

## ON THE MOVE TO SCHOOL!

### An active transportation educational and mobilization program for children in Quebec

#### Organisation

Founded in 1967 as a non-profit organization, the mandate of Vélo Québec is to facilitate and encourage safe and convenient cycling for pleasure, tourism, and transportation.

#### Project status - ongoing

Following the success of the initial pilot project in 2005–2006, Vélo Québec decided to make the “On the move to school!” a permanent program.

#### Overview

“On the move to school!” is an educational active transportation program that aims to improve walking and cycling conditions for elementary school children, as well as raise community interest in the health, environmental and safety benefits of active transportation. Program implementation is spread out over 3 years. As of 2006–2007, 25 schools comprising 12,000 students are using the program’s tools and communications activities that promote active transportation.

#### Contact

Annick St-Denis  
Active Transportation Coordinator  
Vélo Québec  
Telephone: 514-521-8356, ext. 347  
E-mail: [astdenis@velo.qc.ca](mailto:astdenis@velo.qc.ca)

#### Selected Resources

Web site:  
[http://www.velo.qc.ca/monecole/index\\_e.lasso](http://www.velo.qc.ca/monecole/index_e.lasso)

### Background

Kids who walk or bike to school not only improve their fitness but also improve the quality of their environment. When children take active forms of transportation to school, parents are able to reduce the number and length of car trips keeping neighbourhoods quiet and reducing pollution in areas near schools.

“On the move to school!” is based on the “Safe Routes to Schools” program created more than ten years ago in Great Britain by Sustrans [<http://www.sustrans.org.uk>]. The program aims to resolve the issue of increasing rate

of car ownership by families and the sedentary lifestyle of school-aged children.

### Issue

In 1971, close to 8 out of 10 Canadian students walked or biked to school. In 1990, the proportion using active transportation had dropped to less than 1 out of 10 (Kino-Québec, 2004). The increased rate of car ownership by households in this same period is a key factor in the high use of cars as a method of getting students to school.

Today’s youth are 40% less active than 30 years ago, resulting in a tripling of excess body weight in Canadian children between 1981 and 1996, which has had a broad range of negative health impacts. Programs such as “On the move to school!” are integral to improving the health of students and our environment.

### Goals and Objectives

I “On the move to school!” is an educational active transportation program whose objective is to motivate all key decision makers to improve walking and biking conditions for elementary school children.

Its fundamental goals are to:

- get elementary school kids to integrate active transportation into their everyday lives, and
- reduce the use of motor vehicles near schools

In its pilot phase, the project was first implemented in 2005–2006 with 8 schools in the Greater Montreal region with widely varied profiles.

### Actions

#### Approach.

“On the move to school!” uses an engaging and pedagogical approach based on 3 themes: safety, health and the environment.

#### Organizational steps

- **Establishing advisory committee and pilot school selection.**

The proponent established an advisory committee involving public health, school boards, physical education associations, municipalities, police services, etc. and 8 pilot schools were selected.

- **Presentations.**  
Vélo Québec made presentations to school authorities and parents on the nature of the program and the benefits of active transportation.
- **Program specialization.**  
Implementation of the program involves offering to schools a series of tools and communication activities. Schools select the tools and activities that best suit their needs, and work with a program team comprising an engineer, an urban planner and a liaison officer to implement the program. Top of page

## Tools

Some of the key tools used to implement the "On the move to school!" program include:

- **Mapping of residences.**  
Each school taking part in the program receives a map of the neighbourhood with student's homes highlighted. This large, laminated map provides a general representation of the area.
- **Route plans.**  
Route plans for the first 8 schools were produced following the collection of information and meetings with municipal stakeholders. These plans provide an analysis of the area, identify issues and propose concrete solutions to obstacles limiting the development of active school transportation.
- **L'aller-retour magazine.**  
Comic strips, games, environmental highlights, jokes, safety tips and even a letter from Podz! "On the move to school!" kids now have their own magazine. Published 3 times a year, "L'aller-retour" magazine serves to remind everyone that active transportation can be practised during the summer and winter.



L'aller-retour magazine

Photo: Daniel Auger (Kino-Québec Estrie)

- **Web site.**  
In late summer 2005 we posted a new online Web page showcasing "On the move to school!". The Web page has since grown and now includes the contents of the 3 editions of the magazine and pedagogical tools that allow teachers to incorporate active transportation into the day-to-day curriculum.
- **Podz mascot.**  
With the support of a communications firm, the program created a mascot, Podz, to help motivate children to walk or bike to school. Podz, whose head is a foot, is a big hit with kids.



Podz mascot

## Communication activities

- **Parents.**  
Through the development of a brochure, newsletter, and internal communications, parents are regularly informed about "On the move to school!" activities.
- **Launch of "On the move to school!"**  
On October 5, 2005, Vélo Québec used International Walk to School Week in 2005 to launch "On the Move to School!". Students and teachers of École Saint-Marc (Montréal) received a visit from the Vélo Québec team, its partners, clowns, a unicyclist, television cameras, photographers and journalists. Activities to celebrate the launch were held over the course of the week in the 8 schools taking part in the project.



