Fredericton NB, Metro Vancouver BC, Bridgewater NS

ISSUE PAPER 85

Marketing Active Transportation

Overview

Municipalities and regions across Canada are developing increasingly sophisticated active transportation plans and programs. Like any product or service, communicating its benefits is important to acceptance and adoption by the public. Recognizing this, transportation agencies and local governments are increasingly turning to the principles and tools of marketing to promote and educate the general public on the benefits of active transportation and to encourage more people to take it up and/or take advantage of existing active transportation programs and infrastructure.

This issue paper summarizes the successes and challenges of marketing active transportation programs and policies in Canada. It focuses on three programs in Fredericton NB, Metro Vancouver BC, and Bridgewater NS. Given each community's unique context (e.g., size, resources, etc.), the three each took a different approach and applied unique strategies to their active transportation marketing.

Selected Resources

There are numerous resources available on active transportation marketing, including the following.

Active Communities Marketing Toolkit www.activecommunities.ca

Community-Based Social Marketing Supporting Active Transportation

http://www.tc.gc.ca/Programs/Environment/utsp/commsocialmarketing.htm

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Context

The mid-1990's saw a growth in municipal planning for cycling across North America. With support from environmental, smart growth and cycling advocacy organizations, more local governments began to recognize the multiple benefits of expanding bicycling in their jurisdictions (e.g. traffic reduction, healthier lifestyles, etc.) and the need for long-term strategies. These early plans often focused heavily on designating bike routes, locating new end-of-trip infrastructure and safety improvements. At the same time the focus on cycling was sharpening, the importance of walking as a mode of transportation also grew and some municipalities began developing pedestrian plans (e.g. Portland, OR, Madison, WI, Cambridge, MA, Ottawa, ON, Calgary, AB). Obvious synergies between cycling and pedestrian policies emerged which helped encourage and lead some municipalities to write combined pedestrian and cycling plans (e.g. Bellevue, WA, Chapel Hill, NC, Kamloops, BC, York, ON). Over time, and as awareness of the population health benefits continued to grow, these combined pedestrianbicycle plans evolved into active transportation plans which recognized a greater range of selfpowered transportation modes, including skating, wheelchairs, scooters, skiing, etc.

As active transportation planning has become more sophisticated, local governments and active transportation advocates have begun to recognize that it is not enough to build infrastructure and expect a significant shift to active transportation modes. Entrenched cultural attitudes towards automobile use, the automobile orientation of municipal infrastructure and land use, and the massive marketing efforts of the automobile industries often make it difficult for active transportation modes to stand out as viable transportation options. This makes switching

people onto [to active transportation modes becomes a social marketing challenge.

Numerous studies, including user surveys and focus groups, have confirmed common assumptions and perceptions about non-recreational active transportation that has inhibited its take-up for day-to-day travel. Perceptions around safety, reduced comfort, extended travel times are fairly pervasive and prevent many potential users from considering active, non-motorized transportation as a viable option (e.g. UBC Cycling in Cities Opinion Survey (http://www.cher.ubc.ca/cyclingincities/survey.html) and Cragg, S, Cameron, C, and Craig, C.L (2006) 2004 National Transportation Survey, Ottawa, ON Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute.

Given the challenges and common misconceptions, marketing is a critical tool for communicating the benefits of active transportation and for changing perceptions of active transportation. Effective marketing can highlight the linkages to specific lifestyle choices (e.g. staying in shape, spending less time in traffic, helping the environment) as well as creating a motivational active transportation "brand" that visually distinguishes infrastructure, wayfinding markers, and other resources to help attract new users.

Active transportation marketing recognizes that active transportation, like any product in a competitive marketplace, must compete against other transportation options from which it must distinguish itself to help win customers or users. Today, more and more agencies are using more sophisticated marketing methods and approaches to attract, cultivate and retain active transportation users. The application of commercial marketing approaches for active transportation has typically involved such features as:

- More detailed market research to better segment and understand different user groups and their expectations and needs;
- Targeted marketing, direct outreach and advertising designed to meet and reach specific market segments (e.g. commuters versus school-age youth, seasonal cyclists/walkers, etc.); and,

 Branding activities to create a consistent, attractive identity for active transportation wayfinding, route and information resources, facilities (e.g., bike racks), etc.

Policy context

The active transportation marketing programs profiled in this issue paper are generally directly linked to, or supported by, larger policy documents. These policy documents include regional transportation plans and strategies, long-term development plans and growth strategies. More general examples are also available in the BC Recreation and Parks Association's publication, Active *Communities Marketing Toolkit*, which is available at www.activecommunities.ca. 2009.

- Trails and Bikeways Plan (Fredericton **NB):** In 2006, the City of Fredericton hired a consultant to develop a Trails/Bikeways Master Plan for the City. The overall intent of the plan is to develop a user-friendly network of on-road and off-road facilities for nonmotorized movement within the city, including trails, bikeways, recreation corridors, and a designated on-street network. Designed to create opportunities for all age groups, including residents, visitors, and people with mobility challenges, a variety of corresponding educational and promotional activities were identified as an important component of the plan. Given background studies that showed how public attitudes and perceptions could make the public slow to respond to infrastructure improvements, marketing was identified as an important tool for changing attitudes towards active transportation and improving active transportation mode share in Fredericton.
- Active Transportation and Connectivity Plan (Bridgewater, NS): The Town of Bridgewater Nova Scotia adopted Active Transportation and Connectivity Plan (ACTP) in June 2008. The plan is intended to guide the long-term development of the Bridgewater active transportation and connectivity network. A special, multi-stakeholder

advisory committee -- the Bridgewater Active Transportation Committee -- was established to develop a vision for the plan, which was later confirmed during a larger public visioning process called, *Imagine Bridgewater*. The plan aims to reduce the reliance on single occupant vehicles and automobile transportation to help transform Bridgewater's streets into a more diverse, healthier and safer public realm.

Travel Smart Program (Metro Vancouver, BC): In 2009, TransLink, the regional transit authority, completed a 30-year strategy and vision document called Transport 2040. The plan set out six strategic goals that included commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in support of federal and provincial targets and ambitious transit, walking and cycling mode share targets. The strategy also identified TransLink's TravelSmart program as a key tool for achieving the targets. TravelSmart is a comprehensive transportation demand management program initiated through Transport Canada's Urban Transportation Showcase Program that carries out targeted business outreach, individualized transportation marketing services, and other programming to support more sustainable and active transportation options.

Rationale and objectives

Traditionally (and somewhat ironically), active transportation options have been marketed passively. Active transportation routes, travel information and infrastructure was typically not researched, marketed, or "sold" as a consumer product. Basic market research did not identify or disaggregate different user groups and their specific needs, expectations and desires for cycling, walking or rolling. While some marketing efforts did occur, most programs tended to focus on work-related commuter trips or carried out very broad-based, general public awareness campaigns.

More recently, more sophisticated marketing tools and approaches, including social marketing and individualized marketing, are being applied to the design and delivery of active transportation options and programs. By utilizing more sophisticated market research and marketing approaches, municipalities, transportation authorities and other transportation agencies are using new methods to identify discrete service needs (e.g. pedestrian or cycling safety for school-aged children, older cyclists, etc.) to help both attract new active transportation participants and to inform new, current and potential users of its benefits and ease.

Effective marketing is essential for communicating to potential users the benefits of active transportation for individuals and communities. Just like other forms of transportation (i.e. automobiles, transit, etc.) using marketing to communicate their product or service to potential customers and encouraging them to purchase or use the product or service, active transportation needs to do the same to be effective and widely adopted.

A good marketing strategy identifies clear objectives in terms of desired attitude changes, behaviour changes, and target audiences. These objectives are then linked to clear indicators that can be used to measure the impact of the marketing interventions (e.g., mode share, consumer awareness, etc.)

Actions

Active transportation marketing takes many forms from individualized marketing campaigns targeting specific groups, events, brochures media strategies, etc. Often municipalities and regions use a range of approaches in order to reach different audiences. The use of active transportation marketing tools and approaches in the three featured programs are summarized below.

