

CYCLING TRAINING FOR THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Organization

Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition

Status

ongoing

Overview

Typically, teachers are an overlooked group in the promotion of Transportation Demand Management. The Cycling Training for the School Community (CTSC) program aims to partially address this by offering bicycle commuting training to teachers, support staff and school administrators. An increase in adults commuting by bicycle will generate more sustainable transportation role models in schools. CTSC workshops offer a commuter cycling skills course together with a seminar on bike education and promotion activities for the classroom. A pilot project was implemented in May 2007.

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Resources

VACC (www.vacc.bc.ca) – Commuter Cycling Skills courses and selected resources for the CTSC inter-active bike-ed seminars

Canadian Cycling Association: CAN-BIKE Program (<http://www.canadian-cycling.com/cca/education/canbike.shtml>) – CAN-BIKE Courses are taught by nationally certified highly skilled cyclists and instructors

Urbanthinkers (www.urbanthinkers.ca) – Creative strategies, initiatives and program development to promote walking & cycling to school.

Community & Policy context

By North American standards, Vancouver has a high cycling mode share – 3.3% for the City (Bicycle Advisory Committee, 2005) and 1.9% for Metro (Pucher, 2006). In efforts to increase this mode share, the City of Vancouver has recently doubled their Bike Network from 80 km to 170km. By the time Vancouver hosts the 2010 Winter Olympics, the City hopes to have cycling trips account for an impressive 10% of the modal share. However, it has been suggested that this ambitious target will require more than just providing cycling infrastructure facilities (Bicycle Advisory Committee, 2005).

In addition to new infrastructure, efforts are being made to encourage cycling across Greater Vancouver through education and promotion. A number of projects are targeted towards schools, however there is little evidence of any school travel planning projects aimed at anyone other than students. British Columbia's *Way to Go* program offers resources to gather important data about the travel habits and concerns of students and parents in order to develop safe walking and cycling programs for students but (Transport Canada, 2007) not for teachers.

This Case Study outlines a different approach: one offering commuter cycling skills and bike education activities to the students' adult role models – teachers, support staff and school administrators. The project – *Cycling Training for the School Community* – was piloted in May 2007 by the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition (VACC) with financial support from the Vancouver Area Transportation Authority (TransLink).

Rationale and objectives

Despite high ownership of bicycles in Canadian homes, (Go For Green, 1999), cycling remains the least utilized travel mode on the daily commute to school (Gilbert & O'Brien, 2005). However, one study found that 75% of the children surveyed said they would prefer to walk or cycle to school (Ontario Walkability Study, 2001). Efforts to encourage students to cut automobile trips and bike to school could benefit from a strong foundation of adult cyclist role models. Adults working in the school system are an essential target audience for cycling promotion because:

1. educators are commuters making daily trips to high traffic destinations;
2. they are, or can be, the primary conduit of school travel planning solutions beyond typical infrastructure improvements; and
3. educators and school staff are role models in both the classroom and school community.

Educators are Commuters

Before focusing on the particulars of educators as potential role models to children and youth, it is worth considering them as employees. School staff make the daily commute to locations that have suffered increasing traffic congestion. In Scotland, where School Travel Planning is strongly supported by National Policy and funding, only 2% of staff at St. Margaret's Academy cycle to work. However when members of staff were asked about changing their commuting habits, the greatest desire for change – at 11% – was to “try cycling to work” (VIPRE, 2007). This encouraging prospect seems to be at the mercy of routine and existing perceptions. When asked why they travel the way they do, most replies focused on speed and habit: “it's the quickest way” (29%), “I prefer this way” (14%) and “I feel that I have no other option” (14%).

The St. Margaret's School Travel Plan indicated that almost half of staff (45%) had a commute of less than 20 minutes. This suggests that cycling could be a viable option for up to four times the number that were interested in giving it a try. Not surprisingly, when asked what would help staff travel more sustainably, the most common response (20%) was for 'more information'. Traditionally, *more information* has referred to brochures with safety tips and maps outlining safest routes. These resources might be useful to existing cyclists, but new and novice cyclists could better benefit from training: including skills on how to cycle safely in traffic, dress for inclement weather, and manage stacks of books or papers. Only after a cyclist has gained greater confidence in these basics would brochures and maps seem useful.

School Travel Planning Solutions Involve more than Infrastructure

In 2005, the Auckland Region (New Zealand) committed to creating a School Travel Plan (STP) in every school within ten years. Although the Region and its various municipalities employ a staff of School Travel Co-ordinators, a great deal of the *TravelWise* STP program delivery and implementation could be directed to its largest audience – the students – through educators. Thus far, educators have only been moderately engaged in integrating STP solutions within their classrooms. One reason for this could be the predominant attention drawn to infrastructure changes within the school community.

