessly demonstrate this with aggressive driving

and unwarranted hostility. This is why city officials in Ottawa put together a program called "Shift to a Nicer Gear — Share the Road." Using statistics from 2003, the city was able to easily identify the problem. Of the close to 15 000 reported accidents in Ottawa:

- 13 cyclists making improper left-hand turns were hit by motorists.
- 29 cyclists were hit by motorists making improper left-hand turns.
- 35 cyclists who failed to yield the right of way were hit by motorists.
- 58 cyclists were hit by motorists who failed to yield the right of way.

Source: "City of Ottawa: Share the Road" (www.ottawa.ca)

Ottawa is a microcosm of the road-sharing problem that exists across Canada. Whether it is cyclists taking an unnecessary risk on the road or a car driver trying to rush their commute, both sides have demonstrated a lack of regard

for the other. Unfortunately for cyclists, they don't stand much of a chance against the weight and power of a car. Since cars far outnumber bikes on the road, Ottawa has targeted adult drivers with an education campaign. Signs that promote sharing the road have been put up, the city's Web site is emphasizing the

program, public service announcements can be heard on the radio, and cars and trucks are putting "Share the Road" bumper stickers on their vehicles. The goal is to create a safer commuting environment for both cars and bikes with the outcome being a roadway where all vehicles can harmoniously co-exist.

Questions

1. Which reasons for not cycling that are noted in the chart do you think are legitimate? Which ones do you think are weak?
2. Why do you think bike sales jumped in 2008?
3. a) What alarming statistics caused Ottawa to create the "Shift to a Nicer Gear — Share the Road" program?

b) Briefly describe Ottawa's "Shift to a Nicer Gear — Share the Road" program.

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Stay Safe

Read the following quick tips from the Canadian Cycling Association and complete the activity that follows.

Ten Quick Tips for Cyclers

1. Stay right—stay as far right as possible on a city street or rural road. Cars should give you about a metre of room as they pass.
2. Warm up your bike—do your pre-cycling abc's: "a" is for air—check your tire pressure and valve stems before you ride; "b" is for brakes, bars, and bells—make sure these items are secured and working well before you ride; "c" is for chain and crank —make sure your chain is lubricated and your pedals (or cranks) are spinning freely before you ride.
3. Avoid sidewalks—sidewalks are for pedestrians. Bikes are vehicles and have just as much right to the road as cars.
4. Avoid squeezing—cyclists need to avoid squeezing past cars and trucks. Similarly, cars and trucks need to maintain at least a one-metre distance when they are passing a bike.
5. Avoid door prizes—cyclists should be on the lookout for car owners who fail to check over their left shoulder before opening their doors. While it's the responsibility of the car owner, cyclists should be on guard so they don't receive a painful "door prize."
6. Carefully go around "road snakes"—a road snake is a crack in the road that is either unfilled or filled with road repair material. Cyclists should cross these cracks at a 90 degree angle to avoid getting knocked off their bikes.
7. Take the full lane—when passing a vehicle that is obstructing traffic, cyclists should check over both shoulders, signal and then take the full lane when passing the obstruction. Once they pass, they should return to the far right side of the road.
8. Go the right way—never ride against traffic.
9. Secure your bike—lock your bike with two locks against a secure, immovable object like a proper bike rack.
10. Be careful around tracks—always cross train and streetcar tracks on a 90 degree angle.

Based on the "Ten quick tips" from the Canadian Cycling Association
Source: www.canadian-cycling.com/ccca/education/canbike_safety.shtml

Question

1. How many of these quick tips do you follow? How many of the quick tips have you either ignored or not known about?
2. Describe any other safety tips that you feel are worth remembering and practising.

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Activity

Your task is to work with a partner to create an advertising campaign designed to promote cycling and condemn bike theft.

Target audience for advertisements: People between the ages of 12 and 20

Theme #1 – Let’s Bike! — an advertisement promoting riding your bike to school or work

Theme #2 – Bike Theft, No More! — an advertisement discouraging bike theft

Your job is to make two advertisements in the following formats. You can use one format for one advertisement and another format for your second advertisement.

Formats

- a) Audio: Record a radio advertisement on your computer or recording device. If you want you can download a program called “Audacity” (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) for free on the Internet as an aid to help you edit your work. Your commercial should be 30 to 60 seconds long.
- b) Video: Record a video commercial. The length of your commercial should be 30 to 60 seconds. Most computers have video editing software. See if you can edit a clean, professional-looking commercial.
- c) Web page: Make a one-page, visually appealing Web page that delivers your message to your audience. You don’t necessarily have to post this on the Internet. Just design your page as if it was going to be posted on the internet.
- d) Poster: Either use a computer or draw a poster promoting the themes for your audience. Posters should be 11" by 17" in size.

Notes:
