

**Letter to Saanich School District 63:****Transportation Policy Review: Recommendations for Enhancing Active Transportation****November 15, 2023**

Dear Policy Review Committee, Board of Trustees, and Secretary Treasurer,

Capital Bike thanks you for your leadership in incorporating active transportation in your Transportation Policy Review. Specifically, we refer to Item #8 of the Draft Transportation Policy Revisions:

*8 Active transportation will be promoted through a variety of means including, but not limited to:*

*8.1 Working with local governments to address road safety concerns as well as identify opportunities to create active transportation routes to school;*

*8.2 Providing communication to students, parents/guardians and the community on road safety issues; and*

*8.3 Building student awareness on various active transportation options for arriving to school.*

**Student Well-being, Environmental Sustainability, and Equity: A Call for Ambitious Action**

Considering the critical intersection of student health, sustainable environmental practices, and the climate emergency, Capital Bike commends SD63 for aligning with the global movement toward cycling and active transportation to schools. Recognizing that effective policy requires clear and ambitious objectives and dedicated resources, we offer our feedback to strengthen your Transportation Policy Review.

**Capital Bike: Who are we?**

Capital Bike is a cycling advocacy organization working in the Capital Region to get “more people, cycling more places, more often.” As a community-driven charitable organization, we develop and promote cycling education programs, organize events like Go By Bike Week (GBBW), and advocate at all government levels to improve cycling safety and infrastructure.

## **Cycling to School: A Multi-faceted Benefit**

Research continues to demonstrate the many and substantial benefits from students making their way to school by bicycling or other forms of active transportation. These include important physical and mental health benefits:

- increased physical activity
- improved cardiovascular fitness, muscle strength, and overall physical endurance
- better bone health
- enhanced motor skills
- reduced risk of obesity
- promotion of long-lasting healthy lifestyle habits
- stress reduction
- improved concentration, focus, and school performance
- enhanced mood
- better sleep quality
- increased energy levels
- social and community interaction opportunities

When students cycle or walk to school, they are also significant environmental benefits:

- reducing climate-warming carbon emissions (which is critical as road transportation remains the CRD's number one source of carbon emissions, and trips to K-12 schools account for 7% of all outbound trips in the CRD.)
- improving air quality resulting from reduced tailpipe emissions and particulates from brakes and tires
- mitigating noise pollution
- promoting cycling infrastructure the whole community can utilize
- encouraging sustainable transportation practices and eco-friendly habits

Important equity considerations come into play as well, such as:

- reducing the financial burden for lower-income families where safe and convenient infrastructure is available to reduce car dependence

## **Our Recommendations and Feedback**

We propose the following additions to Item #8 in the Draft Transportation Policy, aiming to make it more ambitious, concrete, prescriptive, and measurable:

### **1) Encourage Cycling and Active Trips to School with Needed Infrastructure:**

- a) Formally adopt the CRD's All Ages and Abilities bikeway policy to help guide district construction & advocacy on bikeways.
- b) Collaborate with municipalities to accelerate the construction of a quick-build complete cycling network by 2027 that provides an All Ages and Abilities (AAA) bikeway to the main entrance of every school. Where needed, provide school land to enable students to arrive at school safely where roads are not designed to permit AAA infrastructure near schools.
- c) Reassess the distribution of School District budgeted funds, resources, and land allocation to facilitate different commuting modes, prioritizing active transportation options.
- d) Reconsider infrastructure projects that promote car-dependency over cycling and walking to school, especially those projects which negatively affect those cycling to school and those on bikes in the wider community. As an example, pick-up and drop-off zones should be designed to not endanger people on bikes and discourage people from using active transportation. Recently, SD63 has proposed a drop-off driveway parallel to the Lochside trail at Lochside School; this design runs counter to good design practices and would discourage people riding to school and along the Lochside trail.