• **Fredericton:** One of the keystones of Fredericton's *Trails/Bikeways Master Plan* is an active transportation education and awareness building component. The plan outlines a number of actions to promote active transportation by integrating the trails/bikeways network into municipal maps,

recognizing business and individual mode shifters through a special awards program, and working closely with local school boards and health agencies to promote active transportation with students, patients, staff and clients.

Fredericton's Trail Guide



As part of the initiative, a marketing consultant was hired to design and guide the plan's marketing component. Actions have included mailing information pamphlets outlining the trail systems and the benefits of active transportation to all 40,000 Fredericton households, hiring an outreach coordinator to interact with and assist city trail users, and creation of a trail information centre. The trail information centre was kiosk located on the trail where residents and visitors could get more information trail routes safety, and key attractions. Free bike bells were also given away and a local bridge closure was used as an opportunity to promote a park-and-walk campaign. Like other municipalities, Fredericton has closely linked these activities

to other ongoing events and programs, including Active and Safe Routes to School, a Commuter Challenge, International Trails Day, and International Walk-to-School Week.

Active Transportation and Connectivity Plan (Bridgewater, NS): Bridgewater's plan specifically recognizes that planned infrastructure improvements need to be supported by an education and marketing campaign to promote active living, and to help change attitudes and perceptions about active transportation. The Active Transportation Committee that was formed to help develop the plan and implement actions has now started branding its active transportation program. This work includes a distinctive web site with an interactive map that clearly explains the components of the active transportation plan. The map includes pop-up windows with before and after photos of infrastructure improvements, drawings/plans of future projects, examples of route/network signage, and basic rules-ofthe-road information. Bridgewater also developed a unique logo and brand identity that is easily and universally recognizable in a range of settings.

As part of the first phase of implementation, Bridgewater's Active Transportation Committee also initiated a three-year project in partnership with the Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Prevention to implement a number of information dissemination activities, including a selection of information brochures aimed at different target markets (e.g., commuters, school-aged youth, etc.), and a website which functions as an active transportation information clearinghouse. The committee is also helping organize community events, such as the Commuter Challenge, International Trails Day, Walk Lunenburg County, Walk-to-School Month, and a cycling program called, Kids of Steel. Partnerships are also being forged with target groups for future promotional/safety awareness programs. Target groups include

elementary and high schools, large employers, and small businesses.

Marketing is also being coordinated with ongoing city public realm improvements and planning projects, including the 'River Renaissance' project and the Town of Bridgewater's Integrated Community Sustainability Planning process.

In order to measure the effectiveness of the marketing activities, the Active Transportation Committee is establishing baseline data and will be conducting post-project focus groups to assess impact of outreach activities.



TravelSmart Program (Metro Vancouver, BC): In 2006, TravelSmart began as part of the Urban Transportation Showcase Program (UTSP). As part of this program, TransLink piloted an innovative personal transportation marketing project in six neighbourhoods located in the inner, middle, and outer rings of metropolitan Vancouver. The program used a variety of education tools and incentives to help people switch some or all of their trips to more sustainable transportation modes (see Urban Transportation Showcase Program case study, *TravelSmart*).

Following the pilot project, the TravelSmart brand was expanded to all TransLink demand side management programs and served as the transportation demand management brand for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games. After the Games, TransLink is planning to continue to develop, expand and refine the TravelSmart program by creating brand extensions targeting different lifestyle components. For example, "TravelSmart Work" or "TravelSmart School" will target specific trip types and user groups and

communicate the most appropriate travel options to the target group.

Currently, the TravelSmart website serves as a hub for all of TransLink's demand side management programs including telework, ride and car sharing, employer transit passes, and active transportation. This portal offers a variety of transportation users access to a range of information on incentives, user information (e.g., schedules, routes, etc.), and the personal and broader community benefits and advantages of more sustainable different transportation choices. Currently, TravelSmart's active transportation programming emphasizes cycling options with route maps, information on bicycles on transit, and links to outside resources.

