



transportation

Municipality changing staff commuting habits

District of Saanich, British Columbia

Green Municipal Fund Case Study



To help deter theft, weather-protected bicycle racks were set up in places where they could be seen from the inside of Saanich's municipal buildings (Photo: District of Saanich).

Transportation Demand Management Study (GMEF 5120)

Date project completed: April 2004

Total project value: \$65,000

GMF grant: \$32,500

- Municipality studies transportation demand management strategies to reduce car use and promote more sustainable travel choices among employees
- Study uncovers ways to reduce car trips and helps to double the number of employees cycling to work
- Promoting healthy lifestyle and active living choices proves to be one of the most effective strategies
- Program is ultimately absorbed into broader community health and wellness initiatives

OVERVIEW The District of Saanich developed and implemented a transportation demand management plan for all its municipal facilities. The goal was to develop strategies to encourage municipal employees to look at alternatives to the car for their daily commute and reduce the demand for parking at municipal buildings. After field testing some of the program components for one year, the municipality determined that an incremental approach that emphasizes the health and wellness benefits of active commuting would get better buy-in from employees and would yield better results over the long term. Responsibility for the program was subsequently handed over to the parks and recreation department, which successfully absorbed many of the trip reduction measures into its Active Communities initiative. Overall, the project helped to nearly double the number of municipal employees cycling to work each day.

PROJECT TEAM

District of Saanich

CONTEXT The District of Saanich is a community of 110,000 people immediately adjacent to the B.C. provincial capital of Victoria at the south end of Vancouver Island. With its mild climate, Saanich is one of the few places in Canada where year-round bicycle and pedestrian commuting is an easy option, and the municipality has invested considerable resources over the past two decades to encourage residents to make this lifestyle change.

In early 2004, faced with increasing demand for parking space at its municipal sites, the District of Saanich decided to explore whether a transportation demand management approach could be applied to reduce employees' dependency on the automobile and move them toward more sustainable modes of travel.



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APPROACH The first step was to conduct a comprehensive survey of employees at all municipal sites to determine existing commuter travel patterns and identify any issues or barriers to using alternative modes of transportation. Municipal sites included Saanich's municipal hall, fire and police stations, public works and recreation centres.

Guided by the results of the baseline commuter survey, the project team developed a toolkit of potential options for reducing single occupant vehicle (SOV) trips. Taking a “carrot and stick” approach, the team structured these trip reduction strategies around incentives to promote the use of alternative modes of transportation and disincentives designed to discourage single occupant driving. At the same time, the district launched branding exercises and educational campaigns to raise awareness about the program, enhance people's understanding of different travel options and the positive or negative effects of their decision, and remove biases against more sustainable choices.

An implementation plan was developed and select program components were field tested over the course of one year. The success of the initiative was then reviewed to determine next steps.

RESULTS The survey showed that most people live within walking, running and cycling distance of their workplace. However, 73 per cent of respondents choose to drive to work alone—considerably higher than the regional average of 55 per cent. Nevertheless, it appeared that municipal employees were willing to change their travel habits, with carpooling and cycling emerging as the most popular alternatives. Perceived health and fitness benefits were cited as the key motivating factors.

Trip reduction strategy options were coordinated under a program called SHIFT — Saanich Healthy Ideas for Travel. Proposed

strategies included an online ride-matching program for carpoolers, clinics to promote the health benefits of walking and a guaranteed ride home program. To encourage cycling, the plan recommended setting up secure, weather-protected bicycle parking that people can see from inside the buildings. To encourage public transit use, transit stops should also provide shelter from the rain. And to encourage car pooling, parking stalls should be reserved in preferred locations close to building entrances.

Implementing the transportation demand management initiatives proved to be the most challenging aspect of the project. In particular, issues such as pay parking and financial incentives were fraught with policy and personnel challenges and were the subject of multiple discussions at the senior management and political level.

Eventually, responsibility for the SHIFT transportation demand management program was moved to the district's parks and recreation department, where it was integrated into the municipality's overall health and wellness strategy. “The focus was also amended from a transportation-oriented approach to a more incremental approach that seeks to build a culture of healthy lifestyle and active living choices among our employees,” explains Colin Doyle, director of the engineering department at the District of Saanich.

Despite these initial implementation challenges, Saanich has expanded its cycling facilities significantly as a result of the program and has seen a sharp increase in the number of municipal employees who cycle to work. Doyle, who has been a regular bicycle commuter for over 10 years, estimates that since the completion of the SHIFT program there has been nearly a two-fold increase in cycle commuting. “We now have a waiting list for lockers in the change room,” he says. “Although there are many factors which may have caused this behaviour change, I think much of the credit should go to the SHIFT program.”



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NEXT STEPS Saanich will assess the parking lot use rate at the municipal hall at typical peak times and conduct annual “spot-checks” for car occupancy rates to measure incremental changes in carpooling to work. It will also periodically re-survey employees to see how travel patterns have changed since the original baseline survey was conducted. The municipality also aims to develop meaningful benchmarks to motivate employee participation and generate awareness of health and fitness benefits and of environmental and sustainability benefits of “ditching” the car, as well as the potential financial savings.

LESSONS LEARNED The payback from using transportation demand management was made clear: “If we can get five per cent of our SOV commuters to change to alternative modes of transport, we will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by one tonne each week,” says Doyle. “We’ll also save the municipality a considerable amount money by deferring the construction of more parking stalls.”

In the absence of mainstay transportation demand management carrot and stick initiatives such as cash incentives and pay parking, Doyle says the best way to effect systemic change among employees is to work to entrench a culture of healthy lifestyle choices. “The transportation component fares best if understated,” he says.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES To read the full report or to learn about other GMF-funded initiatives, please visit the GMF website at <www.fcm.ca/gmf> or contact us at 613-907-6208 or at gmf@fcm.ca.

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About the Green Municipal Fund

The Government of Canada endowed the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) with \$550 million to establish the Green Municipal Fund™ (GMF). The Fund provides low-interest loans and grants, builds capacity, and shares knowledge to support municipal governments and their partners in developing communities that are more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

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