

# Changing transportation behaviour in Ontario

## Overview

Transport Canada offers a wealth of case studies and issues papers profiling programs and strategies that encourage the use of more sustainable transportation modes in Canada.

But how do those initiatives affect the individual? This article profiles several Ontarians who have changed their transportation habits as a direct result of their participation in a sustainable transportation program. Their stories illustrate how even simple transportation initiatives can have a long-term, beneficial impact on people's travel behaviours—changing drivers into carpoolers, transit users, cyclists, pedestrians and teleworkers.

## Selected Resources

Smart Commute, [www.smartcommute.ca](http://www.smartcommute.ca), [Carpool Zone](#), [TMA Toolkit](#), and [tips for planning the commute](#).

Ontario Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure's [TDM grant program](#).

McKenzie-Mohr & Associates, [Fostering Sustainable Behaviour: Community-based Social Marketing](#)

## The Ontario Experience

In recent years, Ontario has invested millions of dollars to improve passenger transportation across the province, most notably for public transit systems. In addition to federal gas tax funding to municipalities for infrastructure, the Ontario government provides local governments with 2¢/litre of its provincial gas taxes. By 2010, the Ontario government will have provided \$1.6 billion in gas tax funding to Ontario municipalities for local transit priorities.

In addition, the province introduced a transportation demand management (TDM) grant program in 2008 to encourage cycling, walking, transit and trip reduction. Up to \$50,000 per project is available for municipalities to develop and implement TDM plans.

But even with such investments, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from passenger transportation continue to rise. Between 1990 and 2007, emissions rose 24%, while the population increased by 16% over the same period.

It's clear that more needs to be done to reduce emissions from passenger transportation and this paper showcases some of the ways that Ontario communities are helping to do just that.

In this article, Transport Canada shares the stories of four Ontarians who have changed their travel behaviours as a direct result of policies, programs or other initiatives available within their community.

## Community-based social marketing

Two of the stories in this paper illustrate how community-based social marketing (CBSM) campaigns can lead to long-term behaviour change.

CBSM techniques focus on direct contact among community members and on removing the structural barriers that prevent people from changing their behaviour. In the case of sustainable transportation, CBSM has been used by such annual campaigns as the *Clean Air Commute* and *Shifting Gears* to encourage people to adopt more sustainable transportation habits.

CBSM programs have a strong track record of changing people's behaviours and can be delivered by a wide variety of stakeholders, including municipalities, health, social and environmental agencies and non-government associations, as well as schools and community groups.

## Transportation management associations

Ontario has the largest number of transportation management associations (TMA) of any province in the country. The largest of these is Smart Commute, which serves nine municipalities in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area (GTAH).

TMA's are non-profit, member-controlled organizations that provide sustainable transportation services in a particular area, such as a commercial district, mall, medical center or industrial park. They are typically public-private partnerships, consisting primarily of area businesses with local government support.

TMA's provide a framework for delivering a variety of transportation services, making them more cost-effective than programs managed by individual businesses. In particular, TMA's allow even small employers (25 employees or less) to provide a range of services comparable to larger companies.

Smart Commute began in 2004 as a way to bring local employers together to reduce traffic congestion and provide employees with more sustainable transportation options.

Among its services, Smart Commute offers Carpool Zone, a carpool ridematching service available in English, French and Chinese, emergency ride home programs, and seminars and other information resources. It also helps to coordinate events, such as the *Clean Air Commute* and conducts site assessments and surveys so that employers can understand their employees' transportation needs.

This paper includes the stories of two people who changed their way of commuting because of their participation in Smart Commute Hamilton.

## Changing habits, one person at a time

### Cycling can be an adventure

Christine P. lives and works in Richmond Hill, Ontario, part of the York Region. She first tried cycling to work when her workplace signed up for the *Clean Air Commute*, a week-long campaign that encourages people to try sustainable transportation.

Before joining the campaign, Christine always drove to and from work. "Living in York Region, I am not alone in being tied to my car and frequently, I was the only person in it," she says. "Distances in this region are significant, the population is not dense and communities have sprawled."

Christine was encouraged to participate in the *Clean Air Commute* campaign because it was presented in an inviting and positive way. "Having my workplace sign on showed leadership," she says. As a senior manager, Christine also wanted to set an example for her employees.