While the focus of STP is to alter the travel behaviour of students, school staff are routinely surveyed. The *TravelWise* survey asks staff *what would encourage you to walk or cycle to school?* and then offers a list of infrastructure options such as; cycle lanes, traffic calming, showers & lockers (TravelWise, 2006). This line of inquiry could build an expectation that STP solutions are engineered by outside professionals. However, educators who navigate the route to school by bike would be able to offer valuable input from what road safety engineers call the *vulnerable road user*. Their perspective could add to a wider discussion of STP strategies and solutions.

It's obvious that teachers cannot promote cycling until they are cyclists themselves; with experience cycling around this city.

Mary Sherlock, Vancouver Secondary School Support Teacher

School Staff as Role Models

Finally, educators are role models both inside and outside of the classroom. The *Ontario Education Act* suggests that educators “maintain a higher standard of conduct than other employees (and that by their conduct they are) perceived to uphold the values, beliefs, and knowledge sought to be transmitted by the school system” (Berryman, 1998). When an educator cycles to school, their bicycle, helmet and gear can become visual prompts demonstrating their commitment to environmental stewardship, social responsibility and active living.

Visibility is a key factor in the *Role Model Program's* (2007) efforts to empower under-served students in the San Jose, California area. The premise for this program is that without adult role models in positions of academic success, the life choices of some students of diverse ethnicities may be limited. Similarly with fewer than 3% of adults commuting by bicycle, children and youths are essentially without adult role models on bikes.

In order to increase the mode share of cycling among student, it is important that more adults are visibly traveling to school by bike. Such an effort would help to decrease traffic congestion around schools, provide educators with valuable personal experience about navigating the school community as *vulnerable road users*, and increase the visibility of adult cyclists as role models.

CTSC Goals and Objectives

The Cycling Training for the School Community (CTSC) program involves the co-ordination and promotion of cycling training catered to teachers, school staff and administrators. CTSC workshops offer a combination of a commuter cycling skills course and a

seminar on bike education and promotion activities for the classroom. The goals of the program are:

1. to improve cycling skills of educators who have considered cycling to work but have felt that they lack the confidence; and
2. to make available resources and activities that integrate cycling, bike safety and active transportation ideas into the school community and classroom curriculum.

The objectives of the CTSC program are:

- to raise awareness amongst educators that commuter cycling skills courses for novice cyclists exist, and can be combined with school-centred bike-ed resources;
- to improve personal cycling skills of educators through classroom and on-road instruction;
- to aid in the education and promotion of cycling in schools by providing educators with an inter-active seminar of activities, and local and internet cycling resources;
- to increase the number of educators commuting by bicycle and thereby model bike commuting to children and youths;
- to bring educators who have an interest in cycling together to generate discussion, build camaraderie and support; and
- to set a precedent for commuter cycling training to be offered as paid professional development for educators.

Actions

In December 2006, TransLink agreed to fund a pilot project to offer commuter cycling training and classroom activities to educators as a foundation for further bicycle promotion. The idea had been initiated by two local bicycle advocates and educators – Arthur Orsini and Cara Fisher – as a means of generating greater depth of staff support for bicycle promotion in schools. Despite early enthusiasm for the initiative, the project was delayed by a series of investigations regarding insurance and liability. In order to proceed, Orsini and Fisher contacted the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition (VACC) who had insurance for their existing commuter cycling skills courses. In April 2007 the VACC agreed to administer the CTSC project and the first two pilot courses were scheduled for the following month. Orsini and Fisher acted as the Project Co-ordinators for the Pilot Project and administered the billing and payment for substitute staff to cover two days away from school for each participant.

The pilot required the recruitment of two dozen educators from across Metro Vancouver. To register, participants completed a short questionnaire to identify their cycling use, confidence and interest in bike commuting. A \$50 deposit was required in order to encourage full attendance on both days of the workshop. The project was originally called *Cycling Training for Teachers*, but the name was changed to acknowledge that all school staff had the potential to model commuter cycling to students.

Participants were recruited through email broadcasts across the personal networks of the Project Co-ordinators. This method of outreach proved more than adequate as all available places were filled and confirmed within a week. Twenty-two educators participated in the two pilot workshops over two days in May 2007 at the Vancouver School Board Head Office.

The first day consisted of an eight-hour commuter cycling skills course including classroom and on-road sessions covering how to ride confidently in traffic, check the safety of your bike, ride at night and in the rain, and plan the best route. The second day was a four-hour inter-active bike education and promotion activities seminar including mapping, trip-diaries, bike safety, bike art, and local programs and internet resources for the school community and classroom.

