

TravelSmart

Organization

TransLink, Metro Vancouver

Status

Pilot period ended November 2006.

Overview

TravelSmart is an innovative personal transportation marketing program that was piloted by the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority, TransLink. The first of its kind in Canada, the program encourages people to change their personal travel behaviour and increase their use of more sustainable travel modes (i.e. public transit, ridesharing, bicycling and walking) through a combination of personalized information, incentives and rewards.

The project was one component of a larger Urban Transportation Showcase Program (UTSP) project undertaken by TransLink. It was piloted in six neighbourhoods located in the inner, middle and outer rings of the metropolitan Vancouver region, each with varying degrees of access to transit and other travel options. A “before” survey was conducted to identify individuals interested in participating in the program and to establish baseline travel behaviour conditions. After the completion of the program, an “after” survey assessed any TravelSmart-related behaviour changes. Control groups were used in both surveys to isolate the impact of any external factors.

The 13 month pilot project ended in November 2006 with more than 600 people participating through all of the stages in each of the six pilot communities. Program results indicate that the use of more sustainable modes of transportation increased substantially with TravelSmart participants. Walking and public transit use increased by 9% and 12%, respectively, while car trips declined by 8%.

Contact

John Beaudoin
Manager Customer Services and Marketing
Phone: 604-453-4612
E-mail: John_Beaudoin@translink.bc.ca

Resources

More information is available on TravelSmart at:

http://www.translink.bc.ca/Plans_Projects/Urban_Showcase/TravelSmart/default.asp

Community context

Metro Vancouver (formerly the Greater Vancouver Regional District) is one of Canada’s fastest growing urban regions with a population of about 2.5 million people. The Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority, or TransLink as it is more commonly known, is the agency responsible for transit services and the major road network across the region’s 1,800 square kilometres. TransLink’s transit system carried 282 [million passengers in 2006, making it Canada’s third largest system behind Toronto and Montreal.

While ridership is up 24% since 2002 (and by as much as 40% in some corridors) and transit’s market share of all trips has grown from 10% to 12% region-wide since 2001, transit and non-automobile transportation options are not equally available in all areas of Metro Vancouver. Although transit carries around 45% of commuters into Downtown Vancouver, suburban ridership numbers, particularly for travel that does not terminate Downtown are not as impressive.

Policy context

In 2004, TransLink, in partnership with several Metro Vancouver municipalities, non-profit partners and Metro Vancouver, was selected to deliver an Urban Transportation Showcase Program (UTSP) project.

Vancouver’s Showcase features three major capital projects -- Transit Villages, the Central Valley Greenway and the Main Street Transit Priorities project – in addition to a Goods Movement study, a Hybrid Bus Demonstration project and TravelSmart.

TravelSmart was first developed in the early 1990s in Munich, Germany by Socialdata, an international transportation and social research institute. Based on its impressive results there, the program was successfully brought to a number of European countries, Australia and the United States. Greater Vancouver's TravelSmart pilot is the first time this program has been launched in Canada.

Rationale and objectives

Traditionally, transportation providers have encouraged the use of more sustainable transportation modes through more conventional initiatives, including the provision of transit services and infrastructure, pricing and longer-term land use policies. While such measures are essential, ultimately their value can be limited if the travelling public is unaware of the options available to them and how best to use them for their own personal transportation needs.

As a program, TravelSmart seeks to improve the general public's perceptions, knowledge and use of the more sustainable transportation options and services available to them by using an individualized marketing approach. The program's underlying methodology recognizes that many people are interested in using transit, cycling, walking and carpooling, but often require more information to begin using them, or to use them more often. Through a combination of personalized information, incentives and rewards, TravelSmart encourages people to think more about their transportation options and allows them to make more informed travel choices.

There are several key principles of TravelSmart's individualized marketing program:

- *Focus on households.* By focusing on households, TravelSmart addresses the full range of trips originating from home, not only the work commute trip. Participants can start by considering alternative transportation for small trips, close to home.
- *Target interested households.* TravelSmart focuses on households that indicate that they are interested in increasing their use of more sustainable transportation options.

