



Regional Cycling Strategy
Background Study

Setting the Context

16 March 2009

SUMMARY

TransLink plans to develop a Regional Cycling Strategy by 2010. This strategy will identify strategic directions and the roles of various agencies with respect to planning and investments in bicycle facilities and programs throughout the region. To establish a foundation for developing the strategy, TransLink is preparing a number of background reports, including this report entitled “Setting the Context.”

The Regional Cycling Strategy will be developed based on a vision of cycling articulated by a wide range of stakeholders. One of the key aspects of this vision is that the proportion of trips made by bicycle (referred to as the “mode share”) in the region will increase substantially over the next 10 to 30 years. This is a particularly important goal, given that the cycling mode share did not increase in the ten years from 1996 to 2006. Although the total number of cycling trips increased as a result of population growth, the proportion of trips in the region made by bicycle remained constant at 1.7%. Outside of Vancouver and UBC, the bicycle mode share in the remainder of the region is only 1.0%.

These results surprised many people, who had assumed that all the bicycle plans, facilities and programs implemented in recent years would have resulted in a noticeable increase in bicycle use. What these results indicate is that the current approach to bicycle planning is not producing desired results. If one of the goals of the Regional Cycling Strategy will be to encourage large numbers of persons to cycle, then a different approach will be needed to planning and implementing bicycle facilities and programs.

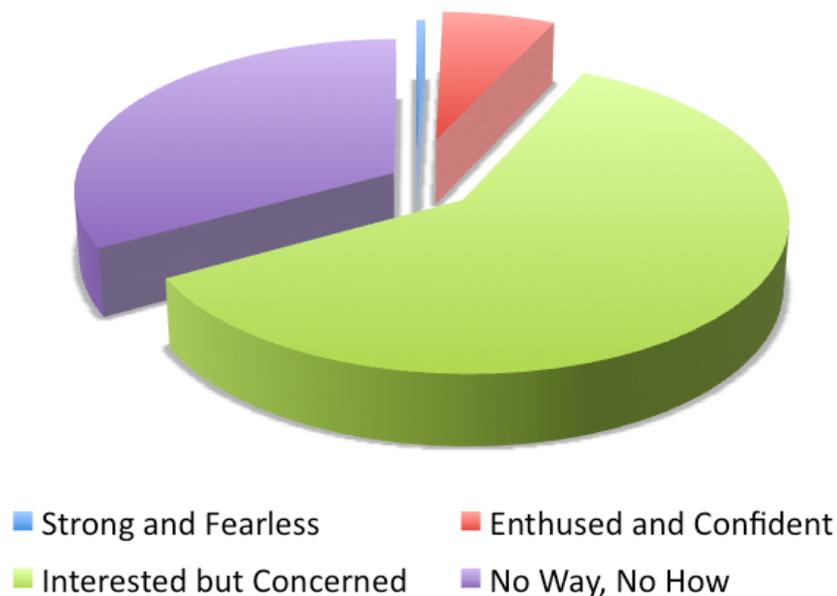
This document provides a basis for developing a different approach. It includes a review of experience elsewhere, highlighting successful initiatives. It also includes an analysis of conditions in Metro Vancouver, and concludes with an assessment of the “gaps” between current conditions and the future vision of cycling in the region. Key issues, “gaps” and opportunities which are identified in this document include:

- **Funding** is a key issue. The experience in other communities has shown that a substantial and sustained level of funding for cycling facilities and programs can yield significant increases in bicycle trips, as in Copenhagen. On the other hand, no amount of innovative programs and staff energy can compensate for low funding levels, as is the case in Chicago, where the cycling mode share remains well below target levels.

In Metro Vancouver, funding for bicycle facilities and programs over the past decade has amounted to less than 1% of regional transportation spending. This is substantially less than the bicycle mode share of 1.7%. The most likely interpretation of these numbers is that the current bicycle mode share represents a “base level” of cycling, and that past investments in cycling facilities and programs have only been enough to maintain this “base level.” Substantial increases in funding are required if substantial increases in the bicycle mode share are to be achieved.

- **Target markets.** We have only captured a small part of the potential market for cycling. Market research and travel data suggest that currently, most cycling trips are made by “strong and fearless” and “enthused and confident” cyclists. Although these are typically the most visible types of cyclists, as Figure S.1 illustrates, they are not representative of the majority of cyclists, only accounting for an estimated 8% of the cycling market.

