

Report to Funders: KidsCAN Cycling Road Skills Pilot

January 30, 2010

Context

The Capital Regional District (CRD) has identified sustainable transportation as a key strategic goal. Guided by the Travel Choices Strategy (adopted in 2005), the Region, and its 13 municipal partners, has a mandate to significantly reduce the frequency and length of trips taken by automobile. A substantial portion of the 1.2 million trips taken each day in the region are school-based trips (approximately 107,000.¹) of which nearly 50% of the trips are taken by automobile.

In addition to the Region’s mandate, the Province has also recognized the importance of developing transportation alternatives in its bid to combat climate change. Transportation in the CRD is responsible for over 65% of all carbon emissions from every sector.

The healthy living imperative has brought into the fold the Vancouver Island Health Authority looks to active transportation as a key to improving childhood fitness levels.

Although the problem of auto-reliance has been accurately identified, the solutions are not easily addressed. With respect to school-based trips, it is not enough to simply “encourage” students to choose active transportation through education and promotion. Land use patterns, demographic shifts and the development of specialized (destination) schools over the last 20 years have all contributed to undermining the original ‘walk shed’ of most school locations. (The average trip distance for school-based travel is 5 km, but 19% or roughly 19,000 of these trips are under 1.6 km². As a result, many students simply live either too far away to walk or lack the skills to safely negotiate the road network on their bicycle.

With mounting pressure to stop driving their kids to school, parents have long been calling for a comprehensive approach to cycling education and training but questions relating to who should be responsible for delivering

Excerpt from **Making Cycling Irresistible:**

John Pucher and Ralph Buehler
Transport Reviews, Vol. 28, No. 4, July 2008.

Dutch, Danish, and German children receive extensive training in safe and effective cycling techniques as part of their regular school curriculum.

Since many children get to school by bike, training in safe cycling is considered essential to ensure their safety.

But it also gets kids off to a lifetime of safe cycling skills. And since all schoolchildren are included, it means that girls as well as boys start cycling at an early age.

“In Canada, Kids are expected to magically figure out how to ride safely in traffic without any formal instruction. The first time they learn the rules of the road, they are making an application for their driver’s license”. Marsha Petty-Johnson, Bike Skills Coordinator

¹ Data derived from the CRD 2006 Origin and Destination Travel Survey

² 1.6km is the distance below which a new ‘walking school’ in Ontario requires students to use active modes to get to school.

such a program have been unclear. Up until now, children typically first learn to ride a bike through early education programs such as “bike rodeos” which take place in a gymnasium or tennis court. But as children grow older, and more independent, we tend to be surprisingly casual about letting children transition from riding on park paths and sidewalks, onto the roadway and ultimately negotiating complicated intersections.

To combat this problem, the CRD has taken a page from the European approach to cycling education by developing a pilot program that is fully integrated into the school system. Rather than being an optional extra curricular activity or a recreation-based skill, the preferred approach is to view cycling education as an essential life skill that ultimately contributes to establishing a community-wide cycling culture in the next generation.

Program Description

Partnerships. The CRD partnered with School District 61 and Bike to Work (BTWV) Victoria to develop a made-in-the-region bike skills course geared to an underserved age group (youths, ages 11-13) the skills they need to negotiate their local roads safely. With seed funding of \$8,000 from the Ministry of Education’s Community Connections program, the CRD was able to engage the Bike to Work agency to develop curriculum and to undertake the training sessions. based on the very successful CAN Bike national cycling program they deliver for adults.

