



Youth Moving Safely With Active Transportation 2011

Hanover/Walkerton Active Transportation Committee



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Heart and Stroke Foundation
of Ontario



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Executive Summary

The Hanover/Walkerton Active Transportation Committee (H/W ATC) began discussing the “Youth Moving Safely with Active Transportation” project in October 2010. With financial assistance from the Heart and Stroke SPARK Advocacy Grant, the Committee formulated a plan to address a variety of health concerns confronting Grey Bruce youth including high rates of motor vehicle collisions, physical inactivity, pedestrian and cyclist safety and access to recreation and leisure. Sixteen area secondary school youth were recruited to take part in data collection using portable GPS units. Participants were compensated with a \$100 honourarium and a \$25 gas card to assist in travel costs for meetings. Each participant was expected to attend an initial training session, complete one week of data collection, fill out a walkability checklist and participate in a post data collection focus group.

The development of a Youth Moving Safely with Active Transportation project in Hanover and Walkerton was led by staff at the Grey Bruce Health Unit. Active Transportation has been an ongoing focus of the Health Unit and community partners since the Board of Health passed an Active Transportation resolution in 2010. Due to the large, rural nature of Grey Bruce, transportation is regularly identified as a major barrier for individuals of all ages. In particular, transportation for youth can be challenging due to limited vehicle access and long distances between locations.

Partners in the program include the Town of Hanover, the Municipality of Brockton, the Counties of Bruce and Grey, the Bluewater District School Board, the Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board and the Hanover Youth Coalition. Input and feedback was also received from the Bruce Trails Network, Grey Bruce Geo-Spatial and Saugeen Mobility and Regional Transit. Walkerton and Hanover were chosen as pilots for the program

due to an appropriate level of readiness from the community, an interest in actively partnering in the project and the proximity of three secondary schools in the two communities.

Short term goals of the project were to raise awareness of the benefits of active transportation with both the participants and the broader community. Additional immediate deliverables include the training of youth on the GPS unit, collection of data and feedback through the focus group and walkability checklists. Longer term goals of the project are to address barriers, improve safety and ultimately change attitudes about active and safe transportation at the community, municipal and county level.



Rationale

The rationale for the development of a Youth Active Transportation project in Hanover and Walkerton is multi-faceted. Active Transportation has increasingly been on the radar of community residents, stakeholders and leaders over the past couple of years.

This has led to a number of key active transportation initiatives in Grey Bruce including presentations by Gil Penalosa from 8-80 Cities, Mandy Johnson from Canada Walks and Kate Hall from Green Communities Canada.

It is no secret that transportation presents a major barrier for individuals of all ages in the Grey Bruce region. Youth, in particular, face challenges as they may not have regular access to a vehicle, live outside

the urban community and rely on travel by school bus on a daily basis. This is of particular importance as the risk of obesity increases 6% for each hour spent sitting in a vehicle and many youth spend 1-2 hours per day commuting between home and school. Sixteen percent of Grey Bruce youth are currently overweight or obese (Youth Today the Real Picture, 2007).

Given the health impacts (obese adults are expected to die at least 7 years earlier than peers at a healthier weight) and economic costs of obesity (\$4.3 B spent in Ontario each year) (Johnson, 2011) it is hoped that this project will help identify the transportation challenges, choices and travel routes of youth in these two communities.

Conclusion

In Ontario, 22% of grades 7-12 students said they use active modes of transportation to get to school in the morning and 32% indicated active modes in the afternoon (Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, 2009). Although a much smaller sample size was used in Grey Bruce, these numbers appear to exceed active travel patterns of Grey Bruce youth. There is much work to be done to alter the attitudes about and the opportunities for active transportation as outlined in the goals of the project. As such, these goals may not be fully met for some time given the recommended policy and infrastructure changes highlighted by the youth participants:

- improved sidewalks
- traffic calming measures
- improved aesthetics (benches, garbage cans, etc)

It is clear that youth need both internal and external

incentives to alter their modes of transportation. Although the youth identified both overall health and financial gains as motivators for change these factors alone are unlikely to result in long term behavior change. While some minor changes in attitude and behaviour were noted there is a need to address concerns within each community to result in lasting change. Until the healthy choice is the easy choice this will continue to be challenging. Given the nature of Grey Bruce, rural youth will continue to be dependent on vehicular travel to access the larger centres. The focus now becomes on ensuring that the necessary infrastructure is in place for youth to travel safely and comfortably within these communities. By providing quality sidewalks, appropriate crossings, safe vehicle speeds, attractive surroundings and places to rest communities increase the opportunity for residents of all ages to travel by active modes. These are the items that will be addressed in the next stages of the project.

To view the full report please visit:

http://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Healthy_Communities/Active_Transportation.htm



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