Figure S.1 — Four Types of Transportation Cyclists, Portland OR



City of Portland

The largest market segment is described as “interested but concerned,” accounting for approximately 60% of all cyclists and potential cyclists. Unlike more committed and confident cyclists, these are people who are not comfortable cycling in traffic, and who prefer low-traffic or separated facilities. In order to achieve a significant increase in the

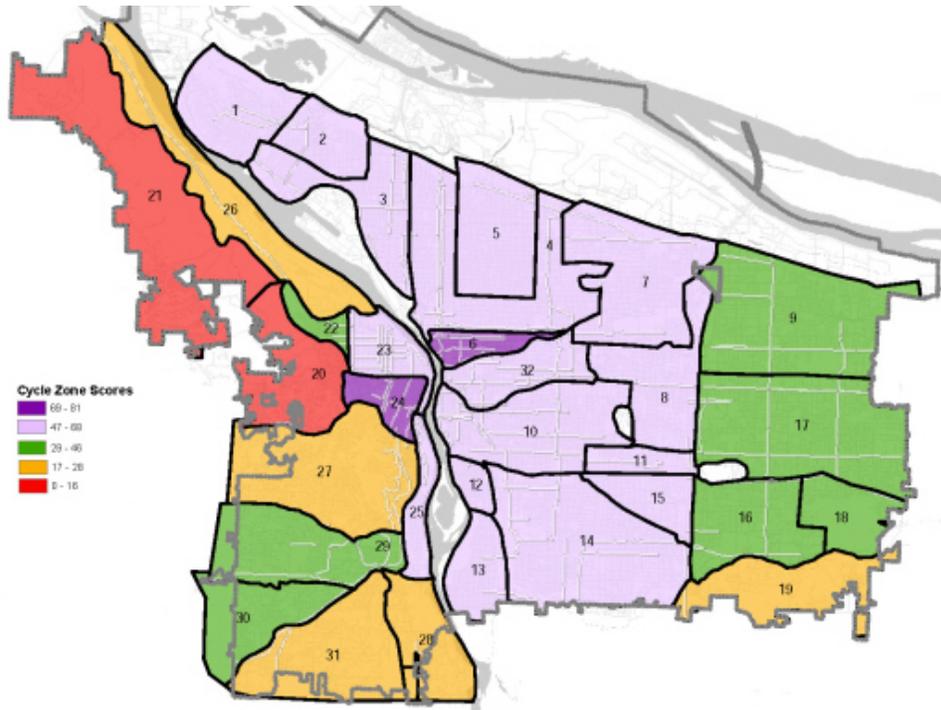
bicycle mode share, it is essential that bicycle facilities and programs are targeted to the “interested but concerned” market segment.

- **Bicycle network.** Bicycle plans throughout the region have been developed based on assumptions about trip distances which are contrary to actual bicycle use. Although the median trip distance by bicycle in the region is 3.6 km, and two-thirds of bicycle trips are under 5 km in length, travel patterns for longer-distance trips are often given equal (or even greater) emphasis when planning bicycle routes, such as trips between regional town centres. Similarly, while high densities and mixed land uses are more conducive to cycling, the majority of bicycle route kilometres in the region are in other, lower-density areas.

Development of a Regional Cycling Strategy should seek to tailor bicycle routes to match the conditions in a given area. An approach to this is one being used in Portland Oregon. Referred to as a “cycle zone analysis,” the concept involves dividing a municipality or the region into dozens of “cycle zones” based on geography, road network, land uses and demographics, as illustrated in Figure S.2. Within each zone, bicycle facilities and supporting programs are tailored to the conditions and potential for cycling in each zone. In addition to maximizing the attraction and effectiveness of the bicycle network within each zone, a comparison among cycle zones would identify those with the greatest potential for increased cycling, and would provide a basis for prioritizing investments.

- **Bicycle facilities.** Although there are approximately 1,400 km of bicycle routes in the region, the majority of these are not the types of facilities which attract people to cycling. Approximately 60% of the regional bicycle network consists of on-street facilities that are attractive to “strong and fearless” and “enthused and confident” cyclists, such as bicycle lanes on major arterial roads, wide travel lanes and paved shoulders. These facilities are generally not attractive to the much larger “interested but concerned” market segment, however, who prefer separated pathways and low-traffic on-street facilities.

