

Sustainable Transportation Planning

Community-Based Travel Marketing in the Winnipeg WinSmart Showcase

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Abstract

Community-based travel marketing (CBTM) is one of several integrated transportation demand management initiatives in the WinSmart Showcase. Through a series of steps, this initiative aims to reduce automobile dependence, and subsequently greenhouse gas emissions, by enhancing individuals' awareness and understanding of alternative forms of transportation. CBTM is based on the idea that people are different, which requires a variety of tools and techniques to encourage and facilitate alternative transportation use. By providing customised assistance and working directly with people who have self-identified as being interested in changing their travel behaviour, the program encourages reductions in car use in ways that will work for each person's situation.



Source: K. Walsh

As the initiative is about to begin, there are few lessons to watch for. First is to see if there is a change in travel behaviour: Will CBTM point the way to reducing car dependence in our city, taking into account the urban form and extreme climate? Second is to determine whether the initiative

is cost effective: Will enough people change their travel behaviour to make the investment worthwhile? Finally, the central goal is to cut greenhouse gases locally: Will CBTM be an effective way to help reduce Winnipeg's greenhouse gas emissions?

At the heart of this study are theories of collaborative planning and social marketing. Central to collaborative planning is the idea that everyone is different and has a unique worldview; social marketing focuses on people's self-perception and their ability to empower themselves to act sustainably. Rather than taking a broad-brush approach, CBTM addresses the global issue of greenhouse gas emissions by empowering individual Winnipeggers to meet their travel needs sustainably.

While CBTM has been tried in other countries, and to a small extent in Canada, it has never been done in a city with a climate similar to Winnipeg's. Therefore, in the global context, this initiative is a best practice model; for Canada and for a cold climate, it is cutting edge.

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Introduction

Planners often talk about change. There are many theories about whether and how planners can instigate change towards a more sustainable city. In the wake of global environmental issues, transportation is an area of particular concern to many planners. To shift an entire culture towards travel behaviour that is sustainable is a major challenge in planning today.

This case-in-point studies the community-based travel marketing project, or CBTM, in Winnipeg's WinSmart Showcase, which captures the essence of collaborative planning and social marketing, two planning approaches which help to mobilise cultural norms towards behaviour that is sustainable. The study presents the background of WinSmart and its various initiatives, then focuses in on the facts of the case of the CBTM program within WinSmart. Vancouver's TravelSmart program is reviewed as a precedent. Following this are the obstacles which the project may face and lessons which Winnipeg can learn and pass on to other cities. The study concludes with a look ahead to where CBTM can be further taken in Winnipeg and beyond. To begin, here is a look at the ideas behind the program.

Collaborative planning is a way of approaching cities that acknowledges the differences of culture, politics, lifestyles and ways of thinking residing within them. It harnesses the energy generated by differences, rather than forcing conformity, and in doing so creates new possibilities for ways of doing things, which become new realities and norms. Collaborative planning has been largely spearheaded by the works of Patsy Healey and Leonie Sandercock, who believe in untold possibilities for cities when we imagine and communicate ideas. For Healey, "[cities'] existence and their power to act lie in the way they are imagined and brought to life, and in how these imaginings then become mobilised to shape politics, public policy and projects" (2002, p. 1783). When planning is collaborative, all citizens are participants, and participation instigates change – sometimes towards sustainability.

People portray certain patterns in their interactions with the environment. *Social marketing* is a way of encouraging people to cultivate behavioural patterns that are environmentally sustainable. Doug McKenzie-Mohr has studied social marketing in depth, and his findings are very useful for sustainable travel behaviour (see McKenzie-Mohr, 2000). Social marketing works with an individual's self-perception, and is only effective if that individual perceives herself as someone who acts in sustainable ways. For example, when a person agrees to a request to switch to using only compact fluorescent light bulbs, her self-perception changes. She now self-identifies as the type of person who uses these 'green' bulbs; as someone who engages in sustainable behaviour.

