

Bicycle Newfoundland and Labrador

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Bicycle Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to increasing cycling participation in the province. Cycling is an equitable and climate-friendly transportation mode that has significant benefits for physical and mental health.

NL currently ranks in the bottom of the country in terms of active transportation infrastructure and mode share. In 2021 Bicycle NL participated in a national bike count (Pedal Poll) in which St. John's was one of 14 pilot cities. In this poll, St. John's ranked last place out of 14 pilot cities on the number of bike trips counted per hour¹. The 2021 Census of Population found that among the 41 biggest cities in Canada, the share of people commuting by bicycle was lowest in St. John's, Saint John and Oshawa, each at 0.2%.² BNL asserts, backed up by research in other jurisdictions, that this is the result of policy choices more than environmental factors such as weather or topography.

BNL believes that pedal-assist electric bikes (e-bikes) will be a key component, along with dedicated infrastructure, in achieving equitable adoption of cycling in the province. E-bikes have significant potential to replace motor vehicle use. They allow people to cycle who may not be able to ride a traditional bike, support hauling cargo and children, "flatten" hilly environments, and are much more affordable and environmentally friendly than motor vehicles. We are confident that these benefits will apply to both urban and rural environments in the province.

Because of these significant benefits, various e-bike incentive programs have been implemented by governments around the world. In Canada, provincial rebate programs have already been introduced in Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Yukon³.

Bicycle Newfoundland and Labrador strongly supports the implementation of a provincial e-bike incentive program in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Impacts on health

As the Health Accord NL report has outlined, this province ranks among the lowest in the country on several key health metrics⁴. The physical and mental health benefits of active transportation are well established in the literature⁵.

It has been proven that pedal-assist e-bikes have significant health benefits because people tend to use them more and travel longer distances than on traditional bikes⁶. Unlike the physical activity tax credit, an e-bike incentive will promote health outside of organized activities while also supporting an equitable and sustainable form of transportation.

¹https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4000804

²<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221130/dq221130c-eng.htm>

³https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1C-sYcwLrQFsr8r2A6RiAP2RwGsBNwr1BKOF_HJvCsVU/edit#gid=0

⁴https://healthaccordnl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/HANL_Summary_Document_Web_Feb17-2022.pdf

⁵<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0091743515001164>

⁶<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S259019821930017X>

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Equitable transportation

Limited public transit, sprawling municipalities, and lack of separated cycling infrastructure all contribute towards car dependence and transportation inequity in a province where many are struggling to make ends meet.⁷ A recent household survey from Food First NL indicated that many low-income residents in St. John's do not own a car and have difficulties getting to the grocery store to buy food⁸. Supporting cycling would enable more people to avoid the high cost of vehicle ownership. An e-bike incentive program would put a compelling alternative to private vehicle ownership within reach for many and would complement existing public transit service⁹.

We have not observed an equitable uptake of cycling in the province to date. In 2021, the Pedal Poll census showed us that cyclists in St. John's are disproportionately white men of a certain age, and are typically recreational instead of utilitarian cyclists. Lack of safe infrastructure excludes large segments of our population including women, children, seniors, people with disabilities, and racial minorities⁵.

We believe that e-bikes, along with dedicated cycling infrastructure, will change this dynamic. E-bikes have already proven to be popular amongst older demographics in the province. We believe that there is massive potential for e-bikes to confer numerous health benefits and reduce social isolation among seniors. Further, e-bikes provide a viable transportation option for many individuals with conditions that make it difficult to walk or ride a traditional bicycle.

Climate

Meeting net-zero climate targets requires a drastic reduction of the number of personal vehicles on our roads. The 2016 Census revealed that 59% of residents in St. John's travel less than 5 km to get to work and 10% of residents live less than 1 km from work. Many of these trips could be easily replaced with a bike, e-bike, or other form of micromobility. The City of St. John's has committed to increasing sustainable transportation mode share to 8% walk/bike by 2030¹⁰. We believe that e-bike incentives will be instrumental to achieve climate targets in St. John's and other municipalities in the province.

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BNL believes that increasing cycling mode share will require a multi-pronged approach that includes building high-quality infrastructure, educating the public, and providing financial incentives to encourage cycling instead of driving. An e-bike incentive program will result in significant health, equity, and environmental benefits for the province. If such a program is considered, the board of Bicycle Newfoundland and Labrador would be happy to consult on the details of the policy.

Best Regards,

Ryan Green on behalf of the Board of Directors, Bicycle Newfoundland and Labrador

⁷<https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Household-Food-Insecurity-in-Canada-2017-2018-Full-Reportpdf.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.foodstjohns.ca/blog/survey-highlights>

⁹ <https://www.tcat.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Active-Transportation-and-Public-Transit-Integration-web-3.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://pub-stjohns.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=11109>



Quotes Regarding E-bikes from BNL Membership

Sean, 54, CBS

"My wife (54) has MS. She was diagnosed back in 1995 and while her condition is quite stable, the disease does take it's toll on her strength and endurance. She had a bike for years but could not join me on any longer rides or anything that involved hills. So, we bought an e-fat bike back in Dec of 2020. Now, she can ride with me and even enjoys riding in the snow. She also takes it on the road by herself and that is something she would never try with her "traditional" bike. For anyone with strength or endurance issues, an e-bike can be a saviour. It can get you out more and to be able to ride and keep up with other people."

Rebecca, 63, Salvage

"My husband and I live in Salvage and are both over 60 years old (63 and 64). We just bought class 2 e-bikes (Lectric brand). We are both pretty active hikers, but wanted something we could explore further with. My husband has arthritis in both knees. These bikes make it possible for us to climb hills easily and ride further than we might go without the pedal assist. There certainly is a learning curve, however we both got on the bikes and felt comfortable being able to handle them right away. For us, it is more about accessibility than speed."

Mike, Grand Falls

"I injured my hip 2 years ago (dislocated at the sacrum) it was very painful to ride a normal bike which I love to do. I bought an Ebike in hopes to get back out and it worked great! I have a Gosen 750Wh ebike with 20inch fat tires and i bought a custom oversized seat for extra hip support. It got me back out and helped me keep my hip and legs stretched as I recovered and went through physical therapy and many trips to the chiropractor. Today I'm happily riding a normal bike again and enjoying the Ebike for long trips and rest days."

Myles, St. John's

"My partner and I realized we could easily get by without the second vehicle. My employer at the time was only a 12 minute bike ride so it made no sense to be spending 10k\$/yr on a car that was only going to be used for a few minutes a day. The laws in St. John's make it difficult for someone not physically fit to engage in vehicular cycling as keeping up with traffic would be difficult. It was very apparent that an e-bike was the best option."