

Municipal Governments and Sustainable Communities:
A BEST PRACTICES GUIDE 2001
(Excerpts related to Sustainable Transportation)

FCM-CH2M HILL
Sustainable Community Awards

CH2MHILL



Canada

(Complete copies of this Guide may be downloaded from <http://kn.fcm.ca>)





FCM-CH2M HILL Sustainable Community Awards 2001 Winners

TRANSPORTATION

Regional Municipality of Waterloo, Ontario
Developing a regional bus system that increases transit ridership1

FCM-CH2M HILL Sustainable Community Awards 2001 Submissions

TRANSPORTATION

Resort Municipality of Whistler, British Columbia
Whistler Comprehensive Transportation Strategy4

City of New Westminster, British Columbia
McBride Boulevard Pedestrian/Bicycle Overpass Project4

City of New Westminster, British Columbia
Walkable Cities4

2001 Winners

TRANSPORTATION



Developing a regional bus system that increases transit ridership

Population: 450,000

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Regional Municipality of Waterloo's new regional transit system provides a seamless network and fare structure across three cities, including specialized transit service to three rural communities. The Grand River Transit (GRT) system has increased ridership in the region by four per cent in its first year of operation. By decreasing automobile use, the system has reduced vehicle air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and energy use — critical steps toward fostering a sustainable community. GRT conventional transit was launched on January 1, 2000, followed by the formation of GRT MobilityPLUS (specialized transit) on January 1, 2001.

BACKGROUND

Waterloo region is a community of 450,000 spread over an area of 1,382 square kilometres in southwestern Ontario. The regional government of Waterloo is made up of three municipalities: Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo. Prior to January 2000, the area had two conventional municipal transit organizations, Kitchener Transit and Cambridge Transit. Cambridge Transit included a service for people with disabilities in that city, while Kitchener and Waterloo used a separate service for these clients. Two other services provided medical and senior transportation in the rural communities of Wellesley, Woolwich and Wilmot. A private carrier provided intercity transportation between Kitchener and Cambridge. In 1997, the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC) issued briefing papers that recommended changes to how communities manage their transportation systems. TAC suggested that in order to make public transit more efficient, municipal governments should focus their infrastructure development to better accommodate buses rather than focus on the needs of automobiles.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Waterloo's 1999 Regional Transportation Master Plan was heavily influenced by TAC. As a result, it contained one principal objective: to reduce the share of automobile travel by encouraging people to use alternative modes of transit. To meet that objective, planners recognized the need to create an integrated, more efficient transit system. However, provincial legislation and licence restrictions prevented integration under

the municipal-based transit structure. "Because of provincial legislation, we would have had to go to the Transportation Board to get licences to cross boundaries and link the systems," said Regional Director of Transit Services Don Snow. "We decided that process was too cumbersome." Instead, the region opted for a simpler solution — changing the Regional Municipality of Waterloo Act to allow for an integrated transit system. This, coupled with the fact that the Government of Ontario encourages regional governments to increase efficiency by amalgamating local services under a regional banner, led Waterloo to its decision to create the GRT. "The goal from the beginning was to meet the targets set out in the region's master plan, specifically to increase ridership," said Snow. "And the most effective and progressive way to accomplish this objective was to consolidate into an integrated system, managed and controlled by the region." In the short term, Waterloo aimed to change over to the new transit structure incrementally. This kept disruption to service and employees at a minimum. To reduce anxiety about the change and to discourage resistance, the region developed a transitional marketing plan that called for open communication with all the affected parties. Long term, the region aims to reduce automobile use from 84 per cent to 77 per cent by 2016. Achieving that goal will require a doubling of transit ridership and a five to seven per cent increase in the share of travellers choosing transit.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

To launch GRT, the region had to pull together the staff and systems of several local communities and develop a common plan. That meant creating a new administration and merging two unions while assuring employees they would not be laid off. The amalgamation affected 370 employees from six different employee groups with a variety of job classifications and responsibilities.

To keep the transition running smoothly, the region established a project team and hired a consultant to prepare a new regional transit organizational structure.

The transition team worked within a tight time frame. Regional council made the decision to amalgamate in spring 1999. By October, the team had to present to council its plan for the creation of a regional transit system. Council expected the team to launch the new system by January 2000.



Within the first 10 months of the project, the transition team had completed the following:

- The payroll and human resources team transferred six different employee groups to the regional payroll system while the benefits team transferred benefit coverage for all staff to the region. Meanwhile, staff in charge of labour relations established a communications protocol with numerous bargaining units. This kept all relevant groups well informed of the region's progress and process. Furthermore, staff made sure that employees were informed whenever significant decisions affecting them were made. GRT also launched a customer newsletter to keep the public informed.
- The region amended its regional development charge bylaw to establish residential and non-residential transit rates. (The provincial Development Charge Act allows municipal governments to include a transit charge on all new residential and commercial development.) Regional council approved a transit budget for 2000, which involved a transfer of existing services and cost structures.
- The region respected existing contracts between municipal governments and various private sector companies.
- The region implemented a new identity for the regional system, including a new logo, bus stripes and stop signs. It renumbered routes, launched a new regional transit telephone system and designed a Web site.
- The region harmonized all fare structures for both the conventional and the specialized systems and broadened the location of sales distribution centres to make it easier for customers to purchase tickets.
- The records management team made sure that all pertinent transit records were transferred from the municipal services to the region.

"Once you have the political support for an amalgamation, you have to take that direction," said Snow. "Although it was a great deal of work, it went fairly smoothly from the perspective of the employees that were affected. The only resistance was from the Cambridge operators because they realized they would be gobbled up by a larger union."

