

Wheel 2 Work in Whitehorse

Organizations

City of Whitehorse, Recreation Parks Association of the Yukon (RPAY)

Status

Ongoing. Started Summer 2006.

Overview

Wheel 2 Work Whitehorse is an active transportation social marketing campaign that uses incentive prizes to encourage more people to commute by bicycle during the summer season. The program is intended to complement the city's numerous recent bicycle network investments and improvements with the objective of helping ensure that these investments are optimized and that the new infrastructure is well used by residents.

Over the past three years, the City of Whitehorse has made numerous improvements to its cycling network, including: upgrading several multi-use paths from outlying residential areas into the downtown; new lighting along selected pathways; a new bicycle/pedestrian bridge over the Yukon River to better connect a major residential neighbourhood with the downtown, a new staircase with bike-ramp, a new roundabout providing a safer connection from the river rail to the bike lanes along 4th Avenue and; improved bicycle infrastructure in the downtown, including artisan-designed bicycle racks, on-street bicycle lanes and markings and improved safety signage for bicycles along major arterials.

Wheel 2 Work was launched in May 2006. The program was quite successful with 210 participants signing on and logging almost 40,000 kilometres of bicycle travel. The program will be continued in 2007 and improvements to the program are being considered.

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Resources

Bicycle routes, safety and other information can be found at the City of Whitehorse's web site at: www.whitehorse.ca

Community context

The capital of Yukon, the City of Whitehorse is home to over 21,000 people and the administrative and commercial centre of the territory. Despite its northern locale and extreme winter climate, the Yukon Territory boasts a relatively large population of year-round bicycle and pedestrian commuters. According to Statistics Canada, 2% of workers rode to work in 2001. Yukon is tied with B.C. for the highest percentage.

For the past several years, Whitehorse has been working to support bicycle commuters and to increase the city's already impressive modal split through a series of infrastructure and amenity improvements. These improvements have been guided by an overarching policy framework of official plans, strategies and local area plans that all include supporting alternative transportation. More recently, the City of Whitehorse has been able to expedite its bicycle network improvements through its Transport Canada-funded Showcase initiative.

Policy context

The improvement of bicycling facilities, infrastructure and personal transportation choices is collectively supported by City of Whitehorse's 2002 *Official Community Plan*, a 2002 City-wide *Transportation Study*, and a 2006 *Downtown Plan* which specifically supports alternative transportation strategies including the expansion of bike lanes and bike connections downtown.

As a northern city subject to potentially greater climate change impacts than more southern Canadian cities, Whitehorse's alternative transportation programs are further supported by its greenhouse gas reduction initiatives. Their commitment dates back to January 1995 when a

resolution in Council was passed to join the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Partners for Climate Protection Program (PCP). In the fall of 2001, a temporary Climate Change Coordinator was hired to initiate the five-step PCP program which culminated in the adoption of a *Local Action Plan to Reduce Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions* for city operations and the community in February 2004. The strategy commits the city to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through a variety of approaches, including the purchase of a bicycle fleet for city employees and numerous end-of-trip facility upgrades for commuter cyclists.

Whitehorse is also one of Transport Canada's original five Showcase cities. The expansion and improvement of the city's multi-use pathway network was a major component of the Showcase.

Rationale and objectives

Over the past several years, the City of Whitehorse has made a series of commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to improve the city's sustainable transportation infrastructure and supports. Through a number of key policy and program initiatives, the city has now improved three multi-use trails between downtown and residential areas with the addition of new connections, built a new pedestrian/bicycle river crossing to better connect the trail network, improved lighting on all routes, and constructed "bike-friendly" stairs on one particularly steep grade (i.e., the stairway includes a special bicycle ramp to assist in walking bikes up and down them). On street bike lanes, signage and new bicycle racks have also been added throughout the downtown area.

In total, the City of Whitehorse has invested \$2 million on infrastructure improvements to support active transportation. To ensure that these investments are optimized and well used by residents, the city is now working on implementing a number of social marketing and additional public outreach and education programs. Wheel 2 Work is one of these programs.

Whitehorse has also recognized the benefits of community-based social marketing as an attractive

alternative to information-based campaigns. Community-based social marketing is based upon research in the social sciences that demonstrates that behavior change is most effectively achieved through initiatives delivered at the community level which focus on removing barriers to an activity while simultaneously enhancing the activity's benefits.



New painted bike lanes and signage in Whitehorse

Actions

In early 2006, the City of Whitehorse partnered with the Recreation Parks Association of the Yukon (RPAY) to create a goal oriented program with incentive prizes to help encourage more people to ride their bike to work between May and September 15th. Called Wheel 2 Work, the program involved having participants sign up to track the number of kilometres they rode over the five month program period. Their distances could be submitted online through the Commuter Challenge web site, on a Microsoft Excel log that they could email periodically, or by phone. Participants could purchase or borrow a cycling odometer to help log their kilometres ridden. They could also email details of their route to the City of Whitehorse which would use its in-house GIS resources to calculate its length.

