

### Green Commuting Initiatives

**Organization**

Resource Conservation Manitoba

**Status**

Started 1997, ongoing

**Overview**

Green Commuting Initiatives (GCI) promotes sustainable and active transportation practices in Winnipeg workplaces and schools by encouraging cycling, walking, transit and carpooling.

Resource Conservation Manitoba, an environmental non-governmental organization that leads the way in providing community-based trip reduction programs for schools and workplaces in Manitoba, currently coordinates four programs under the GCI banner:

- off ramp Manitoba – A secondary school vehicle trip reduction program designed to encourage high school students to become leaders in the green commuting initiative at their schools
- Active and Safe Routes to School – An active transportation program that works with parents and teachers to get elementary-aged children to and from school in a safe and more sustainable manner, including walking and cycling
- Winnipeg Commuter Challenge – An annual public outreach project that fosters friendly competition between workplaces and schools to adopt alternative forms of transportation during National Environment Week
- Going Green – A pilot project to provide TDM tools to Winnipeg workplaces that build capacity in supporting alternatives to the single occupant vehicle

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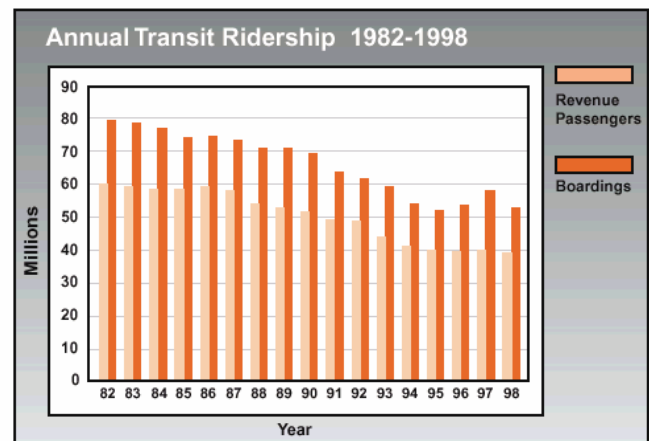
**Resources**

- Green Commuting Initiatives  
 (www.resourceconservation.mb.ca/gci/gci.html)

**Community context**

As with many other municipalities across Canada, the City of Winnipeg has historically accommodated increased auto travel through significant investments in new roads, road widenings, bridges and underpasses. In the past, these improvements were made without parallel investment in public transit, cycling or pedestrian amenities.

As a result of these improvements, traffic congestion is minimal in Winnipeg and travel by auto around the city is easier than ever. Consequently, the majority of commuters in Winnipeg travel by car, while Winnipeg Transit’s overall share of the city-wide work and post-secondary trip market is only 20%. A very small percentage of commuters or students walk or cycle to work or school.



Source: *Direction to the Future: Guide to Better Transit in Winnipeg* (January 2000)

**Policy context**

Although the City of Winnipeg is in the process of developing a comprehensive environmental strategy in which sustainable and active transportation are key areas highlighted for policy development, its current programs and policies are limited.

Resource Conservation Manitoba’s (RCM’s) GCI program was developed partly in response to fill this void and to expand and improve transportation demand management programming in the city.

RCM's programs are also designed to respond to provincial and federal directives to improve community-level GHG reduction initiatives as a part of Canada's commitment to implementing the Kyoto accord.

## Rationale and objectives

According to research conducted by Resource Conservation Manitoba, the government of Manitoba and the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute:

- Commuting by car is the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in Manitoba.
- Up to 50% of children are driven to and from school each day
- 63% of Manitobans do not engage in enough physical activity.
- 55% of youth aged 12-19 are not active enough for optimal growth and development

The statistics are more worrisome when considered in the light of a growing body of medical research that shows a strong correlation between increasing levels of inactivity and increasing rates of coronary heart disease, hypertension and adolescent diabetes.

The Green Commuting Initiative (GCI) seeks to help reverse these troubling trends by promoting more sustainable and active forms of transportation, including walking, cycling and transit.

In addition to the overall objective of reducing transportation-related GHG emissions, each of the four GCI initiatives have separate but related program objectives.

### off ramp Manitoba

- To reduce the number of single occupant vehicles commuting to and from Manitoba high schools
- To increase awareness of climate change and transportation issues in high schools
- To encourage more active and environmentally-friendly transportation choices amongst high school students, including walking, cycling and transit

### Active and Safe Routes to School

- To increase physical activity amongst elementary-aged children
- To ease traffic congestion around schools
- To improve safety and calm streets in and around school neighbourhoods
- To improve ambient air quality in the community at large and immediately around schools

## Winnipeg Commuter Challenge

- To promote more sustainable and active transportation alternatives in Winnipeg workplaces and schools
- To highlight the environmental, physical and public health benefits of more sustainable transportation choices
- To build a network of committed individuals who will take the sustainable transportation message into their respective workplace or school.