Other Actions

Looking beyond the three examples profiled in this issue paper, it is evident that some active transportation strategies are linked through a cohesive marketing plan while others are a collection of strategies that are implemented individually as resources are available. However, active transportation is usually marketed under one or more of these broad policy areas:

- Healthy living campaigns: These campaigns focus on the personal health benefits of using active transportation. Often active transportation is promoted with recreational activities to promote healthier lifestyles. As the larger concept of 'healthy built environments' continues to grow, so to have the number of active transportation programs and initiatives that promote the health benefits of more active and sustainable transportation forms. (e.g., "Spring Meltdown"- Active Comox Valley, "Active is You" Esquimalt, Recreation and Parks, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Active Living program).
- Commuter campaigns: These campaigns focus on automobile commuters and are often linked with a range of other commuting

options, such as transit and telecommuting. (e.g., Bike-to-Work-Week Victoria and Vancouver BC, Commuter Challenge -- www.commuterchallenge.ca)

- School travel planning: School travel planning targets children, parents, teachers, and other school employees, encouraging them to use active transportation options to get to and from school. Given the age group these programs target, pedestrian and cyclist safety is often a key focus. Examples of active transportation activities include, 'walking school bus' initiatives, cycling safety programs, safe routes to school, etc. (e.g., Walking School Bus www.walkingschoolbus.org, Safe Routes to School www.saferoutestoschool.ca/iwalk.asp),)
- Trail and outdoor experience: These programs highlight the recreational and/or outdoor experiences component as an added benefit of using active transportation options. These projects typically focus on existing offroad trail and greenway systems. In some cities (e.g., Whitehorse) these networks allow users to take advantage of multiple modes of transportation throughout the year (i.e., cross country skiing, bicycling, walking) and are aligned to allow easy commuter use, but in other locations they are primarily recreational. (e.g., Fredericton, NB)

The marketing of these various approaches to active transportation, and the active transportation systems profiled in this issue paper, use a number of both passive and active marketing tools to reach the public. Some of the most common tools are described below.

• Multi-media outreach: While media campaigns can vary in scale and scope, many programs use a variety of specific tools including, advertising, media-releases, op-ed pieces, project or program websites, postering and the like. Increasingly, social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, web blogging etc.) is being to market active transportation

- programs and events and to build general public awareness of, and support for, specific projects. Some transportation authorities have also developed specific applications for smart phones (i.e., iPhone apps) that allow people to locate nearby bicycling and/or pedestrian routes and the like. The Active Transportation Alliance in Chicago uses You Tube, a blog, a Facebook page and a page dedicated to media outreach (www.activetrans.org/openstreets). The Toronto Coalition for Active Transportation has also set up its own Facebook page. The City of Winnipeg also operates an active transportation blog at http://winnipegatrans.wordpress.com.
- Program branding: Creating a distinctive logo and 'look' or brand for active transportation programs, services and infrastructure (i.e., routes, trails, signage) helps create a cohesive and recognizable identify for programs and services, which in turn can help support and promote increased public awareness of active transportation options and benefits. When used in conjunction with wayfinding (i.e., route signage) a branded program can often become a point of pride for communities (e.g., Galloping Goose Trail, Victoria, BC, Bridgewater, NS Active Transportation Plansee example)
- **Project or program website:** A website can deepen brand recognition by linking the various components of the active transportation strategy (e.g., events, incentives, maps and users resources, etc.). A well designed site can function as a 'one-stopshop' for the public to access all levels of information, from basic program information to more in-depth information on, for example, the personal health benefits of active transportation. The information can be easily tailored for different users, including children, youth, adults, seniors and the mobility impaired and updated through the seasons to take into account the different modes of transportation used in winter and

shoulder season travelling. (e.g., Translink TravelSmart website, Vancouver, BC)