Social marketing is not quite so simple, however. First, people cannot be coerced; they must have it within themselves to want to change their behaviour to be more sustainable. Second, people will behave sustainably depending on the perception of the amount of control which they feel they have over a situation. If they perceive they have a lot of control, they will act. This requires a sense of empowerment. Social marketers must send vivid, credible and empowering messages and prompts, and even make home visits to cultivate sustainable behaviour. As habits form, others catch on; in general, people will follow what is culturally acceptable in the given context. Over time this helps to create new, more sustainable norms.

"I propose ... a [planning] sensibility that can help citizens wrest new possibilities from space and collectively forge new hybrid cultures and places"
- Leonie Sandercock, 2004:134

Background: A Brief History of WinSmart

The WinSmart project (Winnipeg for Sustainable Management Advancing Responsible Transportation) is a cost-shared project between the City of Winnipeg, the Government of Canada and the Province of Manitoba. The project was originally developed in 2002 as an application to Transport Canada's Urban Transportation Showcase Program.

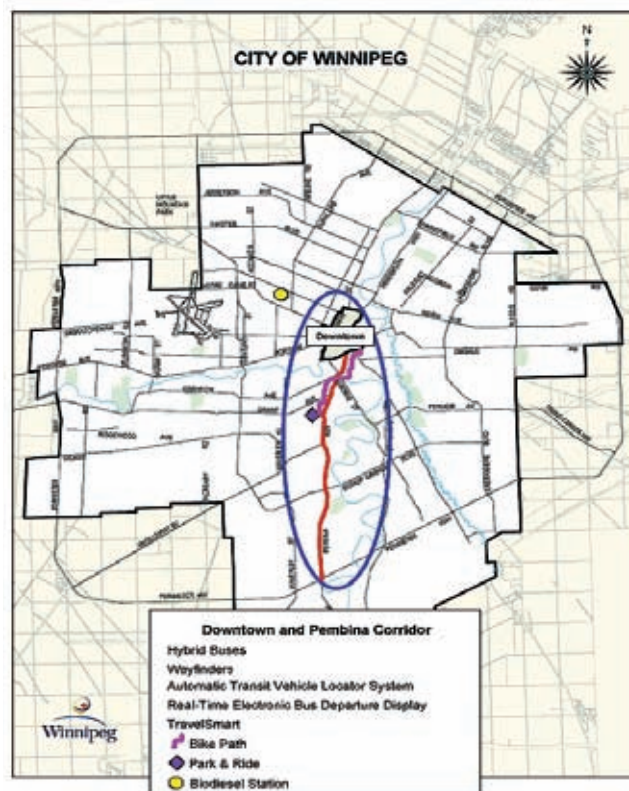
The original application included a number of ambitious projects, including a hydrogen fuelling station and a proposal for a Capital Region ridesharing service. Unfortunately, budget restrictions meant that a number of projects had to be removed.

Following extensive negotiations, an agreement was prepared and was on the verge of being signed in October of 2005. At this point, Transport Canada announced that all of their climate change funding was frozen pending a full program review. At this point, it seemed unlikely that the program would be renewed, and both the City and the Province considered the file closed.

However, in the spring of 2006, the UTSP program was renewed and extended to 2009. The project was revived with ten components and an agreement between Transport Canada and the City of Winnipeg was signed in September of 2006. WinSmart was officially launched in November 2006 and the majority of the work is underway in the spring of 2007.

The main objective of the WinSmart Showcase is to promote innovative approaches to urban transportation that increase energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Situated in the area of the city that experiences the heaviest traffic, between the University of Manitoba and downtown Winnipeg, the WinSmart Showcase promotes environmentally sustainable transportation practices in three strategic areas.

The first area of interest is technology demonstration. The City will make a significant investment in demonstrating the benefits of two 60-foot articulated hybrid diesel-electric buses and will be building a bio-diesel fuelling site for municipal fleet vehicles. Another area of interest is in making transit, cycling and walking more competitive, including upgrades to Winnipeg Transit, a new active transportation path and a community-based travel marketing project. The final area is examining energy efficient trucking and freight models.



