

# CASE STUDY SERIES

Profiles of *Active & Safe Routes to School* initiatives in Canada involving one or more schools at the local, regional or provincial/territorial level.

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## # 5: WAY TO GO!

<i># of schools</i>	<i>Setting(s)</i>	<i>City/Town OR Region</i>	<i>Province/Territory</i>
600	Urban/suburban	province-wide	British Columbia

### KEY WORDS

**Language(s) of resources:** English; and Mandarin, Punjabi, Vietnamese (brochure and parent survey)

**Problems/Solutions:** traffic congestion and traffic safety, developing best routes to schools, walk-bike safe zone, reducing conflicts between child pedestrians /bicyclists and vehicles at the school site, establishing formal walking strategies, sustaining and maintaining interest in program

**Partners:** corporate sponsors ( autoplan brokers, and auto insurers), police department, municipalities, school districts, school administrators, parent advisory committees, teachers

**Tools:** small grants, safety equipment, program identity material, surveys (student and parent), mapping exercises, training meeting, media, Resource Kit (process manual; information on traffic safety, environmental issues and fitness), road safety program, regional coordinators

**Events:** Walking Wednesdays, links to Earth Day, Bike Week, Environment Week, Clean Air Day, Walk a Child to School Day

**Curriculum resources:** Blazing Trails through the Urban Jungle

**Case study version:** September 1999

## For further information contact:



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## Partners

Sponsorship from the RoadSense Team (a partnership of Autoplan Brokers of B.C. and Insurance Corporation of B.C.)

School Districts

Police Departments

Municipalities

Greater Vancouver Regional District

Bike Smarts

## Participants

### Pilot schools:

- Carisbrooke Elementary, North Vancouver
- Clinton Elementary, Burnaby
- Gilmore Elementary, Richmond
- Hawthorne Elementary, Delta
- Norquay Elementary, Vancouver
- Our Lady of Perpetual Help Elementary, Vancouver

200 other schools actively implementing the program

600 schools throughout B.C. have requested the Way to Go! resource kits

## Goals

The overall program goal is to change the culture of a school community, so that the identity of a school is strongly and positively associated with making choices to walk, bike and bus safely to school.

The basic approach to enhancing the traffic safety concerns at schools involves the following:

- reduce the number of cars traveling to and from schools by providing positive alternative options
- emphasize traffic safety education for children and parents.



## Program Components (& Players)

The program consists of a Resource Kit: a process manual and related resources including supplementary information on traffic safety education, environmental issues, health and fitness. The manual outlines the step-by-step process that a school can follow in order to introduce safe walking and biking options for students traveling to school. It includes implementation tools and ideas, as well as references to other programs and information a school can use to support and promote their work.

The *Way to Go!* program also includes the support of regional coordinators in the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island. They provide training and hands-on advice and direction for *Way to Go!* programs. All other parts of the province are supported by the Program Coordinator.

RoadSense Regional Teams provide individual schools with support in the form of small grants for communication costs, safety equipment, program identity materials and packages of special items for celebrations and events.

Bike Smarts is an ICBC RoadSense program that provides the guidance to introduce bicycle safety and skills to children aged seven to thirteen. Bicycle safety education is an essential part of *Way to Go!* program implementation, particularly where schools are focusing on bicycle options for student travel. Schools are encouraged to register with the Bike Smarts Program, and plan to present the information to their students.

## Background

The Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) conducts a trip diary survey every ten years in order to understand transportation choices, and how people are traveling within the region. In 1984 this survey established that one of every three students traveled to school by car. In 1994, the results of the survey indicated that there had been a huge increase in this number, and that one of every two students made the school journey by car. It is estimated that within the GVRD one of every five cars on the road at peak hours is taking a child to or from school. The region is concerned about these choices as they have serious implications for road use and air quality, as well as having the potential to develop a car-dependent attitude in a whole generation of young citizens. This trend toward more and more automobile use, even for short journeys, is evident throughout the (over)developed world.

The *Way to Go!* school pilot was launched at six elementary schools in the fall of 1997, commissioned by the GVRD, to design and test a School Traffic/Trip Reduction Program. Because of the traffic safety concerns associated with congestion at school sites the Insurance Corporation of B.C. (ICBC) provided funding for the pilot project. The researchers were

astonished at the huge demand for participation in the pilot phase of the program, arising primarily from traffic safety concerns at schools.

The RoadSense Team was formed as a result of a partnership between ICBC and the Autoplan Brokers of BC, to provide five year community based traffic safety programs across the Province. Because of the successful GVRD *Way to Go!* pilot, and the growing demand for the program, it was selected as one of the sponsored programs. *Way to Go!* resources and support are now available to all elementary and middle schools in the province. Since September 1998 *Way to Go!* has distributed program resources—a manual, resource kit, support and training—in response to requests from over 400 schools in B.C.

## Implementation

The *Way to Go!* program is designed to assist elementary school Parent Advisory Committees by:

- providing ideas, tools and resources which can be used to implement car use reduction strategies
- providing tools to develop more traffic safety awareness at school sites
- introducing strategies and opportunities for children to have the option to walk, bike or bus to school safely.

The program provides a manual and a resource kit, as well as support and local or regional training.

