

# The Daily Gleaner

## Green Matters for the Daily Gleaner, September 19, 2011

By Alycia Morehouse

### Celebrating Carfree Day in Fredericton

I hereby issue you a challenge. Go one whole day – 24 hours – without getting in your car. If that hasn't forced you to turn the page, then please, just hear me out.

September 22 is World Carfree Day. Every year, people from around the globe join together in an effort to reduce the amount of vehicular traffic on the roads. You might ask if it makes that much difference in just one day. But the point is much larger than that, as collective actions like this are about raising awareness. It is about creating awareness about society's extreme vehicle dependence, and educating about other more environmentally and economically friendly options.

Motor vehicles are the single biggest source of air pollution, and contribute approximately 14 percent to the world's greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning, and that number continues to climb.

Researcher Phil Gott, in his 2008 Global Insight study, says the estimated 800 million vehicles on the road today are expected to double by 2050, which could have devastating effects on air quality. And of course, all of the old vehicles have to be disposed off and new ones continually manufactured, which comes with great cost – both economic and environmental.

A 2006 Statistics Canada report on average household spending on transportation reflects Canadians' love affair with their vehicles. The majority of transportation spending – a whopping 90.6 percent - goes towards buying, leasing, renting and operating private vehicles, while only 2 percent is spent on public transit options.

Even with the steady rise of oil prices that are passed on to us via rising fuel costs, there has been relatively little impact on the driving practices of Canadians. It seems that we have not yet hit the ceiling that will force people out of their cars and onto bike lanes, sidewalks and trails.

So now, back to the challenge – considering alternatively commuting for one day instead of getting into your vehicle. Alternative transportation (AT) could be walking, biking, running, or public transit.

And AT is made easy here in Fredericton. Now with over 85km of well-maintained and accessible trails, you can get to all corners of the city and enjoy our community's beauty at the same time. And AT can now be a four-season option, with main commuter corridor trails paved and plowed in the winter. So there is no excuse. I know from experience that taking that first step – literally – might be a little challenging but you will get used to it, and then maybe surprise yourself by growing to love it!

So Frederictonians – get out of your cars! Walk to work; walk the kids to school; ride your bike to the grocery store. Since the first closure of the Princess Margaret Bridge, many people have chosen to commute actively, and stuck with it even after the bridge re-opened. Your reasons

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for liking it could be many: less stress from time spent in traffic, fuel savings, health benefits, etc.

And one final small urging to all commuters: we must all learn to get along - drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians alike. We live in an impatient world, which has fueled our vehicular dependence, and has made commuting a daily practice of 'point A to point B', instead of what could be an earth-friendly way to stay active and get to where you are going. So let's all slow down a bit, and watch out for each other, it will make everyone's commute a little more pleasant and a whole lot safer.

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