Christine's 30-kilometre round trip commute is longer than average. Statistics Canada notes that for people living in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton areas (GTHA), the average round-trip commute is about 19 kilometres. She decided to cycle with co-workers during the campaign for safety and social reasons.

"We began with some trepidation," she recalls. "We weren't even certain that we were capable of a 30-kilometre round trip cycling trip. But when we successfully completed the challenge there was a real feeling of exhilaration and empowerment."

The fresh morning air and afternoon sunshine were a welcome change to the stress of driving. "My energy level improved and my physical stamina increased," she says. "It also led me to additional efforts to improve my physical fitness and I feel a renewed sense of adventure."

Even when the one-week campaign was over, Christine has continued to make cycling her commuting choice during good weather.

### A carpool community

Elizabeth works for the City of Hamilton and sometimes needs a car during the day for her job. Luckily, the city provides a pool of fleet vehicles for use by employees.

When the city joined *Smart Commute*, a transportation management association in the GTHA, Elizabeth, a long-time single occupant driver, decided to give carpooling a try.

"I always felt bad driving alone, I didn't feel comfortable doing it," she says. Instead, she found a carpool match using *Smart Commute's* ridematching website, *Carpool Zone*.

All of her fellow carpoolers work at the city and there are usually at least four people in the car for the 14-kilometre round trip commute.

"I don't have to worry about driving every day and I like having the company," she says. "My fellow carpoolers are also from different city divisions so we get to learn about what the other departments do. That's been very useful when issues come up at work—I can call one of my carpoolers for help."

### Making smart choices, inspiring others

Peter is not exactly a convert to sustainable transportation, but his story is inspiring to anyone who is considering a move to a healthier lifestyle.

Peter now works as the transportation coordinator for Hamilton's *Smart Commute*, but it was while completing his master's degree that he made the move to sustainable transportation modes, a decision he has never regretted.

"When I got the job in Hamilton, I specifically bought a house downtown so that I could walk to work, and then cycle and use transit for other things," he says. His commute is a short 10-15 minute walk.

He does own a car but splits the responsibilities and costs with his sister, Maria.

"The car usually just sits in the driveway," he says. "I take it for longer trips up north and sometimes still take it for grocery trips, but I'm trying to eliminate those."

Because Peter and Maria split the costs, the financial benefits have been well worth it.

"When I was driving all the time I had to gas up every week," he says. "Now, I only need to get gas every two weeks, if that. Plus I only pay half the insurance and a smaller portion of the car loan."

If he needs transportation during the day for his job, he cycles or takes the bus.

"Being a transit rider makes me feel better," he says. "When I use transit my stress is reduced, I can listen to music or I can work. When I'm in a car I can't do that, so I never see that time as wasted."

Even when he's out of his own city, Peter chooses transit over the car, explaining that whenever he's in Ottawa he stays with a friend who lives very close to the TransitWay, Ottawa's bus rapid transit system.

Peter has definitely noticed the health benefits of using sustainable transportation. "I feel healthier and sometimes just feeling healthy about something is a health benefit in itself!"

He's also received accolades from others when he shows up to a meeting by bicycle or bus. Oftentimes, his meetings take him up the Hamilton Mountain, the area that divides the upper and lower portions of the city.

"People find it hard to take the bus up the mountain but when they find out that I've done it they're impressed. It makes me feel good," he says, adding that he hopes his example inspires others to do the same.

### **A picture is worth a thousand actions**

A simple poster on a downtown information board spawned huge changes in Christine J.'s life.

This Peterborough mother of an active eight-year old son recalls the day she saw an advertisement for the *Shifting Gears* campaign of Peterborough Moves, an organization that delivers information and programs that support sustainable transportation initiatives. *Shifting Gears* is a month-long campaign to get people to try cycling.

"A vacation was offered as the prize for taking part," she says. "My family has never been on a vacation, ever. Although I didn't win the prize I did get into shape and changed my habits, so it was a great incentive."

Christine took the *Shifting Gears* challenge and involved her son as well, cycling with him to and from school each day, a 10-km round trip.

As a part-time communications coordinator at one of Peterborough's post-secondary institutions, Christine is able to telecommute a few days a week for her job. When she isn't telecommuting, she cycles to work in the spring, summer and fall. In winter, she drives her son to school but carpools with a neighbour. Errands, like grocery shopping or to the bank, are mostly done on foot.