KidsCANBike Curriculum. Bike to Work Victoria (BTWV) has provided cycling education for adults using their highly regarded specially designed one-day cycling skills course³, for 11years. For this pilot, BTWV adapted and updated the existing national KidsCAN Bike course to reflect local conditions and to build on their extensive experience teaching road skills. In keeping with the CANBike standards, BTWV hired a certified KidsCAN national examiner/instructor (Gavin McPhail) to train and certify qualified BTWV adult instructors (Patrick O’Connor and Marshall Rathwell) to deliver the KidsCAN course. In addition, two other instructors were designated as Assistant Instructors (Marsha Petty-Johnson and Julie Higginson) making them qualified to provide support to the Lead Instructors during the on-road portion of the training. Further information on the CANBike national program is available at: www.canadian-cycling.com

Course Format & Content. The students received a total 8 hours training made up of approximately 4 hours of class room time and 4 hours of on-



Kids CAN-BIKE program, developed by the Canadian Cycling Association, is designed for youths ages 9 to 13 and provides up to 12 hours of in-class and on-bike instruction, which teaches steering, signaling, right and left turns, changing gears, braking and avoiding road hazards. Young cyclists are taught to ride safely to school or to the local swimming pool on residential streets.

³ Name of the program is “Bike to Work Skills Course” or BTWSC

road instruction. The course was held during school hours and was integrated into the teachers' workplans every Friday, for the month of November. To maximize the number of students that could be engaged in the pilot, an innovative schedule was developed whereby all the enrolled students were taught as a complete class in the morning for the in-class portion of the curriculum, then the students were divided into four groups of approximately 12 people, and each group rotated turns to take the on-road portion. This allowed for small groups and maximum oversight (each on-road pod had approximately 6 students, a Lead Instructor and an Assistant Instructor).

In advance of the course, students were provided with a bike safety checklist with tips for ensuring their bicycles would be road-worthy for the course. On the first day of the course, a bike mechanic was on-site to address issues relating to unsafe / unmaintained bikes. Participants with bikes with conditions that could not be readily repaired on-site were not permitted to take the on-road portion of the course with the unsafe bike, but were encouraged and supported to borrow other students bikes to go on the road.

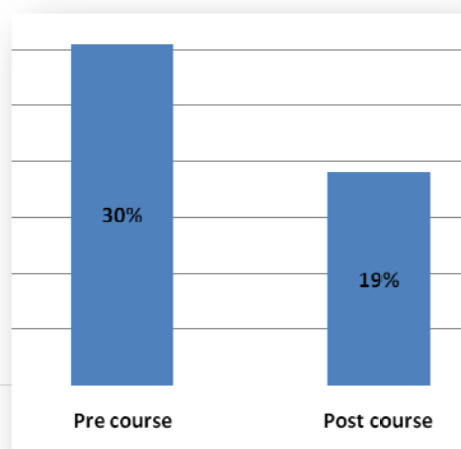
Outcome. Fifty four students participated in the course and fifty successfully completed both the in-class and on-road components, thereby earning their official Riders' Licenses - developed specifically for this pilot.

Before and after surveys revealed the following information:

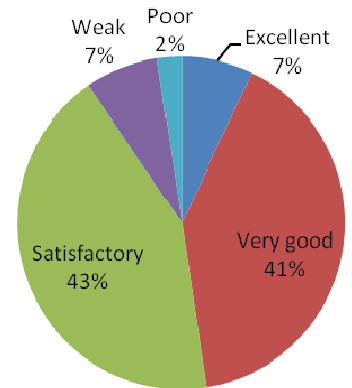
- 90% of the students rated of the course as "satisfactory" or above
- When asked how often the participant would ride on the sidewalk, 71% of them stated "some or all the time" before they took the course. However, after they took the course, only 19% said they would ride on the sidewalk.

The following chart illustrates the striking changes in attitude and confidence as a result of participating in the program:

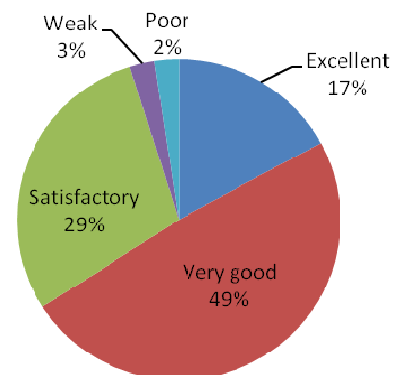
Number of students who said that they would ride on the sidewalk "all or some of the time":