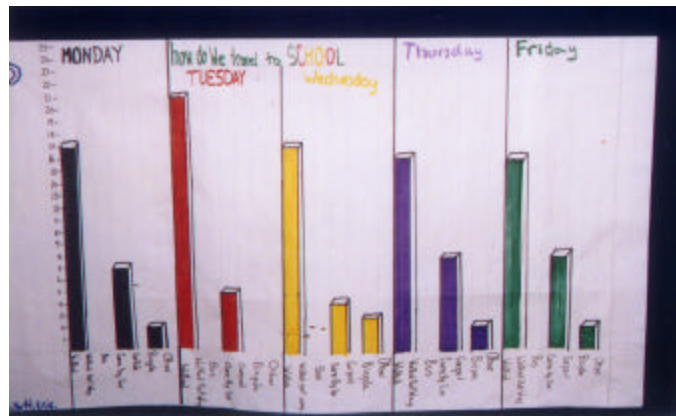
To begin the process of organizing a *Way to Go!* traffic reduction program, schools conduct student and parent surveys to determine current travel choices, and any challenges and opportunities for their school's program. These surveys also help gauge parent support and identify volunteers interested in working to organize the program.

Students and parents map the school areas, and conduct traffic and pedestrian counts. These exercises provide a better understanding of the traffic issues at the school, and allow an opportunity to identify sites where there are a large number of conflicts between vehicles and child pedestrians. It is also an opportunity to identify the best routes to school for child pedestrians or cyclists by ensuring that the routes are as safe as possible.

After analyzing school survey and mapping data, project teams plan walking, and, where feasible, biking strategies best suited to their individual community needs.

Strategies incorporate three basic components:

- Establishing a safer school site by re-directing traffic flows, controlling intersections, or discouraging driving in designated safe walk/bike zones. This ensures that there is a safe approach to the school for students walking and biking.



- Establishing formal walking or biking strategies, such as walking school buses, rolling school buses, walking or biking buddies, walking pools, etc. to support travel alternatives.
- Ensuring that pedestrian and cycling safety education is presented to parents and students, and that parent drivers are made aware of the importance of driving and parking safely and in accordance with by-laws and driving regulations.

This program has been successful in reducing the number of children traveling to school by car thereby making school sites safer. The provision of traffic safety education and the resultant increase in traffic safety awareness results in a school population that values and promotes active and alternative transportation to schools, as well as encouraging safe pedestrian and driver behaviours.



## Promotion & Communication

Promotion of the program has occurred in a number of ways. Formal recruitment of school districts did not begin until January of 1999, but because of media coverage across BC in the fall of 1998, many schools became interested and involved in the program. In certain municipalities and school districts traffic safety officers have taken the lead in distributing program brochures, and encouraging schools to request the *Way to Go!* kits. In other areas, the municipality has had a key role in taking the program materials to elementary and middle schools. *Way to Go!* coordinators have made presentations to many groups including District Parent Advisory Committees, school boards, school district principals' and vice-principals' meetings, school district traffic safety committees, individual parent advisory committees, municipal councils, community policing conferences, alternative transportation conferences.

The formal communication strategy involved sending program information to all fifty-nine of the Province's school districts in order to introduce the program to the Superintendents of Schools, the School Boards, the District Parent Associations and the Parent Advisory Committees in each of these areas. When enough interest is indicated, a training meeting is planned in order to provide further support and advice for school project teams.

Media interest in the program has been a useful tool for generating school interest, as the program at individual schools has been profiled. The program has enjoyed significant media attention, including:

- CBC radio, CBC local TV news, CBC The National
- BCTV, VTV, CHEK TV
- Rogers Cablevision Community Program, Delta Cable
- The Globe and Mail, The Vancouver Sun, The Province, Victoria Times Colonist
- Community Papers
- Vancouver Magazine
- Good News: BC Principals and Vice Principals Newsletter

## Lessons Learned

If a school is unsure about introducing the entire program, a starting point can be the planning of one special day when everyone in the school is encouraged to walk or bike. This can link to larger celebrations such as Earth Day or simply be a special event: March forth on March Fourth, March into Spring Day, etc. Schools have designated one day a month as Walking Wednesday, which has then been expanded to include every Wednesday. This introduction of an event to support and initiate a change in travel choices has a number of advantages. It does not seem overwhelming, people are slowly breaking their driving habit and a school community can build on the success.



Schools love to use ideas that they know have already worked in other communities. Project teams quickly adapted descriptions of successful celebrations, classroom projects and events from other schools. They then put their own individual and unique creative ideas into the planning and thus created new examples for other schools.

The data-gathering stage of the program is very exciting for school

communities. Incorporating students into data gathering and planning activities such as graphing the surveys, and conducting traffic and pedestrian counts helps to increase their participation and interest in the program. The parent surveys are tremendously valuable as schools identify information that is essential to walking and biking strategies that will work for their community. Schools also use the survey as an educational tool, and an opportunity to prompt immediate changes in people's travel choices.

Translation of essential messages, posters, parent surveys and invitations to planning meetings is important if a school has a large number of non-English speaking parents and grandparents. This ensures that all members of the school community feel welcome, have an opportunity to participate, and to understand the reasons for the introduction of the program. This can also contribute to community building in the school as well.

At schools where we have been able to integrate signage that identifies the school with the *Way to Go!* program, a very strong and positive identity with the program has developed.

## **Building on the Experience**

A number of the pilot schools have been incorporating the *Way to Go!* program into their school planning for over a year and a half. Some of these schools have continued to increase interest and involvement in the walking and biking strategies. It is important to evaluate what happens at those schools, and what is happening at schools where interest has fallen off or is remaining static. Understanding what leads to sustaining a program in a school is essential to establishing how to build on the initial commitment, and create an ongoing, enduring change in travel behaviours.

As the *Way to Go!* program is being used in urban and suburban environments as well as in smaller towns, it will be interesting to see what aspects of the program need to be adapted in order to make it more useful in these different settings. The ideas and strategies that these schools are able to devise and introduce will then become a rich resource for the second wave of schools introducing the program in the 1999/2000 school year.

**Do Something About It**

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