## Going Green

- To demonstrate the economic and environmental benefits of workplace-based TDM programs
- To distribute resources on sustainable transportation to workplaces in Manitoba

## Actions

Resource Conservation Manitoba (RCM) is a non-profit, non-governmental environmental organization directed by an elected community board. RCM's mission is to promote ecological sustainability through environmental education and to develop alternatives to current practices.

Sustainable transportation is one of RCM's core program areas. Beginning in 1997, RCM began researching and promoting transportation demand management initiatives for application in Winnipeg.

Green Commuting Initiatives (GCI) is a palette of four, interrelated sustainable transportation programs targeting Winnipeg workplaces and schools. The programs all encourage individuals to consider using active modes of commuting and the use of public transit or ridesharing.

### off ramp Manitoba

Launched in the fall of 2003 as a pilot project at four high schools, off ramp Manitoba is designed to get high school students to implement campaigns that encourage fellow students and staff to take the "off ramp" and use alternative forms of transportation to get to and from school. The program is modeled on a successful program developed by a Vancouver-based sustainable transportation organization (please see the case study *off ramp: A Secondary School Trip Reduction Program*).

The program provides resources and support to interested students and teachers in establishing sustainable transportation initiatives at their school or community.

The goal of each off ramp initiative is to change attitudes and circumstances so that secondary school students increasingly use sustainable forms of transportation. The objectives of these activities are to:

- Raise awareness of the health and environmental consequences of individual travel choices
- Raise the social stature of sustainable transportation choices, such as walking, cycling, skateboarding, in-line skating, transit and carpooling
- Reward 'good' behaviour of those already traveling to school sustainably

Events are planned to focus the group's efforts into activities to get the rest of the students walking, cycling, taking transit or carpooling to school.

The long-term objective of the program is to develop a network of off ramp clubs or groups at high schools throughout Manitoba.



*Students and teachers take part in hands-on activities at the off ramp sustainable transportation workshop*

### **Active and Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) Program**

In 2002, RCM began a pilot project with four elementary schools in Winnipeg to encourage the use of active modes of transportation to and from school on a year-round basis. The pilot was highly successful and built the foundation for RCM's current Active and Safe Routes to School Program.

RCM works in partnership with Go for Green's National Active and Safe Routes to School Program. Go for Green is a national non-profit organization promoting active living and the environment.

There are several components of the ASRTS program which are tailored to meet the specific needs of participating schools and communities. Program components include neighbourhood walkabouts, transportation surveys, walking clubs (e.g. Walking Wednesdays and Footloose Fridays), walking/cycling school buses for children with adult supervision for safety and traffic awareness, no-idling zones and active

transportation events including Clean Air Day and International Walk to School Day.

"Promoting walk to school initiatives is a win-win situation for schools," says Program Coordinator Andrea Lamboo Miln of RCM. "Not only is walking a great way for children to build physical activity into their day, but promoting walking to school can also help schools address the growing traffic congestion experienced during drop off and pick up times."



*Bike racks at Bairdmore Elementary School on Clean Air Day*

### **Winnipeg Commuter Challenge**

The Winnipeg Commuter Challenge is an annual event that fosters friendly competition between workplaces and schools to adopt alternative forms of transportation during National Environment Week. The Commuter Challenge is part of a larger national sustainable transportation event to celebrate Environment Week.

In Winnipeg, the competition encourages businesses, schools and individuals to bus, bike, walk, skate, paddle, carpool and telecommute to work or school during one week in late May or early June. Green or active kilometers are compiled for each registered organization on the National commuter challenge website, and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions are calculated from participants collectively choosing green or active modes of transportation.

Media events are held prior to and during the Commuter Challenge and prizes are awarded to businesses, individuals and schools for the highest participation rates in several different categories.

As a companion event, RCM also organizes the Winnipeg Campus Commuter Challenge for students and staff from Winnipeg's four major post-secondary institutions.



*Participants of the Amazing Commuter Race, part of the Winnipeg Commuter Challenge 2002 media kick-off Event*

### Going Green

Going Green is a pilot project that seeks to build upon and expand RCM's current Transportation Demand Management programs and services developed through previous RCM Climate Change programs.

The program links into the Winnipeg Commuter Challenge by working with four Commuter Challenge workplace coordinators who are looking to build capacity and identify mechanisms of support within their own organizations to promote transportation alternatives.

One such workplace is Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC). RCM is working with the Green Citizenship Committee at the PWGSC downtown Winnipeg office to develop a transportation survey that provides baseline data on current commuting trends, assesses the willingness of employees to try alternative modes, and identifies barriers for prospective green commuters. PWGSC committed resources to develop the survey, which was tested by a dozen employees before being launched to all 200 downtown Winnipeg employees.

Another objective of the project is to develop web-based and electronic resources to promote and support active and sustainable transportation. To date, a web page has been designed to promote the Walk 'n Roll Guide, a planning resource developed by Go for Green and Health Canada, to help deliver workplace active transportation promotion and incentives.



*PWGSC employees test the on-line transportation options survey*

### Results

To date, each of the programs has been successful and is growing in popularity. Serge LaRoche, one of GCI's Program Coordinators, thinks that the trend "is indicative of the growing awareness among Winnipeg workplaces and schools of the personal and community benefits associated with active and green commuting."