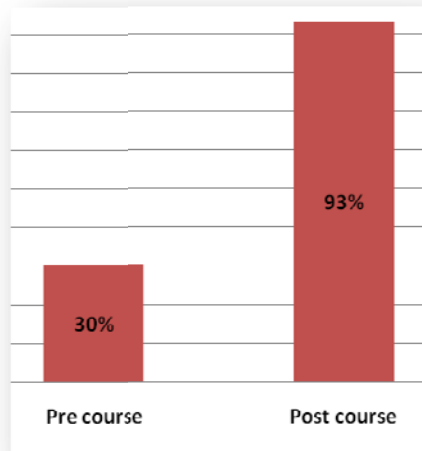
Feedback on Classroom Instruction



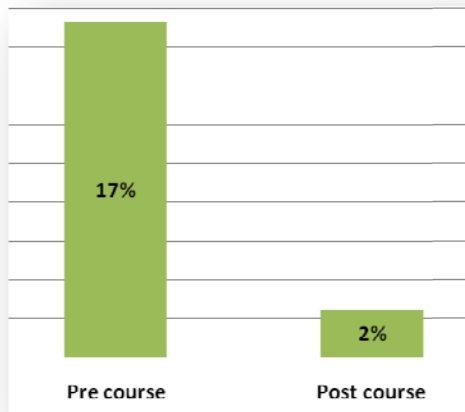
Feedback on On-road Instruction



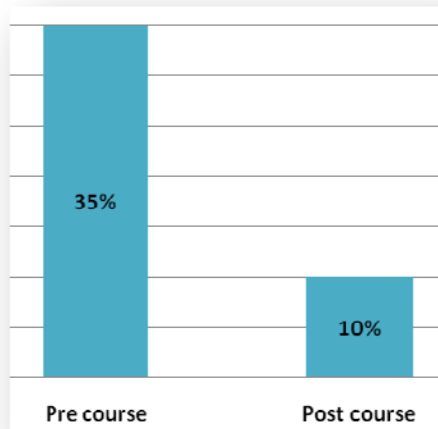
Number of students who feel they would ride on the right side of the road "all or some of the time":



Number of students who said that they would "rarely" or "never" wear a helmet:



Number of students who said that they were "unsure" if their helmet fit properly:



Media Interest. The pilot was featured by A-Channel News. The clip can be seen on the CRD website at www.crd.bc.ca/transportation. In addition, the Fraser Basin Council has featured this program as a "Success Story" as part of their TDM Toolkit (<http://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca/programs/tdm.html>)

Lessons Learned. Although the pilot program was an unqualified success, opportunities for improvement were identified.

1. Feedback received from the sponsoring teachers suggest that some of the instructional tools developed for the classroom were somewhat 'dated' and were not, as a result, as effective at maintaining the students'



A-Channel News was on-site covering the story.

attention. The new learning environment is very interactive and utilizes different mediums – especially video. For example, the students responded very well to the helmet safety segment where a *Bill Nye – The Science Guy* video was utilized to underscore the key messages.

Action for Consideration: It was suggested that a combination of funding and innovative partnerships (film programs) be sought to develop short, interactive and engaging video segments for each learning unit.

2. An additional suggestion was made concerning assistance with class control and discipline. Although the cycling instructors were excellent in their delivery of the curriculum, it was suggested that the program might benefit with the students’ regular classroom teacher participating in the on-road portion of the course to provide the necessary “authority figure” to ensure the students stay focused, engaged, and on task for the duration of each class.

Action for Consideration: There may be an opportunity to offer teachers the Bike to Work Skills Course (BTWSC) so that they can more fully participate in the program delivery. However, the format and schedule of the program would have to be amended, as this pilot program relies on teachers remaining in-class to teach the students that are not out taking the on-road portion of the program. In addition parents can be encouraged to take the BTWSC so they can assist with the program.

3. Surprisingly, access to appropriate and safe bicycles was not a significant issue during the pilot program. The reasons for this non-issue may be due to Arbutus being a “Global” school with an established cycling culture. However, as this program is rolled out to other schools, universal access to bikes may not be as straight forward. The format of breaking students into smaller on road groups allowed students who didn’t have bikes to share a bike and helmet. Although this isn’t ideal, it made it possible for more students to participate.