*Shifting Gears* also got Christine thinking about the family car. "Our car was dying at the time," she says, "and we had effectively been without one for about three and a half months." She finally ditched their inefficient car for a more efficient four-cylinder model.

Christine says that the whole experience has been overwhelmingly positive.

"I bike about an hour and a half a day and that additional time in the sunshine, soaking up the Vitamin D, has made a huge difference to my outlook," she says. "As soon as

I'm back on the bike after the winter my memory improves and I feel like I'm a sharp, intelligent woman again."

She recounts the other benefits she's noticed. "My winter padding is slowly melting off and since I started cycling I've lost seven pounds! That inspired me to eat more veggies and I've also noticed that I don't need my usual three cups of coffee in the morning to feel alive," she says. "At the beginning, I thought I would be more tired, but I was surprised at how much energy I have."

She also appreciates the time she spends with her son, cycling to school.

"We connect and tell stories, it's a way to keep our family together," she says. She also notes that on many mornings they leave early so that they can stop by the lake *en route* to school. "Sometimes we forget how picturesque our city is, so we'll stop to look at the ducks and the geese and take a moment to breathe in our natural surroundings," she says.

## **Programs, policies and initiatives**

Each of the programs highlighted in this paper is described below.

### **Clean Air Commute**

The *Clean Air Commute*, organized by Pollution Probe, is a week-long event in June of each year. Organized at workplaces, the campaign encourages people to try a more sustainable mode for their daily commute, instead of driving. Since 1993, it has registered more than 650 workplaces in the GTA and cut more than 4,000 tonnes of GHG emissions. In surveys conducted since 2001, more than 70% of the people who switched from driving to a cleaner mode of transportation during the event said that they intended to continue on a permanent basis.

### **Smart Commute**

The *Smart Commute* transportation management association is a partnership between Metrolinx (formerly the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority) and the cities and regions of the GTHA. *Smart Commute* helps local employers and commuters explore different commuter options and offers a wide array of services, including:

- Exclusive ridematching programs for employers
- Site assessments and surveys to understand commuting behaviour
- Shuttle bus and emergency ride home programs
- Workshops, lunch & learns and seminars
- Incentives and promotions.

*Smart Commute* also helps deliver the *Clean Air Commute* to its affiliated employers.

Between 2005 and 2008, *Smart Commute* reduced the drive-alone mode from 50% to 48% and increased carpooling

from 7% to 13%, eliminating 100 million kilometres of car travel (Reinventing the Commute).

*Smart Commute Hamilton*, one of the TMAs that is part of the larger *Smart Commute* program, is led by the City of Hamilton. Aside from the services offered by *Smart Commute*, *Smart Commute Hamilton* offers its employees secure bicycle parking and discounted transit passes.

### **Peterborough Moves and Shifting Gears**

Peterborough Moves delivers information and programs that support sustainable transportation initiatives in the City and County of Peterborough. Its programs include the Active and Safe Routes to School Peterborough, cycling classes and information on fuel-efficient driving.

*Shifting Gears* is a month-long transportation competition that encourages people to leave their cars at home and use sustainable ways to get to work (walk, bike, take transit, share a ride or work from home).

### **Highlights**

Anyone who has ever tried to lose weight or quit smoking knows that breaking a habit is hard to do. Changing transportation habits can be just as challenging. The perceived convenience of single occupant vehicle travel can sometimes outweigh the very tangible advantages that come with sustainable transportation modes: a healthier lifestyle, financial savings, and community and social benefits.

All of the people interviewed for this paper made a change to their commuting behaviour and did so because of a program or initiative offered in their community or workplace.

This section presents a few of their insights on the barriers they have faced and what program organizers might do to improve their initiatives.

### **Improving transit**

Although Christine J. of Peterborough lives in a central location, she works part-time outside of the downtown area of the city, making transit use difficult.

“Most city buses route through the downtown as the central hub, which makes sense for the majority of commuters but doesn’t work for me,” she says. “There is a bus I can take to get to work, but it’s not convenient or fast and it takes more than an hour to get there. By car it only takes about 10 or 15 minutes.”

Improving transit routes, particularly to destinations such as post-secondary institutions is one way that municipal and transit planners can improve the uptake of sustainable modes of transportation.

### **Improving sidewalk and cycling infrastructure**

The biggest challenge that Christine P. faced wasn’t the length of her commute but the route.

