



TDM TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE COMMUTING – AN EMPLOYER’S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

There is a comprehensive transportation consulting industry across Canada that provides engineering services for highway and roadway design, environmental assessments, traffic engineering, etc. that all contribute to the development of our transportation infrastructure. However, as leaders in transportation planning and engineering, these transportation consultants must also strive to ‘practice what we preach’ in terms of promoting sustainable transportation solutions in our communities and in our daily lives. The purpose of this presentation is to examine the Travel Demand Management (TDM) initiatives that our AECOM Richmond Hill office has implemented to promote more sustainable work related commuting, and to present a discussion on successes and lessons learned through the application of these programs.

Being a part of the transportation planning and engineering industry, transportation consultants understand that major interim capacity improvements are not always possible and are not the only solution to congestion issues, particularly in the dense and congested Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).

As leaders in transportation planning and engineering, transportation consultants must strive to lead by example in terms of promoting sustainable transportation solutions in Canada on a daily basis. This presentation will illustrate an employer’s perspective of transportation consultancy Travel Demand Management (TDM) programs to promote more sustainable work related commuting, including: our motive to remain committed to participating in these TDM initiatives; recent initiatives we have participated in; metrics for measuring success; other mechanisms that may be pursued; and what worked, what did not work and lessons learned.

TDM is a strategy to reduce the single occupancy vehicle (SOV) demand within the existing transportation network. By implementing TDM measures, highway congestion and traveler delay can be reduced resulting in fewer needs to increase the existing roadway capacity.

The GTHA is the fastest growing urban region in Canada and the third fastest in North America. Congestion is a pre-existing issue and we need to plan for an additional 100,000 people per year over the next 20 years. This will result in approximately 1.5 million additional passenger and commercial vehicle trips per day in the GTA by the year 2031. This increased transportation demand cannot be ignored.

A number of large scale Multimodal Transportation Planning Studies have been completed to better understand the required improvements that will foster and manage this growth, including optimization of the existing road networks and expanding non-road infrastructure. The development of a Traffic Management strategy that reduces demand and improves system efficiency will ultimately result in improved performance of the existing transportation system.

In addition, based on Statistics Canada (2011), roughly 15.4 million Canadians commute to work on a daily basis and four out of five commuters rely on an SOV as transport. The average commute time varies greatly depending on where you live. For many of those who commute into the city, commute times tend to be longer, and longer commutes for employees mean much higher gas usage and more wear and tear on vehicles resulting in high associated daily commute costs.

As a result of the growing need for TDM measure implementation within Canada's Urban Growth Centres, initiatives have been implemented at our office to promote a more efficient and sustainable use of the existing transportation infrastructure in the GTHA. These initiatives include workplace policies, on-site commuter friendly installations, participation in commuter organizations, regular informative interactive workshops, advocacy in the local employer community, and support from the local transportation management association. These initiatives are meant to benefit employees financially, help reduce SOVs during peak periods, support a healthier working atmosphere, and benefit the environment by reducing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions.

By providing these tools to employees, members of our staff have been able to shift transportation modes, alter traveling routes and reduce or retime their daily commutes. In particular, recently employees have taken advantage of designated carpool parking spaces; regional bike to work day; and our corporate step challenge to promote walking commutes and healthier living.

There are a number of other mechanisms that an employer can consider to promote sustainable commuting within the workplace. As an example, to encourage carpool groups an employer can offer a vanpool fleet service, where company maintained vehicles are available on site for work related carpool trips. In addition, a stigma is often associated with carpooling due to less flexibility and reliability. In the case of our local transportation management association, if an emergency arises, sustainable commuters can receive full reimbursement for their expenses through an Emergency Ride Home claim service. For instance, if a carpool match is unable to complete a return trip, an employee can take a taxi or transit service and be fully reimbursed for the travel expense through this service.

To measure and track employer TDM measure success, employer travel surveys should be completed regularly. These surveys typically include questions such as *what is your current daily commute mode; have you tried carpooling;* and, *what are the barriers preventing you from switching modes.* These surveys can then be used to determine areas that require improvement.

How can other Canadian employers get involved with TDM implementation?

To get started in implementing a successful TDM program in the workplace, designate an ambassador or committee that already participate in sustainable commuting to develop a program and engage employees. As frequent employee engagement is required for these programs, ambassadors that already understand the benefits of TDM measures will likely promote the program with enthusiasm and will keep it fresh for employees. Be sure to reach out to the local TMA or advocacy group as these groups can offer a wide variety of starter program services to companies for reasonable prices.

Seeking senior management support and funding for starter TDM initiatives is crucial to the success of the program. Some inexpensive beginner TDM initiatives that are proven successful include office flex hours to promote time-shift, use of conference calls to minimize trips, business casual attire days to promote active transportation, lunch and learn workshops to educate employees about sustainable commuting, and on site facilities such as bike racks and carpool parking spaces.

Finally, based on individual employer travel surveys results, customize your TDM initiatives to your specific workplace as some initiatives work better than others depending on office location, available transit services and focus of the workplace. By providing these sustainable commuting initiatives to employees, employers can have a noticeable impact on the local performance and reliability of the existing transportation network.