Twenty three educators registered for the two pilot workshops but one withdrew due to a scheduling conflict. The participants listed environmental, health and economic benefits as their prime motivators for signing up. The 'average' participant was a 36-year-old woman teaching elementary school with no previous cycling training, and who had never biked to work.

- Average age of participants was 36.
- Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the participants were female (70% = 16/23).
- Half of the participants were Elementary School Teachers;
 - 12 were Elementary teachers (52%)
 - 8 were Secondary Teachers (35%)
 - 2 were Adult Educators (9%)
 - 1 was an Administrator (with Elementary Classroom duties).
- Prior to the course, 73% of participants had no cycling training.
- Half of the participants (52%) had never cycled to work, three (13%) were daily bicycle commuters.
- Almost three-quarters (70%) *practically never* cycled to work in the winter and two-thirds (65%) *practically never* cycled to work in the spring/autumn.

At the end of the workshop participants completed an evaluation form asking about their cycling confidence and anticipated bike commuting. One month later, another

evaluation form was sent out asking about actual bike commuting since the workshop.

Results

Following the workshop, two-thirds (68%) felt much more confident as a cyclist and better prepared to promote cycling at their school. Practically all of them (90%) felt that at least two colleagues lived within an appropriate cycling distance from their school and might be interested in attending a CTSC workshop.

One month after the workshop, an additional evaluation form was sent out. Despite the busy close of the school year, two-thirds of the participants responded. Four of those fourteen (29%) had made their first ever bike commute to school since the workshop. Two of these new cyclists had continued biking to work at least three days each week. The confidence of these respondents had risen as well as their intention to commute by bike more often. All had discussed bike commuting with colleagues and students – 83% of them claiming to have had *a lot* of these discussions. All but one (93%) had incorporated at least one bike activity into their classes.

I am writing to say a big THANK YOU for having helped to support the Cycling Training for Teachers workshop that was held at the VSB this week. I am a Grade 3 teacher in Vancouver that really believes in promoting environmental stewardship, social responsibility and active living. However, I often feel overwhelmed and ill-equipped to teach about these subjects. Finding a way to combine the three topics in a real, relevant and meaningful way to my students can be challenging. I specifically feel that there is a lack of training and support for teachers who want to implement environmental changes in their schools and classrooms. The VSB plays a very powerful and important role in implementing change in the community. I feel that by having supported this workshop, and hopefully others of its kind in the future, the VSB has taken some steps in the right direction. By equipping its teachers with proper training in sustainable transportation, the VSB demonstrates that environmental issues and healthy living are priorities. I thank TransLink for having recognized the merit in teaching teachers and for having provided the necessary funding to make it possible. The workshop did an amazing job of addressing environmental stewardship, social responsibility and active living. I left feeling inspired and motivated to not only make changes in my personal life, but also to encourage my students to do the same. I was very impressed with the organization and expertise that the presenters of the workshop brought with them. I am writing to thank you for having made this experience possible and to ask that you continue to support this project in the future. Thank you.

Daniele C., Elementary Teacher, Vancouver School Board

I thought this whole idea was really great. It's really a useful & green-friendly idea that's great for health and wealth! My children and I have ridden to work and school lots of days and they really love it. My youngest son got a new, bigger bike with gears so now we can go on longer trips.

Margaret C., Elementary Teacher, Richmond School District

Partners

The CTSC program is hosted by the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition (VACC). The one-and-a-half-day workshops combine a commuter cycling skills course (eight hours) taught by qualified instructors and an inter-active bike education and promotion activities seminar (four hours) co-ordinated with activities previously developed by Urbanthinkers. The initial pilot project was funded by the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority (TransLink) and hosted at the Vancouver School Board Head Office.

In future, it is expected that the VACC will continue to administer and co-ordinate the program while relying on municipal transportation departments and school districts to fund CTSC workshops within their jurisdictions. The workshops will make use of regional resources developed with the support of TransLink.

Resources

The VACC employed two program co-ordinators to generate the pilot of the CTSC project. Once developed, this role required approximately one day per week to administer the recruitment and registration of educators in the month leading up to the workshops.

CAN-BIKE certified instructors were contracted to run the Day One commuter skills course. Two instructors worked together to allow for a class size of 12 – amounting to a cost of approximately \$1,000 for the course material and instructors per 12 participants. (Note: The VACC holds insurance to run cycling training programs and a ratio of no more than six participants per instructor is required for on-road sessions.)