WinSmart projects are concentrated around the city centre and Pembina corridor. Source: City of Winnipeg

Facts of the Case: CBTM in WinSmart

Resource Conservation Manitoba will be delivering the Community Based Travel Marketing project as one of the WinSmart initiatives, with funding provided by the Province of Manitoba and Transport Canada. The CBTM project in Winnipeg will follow best practice models with adaptations based on lessons learned from elsewhere and issues specific to our city and climate.

Once the geographic boundaries of the study area are determined, a travel survey will be distributed to random households. This survey will identify current travel behaviour including mode of travel, kilometres travelled, point of origin and destination, and purpose of travel for each person within the household over a one-day period. Reminders by mail and by phone will be used to encourage a high return rate on the travel survey.

Included in the travel survey will be a question regarding potential interest in changing travel behaviour to become less car dependent. Based on this response, survey participants will be grouped into three categories: (1) those who already use sustainable or green modes of transportation, (2) those who are interested in learning more and potentially reducing their car use, and (3) those who do not want further contact.

Households from the first and second groups will receive an information sheet that lists a variety of resources available upon request, such as a cycling map, walking brochure, transit information for their location, etc. The resource package will be delivered on bicycle to interested households. Typically, recipients who request resources receive an incentive. Also, those who already use sustainable modes of transportation will receive a mode-appropriate reward for their choice.



Source: S. Sandhu

The resource request sheet also includes a question regarding household interest in more detailed and customized assistance through personal contact, either by telephone or in person. Follow-up contact is made and individualized assistance provided within a couple of weeks. Examples include identifying potential cycling routes specific to a household member's common destinations or familiarizing an individual with Winnipeg Transit's online trip planner (Navigo).

To evaluate any change in travel behaviour, a follow-up travel survey will be conducted at least one year after the initial survey. The goal will be to determine if travel patterns have changed, whether the individualized marketing intervention played a role, and to calculate the resulting reduction in GHG emissions from travel behaviour change.

Precedent: TravelSmart in the Sustainable Region Showcase for Greater Vancouver

Currently underway is a travel marketing pilot study in the first city in Canada to adopt such a program, the Greater Vancouver Area. TravelSmart, developed in Germany by Socialdata and delivered in cities in Europe, Australia and the US, is one of the components of the Sustainable Region Showcase for Greater Vancouver (the equivalent of Winnipeg's WinSmart Showcase).

TravelSmart has marked six neighbourhoods to partake in the pilot. Because each neighbourhood differs in degree of access to various travel options, the program will help to pin down the requirements of the different neighbourhoods to better facilitate alternative travel behaviour in each.

As in Winnipeg, random households in each neighbourhood are surveyed for their level of interest in using alternative travel modes. Those expressing an interest are offered a variety of materials and resources from which to choose to assist and motivate them to create travel options which will meet their specific needs. These materials include a neighbourhood map highlighting local destinations and routes and a variety of transit information. Those who specify their preferred resources and return the information to the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority (TransLink) receive their resource package in a branded tote bag and a complementary umbrella as a further incentive to follow through with the program. An experienced user of transit or active travel modes is available to further support participants, either over the telephone or in person, if requested. Those already engaged in regular use of alternative modes are encouraged to continue to do so with a reward.

TravelSmart helps and inspires people to travel sustainably of their own accord. So far, the program has proven a success in reducing car dependence and has contributed to the overall goal of the Sustainable Region Showcase for Greater Vancouver, which is to lower greenhouse gas emissions in the Greater Vancouver Area (MacIsaac, 2006; Transport Canada, 2007).

Clearly, the CBTM program in Winnipeg follows a close path to TravelSmart. By raising awareness, initiating discussion, and tailoring programs for self-identified interested individuals, both exhibit traits of collaborative planning and social marketing. However, Winnipeg's infrastructure, culture and climate pose a new set of challenges. These are discussed in the following section.