Photo: Daniel Auger (Kino-Québec Estrie)

- **Animation.**  
30 activities took place in the eight schools taking part in the program in 2005–2006. One of the activities entitled, “Les explorateurs urbains” [urban explorers], allowed input from children on developing route plans.
- **Urban cycling workshop for families.**  
After surveying the interest of parents, we created an urban cycling workshop for families. The workshops allow children and parents to learn together the rules of the road as well as tips and tricks for biking in the city.

## Results

The first 8 schools have completed the first year of the program. The program is now in a development phase and is offered in 2006–2007 to 22 other elementary schools. The program reaches all the students at each school and their parents. We counted 12,000 students directly affected over 2 years. The program provided for the installation of bike parking areas, which provided a daily reminder of the integration of active transportation in schools.

Each of the 8 pilot schools were surveyed at the beginning of the first year. The survey aimed in particular to identify the main obstacles to engaging in active transport. The results are that many students fear accidents, and of “bad” encounters with cars, as well as the perception that the distance to school is too long. Those who practice active transportation do so for health reasons, pleasure or because they do not own a car.

Qualitative results of the first year of “On the move to school!” included setting up favourable conditions to promote behavioural change with respect to school transportation, namely:

- Development of school support for the program objectives;
- Encouraging and motivating children to be enthusiastic about active transport;
- Enhancing the awareness and commitment of parents;

- Consultation with municipal stakeholders; and
- Increasing media recognition.

“I want to thank the “On the move to school!” team for this excellent initiative. This skillfully managed program significantly contributed to changing the attitudes and behaviour of members of my family with respect to transportation to school and work. I now bike to and from work twice a week! What’s more, several of my friends and family members have followed suit, thinking, if she can do it, so can I” Sophie Lachapelle, parent, École Somerled à Montréal.



Photo: Annick St-Denis (Vélo Québec)

## Participants

The first 8 schools are located in the greater Montreal metropolitan area, in 3 administrative regions of Quebec: Laval, Montérégie and Montréal. In

2006–2007, the Quebec, Outaouais and Estrie regions joined the program.

In addition to the students, parents and school personnel, the program also involves the municipalities and various social and community groups.



Regions involved in the program.

## Resources

The first year, the program had a cash budget of \$200,000, in addition to numerous time contributions (schools, parents and municipalities). The main cash expenses were salaries, the production of communication

tools and the purchase of parking facilities for bikes. Program services are provided free for schools.

Since the tools and approach have already been developed, the unit cost per school is significantly less for the second and subsequent groups.

The main partners in the project in 2005–2006 were:

- Direction générale de la santé publique du Québec [public health branch]
- Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon
- Ministère de l'Éducation, des Loisirs et des Sports [Department of education, leisure and sport]
- The City of Montréal
- Agence métropolitaine de transport [Metropolitan transport agency]
- Direction générale de la santé publique de Montréal [Montréal public health branch]
- Go for Green
- Transport Canada
- Société de transport de Laval [Laval transport society]
- Environment Canada (One-tonne Challenge)

## Timeline

The Vélo Québec team developed a standard implementation plan for each school over a period of 3 school years.

### First year

- Communications and facilitation in the school community
- Data collection and meetings with municipal and school players to establish a route plan
- Bike parking appraisal and establishment of new parking areas

### Second year

- Continuation of communications and facilitation
- Political campaigning for the implementation of the recommendations contained in the route plan

### Third year

- Continuation of communications and facilitation with a view to reducing the presence of the liaison officer and having the community take charge of the program

- Continuation of political campaigning for the implementation of the recommendations contained in the route plan and for planning support for the following year

## Lessons learned

### Participant expectations and requests

- Students: that activities be well suited to their age with a sufficient degree of difficulty.
- Teachers: that school activities be linked to the curriculum without adding to their workload.
- Parents: that parents be educated on the program's activities and how to encourage safe active transportation.
- School administration: that the program cost no money and that they receive support from the “On the move to school!” team.

### An approach to be replicated.

Following the success of the pilot phase, Vélo Québec is continuing to develop the program and has obtained the collaboration of regional partners for deployment in Quebec outside the metropolitan area. The program is booming and the success of its growth rests, among other things, on two elements.

- Vélo Québec's province-wide reputation, its expertise in active transportation and its knowledge of the field in the Montreal metropolitan area, which ensured the program's credibility from the very start and thus fostered the support of numerous partners.
- Collaboration with regional partners. The specific knowledge of regional partners about an area and their experience in regional mobilization made them essential players in ensuring community support for the goals of “On the move to school!”

### Other lessons learned

The response from the community confirms that the timing is excellent for the launch of a program for active school transportation.

The program must offer a range of à la carte activities, with each school selecting a few based on its needs.

### Next steps

From a pilot project limited a year in the metropolitan area in 2005-2006, Vélo Québec wishes to extend “On the move to school!” to all Québec regions before 2015.

Vélo Québec intends to reach another 100 schools in other administrative regions of Québec during the next 3 years. The following program development activities are expected:

- 2006-2007-2008: secure financing.
- 2008: assessment of the first three-year cycle in the 8 pilot schools.
- Editing and increase of the Internet content, namely of pedagogical tools.
- Implementation of activities for the second year of the program.
- Spring 2007 – Workshop Rues viables, rues pour tous (Viable streets for everyone) intended for municipal, school and public health stakeholders
- Training for regional partners
- Creation of a corporate signature specific to the program