

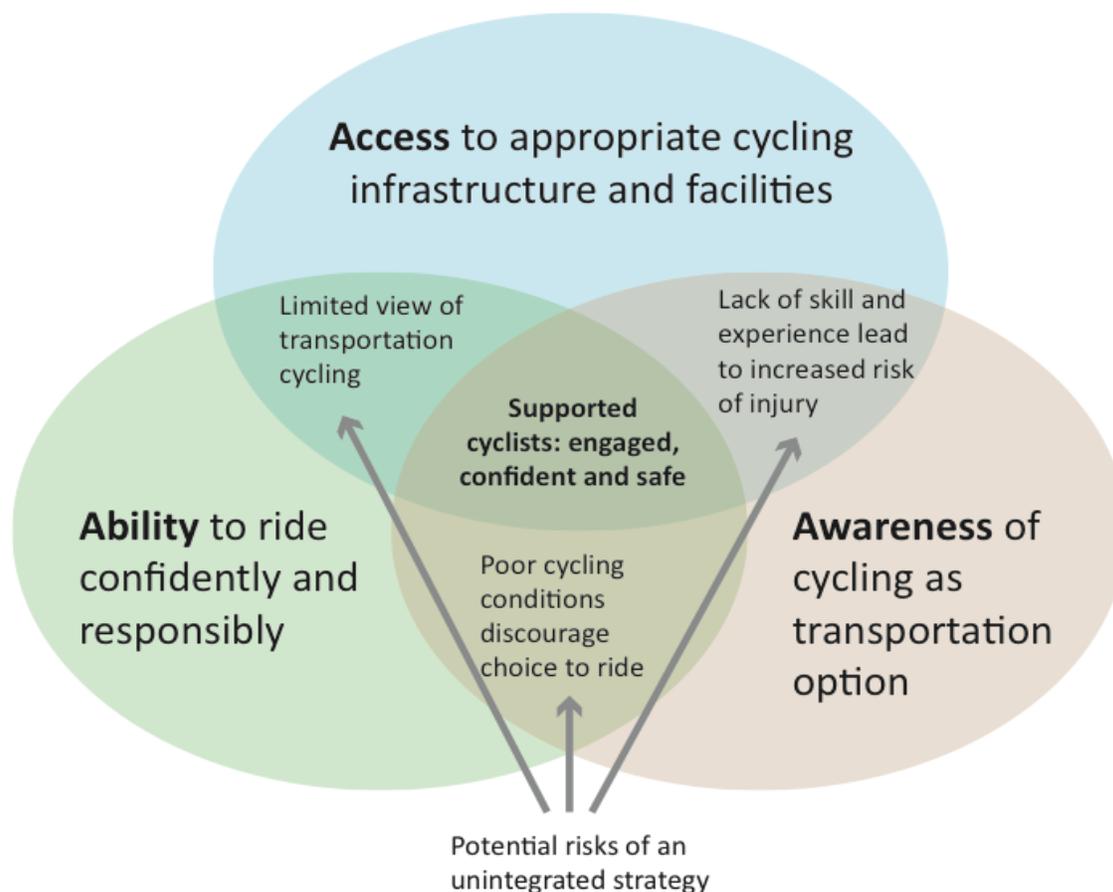
Right to Bike: A Provincial Youth Cycling Education Framework

The Context

The profile of cycling is on the rise in British Columbia: the bicycle was Vancouver Courier's biggest news maker of 2010; cycling is an integral part of TransLink's 30 year plan to reduce car use to 50% of all trips in Metro Vancouver; and the Province has invested over \$100 million in promoting cycling over the last 10 years.

But for all of its recent notoriety, popularity and time in the spotlight, cycling has gained little ground where it counts - traffic mode share - in recent years. In the period between 1996 and 2006, total cycling to work numbers increased by just 0.1% in BC. And what evidence exists suggests that rates of cycling to school declined over that same period.

Investment in encouraging cycling in BC has predominantly been focused on building infrastructure and facilities and, to a lesser extent, promoting awareness of cycling. A necessary, but as yet under-utilized, complement to these measures is to engage the near market for cycling - those interested but not yet active - with the ability to do so confidently and safely:



The Case for Youth Cycling Education

An obvious place to start, in order to maximize benefit and ensure long-term impact, is to provide bicycle skills and safety training to children and youth.

Bicycle and traffic safety skills contribute to the health, safety and development of today's children. Among young British Columbians, rates of inactivity, obesity and chronic diseases are on the rise; motor vehicle crashes are a significant cause of preventable injuries and the leading cause of preventable death; and only half of all children are active enough to ensure healthy development and growth.

Effective bicycle skills training also lays a strong foundation for knowledge about traffic safety in general. As most bicycle crashes are the result of errors on the part of the cyclist or other road users, bicycle education addresses the primary cause of injuries related to cycling by creating safer cyclists and, eventually, safer drivers more conscious and accepting of bicycles on the road.

Currently, cycling education is offered by a handful of providers, concentrated in the south-western part of the province. Awareness of training opportunities and resources is low, accessibility is poor outside of major metropolitan areas, and there are no commonly agreed upon standards or criteria for what constitutes effective cycling training.

A Provincial Standard

We are proposing a framework wherein a lead organization, supported by a board of partners and stakeholders, establishes and coordinates a standard for cycling skills and safety education for the entire province.

The proposed standard would be built around a linear progression of levels, which mirrors children's physical and cognitive development, and allows anyone - child, adult or senior - to advance at their own pace to the level that suits their needs and ability:

Level 1 (Typically Grade 3/4)



Basic bicycle control and skills in a controlled environment.

Level 2 (Typically Grade 5/6)



Riding on quiet streets, bicycle maintenance, responsible riding.

Level 3 (Typically Grade 6/8)



Riding with traffic, advanced handling skills, sharing the road.

A certification program tied to the standard would be licensed to parties interested in delivering certified cycling training, and would include everything needed to deliver bicycle skills and safety training, anywhere in BC. Based on best practices and successful models in other fields, the program would operate on a cost-recovery model, and would offer:

- Common performance-based standards for the instruction and certification of trainees;
- Instructor training both for qualification to train and ongoing professional development;
- Accreditation of instructors, facilities, and other essential resources;
- Educational material and templates;
- Publicity, to raise public awareness of the benefits of cycling training and the existence of a standard; and
- Ongoing support to instructors and stakeholders.

Road Map

The successful realization of a Provincial Bicycle Education Framework will require a number of elements to come together over a 2 year period:

- *Partnership*: diverse stakeholders from public health, education, transportation and government have an interest in increasing youth cycling and traffic safety awareness. Agreeing on a standard will require a broad range of expertise, vision and consensus.
- *Institutional Support*: the idea of a common standard may satisfy a pressing need, but it will require leadership to achieve. We are looking to the existing structures of government, health care and commerce to add credibility and urgency to the foundation of this program.
- *Funding*: a standard that is applicable and accessible province wide will require funds to develop, administer and operate. While the proposed model would eventually operate on a cost recovery basis, the program will require financing during the growth period and for target and at-risk groups.
- *Proof of Concept*: the model and structures for common standards in skills training are well-established and proven to work. However, the BC cycling education standard will require development and evaluation, and the best possible way to undertake this would be with a prototype that would allow for the refinement of the approach prior to a province-wide roll out.

Moving Forward

A number of municipalities and school districts have identified a need for cycling skills and safety training; interest and opportunities for collaboration are already blossoming. And in June of 2012, the VeloCity conference in Vancouver presents an excellent platform to showcase BC's progressive action on cycling education to the world, and a perfect launch opportunity for the framework, encouraging an ambitious timeline for this effort.