Sample TravelSmart map featuring destinations, trail & bus routes, travel amenities and travel time estimates. Source: Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority, available on-line at http://www.translink.bc.ca/files/urban_tran_forum/S_Surrey.pdf

Challenges

Community-based travel marketing in Winnipeg faces several obstacles, both on the side of the participants and of the program.

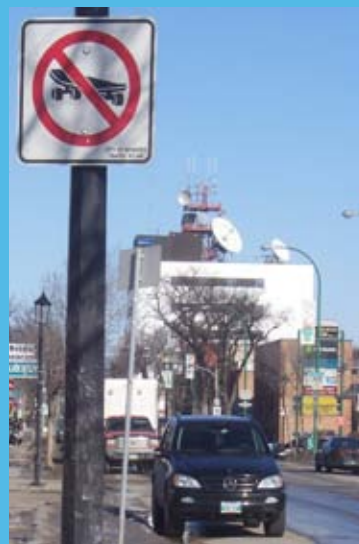
Participants could find that the urban form of the city is a challenge to alternative travel modes. Unlike much of the Greater Vancouver Area, Winnipeg is a low-density city spread out over a large area, a pattern that generally leads to car dependence. The result is reduced public transit service beyond the downtown core and insufficient infrastructure to accommodate active modes: not an environment that is supportive of travel alternatives.

Further, the climate of Winnipeg is extreme: hot, humid summers contrast the cold and snowy winters, making alternatives even more challenging to use. The urban form and climate together have contributed to a local travel culture based almost entirely around the car, resulting in a cycle of car dependence. This cycle can be very hard to break as people find themselves rationalising car use in the face of the weather, built form, or normality. Given such challenges, even those who have expressed an interest in changing their travel behaviour must remain very committed.

The CBTM program itself also faces a number of challenges. The program requires enough participants to obtain results that reflect the diversity and realities of individual travel needs. To make the project worthwhile, there must be a sufficient number of people willing to change their travel behaviour.

A loss of political will could cut off the program prematurely if results are not evident at an early stage. Often, politicians and the public demand immediate results. Since this kind of behavioural shift happens at a deeply personal and cultural level, sufficient time needs to be invested before any significant change is evident.

Overcoming these obstacles will require all involved to remain committed to the program in the spirit of collaborative planning and social marketing.



Car culture and snowy winters make alternative transportation a challenge for many Winnipeggers. Source: K. Walsh

Looking Ahead

Lessons to be Learned

There are a number of lessons to be learned from this program. First is to determine the current travel patterns of residents in the area of study. Second is to see if participants will in fact reduce their car dependence as a result of personal contact and individualised assistance. Third, the initiative will need to demonstrate a quantitative reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from a change in travel behaviour. Ultimately, the goal of the program is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from personal transportation; will CBTM be a successful way of achieving this in Winnipeg, particularly in a cost-effective manner? These lessons will be learned upon completion of the project.

Whatever the outcome, CBTM will be an informative source to other cities wishing to address greenhouse gas emissions from personal transport, particularly winter cities, those with low densities and those which are predominantly car-centred.



A great way to get around Winnipeg in the winter! Source: J. Locke

Next Steps

The community-based travel marketing program will be underway this spring. Following the pilot, the City of Winnipeg and Resource Conservation Manitoba could carry through the momentum into another project, perhaps one aimed at specific neighbourhoods, as was done in Vancouver. As interest continues to spark in citizens, more infrastructure and programming to support alternative travel will be needed. Ultimately, CBTM could be integrated into all transportation planning, indicating a large commitment on the part of the City towards sustainable transportation.

Conclusion

The catalyst for change towards a sustainable city is the people themselves. Programs like CBTM help by guiding and encouraging people in the right direction. While there are a number of challenges facing CBTM, the fact that it is rooted in collaborative planning and social marketing may well ensure its success in helping to alter travel behaviour. By applying best practices learned in other cities such as Vancouver, Winnipeg is crafting its own program to help citizens meet their unique needs. Other cities will turn here for guidance. Perhaps one day Winnipeg will be a model city of greenhouse gas reduction achieved entirely by the people of their own volition.

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Source: J. Lee