



15 August 2009

From: Michael L. Sena
To: Nick Bradley
Traffic Technology International
Ref: Recreation_V2
Re: Proposed Article

SEPARATE TRANSPORTATION FROM RECREATION

At some point, recreation ceased being a spontaneous activity for children and became a set of contrived activities organized by adults. It was as if adults decided that spontaneous playing was a waste of a child's time. Safety has been the main justification for this transition from spontaneity to premeditation. Children are safer when they play under the supervision of adults, claim adults. It is difficult to deny all of the advantages to organized play, but "official" facilities are usually centralized because they are expensive to build and maintain, and they need to be shared by as many people as possible. The result of this movement away from spontaneous play and small neighbourhood facilities is more driving and more traffic congestion along the way.

Adults have added to the problem by getting themselves to all of their recreational activities. It seems that people of all ages cannot separate recreation from transportation. On the one hand we are being urged in media campaigns to exercise in order to stay healthy, but the only opportunities to engage in exercise seem to require that we get into a car and drive or be driven, thereby adding to and being part of the traffic congestion problem.

What can you do? Walking and cycling are part of the answer to this problem. Instead of driving for half an hour to the gym, exercising for an hour, and driving half an hour back home, take an hour walk by yourself, with a family member or a friend. Add a pair of ski poles to give your upper body a workout while walking, and you have a perfect exercise, one that is less damaging to the knees and hips than jogging on pavement. If you have a dog, he or she will introduce you to your neighbours, broadening your social network. You will even save time and maybe get a better workout than at the gym.

The only valid argument that has been used against the neighbourhood exercise routine is fear of personal attack. We don't walk or run or cycle because it's not safe, and it's not safe because there are not enough people out there keeping a watchful eye out for their neighbours. If you cannot walk, run or cycle around your neighbourhood because you are afraid of being assaulted, then there is something very wrong with the government that is running your town. Get your politicians to start doing their jobs. There is not a fast financial return to be made from increasing personal safety, like there is for charging drivers for entering the city, but the long-term positive effects to the community as a whole from a safe and secure environment will be much greater. If your mayor or city governing council is not promoting safer streets and parks, so that you and your family can move about your environment in safety, maybe it's time you to raise your voice and suggest that they do.