“My route isn’t particularly bike-friendly. I have to travel on very busy roads that have no cycling lanes,” she says. “Some of my co-workers and I have raised this with our local politicians, but we haven’t overcome the problem yet.”

Christine J. cites similar challenges. She admits that she cycles with her son on the sidewalks, but with no bike trail and few bicycle lanes, using the sidewalk makes her feel safer.

She says that if bicycle lanes were added and sidewalks cleaned faster in winter (and sand or salt applied), she would likely try winter cycling.

“There are some people who bike here in the winter, but many drivers are not aware of sharing the road,” she says, adding that the few bike lanes the city does have are often used by cars as parking spaces.

“Increasing the number of bike lanes and enforcing their use is something the municipality could work on to make cycling easier.”

### **Planning the commute**

When people begin to use sustainable transportation modes—particularly those who choose an active mode—advice on route planning, clothing, weather and other handy tips can make trip the easier.

“Cycling to work takes some planning. I check the weather forecast, keep a change of clothes at the office and allow for additional time,” says Christine P. “But it’s worth the extra effort. Even the time when the fire alarm went off and I got caught changing my cycling clothes to business attire!”

Elizabeth found that simply keeping on schedule with her fellow carpoolers was the biggest challenge.

“I have two children and I have to get them to school and daycare before I get into my carpool,” she says. Alternating drivers and deciding who will drive ahead of time based on their schedules worked for Elizabeth’s carpool.

As with many other sustainable transportation organizations, *Smart Commute* offers practical tips for walkers and cyclists, as well as advice for those who choose to take transit, telework or carpool. For links to these resources, see the **Selected Resources** section at the beginning of this paper.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the fact that Ontario residents have the longest average commute (~8.7 km daily roundtrip), the provincial government, municipalities and community and business groups are making steady progress in improving the

sustainable transportation options available to people. Ontario, for example, boasts the highest transit use of any province in Canada with 12.9% of workers using public transit for their daily commute; of Ontario's largest municipalities, Toronto leads the pack with 22% of people getting to work by transit.

Although more needs to be done to encourage people to adopt more sustainable modes of travel, the stories in this paper show how effective initiatives like TMAs and social marketing campaigns can be.

Whether it's the long-term goals of a transportation management association, or a week- or month-long Clean Air Commute. <http://www.nothingispossible.ca/index/index/commute>.

Community Foundations of Canada. *Average Commuting Time and Median Distance for a Round Trip Between Work and Home*. Based on data from Statistics Canada. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-XII-1.pdf>.

Ontario Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure. *Public Transit Highlights*. <http://www.mei.gov.on.ca/en/infrastructure/sectors/?page=transportation>.

Ontario Ministry of Transportation. *Ontario Transportation Demand Management Municipal Grant Program*. <http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/sustainability/programs/tdm-grant.shtml>.

Natural Resources Canada. Office of Energy Efficiency. *Passenger Transportation GHG Emissions by Energy Source*. [http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/corporate/statistics/neud/dpa/tablestrends2/tran\\_on\\_5\\_e\\_4.cfm?attr=0](http://oee.nrcan.gc.ca/corporate/statistics/neud/dpa/tablestrends2/tran_on_5_e_4.cfm?attr=0).

Peterborough Moves. <http://www.peterboroughmoves.com/>. Information on its Shifting Gears campaign can be found by clicking the Shifting Gears link from the main Peterborough Moves page.

Smart Commute <http://www.smartcommute.ca/>. *Reinventing the Commute: How Employers are Greening the Trip to Work*. <http://www.smartcommute.ca/papers>. Smart Commute Hamilton can be found by clicking the Hamilton link from the main Smart Commute page.

Statistics Canada. *Population and dwelling counts*. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/popdwel/Table.cfm?T=101> and *Census 2006* <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm>.

Transport Canada. *The Role of Community-Based Social Marketing in Supporting Active and Sustainable Transportation*. <http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/programs/environment-utsp-commsocialmarketing-839.htm>.

Victoria Transport Policy Institute. *Transportation Management Associations*. <http://www.vtpi.org/tdm/tdm44.htm>.

sustainable transportation campaign to get people to take that first step, such initiatives play a vital role in changing transportation behaviours. And changing that behaviour over the long term is ultimately what defines the success of any sustainable transportation program.

## Resources