



Cyclists enjoy a ride on the Lochside Regional Trail. Although the trail runs parallel to highways and city streets in parts, it's quiet enough that you can hear birdsong.

JOHN MCKAY/POSTMEDIA NEWS

OPINION

If this bike trail wasn't made in heaven, it's close

PETE MCMARTIN
VANCOUVER SUN



VICTORIA
Bicycles and the people who ride them often find themselves on the angry end of a political tirade these days: They take up precious road space, they impede the flow of traffic, riders don't observe the rules of the road. Funny, but the same thing can be said about cars, only a thousand-fold.

So a few kind words about bicycles today, and what may be the best day bike trip for the occasional rider in B.C.

Tuesday, my wife and I, and two friends from Hong Kong staying with us, took a mini-vacation and stayed overnight in Victoria. Rather than drive, we rode our bikes. We rode a route called the Lochside Regional Trail, which runs about 30 kilometres between the Swartz Bay ferry terminal and downtown Victoria. It is one leg of a system of bike trails that run through the Saanich peninsula and capital area, and sister to its more rustic and famous counterpart, the Galloping Goose Trail that goes all the way out to Sooke. If ever there was a template for how best to integrate bikes and bicyclists through the landscape, and to turn the bicycle into a generator of tourism, the Lochside Trail is it.

For the occasional bike rider,

which I am, or for families with kids, it's ideal. Other than a couple of overpasses there are no climbs, and the trail is wide and often paved. It is, for the most part, well separated from car traffic and usually so quiet you can hear birdsong. The scenery it passes through runs from seaside vistas to farmland to woodland to city. For those not packing their own meals, there are several places along the way to eat. And it makes for a perfect day's ride. At a leisurely pace, with frequent stops and taking an hour for lunch, it shouldn't take more than four or five hours.

For those who don't want to brave the highway traffic, you can drive your bikes out to the ferry terminal and park your car in the overnight area. For four adults and bikes, we paid \$48, and then rode our bikes past the lines of cars queued up for loading — what a wonderfully liberating feeling that was — and waited in a small marshalling area at the foot of the loading ramp. Bicyclists and pedestrians board first, and there, again, is another small joy — riding through the cavernous space of a completely empty ferry. The arrival at Swartz Bay provides another small joy: You're first off.

Getting out of the ferry terminal is the hardest part of your ride. There's a bit of a climb before the road flattens out, and parents with kids may want to let the ferry traffic pass before starting out. But the Lochside Trail begins just outside the ferry terminal, and



The picturesque Lochside Regional Trail runs 30 kilometres from the Swartz Bay ferry terminal to downtown Victoria.

RAY SMITH/POSTMEDIA NEWS

never goes on the highway the entire way into Victoria. Safety isn't a huge concern, and it never has any jarring sections of roadbed like, most notably, the Kettle Valley Railway trail. (A hind note here: For novice bike riders prone to numb butt, you might want to invest in padded bike shorts.)

The trail is well marked with directional signs. At its very beginning, you pass a pretty little marina in Sidney's Tselum Harbour, and from there the scenery only gets more varied. It goes through sleepy little Sidney, then runs roughly parallel to the Patricia Bay Highway through the North and

Central Saanich countryside, though never so close that the highway is a distraction. The trail then runs along the shore through Cordova Bay (following, for a short stretch, the side of the road, though it's well marked off from traffic).

After that, it leaves traffic altogether and here the trail really comes into its own, going through a stunning valley of rich farmland and shaded tunnels of treed woodlots. Just past the halfway point, the trail comes to Mattick's Farm, where there's a golf course with a nice restaurant, and a pretty little shopping mall where bicyclists can buy food for their own picnics.

From there, the trail goes through some expensive looking subdivisions and heads south to Victoria, but not before letting out onto more farmland and the long Blenkinsop Trestle, a pedestrian bridge that crosses over a pretty marsh and pond.

Then it's into Victoria proper, where the trail goes through old residential neighbourhoods, past the startling new and handsome highrise developments in Esquimalt and around the Inner Harbour, all without coming anywhere near street traffic. Then, ideally, you make your way to a hotel with a hot tub.

