

Alberni Valley NEWS PRINT THIS

Cycling route to wind its way down the Island



By Alberni Valley News

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In La Belle Province, it is known as La Route Verte — the Greenway.

It's a sprawling 5,300-kilometre collection of designated roads, cycle paths and bike lanes that the National Post called a "cultural, historic, environmental, and artistic tribute to Quebec," and National Geographic proclaimed the world's best cycle route. It is also an economic generator, pumping an estimated \$95.4 million into the Quebec economy annually, while attracting cycle tourists from around the globe to stay in local inns, eat local food and sightsee at local attractions.

It's a success story some Vancouver Island cyclists want to see repeated here.

Members of the Greater Nanaimo Cycling Coalition and the Comox Valley Cycling Coalition have spent months mapping a cycle route from Mill Bay to Comox. It is now their goal to lobby provincial and local government to adopt the project and provide the seed money to turn dream into reality.

Backed by the B.C. Cycling Coalition, the group's mission statement spells out its goals clearly: "The Inside Passage Bike Route will enable cycling tourists to safely and conveniently access hotels, stores, bakeries, pubs, restaurants, farms, wineries and tourist attractions thereby greatly enhancing their vacation experience and benefiting local businesses, the economy and increasing tax revenue for the provincial and federal governments."

"Most of it is ready to roll," Greater Nanaimo Cycling Coalition chairman Leo Boon said.

According to Boon, the route — which is designed to keep riders away from the highway and near the Island's more picturesque seashores and fields — needs very little infrastructure work. Signage, some safety work at certain awkward intersections and corners, and a bit more attention to regular street-sweeping is about it.

"If we were talking 50 kilometres (of upgrades), I'd say we have a big problem, but most of it can be easily done," he said. "There is no budget set. We are at that point in the project."

That's not the case in the Alberni Valley—and that's why the it's not part of the route.

Port Alberni city councillor Chris Alemany, who has been pushing for cycling infrastructure in Port Alberni, said he hopes that someday a similar project could come here.

"In time I would hope we will see a trail develop along our E&N corridor through Port Alberni and the ACRD as well but there are some pretty significant geographical challenges to overcome," said Alemany.

City engineer Guy Cicon, who has proposed a \$50,000 investment into bike lanes to city council, agreed.

"It would require a lot of work," Cicon said of the E&N route.

"It would be beautiful but you would have to extend culverts, widen bridges."

Cycle Alberni wasn't consulted either, say members Sarah Thomas and John Mayba. Thomas said that there's still a lot of work to be done within town before Island-wide cycling infrastructure could come here.

"If we want to bring that kind of thing here, we have to build up the cycling infrastructure in town so there's something here for them," she said.

The proposed route wends its way from the Mill Bay ferry terminal, along the bucolic backroads of Cowichan, Crofton and Chemainus.

After a brief skip onto the highway at Ladysmith, it then meanders through pastoral Cedar and urban Nanaimo, before following the Oceanside vistas of the old Island Highway from Parksville to Comox, then finally concluding at the Powell River ferry terminal.

Boon foresees connections to cycle routes on the Sunshine Coast and the Saanich Peninsula as part of a greater "B.C. Greenway" that will allow users to experience Georgia Strait from both sides and link with cycle paths in Greater Victoria, the Lower Mainland and beyond.

The coalition's next step is a push to market the idea to Vancouver Island communities. With their support, Boon hopes to tap into funding available through economic development and cycling infrastructure grants in order to make the necessary route improvements.

The final step will be the marketing of the route through dedicated maps and various tourism information outlets.

More information is available at http://www.bccc.bc.ca/inside_passage_bike_route.

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