The Commuter Challenge in particular has had a consistent increase in participation over the years. In 2003, Winnipeg placed first overall in Canada and boasted the following achievements:

- Highest number of participants: 10,058
- Best participation rate among major cities: 1.6 %
- Second highest number of participating workplaces and schools: 155
- Third largest number of green kilometres commuted: 440,000 kilometres

"The increased participation in the event shows that Winnipeggers are looking for an efficient transit service, safe cycling routes, and incentives to ridesharing, similar to those offered in other Canadian cities", says LaRoche. "The Commuter Challenge highlights the need in Winnipeg for safe and efficient ways of commuting to and from work or school that do not rely on a single-occupant vehicle," he adds.

The Active and Safe Routes to School has also been successful and the program is currently being expanded to other elementary schools in Winnipeg and throughout Manitoba. Most recently, 6,000 students from 21 schools across Winnipeg participated in Clean Air Day activities, while another 30,000 students from across the province participated in International Walk to School Day, an internationally recognized day that celebrates the many benefits of walking to school.



*Arthur E. Wright Community School participates in International Walk to School Day*

The off ramp Manitoba program has also been successful. After its first year of operation, the program wishes to expand to other high schools in Winnipeg. So far, presentations have been given to student groups from six high schools.

Significant achievements have also been made with the Going Green pilot workplaces including:

- Winnipeg's main hospital, the Health Sciences Centre, is promoting a rideshare program to be launched in conjunction with the Winnipeg Commuter Challenge 2004.
- The International Institute for Sustainable Development has conducted a workplace transportation survey at its three locations.
- Public Works and Government Services Canada has completed the in-house design and delivery of a web-based employee transportation survey for its three downtown Winnipeg locations and is now completing a green commuting plan to be presented to Management.
- Manitoba Hydro's Green Commuting Committee is developing an internal green commuting web page and organizing pre-Commuter Challenge events for Sustainable Transportation Awareness month in April.

## Participants

A wide range of community stakeholders and agencies have participated in GCI program, including all levels of government, individual schools and schools districts and other environmental organizations.

Some of the key planning, implementation and funding partners have included:

- City of Winnipeg
- Winnipeg Free Press
- Investors Group
- Manitoba Public Health Association
- Winnipeg Transit
- Manitoba Hydro
- Manitoba Cycling Association
- Environment Canada
- Province of Manitoba
- Go for Green
- The Winnipeg Foundation
- Great West Life Assurance Company
- Manitoba Agencies for School Health
- International Institute for Sustainable Development

## Resources

Currently, two full time staff are responsible for the coordination of the four GCI programs. During the larger annual events, such as the Winnipeg Commuter Challenge, additional temporary support staff are sometimes hired.

Each of GCI's four programs are funded through a mix of sources, including government, foundations and businesses. When fully funded, annual operating costs for the four programs are estimated at \$200,000. These costs may increase or decrease depending on the number of schools and businesses participating in GCI programs.

Stable long-term program funding is an ongoing challenge and requires constant staff attention.

## Lessons learned

The successes of the four Green Commuting Initiatives illustrate the value of community-based non-governmental organizations in delivering and managing sustainable urban transportation programs. Some of the lessons learned from the GCI programs include:

- **Pilot programs prior to full implementation.** There is tremendous value in piloting programs first to gauge the level of potential interest from the community prior to establishing a city- or province-wide program. Pilot programs also provide an excellent opportunity to learn from pilot participants. Information gathered can then be used to develop and implement a more successful program.
- **Ensure program flexibility.** Build adaptability into programming to allow programs to be tailored to the specific needs of participating workplaces, schools and educational institutions, particularly as each will likely be at a different level of engagement on the issue of sustainable transportation.
- **Create relationships of trust with program partners.** Building commitment to change individual commuting behaviour requires more than 12 months. Maintaining continuity in services is important in order to build confidence and trust with program partners and client groups. Creating these relationships requires time and committed communication. Coordinating personal meetings can be one of the most effective and least expensive methods to build trust.
- **Carry out public events.** Events can be an effective strategy for introducing green commuting practices into schools and workplaces, since they provide participants with specific, time-limited initial experiences that build interest in committing to further steps.
- **Include an action component in all programs.** RCM believes that educational efforts (e.g. climate change messaging) achieve better results when they include a realistic and convenient action component. It is more

effective to offer solutions rather than just describe problems.

## **Next steps**

Both the off ramp Manitoba program and the Active and Safe Routes to School program are looking to expand to new elementary and high schools in Winnipeg and throughout Manitoba.

An idle free zone campaign is planned for elementary schools, “Remember the Rule: Don’t Idle at School”, as well as the development of a province – wide Walking Wednesday Club.

The Going Green project is in the process of developing user-friendly tools and resources that will calculate individual and collective GHG emission reductions.

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*Images are courtesy Resource Conservation Manitoba, except as noted*