Action for Consideration: The creation of a supply of “loaner bikes” would accommodate universal access to this program.

Cost of the Program. The budget for this pilot program was \$15,825.00 consisting of an \$8,000 School Community Connections Program⁴ grant



Course instruction involved in-class lessons as well as on-road practice.



Students who completed both the in-class and on-road portion of the program were granted “Rider’s Licenses”.

⁴ The specific program is the second round of programming called Strengthening the Connection –which is funded by the Ministry of Education and administered by the Union of British Columbia Municipalities.

administered by the UBCM and \$7,825.00 of in-kind contributions from the project partners.⁵ Financial Statements are attached in *Appendix A*

The funds received by way of the grant were used to contract the Victoria Bike to Work Society. The deliverables assigned to the BTWV for this project were as follows:

- adaptation of the original KidsCAN Bike curriculum to suit the particular needs of this pilot (a program that could be delivered within the school’s existing curriculum over four days);
- development of educational tools;
- training and certifying instructors to deliver the KidsCANBike program;
- delivering the program which included:
 - fees for instructors
 - Cost of teaching materials and supplies
- gifts* and pizza for the graduation ceremony
- assistance with the final Report to Funders (this document)

In Addition to the fee for service contract, the Victoria Bike to Work Society also donated considerable volunteer hours and “in-kind” contributions

- 70 hours for course development, instructor training course materials assisting in class and on road, administrative duties
- program Insurance
- delivery of a one-day Bike To Work Skills Course to 6 adults (teachers and parents)
- 60 hours donated by instructors and assistants- planning sessions , course development and debriefing

The CRD, by way of “in-kind” contributions, undertook the following tasks:

- promotion of the program
- negotiating partnership with a school
- assistance re: development of instruction materials (mapping, surveys etc.)
- media releases, press communications
- post-pilot interviews with students and teacher
- garner donations for prizes**
- develop final Report to Funders (this document)

⁵ In-kind contribution partners include CRD, Victoria Bike to Work Society and school staff time.



Students learned to check their bikes before going out using their ABC’s (air, brakes & chain).



Students were escorted on the road in groups of 6, with the lead instructor at the helm, and the assistant instructor at the back.

* \$500.00 in prizes were purchased *at cost* from Oak Bay Bikes

** Mountain Equipment Coop made a generous donation of bike lights, tools, and sundry other gifts that were presented to the students during the graduation ceremony.

Conclusion

This pilot program was able to illustrate the feasibility of integrating a formal, nationally certified cycling skills course into school curriculum. Nowhere else in Canada has a program with this level of rigour been implemented. Yet it stands as a Best Practice and an example of a program that can, and should, become imbedded into the school system – Province-wide.

This pilot has confirmed the original vision for a pan-jurisdictional program that is delivered each year to middle school aged students. The ultimate goal would be to have every, as a right of passage, earn their CANBike Rider's License before they leave middle school.

The legacy derived from educating an entire generation to be smart and confident cyclists will garner powerful immediate impacts in the spheres of health, fitness, and independence amongst our vulnerable youth population. In the long-term, this 'next generation' will no doubt seed a cycle savvy culture – where riding to work and to do errands is common practice. When the majority of our regional trips are conducted on foot, or by bike or bus, then we will be working towards a sustainable future.

Next Steps

This pilot project illustrates the potential to address significant provincial, regional and local interests relating to social and environmental sustainability. Implementing such an ambitious yet elemental program in these days of fiscal restraint will call for support from senior government leadership and partnerships with agencies that span a variety of disciplines who have a stake in seeing children riding their bikes safely and more frequently. Certainly the four School Districts in the region, the teaching community and the parents associations have long articulated the need for such a program. But there are other agencies, such as the Vancouver Island Health Authority, local governments, ICBC, and the Province who can play a role in moving this joint initiative forward.

Long before teens apply for their driver's license, they will have earned their first "rider's license" at age 11, with many years experience under their belt, negotiating traffic under their own power. *Patrick O'Connor, KldsCAN cycling instructor.*

Appendix A

Financial Statement