- *Offer personalized support and resources.* Direct contact and individualized information, tailored to meet households' specific travel needs, is an effective means to encourage people to think more about their travel choices.
- *Reward those who already use alternative transportation modes.* Households that already regularly use public transit, cycle or walk are offered a small reward to encourage their continued use of these modes (e.g., umbrella, tote bag, pedometer, etc.). The reward program was based on social marketing approach that is discussed at greater length in a UTSP issue paper available at the UTSP website.



A family receiving their personalized TravelSmart® information

Actions

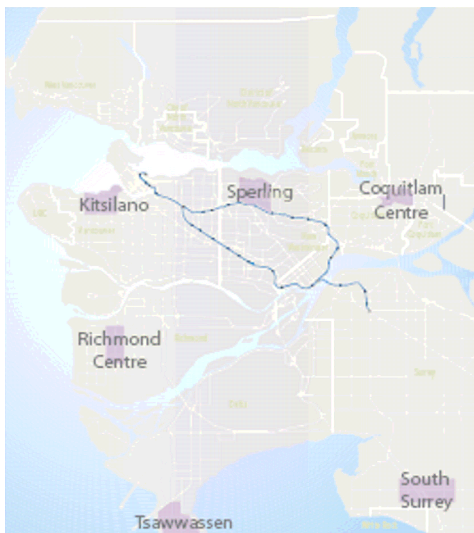
With TravelSmart's impressive results abroad and in the U.S., project organizers in Vancouver were keen to test the program in a variety of neighbourhood contexts.

In Vancouver, TravelSmart was piloted in six neighbourhoods located in the inner, middle and outer rings of the metropolitan Vancouver region, each with varying degrees of access to transit and other travel options. The six neighbourhoods were:

- *Kitsilano, Vancouver:* a dense urban neighbourhood close to Downtown Vancouver where transit use, walking and cycling are extensive.
- *Richmond City Centre, Richmond:* one of Metro Vancouver's designated Regional Town

Centres, Richmond City Center is the urban core of a suburban city with good transit access.

- *Sperling, Burnaby*: centered around a SkyTrain station, a growing, relatively young, auto-oriented, suburban, single-family neighbourhood that has benefited from recent transit, cycling and pedestrian access improvements.
- *South Surrey, Surrey*: a suburban residential community with high levels of car ownership and a relatively high senior's population. A more flexible transit service and a neighbourhood-friendly minibus program has recently been introduced.
- *Coquitlam Town Centre, Coquitlam*: one of Metro Vancouver's designated Regional Town Centres, the suburban community has experienced significant recent growth in housing, retail, and community services and has very good transit connections.
- *Tsawwassen, Delta*: a medium-density suburban neighbourhood located close to the U.S. border.



TravelSmart pilot locations

Implementation of the project began in September 2005 with the launch of the “before” survey, or travel diary, in the six pilot neighbourhoods to establish baseline travel behaviour and data for household segmentation. A randomly selected control group was also surveyed. Approximately 15,700 surveys were delivered to the pilot neighbourhoods and 2,500 to the control group.

The response rates ranged from 62% (South Surrey) to 67% (Tsawwassen).

Survey revealed that between 31% (Sperling, Burnaby) and 36% of participants (Richmond City Centre, Richmond) were not using sustainable transportation for trips (work, work-related, shopping, leisure, education-related, personal), but were interested in receiving local travel information and advice on sustainable transportation options through the TravelSmart program. It also determined that between 15% (South Surrey, Surrey) and 36% (Kitsilano, Vancouver) were already regular users of one or more sustainable transportation modes. Finally, the survey determined that between 32% (Kitsilano, Vancouver) and 49% (Tsawwassen, Delta) of respondents were neither current users of sustainable transportation modes, nor interested in receiving information and advice through the TravelSmart program.

Following analysis of the ‘before’ survey, delivery of TravelSmart’s individualized marketing began in October 2005. It was delivered sequentially in each of the pilot communities. During this period, the households that expressed a willingness to try alternative modes of transportation in the ‘before’ survey were given the opportunity to select the informational materials of interest to them. These materials were then delivered to each household in a TravelSmart tote. Materials offered included transit maps and schedules for bus stops nearest their homes, bike route maps, guides to local parks, discount vouchers for nearby stores and an umbrella. Over 2,500 personalized TravelSmart information packages were delivered throughout the six pilot neighbourhoods.

After receiving the information packages, households with further questions were given the opportunity to request additional, more personalized information (i.e., transit, cycling or walking) through an in-home or telephone consultation with a TravelSmart ‘ambassador’.