When participants first registered with Wheel 2 Work, they indicated how often they cycled to work in the past year, and were asked to make a commitment or pledge about how many kilometres they would travel by bicycle by the end of the program period. To help participants better track or visualize the kilometre commitments they made, their riding distances were plotted over the course

of the well known Kluane to Chilkat International Bike Relay, an annual 238 kilometre relay race between Haines Junction, Yukon and Haines, Alaska. As with the Bike Relay, Wheel 2 Work had eight checkpoints along “the route” where participants became eligible for bicycle-related incentive prizes upon reaching them. Incentive prizes included reflective leg straps, water bottles, stickers and tire repair kits. For each checkpoint reached, participants were also entered into a contest to win bigger prizes including a bike pannier, a bike light, and an odometer or a new commuter bicycle.

In support of the Wheel 2 Work program, special bicycle maintenance workshops were offered. The free workshops covered basic bicycle maintenance and repairs, including fixing flat tires and adjusting brakes and gears. A special “Looks Who’s Wheeling to Work” advertising column was also run in one of Whitehorse’s weekly newspapers to generate interest in the program and to show the public the wide range of people who cycle commute.

Results

Over the first summer of the program, Wheel 2 Work attracted 210 registrants, 108 of whom tracked their kilometres travelled. By the end of the summer, the users who tracked their kilometres had logged almost 40,000 kilometres of travel. Almost half of these riders exceeded 300 kilometres travelled, while six participants travelled more than 1,000 kilometres. In total, the program is estimated to have offset approximately 4.5 tonnes of greenhouse gas equivalents.



A cycle commuter rides to work in Whitehorse

Participants

Wheel 2 Work was developed and offered in partnership with the Recreation Parks Association of the Yukon (RPAY) and Transport Canada through the Urban Transportation Showcase Program. Icycle Sports provided incentives and draw prizes at cost.

Resources

The City of Whitehorse dedicated approximately 15 staff days to set up and organize the Wheel 2 Work project and 1 day a week throughout the summer to run it. The project was funded internally and with the assistance of the Urban Transportation Showcase Program, and coordinated by the city’s part-time Environmental Coordinator.

Apart from staff costs, the program costs for print materials, graphic design, advertising incentives and prizes was approximately \$9,000. RPAY provided an additional \$2,700 for advertising costs, in-house time and incentive prizes.



The Wheel 2 Work program pamphlet

Lessons learned

While the Wheel 2 Work program has only run for one summer, there are some early lessons that have been learned in developing and implementing it.

- **Make it fun:** The program’s incentive prizes and positive marketing helped attract people to the program. Wheel 2 Work encouraged people to change transportation habits gradually and did not employ negative or coercive marketing and messaging.

- **Longer programs can be more effective:** Unlike the Commuter Challenge, a cross-Canada, one-week personal transportation challenge program, Wheel 2 Work is a four-and-a-half month program. Running the program over a longer period gives participants more flexibility in changing travel habits (i.e., they can start more gradually). Any travel changes are also more easily reinforced if participants are doing them for longer periods (i.e., the changes that are made can become permanent).
- **Provide data collection options:** Wheel 2 Work relied on participants monitoring their bicycle usage. By providing a variety of reporting options – on-line, by phone, using an Excel spreadsheet that was emailed in occasionally – participants provided high quality data that has allowed Whitehorse to effectively monitor both frequency of travel and distance.
- **Marketing must be context specific and resonate with the community:** With ample free parking and no rush hour to speak of, the messages used in Wheel 2 Work are different from larger, southern Canadian communities where reducing traffic congestion is often a major concern. Instead, Whitehorse used the results of their on-trail surveys to develop messages for the program that would be more resonant for the local community. As a result, Wheel 2 Work messages focused on the fun of riding to work, the fitness value, the cost savings (versus the cost of gasoline for the trip) and the general environmental benefits.

groups. The on-line kilometre reporting system will also be examined. Extending the program into the winter and/or offering a winter challenge will also be explored.



A Wheel 2 Work participant profile newspaper ad

Next steps

Wheel 2 Work will be run in summer 2007. Possible program changes include expanding to include new rider categories (e.g., younger riders, students, seniors etc.) and providing a wider range of cycling distances (different routes). Partnerships with major employers may be explored, to create a friendly departmental or organizational challenge. Targeting specific neighbourhoods through community newsletters and light pole banners may also be an effective method to target specific