- Campaigns, events and awards: Specific campaigns and events such as 'Bike-to-Work Week' and 'Walk-to-School Month' help bring focused attention and energy to active transportation. They can attract media coverage and link well with recognition awards (e.g., Bike-to-Week company participation awards) and other incentives for individuals and groups who are leaders in active transportation. Awards can be used to recognize and profile early adopters and can help build general awareness around active transportation choices. Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition provides prizes and incentives for employers to participate in bike to work week (www.biketoworkmetrovan.ca/perks/prizes)
- **Individualized marketing:** These programs target specific individuals that have expressed interest (often through a survey) in learning more about switching to more active or sustainable transportation modes. These programs provide individuals and families with information tailored to overcoming their specific barriers to using actively transportation options (e.g., information on bicycle and pedestrian paths located close to their homes, local bus schedules, etc.). There are TravelSmart programs in Vancouver, BC Perth, Australia and Portland, OR where individualized marketing was used to help change travel behaviour (www.socialdata.de/homee.php, www.translink.ca/en/About-TransLink/Plans-and-Projects/Urban-Showcase/Travel-Smart-Pilot-Project.aspx)
- General pamphlets and fact sheets:
 General informational materials are the foundation of many marketing programs.
 They can be distributed at community buildings (e.g., libraries, schools, etc.), local stores and business, and at community events and festivals. They are often a first entry point for those unfamiliar with active

transportation and can direct those interested to more detailed information. The Rails to Trails Campaign in the US has an example brochure prepared for "Making the Case for Active Transportation" that can be adapted for any community to use (see: (www.railstotrails.org/ourWork/advocacy/activeTransportation/campaignForActiveTransportation/2010brochure.html).

Results

Although many municipalities and regions have implemented stand-alone active transportation initiatives (e.g. Commuter Challenge, Bike-to-Work Week, employer outreach programs, etc.) and some have started branding exercises, few local governments are measuring and monitoring the impact of these programs on a consistent or longterm basis. This has limited their ability to fully gauge the effectiveness of their efforts in changes and attitudes and behaviour. Anecdotal evidence and broader survey work suggest that there is increased awareness and understanding of active transportation and some jurisdictions have seen some modest increases in the adoption of active transportation modes. However, it is difficult to isolate the impact of specific marketing efforts without dedicated monitoring programs.

TransLink's TravelSmart pilot program pilot was able to show measurable results in shifting people to modes of travel other than the automobile. During the TravelSmart pilot project, walking and public transit use increased by 9 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively, while car trips declined by 8 per cent. During Vancouver's 2010 Olympics - and thanks to significant increases in transit capacity – TravelSmart is seeking to reduce car and truck traffic in key areas in the City of Vancouver by 30 per cent. For both the Olympic and pilot project results, TransLink was careful to establish baseline data, which was followed up by a dedicated monitoring and evaluation period. This allowed them to evaluate how specific marketing interventions directly resulted in behaviour changes.

Challenges

Some of the key challenges that may be faced in the development and implementation of marketing and branding strategies include:

- Making active transportation a priority:
 Despite a growing policy emphasis on
 shifting people to more active and sustainable
 transportation modes, active transportation
 budgets typically do not reflect this
 importance. Marketing efforts are often
 considered supplementary or incidental to
 larger infrastructure investments.
- Cost and capacity: A professional market research program and marketing strategy can be expensive to develop and be beyond the capacity of in-house communications and/or marketing staff.
- Measurement and monitoring: Plans for monitoring and evaluating the impacts/results of active transportation marketing are often limited. Effectively measuring the "soft" impacts, such as public awareness of the health benefits of active transportation, also requires specialized follow-up and monitoring. Limited program resources and internal capacity can therefore limit the on-going monitoring of the contribution that marketing makes to achieving the active transportation benefits and the behaviour changes that result in a mode shift.

Best Practices

An effective marketing strategy can enhance the effectiveness of active transportation policies and programs by generating wider awareness and support amongst current user groups and by reaching new and potential users. This increased awareness of active transportation policies and projects, in turn, helps maximize program resources and infrastructure investments.

An effective marketing campaign creates an identity for active transportation programs which can then be used as a platform for launching future initiatives that will be immediately recognizable. Here are some best practices:

