IN THIS ISSUE

Do Our Cities Still Work? (Duration: 19:50)
Our cities are making us fatter and sicker. That's what city planners are saying about our North American commuter lifestyles. They say our cities were designed in an era when the car was king. Now they're calling for big changes to the way we design our cities and get around. But can it be done?

News in Review Study Modules
How Healthy Are Canadians? February 2011
Commuters, Cars and Bicycles, October 2008
Urban Decline: Can Our Cities Be Saved? March 2004

Related CBC Programs
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VIDEO REVIEW

Pre-viewing

Complete this informal survey with your class. Discuss the overall trends in the results.

1. Where would you prefer to live when you are an adult? A city, a suburb or a rural area?

2. Where did you grow up? A city, a suburb or a rural area?

3. What was the best part about growing up in that area?

4. What were the disadvantages of growing up in that area?

5. Why do you think most people live in cities?

6. What do you think are the most negative aspects of city living?

Viewing

1. What percentage of Canadians live in urban areas?
   - □ 70%
   - □ 78%
   - □ 81%
   - □ 85%

2. Why are cities making us sick?

3. The annual cost of roads in Canada are $29 billion a year. □ True □ False
4. What is the annual cost to the health care system of obesity?

5. Why did the urban centre of Medellin, Columbia need to improve?

6. What was the main innovation in Medellin and what was its impact?

7. What is the “secret ingredient” to well-being in cities?

8. What change is Toronto making to its roads and why?

9. Why are cities slow to change?

Post-viewing

1. What is the argument posed by this News in Review story (video)?

2. What is the main evidence provided?

3. What other points of view or possible alternative perspectives are there to fully answer the question, “Do our cities still work?”
ENGINEER A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO A CITY PROBLEM

Engineers use a specific design process to inquire into problems, to create a solution and test the results. Frequently engineers partner with urban planners to think through the challenges and problems of living in a city, and imagine what could be created or adapted to improve the situation. Historically a simple problem of city life was how to help people see in the dark? This motivated engineers to figure out a way to light streets and walkways.

Following the steps of the engineering design process outlined in the visual below, design a technology that would improve modern cities. Or alternatively, you could repurpose a technology that is used elsewhere.

The steps in this process sometimes overlap or move in reverse order as ideas are generated and re-considered. The important first step for you is to identify a “real life” problem in city life, for people and for the environment, and to narrow down your focus to a viable solution. Your teacher may decide if you will actually create a prototype or model or simply sketch a design.

It is important to seek peer feedback to improve your ideas through the engineering design process.

Source: burns-classroom.weebly.com
ENVISIONING A CITY WITH BIKES

What do you think?

1. Do you ride a bike? Why or why not?
2. What do you think your community would need in order to encourage more people to use bicycles?
3. What would be the ideal conditions that would lead more people to use bicycles for at least part of their daily commute?

A steady number of cities in the world are reconsidering how to encourage bicycles as a safe, sustainable and efficient mode of transportation. Pollution and traffic congestion are just two of the problems caused by our reliance on cars. Obesity, diabetes and heart disease are on the rise and can be linked to sedentary lifestyles.

A lack of connection with nature is another consequence of our reliance on cars. In his book *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv details a disconnection between children and nature and the resulting physical and mental health consequences. He argues that as children spend less time exploring and playing in the outdoors, they lose their creativity, sense of belonging and an appreciation for the natural world.

And it is not just a lack of connection with nature that our car-obsessed cities may be causing; it is a lack of connection between people. Bike advocates argue that a well-developed cycle-path network through a city fosters positive social interaction between people. Specific age groups are typically limited in their mobility because cities are designed for cars. Children, young teens and some seniors cannot use cars and would benefit from safely integrated cycling and pedestrian walkways.

Increased biking could also ease taxes spend on inefficient public transit systems and increase the amount of open space in an urban area — and economic activity in these spaces — for everyone’s benefit.

Biking could improve quality of life for city dwellers in a diverse number of ways. But what would it really take for bicycles to make a comeback as a transportation of choice in some major cities in Canada?

Appropriate infrastructure including safe bike paths, bike share programs and bike storage is required, as is a change in people’s attitudes. Cars are seen as more convenient, comfortable and more “advanced” than bikes by many. And despite the fear that cycling is unsafe, research shows that the more cyclists there are in a city, the safer it is. Countries with the highest levels of cycling have the lowest levels of cycling fatalities. There seems to be safety in numbers perhaps because drivers are more attentive and riders become more confident and skilled.
Inquiry question: Can a city and cyclists co-exist?

1. Answer this inquiry question by researching what one city (e.g. Mexico City, Beijing, Denmark) is doing to create a bike culture and urban infrastructure to support cycling.

2. Compare the planning of that international city to similar planning in a city or community near your school.

3. As a class, compare research findings.

4. Return to the inquiry question and make a conclusion based on all the facts that you have heard.

5. Consider how your beliefs about cycling may have changed through this learning process.

Take action

- Send a tweet to your local MP, asking for cycling to be part of your community’s transportation plan.

- Teach a child how to safely ride a bike.

- Think of a personal action you could take that would lead to a more sustainable lifestyle.

- Encourage a “take your bike to school” day.
BEAUTIFYING URBAN SPACES

One of the common critiques of urban living is the lack of green spaces and the endless sameness of all the concrete, brick and asphalt. The shortage of trees and plants compromises air quality and may have a real impact on mental health and well-being. Creative people and groups have made it their passion to replace the potential dreariness and sterility with flowers, trees and artwork believing that the positive impact of these creations outweighs any objections to their actions.

1. Search online for images of “guerilla urban art,” graffiti and/or “guerilla gardening.”
2. Create a presentation of the Top 5 images of these attempts to beautify common urban spaces.
3. What do you think motivates these “guerilla” artists and gardeners? What is their purpose? Do you support their actions? Why or why not?
4. Consider your school community. Is there a “common” space appropriate for art or gardening? (Important! Always seek permission before making changes to school property).
5. Design your idea and implement it.