As the inter-active bike-ed and classroom activities seminar could accommodate a larger class size, two groups of 12 participants were combined for a single four-hour seminar on Day Two. In the pilot phase, this seminar was facilitated by two local cycling advocates with experience on bike projects in schools. Once developed, these seminars could be covered by a School Travel Planner or cycling advocate with experience working in schools. A contract of at least two days should be budgeted for a facilitator to prepare, gather resources and deliver the four-hour seminar.

In order to fill all spots under short notice, the pilot project workshops were scheduled during school days. As such, they required a budget to cover substitute staff (i.e. T.O.C.s – teachers-on-call) for two-days per participant. Future workshops will be scheduled on Professional Development (Pro.-D.) days to eliminate the need for substitute staff on Day One. For the Day Two seminar the following day, a budget should allow for either the cost of a buffet dinner (if held after school) or a half-day substitute staff person per participant (if held in the morning or

afternoon). It is not recommended that the Day Two seminar be held during the weekend.

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Urbanthinkers (www.urbanthinkers.ca) – Creative strategies, initiatives and program development to promote walking & cycling to school

Timeline

The timeline for the May 2007 pilot project followed an official agreement by the VACC Board to host the CTSC project on 11th April. Ideally, a call for participants should be sent out at least two months before the workshop.

- February – funding in place for pilot project
- 12th April – finalize workshop venue, date and instructors
- 16th April – email broadcast calling for participants
- 30th April – materials and resources prepared for bike-ed seminar
- 8th May – *Day One course* for first group of 11 participants
- 9th May – *Day One course* for second group of 11 participants
- 10th May – *Day Two seminar* for combined groups of 22 participants
- 14th June – *Evaluation: One month later...* emailed to participants
- July – evaluation & report on pilot project

Lessons learned

While the CTSC project ran only two pilot workshops, there were early lessons learned that have helped guide future implementation and expansion.

Many educators want to commute using more sustainable modes of transportation: As a workplace, schools have well informed employees who should not be overlooked when implementing transportation demand management strategies. Novice and non-cyclists should not be discounted as potential bike commuters. When offered a convenient means of building cycling skills and confidence, new and novice cyclists can be willing to try

bike commuting for its environmental, health, fitness and cost-saving benefits.

Workshops should be scheduled during the work day:

Holding CTSC workshops during the school day acknowledges that commuter cycling can contribute to an educator's role as a model of environmental stewardship, social responsibility and active living.

Educators should be recruited according to the age

level of their students: Where numbers of registrants permit, participants should be grouped according to their roles with either primary, intermediate or secondary students. This can enable educators to discuss specific cycling activities, incentives and barriers appropriate to the age and development of the children and youths they work with.

Workshops should be organized per school district:

In Metro Vancouver, future CTSC workshops will be hosted separately in each municipality and/or school district. In addition to the convenience of similar Pro.-D. calendars, Municipal and School District staff responsible for cycling infrastructure and facilities will be invited to discuss current and proposed cycling initiatives with the educators.

The Day Two Seminar is important in building

camaraderie and confidence: The logistics of participants needing to schedule two consecutive days away from school led the organizers to consider other options for the Day Two seminar; i.e. hold the seminar on a subsequent Pro.-D. day (several weeks later) or packaging the material in the form of a booklet, video or DVD.

However, the participants claimed that the camaraderie generated while sharing ideas and obstacles on the topic of cycling was valuable. Not only did the discussions on the second day allow further comment about the Day One cycling skills course, but it also enabled the educators to hear each other's concerns, ideas and extensions. This helped build their confidence to make use of the materials.

Invite School District staff to the workshops: At the CTSC pilot, a member of the Vancouver School Board's upper management peeked in and mused: *living only 20 blocks away – I should take this workshop too*. Participation of school district staff in the workshops would be beneficial in strengthening a school board's commitment to cycling. In particular it could lead to adequate, secure and sheltered bike parking facilities for staff and students at all school district facilities.

Next steps

The CTSC workshops were well received by participants and achieved their goals of encouraging educators to become skilled and confident bicycle commuters, and bringing the topic of bicycle commuting into classrooms and staffrooms. The next steps in developing and expanding this program will be to:

- meet with Pro.-D. day co-ordinators in the School Districts across Metro Vancouver to build familiarity with the CTSC project and integrate the workshops into the Pro.-D. calendar
 - meet with municipal transportation planners to discuss the shared goals between the CTSC project and their cycling promotion, and therefore request funding for workshops in each municipality
 - build-on and expand thematic resource materials for the Day Two seminar – i.e. intermediate level activities, youth leader cycling initiatives, etc.
 - arrange for TransLink buses with bike racks to be available at the workshops for the participants to practice loading and removing bikes on buses
 - work to raise the standards (and requirements) for adequate secure, sheltered bike racks for school staff and students at all Metro Vancouver schools
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