- Focus on safety. Safety, or the perceived safety concerns posed by cycling or walking, is often a key perceptual barrier to the adoption of active transportation. While physical improvements are important (i.e., new signage, signals, separated streets etc.), marketing that communicates the overall safety of active transportation and the suitability/usability of systems and networks for all age groups and fitness levels can be just as important. Marketing efforts can also help educate drivers to share the road with cyclists and to be more aware of pedestrians. Target marketing can also direct cyclists to training courses that give them the skills and confidence they need to ride more safely.
- **Know your market.** Market research is a critical component of any successful initiative. Like any successful marketing program, the 'seller' needs to understand who the 'buyer' is. Several types of research can be used, including intercept surveys on cycling and pedestrian routes, telephone and webbased surveys, and focus groups to better understand current user needs (i.e., what will it take for existing users choose active transportation options more frequently) and potential user expectation and concerns (i.e., what are the obstacles to taking up active transportation and how can they best be addressed). Increasingly, social networking sites, like Facebook, are being used to carry out market research studies.
- Coordinate and leverage healthy built environment programs. There is a large and growing body of research that suggests a significant relationship between urban and rural form and population health outcomes. There are particularly strong links between personal transportation choices and health risk factors, such as the lack of physical activity and obesity, which in turn are linked to chronic diseases, notably cardiovascular

disease, chronic respiratory disease, diabetes and cancer. Under the umbrella concept of healthy built environments, public health agencies are working increasingly with urban and rural planners to educate people about the health benefits of active transportation and the opportunities and options for active transportation available in most communities. Opportunities to coordinate marketing initiatives with any existing healthy built environment programs or co-market active transportation programs with the health community should be actively explored.

Resources

The cost of developing and carrying out marketing and branding strategies varies widely. While some smaller projects can be done in-house or through existing/annual marketing and communications budgets, larger, more complex projects will require more resourcing and, likely, outside help. A recent survey conducted by the Transportation Association of Canada found only 26 municipalities with at least one full-time equivalent staff member dedicated to planning and implementing active transportation initiatives.

Lessons Learned

Based on current research and on the ground implementation, the following lessons learned can be applied to active transportation marketing and branding initiatives:

expensive, but can benefit the project:
Solid market research, targeted marketing, and project branding and identity building is critical to maintain and grow active transportation. While many larger municipalities or transportation agencies maintain in-house communications departments capable of undertaking basic marketing activities, tailoring marketing to target specific user groups, or conducting more detailed market research may require specific expertise. Despite the added expense and management requirements,

there can be significant value in bringing in external consultants and marketing experts.

- Extend your reach with partnerships. Municipalities and regions should not try to do it all by themselves, when partners offer much-needed energy, knowledge and skills. Community and environmental organizations (e.g. cycling coalitions, school walking advocates, etc.) can help support active transportation outreach, marketing and education programs and special events. Local health authorities and health agencies can also support active transportation programming and planning and provide health benefit information on using more active and sustainable forms of transportation.
- Active transportation marketing can be a complex, multi-disciplinary undertaking: The development of more comprehensive marketing programs involves many procedures among traditionally unrelated fields (e.g., consumer marketing, graphic design and transportation planning). While creating a marketing program should be a collaborative effort that brings together experts from these fields along with stakeholders (users and potential users), some tensions or process obstacles may occur. Indeed, the multidisciplinary nature of such an exercise can make an already challenging process more difficult.

References

AT Marketing Toolkits and Resources

Active Communities Marketing Toolkit www.activecommunities.ca. 2009

Marketing Action Plan
http://www.physicalactivitystrategy.ca/pdfs/MAP
Active Is Campaign Manual.pdf

Municipal/Regional Active Transportation Marketing Sites

City of Ottawa Travel Wise

http://www.rmoc.on.ca/residents/onthemove/travelwise/index en.html

TransLink TravelSmart
http://www.translink.ca/en/TravelSmart.aspx

Active Transportation-related Marketing Campaigns

Active Transportation Campaigns in BC http://www.physicalactivitystrategy.ca/index.php/community-based-awareness/active-is-what-you-make-it-campaigns/

Commuter Challenge http://www.commuterchallenge.ca

International Walk-to-School Week http://www.iwalktoschool.org/

walkOn (Central West Ontario) http://choices4health.org/pages/projects/walkON Walk21 http://walk21.com/

Bike-to Work-Week — Victoria, BC http://www.biketowork.ca/victoria/btww

Smart Commute Hamilton http://www.smartcommute.ca/hamilton/

Rails-to-Trails Campaign for Active Transportation (US) http://www.railstotrails.org/ourwork/advocacy/activetransportation/campaignforactivetransportation/index.htm