The GRT project was a highly collaborative, community-focused endeavour. It was dependent on support from several city departments and area municipal governments. Other partners included employees of Kitchener Transit and Cambridge Transit, whom the region invited to submit suggestions for the name of

the new transit system. A third-year graphics design class at a local community college competed to design the new logo. The region asked community members to form a selection committee to choose the winner.

"This was a way of involving everyone and making them feel a part of the project," said Snow. "It's been more accepted because of their participation." Snow said there were concerns among employees and in the community that the amalgamation would lead to service cuts to save money. "That was never the intent," he said. "The goals have been to improve service by increasing it, not by cutting back on it."

GRT was also designed to improve quality of life for the region's residents.

"If we're early in the planning of a new subdivision, then, depending on what we decide about bringing service to the area, we can help determine whether people will buy one or two or three cars," said Snow. "But if we're not on top of the planning, then people develop bad habits about driving, which are very hard to break. That affects their quality of life."

The region spent \$300,000 on the amalgamation project, which came from the city's capital levy reserve fund.

RESULTS

By the end of 2000, one year after GRT launched its conventional service, amalgamation led to:

- a four per cent ridership increase on the new transit service (360,000 additional trips);
- a 12 per cent ridership increase in the Cambridge service area alone, or 141,000 more trips than in the previous year. In part, this is because customers in the Cambridge area made more than one third of these trips using the 60-minute transfer fare, which GRT expanded to include Cambridge. The 60-minute transfer system allows riders to reach their destination and get back onto the bus within 60 minutes without paying an additional fare;
- the addition of three routes in areas that previously had no service, including two routes that link Cambridge and Kitchener. These services would not have been possible under the previous transit structure because of provincial legislative and licensing restrictions;
- improved mobility for those who rely solely on public transportation; and

- increased safety in the area by encouraging a mode of transportation that is safer than automobile travel.

Eventually, the region expects that increased transit ridership will lead to a decrease in spending on road infrastructure by avoiding the costs associated with road system expansion, such as the widening of roads and the construction and design of new roadways.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The region's transitional marketing plan was critical to acceptance of the new transit service. It ensured that both transit staff and riders were included in all changes. It created a 'feel good' attitude about the transition by reassuring staff and riders that the region would not only maintain its standard of service, but also improve upon it. In addition, it educated citizens about the value of public transit, which likely resulted in increased ridership.
- GRT's establishment of a standard fare structure helped to maintain existing customers and attract new customers. Its decision to broaden the location of sales distribution centres resulted in higher ticket sales.
- The region's establishment of specialist working teams to research, develop and recommend implementation plans for given tasks was very helpful to the process. For example, human resources representatives from the cities and the region spearheaded transition issues such as health and safety, labour relations, benefits and salary administration.
- The region's employee newsletter served as an open forum while the transition process took place. It kept employees informed about transitional issues that might affect their future, which led to good morale among transit staff. This is especially important for front line workers who often deal with hundreds of customers every day.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Don Snow

Director, Transit Services

Regional Municipality of Waterloo

Grand River Transit

250 Strasburg Rd.

Kitchener, Ont.

N2E 3M6

Tel.: (519) 585-7597

Fax: (519) 585-1060

E-mail: sndon@region.waterloo.on.ca



**TRANSPORTATION
RESORT MUNICIPALITY
OF WHISTLER, BRITISH
COLUMBIA:**

*Whistler Comprehensive
Transportation Strategy*

Reducing automobile travel takes precedence over building new roads

in a transportation strategy designed to ease traffic congestion in Whistler. Adopted in 2000 after several years of consultation with stakeholders, the strategy takes a long-term look at transportation problems and solutions in this popular ski-resort destination. Strategies include reducing single-occupant vehicle travel by promoting alternate forms of transportation for residents, resort workers and tourists. Whistler is increasing transit service locally and between municipalities, as well as expanding pathways for pedestrians and cyclists. The results are encouraging: 1998 expansion of Whistler's municipal transit system has increased annual ridership by 800,000. In 2001, Whistler was funded by the FCM Green Municipal Funds to study whether a car-sharing program could help sustain and increase transit ridership by providing residents with the option of using a private vehicle for shopping and recreational trips.

Contact: Jim Godfrey (604) 935-8102

**CITY OF NEW WESTMINSTER,
BRITISH COLUMBIA:**

McBride Boulevard Pedestrian/Bicycle Overpass Project

The city's new overpass, completed in February 2001, creates a safe and convenient crossing for pedestrians and cyclists over McBride Boulevard, a major arterial road that carries 40,000-50,000 vehicles every day. Located in the catchment area for a new school, the overpass will provide safe passage for children walking and cycling to school. The overpass has also acted as a catalyst for the development of the Crosstown Greenway, a pilot project for a major regional bicycle route that will span the city, and the expansion of the city's Greenway Network. A corporate sponsor, Mediacom Inc., funded the majority of the \$1.5 million overpass project.

Contact: P. A. Connolly (604) 527-4569

Award Submissions

**CITY OF NEW WESTMINSTER,
BRITISH COLUMBIA:**

Walkable Cities

Despite a significant growth in the volume of through traffic, the City of New Westminster is becoming more "walkable" thanks to pedestrian-friendly improvements implemented between July 2000 and February 2001. The Walkable Cities project identified barriers to pedestrian crossing at major street intersections and provided facilities to overcome these barriers, including constructing new wheelchair ramps and traffic calming measures. The city also normalized two major intersections that previously had high-speed right turn ramps and constructed curb extensions at 20 locations to provide safer pedestrian crossing at major arterial streets. Street space was reclaimed for the benefit of pedestrians, cyclists and transit users without significantly affecting motorized traffic.

Contact: P. A. Connolly (604) 527-4592