Figure S.2: Cycle Zones, Potential for Increased Cycling, Portland OR

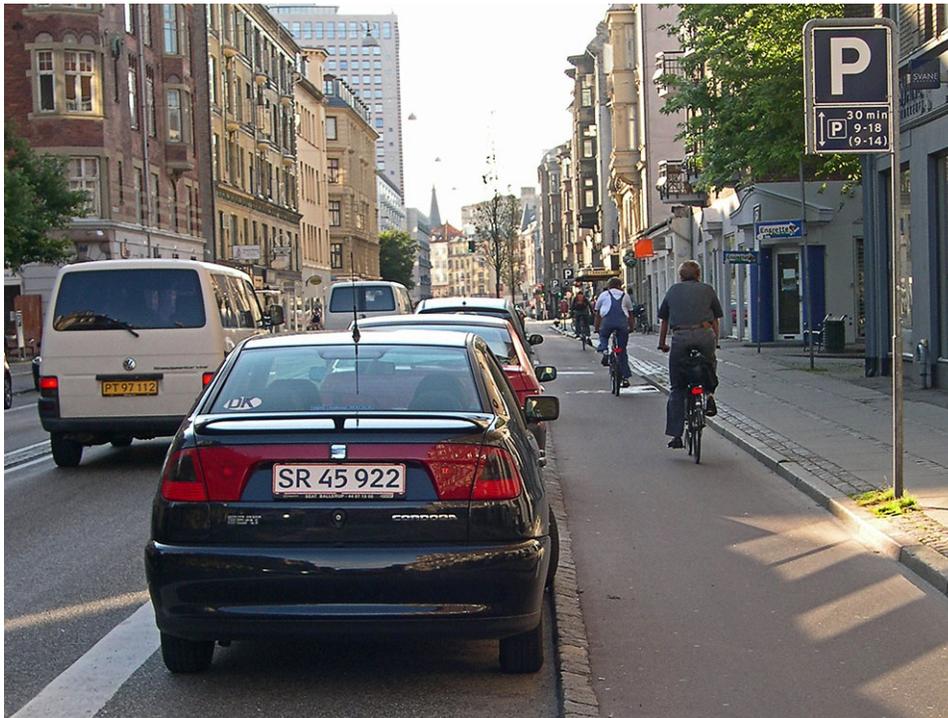


City of Portland

The Regional Cycling Strategy should incorporate “higher-quality” bicycle facilities, in areas where these would attract “interested but concerned” cyclists. Examples of these include off-street multi-use pathways, traffic calmed bikeways along local streets, and separated “cycle tracks” along major arterial roads, as illustrated in Figure S.3.

- **Supporting programs** — including information, marketing, promotion and education programs — are few and far between. There are currently few coordinated, on-going programs in the region. To encourage more people to cycle, the scope and reach of these programs should be expanded, and lead agencies should be identified for each program to ensure their on-going viability. There are numerous examples of innovative and effective programs in other communities which could be adapted for use in Metro Vancouver.
- **Monitoring.** There is no integrated and comprehensive program to monitor the effectiveness of bicycle projects and document the results being achieved. Bicycle travel data and other information are collected in a piecemeal manner by municipalities and TransLink, rather than as part of a coordinated region-wide program. The small amount of bicycle data that is collected is not correlated to bicycle projects, funding or other factors to determine which projects and

Figure S.3: Cycle Track, Copenhagen DK



programs are most effective, and which are not. As a result, much of the cost-share funding provided by TransLink and the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure is allocated based on population, project readiness and other criteria which are not related to the potential to generate new cycling trips.

To make the best use of funds available for bicycle facilities and programs, it is important to developing a comprehensive program to monitor, evaluate and assess past and potential bicycle projects.

- **Partnerships.** There are a wide range of cycling advocacy groups and other stakeholders in the region with an interest in promoting and supporting cycling. In many cases, however, there is not an established, on-going partnership between these stakeholders and agencies responsible for delivering bicycle facilities and programs. There is a significant opportunity for TransLink and Metro Vancouver municipalities to form on-going, productive partnerships with local organizations in developing, implementing and monitoring bicycle plans, facilities and programs. Partnerships offer many potential benefits, including the availability of additional resources and expertise, cost-savings and fund-raising, and community support for bicycle facilities and programs.