In keeping with overall program objectives, all in-home consultations were carried out by TravelSmart ambassadors on foot, transit, or a

combination of more sustainable travel modes. Almost 150 personalized appointments were conducted by TravelSmart ambassadors in the six pilot neighbourhoods.

Customer Information clerks from the Coast Mountain Bus Company (TransLink's subsidiary transit operator) were selected as TravelSmart ambassadors for public transit trips because of their significant experience addressing customer questions about the transit system. Individuals who requested a transit-focused appointment received a sample transit pass to make it as easy as possible to try using transit and to help encourage their travel mode shift.

Cyclists from the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition were contracted to conduct home visits for those TravelSmart participants who requested more information about bicycling. Depending on the participants' needs, services included an in-house bicycle safety check or route planning. Recipients of a cycling home visit were offered a cycling light as an incentive.

TravelSmart participants who requested more information about walking received a pedometer as their gift.

Following the end of each pilot neighbourhood's direct outreach period, an 'after' survey was carried out with participating households. The response rates for the after survey ranged from 67% (control group) to 81% (Richmond and Burnaby) and a 78% average response rate was achieved.

As with the before survey, a control group was also surveyed to help ensure that external influences such as weather, or road work could be taken into account in the analysis. The randomly selected control group was drawn from households from the rest of the Greater Vancouver area and subject to similar influences on travel patterns as the target groups.

Results

By the end of the program, a total of over 3,600 people had directly participated in the TravelSmart program. Analysis of the after survey results

indicate that participants use of more sustainable modes of transportation increased significantly among program participants. Some key results include:

- Car-as-driver travel was reduced amongst program participants by 8% in all areas
- Walking increased by 9%
- Public transit use increased 12%
- Cycling increased 33% in all areas (Note: the absolute number of bike trips was low, making a 33% increase achievable)

In addition, to these impressive statistical results, personal feedback from program participants was overwhelmingly positive and supportive.

Participants

The TravelSmart project closely involved the six participating municipalities of Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, Surrey, Coquitlam and Delta. Metro Vancouver (formerly the Greater Vancouver Regional District) was also an active partner.

Socialdata Ltd., an international transportation and social research institute that has been involved in the delivery and analysis of TravelSmart programs around the world, was hired to help deliver the program.

Resources

The total cost of piloting the TravelSmart program was \$850,000. This included associated staff costs and all program materials. TransLink hired one full time staff person for the project. The consultant's project team ranged between six and 15 depending upon the phase of the project. The UTSP program covered 30% of the budget, while TransLink provided 70%.

Lessons learned

Some of the key lessons learned in developing and implementing the pilot project included:

- **Secure external technical assistance and support where practical and feasible:** An early project needs assessment determined that TransLink would require outside

support and assistance in delivering the TravelSmart program. TransLink then brought in Socialdata, an international transportation and social research institute with global experience in designing, delivering and evaluating TravelSmart programs, to deliver the program. The consultant's program experience combined with TransLink's knowledge of the pilot communities helped minimize project start-up logistics and allowed the development of an efficient and effective program methodology.

- **Be flexible and responsive to local conditions:** Despite the external consultant's experience in TravelSmart program delivery, it was necessary to modify and adapt program elements given local conditions and the project's significant scope. For example, it was originally envisioned that an interim and final trip diary would be done in order to measure the short and medium term impacts of the program. TransLink and the consultant were able to eliminate the need for an interim diary through a research design that phased program delivery over a period of eight months. In addition, data collection was more time consuming than anticipated in the original project schedule. The extra time required did not impact the project or negatively impact results.
- **Sustainable transportation infrastructure supports more sustainable transportation travel choices:** Program evaluation determined that the most significant gains were achieved in areas where sustainable transportation infrastructure and services were best developed and most supportive.

Next steps

Based on the successful outcomes of the pilot, TransLink is looking into developing a more extensive program. During a time when significant expansion is occurring in rapid transit infrastructure

in Greater Vancouver (i.e., Canada Line SkyTrain extension, Evergreen Line light rail service, etc.), TravelSmart may prove to be a powerful tool to encourage mode shift and building transit ridership.

Both the City of Winnipeg and the Region of Waterloo are currently undertaking similar projects.