Safe, comfortable, separated from traffic. Riding it, I couldn't help but think:

What if the country had a trail like this?

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HEALTH RESEARCH

Better HIV treatment could cut emergency room costs, report says

BY ERIN ELLIS
VANCOUVER SUN

The number of HIV-positive patients using emergency services at St. Paul's Hospital in downtown Vancouver could be reduced with better care and housing for drug addicts, according to a report to be released today.

"If you are able to deal with their active injection drug use then you free up a lot of resources for other things so that emergency care can be used in other ways," said study co-author Dr. Robert Hogg, director of the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS' drug treatment program.

The study looked at 493 HIV-infected people taking highly active antiretroviral therapy, or HAART, who also answered an extensive questionnaire. It found 153 people — or 31 per cent of that group — used St. Paul's emergency, mainly for skin infections typical of injection drug users, followed by injuries and poisoning.

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Of those emergency room patients, the report also found:

- 90 per cent were unemployed.
- 87 per cent were on income assistance.
- 79 per cent had hepatitis C, indicating a history of drug use, although only 26 per cent reported current drug use.
- 55 per cent had unstable housing.
- 44 per cent were aboriginal.

Patients who had their condition under control with the HAART drug cocktail were less likely to end up in emergency than those who were not taking the medication properly, had unstable housing and continued unsafe use of injection drugs, said Hogg.

"If we can expand HAART therapy in the Downtown Eastside as part of the pilot program this would be useful in reducing the viral load and actually reducing the number of people coming forward," said Hogg.

The government of B.C. announced earlier this year that it will spend \$48 million on a four-year pilot project to expand the HAART program to hard-to-reach patients such as sex trade workers and injection drug users in Vancouver and Prince George, in north-central B.C. The program uses a "seek and treat" strategy in which health workers go out to find people who are infected but unlikely to seek treatment.

About 5,000 HIV-positive B.C. residents are receiving HAART medication free of charge and 2,800 of those are in Vancouver.

The St. Paul's data was collected from January 2007 to January 2010.


About five per cent of patients treated in St. Paul's emergency department in the 2009-10 budget year had no fixed address, according to Providence Health Care, which runs the hospital. The emergency department budget including labour during that period was more than \$12 million.

The research was to be made public today in Vienna at the 2010 International AIDS conference, chaired by Vancouver's Dr. Julio Montaner, head of the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS.

The official declaration of this year's conference states that the war on drugs is helping to spread HIV/AIDS — outside of sub-Saharan Africa — by discouraging people from seeking medical help.

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FROM PAGE A1

Good Samaritans, sturdy helmet saved her

She had stopped and had one foot on the top of the seawall, talking with her friends about getting sushi for dinner, when she overbalanced.

"The seat on my bike is high because I have back problems and I lost balance. I couldn't grab at anything and it was a straight drop down," she said.

Ross yelled for help, then found an opening in the wall and went to her. The four men held her out of the water until firefighters and ambulance paramedics arrived.

"I couldn't move, I was in pain and shock and hyperventilating," she said. "I was bleeding quite a bit from my legs, back and shoulders. One of the men was holding my head and the man in the soccer shirt said he knew first aid and he talked me through it. I had no feeling in my hands and I started panicking and was going into shock. And I remember the guy holding my head said it was okay if I vomited on him but to keep taking deep breaths and try to relax."

The paramedics put her in a neck brace and strapped her to a backboard, then eight firefighters lifted her over the wall. She was taken to St. Paul's Hospital, then released later that night.

"At first they thought I'd broken my hip because of the pain but it was just badly torn," she said.



WAYNE LEIDENFROST/PNG

Kate Hunter is glad she decided to wear her bike helmet Saturday.

Hunter never got to ask the men their names or properly thank them.

"I'm thankful from the bottom of my heart. I feel so blessed that four strangers helped me when they didn't need to. One of the reasons I was able to stay strong during all this was because these strangers were there for me."

"I don't know who they are but I want to thank them and let them know I'm okay. Hopefully, they read the story," she said. As for getting on her bike again, she's game.

"But I think I'll avoid the seawall. I'm still having nightmares about falling off."

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