

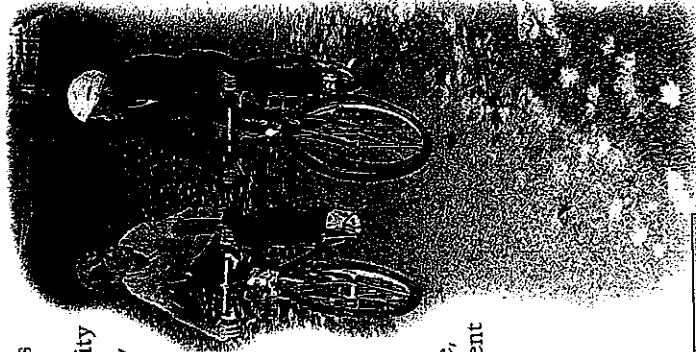
How can technology help us save the planet?

On the Trail to a Greener Future

Article by Sue Kanbai

The roads in a big city can assault the senses: horns blow, cars and trucks streak by, and exhaust pipes belch fumes. Thankfully, there are places in the city where we can escape the traffic. Greenery, parklands, and pedestrian and bicycle paths are all evidence of an urban core that retains healthy values. In particular, the presence of people on bicycles—whether going to work or school, shopping, or just out for a spin—is an important sign of a green city.

Commuting by bicycle results in wiser land use, cleaner air, reduced congestion on the roads, and improved lifestyle habits. Health-wise, it's a great way to squeeze regular exercise into a busy schedule. Economically it makes a great deal of sense, as expenses for parking, fuel, car maintenance, and transit fares are saved. Of course, the environment wins too. Since the bicycling season coincides with the worst air quality levels of the year, riding helps to reduce pollution when it is most needed. One caution is necessary though, and it's that cyclists may need to wear air filters if they're travelling the same routes as motorized vehicles.



GOALS AT A GLANCE

- Respond critically to the article.
- Exchange ideas in small group discussions.

In 1995, *Bicycling* magazine rated North America's "10 Best Cities for Cycling." Three Canadian cities made the list: Toronto (#1), Ottawa (#8), and Vancouver (#10). Toronto was given an "eh-plus" for its impressive blend of programs, ridership, and natural amenities. In Ottawa, parking spaces had to be removed to make room for bicycle racks. In Vancouver, several projects have focussed on accommodating pedestrians and cyclists, and the community has responded enthusiastically. While Canadians are certainly off to a good start, it's just that—a beginning. Statistics Canada's 1996 Census reported that 1.12% of the Canadian population biked to work. [A ridership figure over 1% or 2% is considered "not bad."] While residents of Victoria, B.C., clearly led the way at 4.9%, this was the exception rather than the rule. In fairness, the national statistics are pretty respectable given Canadian weather patterns coast to coast.

Changing established habits can be tough. The best strategy may simply be to make cycling an appealing and accessible option. For example, the Region of Ottawa-Carleton and OC Transpo, the local transportation network, together launched "GreenCommute" in March of 1999. The program aims to promote alternative forms of transportation, thereby reducing automobile traffic and pollution levels. Local businesses can also play an important role. Some companies offer as incentives to bicycling employees:

- shower facilities
- storage lockers
- parking for bicycles

If you want to see more bicycles and fewer cars in your town or city, you might:

- Call your local bicycling club and tell them you're interested in bike-advocacy issues.
- Contact your local city council, and let them know that safe, connected, and continuous bicycle paths are important to you.
- Do more than just consider alternative forms of transportation, use one. A simple change could mean a healthier tomorrow for both you and your neighbourhood.

1. RESPONDING TO THE ARTICLE

- a. Why would local businesses want to encourage bicycling?
- b. What do local weather patterns have to do with the number of people biking to work or school?
- c. What benefits does this article list about increased bicycle use? Who benefits? With a partner, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of increasing the number of bicyclists on city streets.
- d. Why do you think it's so important for more people in large cities to use bikes? Do you think increasing the number of bicyclists in smaller towns, or in the country, is as important? Why or why not?
- e. What factors would a person need to consider when choosing to ride a bike to school or work?

2. ORAL COMMUNICATION EXCHANGE IDEAS

In a small group, discuss other tools or technologies that can be used to help the environment. Do any of these have a "down side"? How many of these technologies are you using every day?

Copy the T-chart at right into your notebook. With your group, generate ideas and fill it in. Make sure to support each item you include with a note that explains how it helps or harms the environment. Try to list both negative and positive factors for each technology.

Share your chart with the class. Discuss how people can be encouraged to use "helpful" technologies. Why do you think we continue to use technologies that harm the environment? With your class, draw some conclusions about the use of technology in the modern world.

Technologies That Help the Environment	Technologies That Harm the Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• bikes—because biking doesn't use gas or cause pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• cars—because cars use gas, cause pollution, and use up other resources
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