### **2) Provide Better, Secure Bicycle Parking and End-of-trip Facilities:**

- a) Provide secure, covered parking for bicycles and other modes of active transportation for students and staff. Consult the school community on placement and design.
- b) Provide end-of-trip facilities for staff and students, including lockers, change rooms and showers. Consult potential users on placement and design.
- c) Ensure entrances to school grounds and to bicycle parking facilities are suitable and wide enough for easy access for non-standard bicycles (e.g., cargo and bucket bicycles), while meeting school security concerns.
- d) Provide infrastructure for electric bicycle battery charging.

- e) Provide bicycle repair facilities for minor repairs and adjustments, like flat tires.
- f) Advocate to the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) to provide funding to top up the Annual Facility Grant funding from the Ministry of Education and Child Care (ECC) to support site upgrades for enhancing accessibility for vulnerable road users.
- g) Advocate to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (SDPR) to increase ECC's Annual Facility Grant for accessibility upgrades to enhance access to school grounds for people with physical impairments.

### **3) Lead the Culture Change to Active Transportation to School:**

- a) Advocate to MOTI for increased funding to run 'Ready, Step, Roll' (RSR), and support the CRD to roll out the Ready, Step, Roll (RSR) initiative every year at every school in the District.
- b) Host RSR events to coincide with Capital Bike's tri-annual Go By Bike Week (GBBW) events.
- c) At the beginning of the school year, at every school: Engage with students and their families around the economic, climate, and health benefits of travelling to school using public transit and active transportation. Engage and inspire students with a school assembly. Reinforce with parents and staff who do drive to schools the critical importance of their role in safeguarding vulnerable road users.
- d) Advocate to MOTI for increased funding and to shift the funding model for 'Everyone Rides, Grades 4 and 5' (ERG45) to fund school districts directly, not external agencies, so that School Districts can hire Active Transportation coordinators to coordinate RSR and ERG45 at each school in the School District.
- e) Provide training to grade 6-8 students to use public transportation, similar to the exemplary Kingston (Ontario) Model. [<https://clean50.com/the-kingston-model-for-youth-transit-programming-the-benefits-public-transit-can-have-on-our-youth-schools-and-the-community>]
- f) Eliminate student car parking at high schools, except for those students where a need is demonstrated. Repurpose recovered parking space for climate mitigation purposes.
- g) Work with municipalities and parent groups towards the elimination of car drop-off zones around schools.
- h) Foster the creation and ongoing support of adult-led "bike-buses" for younger riders.

- i) Assign personnel within the District to be responsible for implementing and supporting these culture change initiatives. Provide paid release time for staff members willing to champion and coordinate these initiatives in their schools.

**4) Be a Strong Advocate for Continuing Improvements:**

- a) Establish a regular liaison within the District to coordinate with municipal staff on improving active transportation to schools, including creating a Safe Routes to Schools Plan, including AAA routes and safe walking connections to the entrance of each school.
- b) Advocate for traffic calming measures, paired with speed limit reductions to 30 km/h or less, on all streets adjacent to all schools at all times.
- c) Advocate to municipalities to create School Streets in front of all school front doors.
- d) Advocate to municipalities that when public works or construction occurs near schools, that safe paths for vulnerable road users be prioritized.
- e) Establish a District Active Transport Committee to review best practices, engage with the community and parents, make recommendations to the Board, and monitor progress.
- f) Set active transportation targets school-by-school and report on progress on a yearly basis. Targets might include: percentage of students with “safe routes” to school, students walking to school, students cycling to school, and number of active transportation related safety incidents per year.

More and more, local governments and school authorities around the world are taking significant steps to enable and promote active transportation and cycling to address climate, livability, health, and environmental challenges. It's terrific that the Saanich School District is joining the trend and contemplating important changes. The necessary changes only really happen when elected leaders create and commit to concrete plans and provide resources to make them happen. Commitment to change is strengthened through ambitious, specific, and detailed policy. We hope our recommendations will be useful in the development of your policy. Capital Bike has a team of expert staff and volunteers who are here to support cycling and active transportation initiatives. Please don't hesitate to reach out. Thank you very much.

Yours,

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