

Overview of research and recommendations on creating closer, greener commutes for teachers and other employees within BC's public school system

Inspiration

- Initially spurred to investigate in 2014 by learning of the unfortunate experience of a friend who was a teacher who contracted MS and whose condition was severely exasperated by her long commute (> 85 minutes each way).

Scope/Extent of long commutes

- Informal canvassing of their colleagues by two friends who are teachers (Surrey & Victoria)
- Commissioned custom cross-tabulated dataset from Statistics Canada:
 - o Across the Mission-Abbotsford & Vancouver census metropolitan areas, over 17,500 teaching professionals are not working within their census area of residence. It is postulated that many of these professionals' commutes could be shortened at minimal cost to school districts.
 - o Across the Victoria/Saanich/Sooke school districts, over 63% of the jobs (~2,950 positions) are filled by teaching professionals who do not live in the same census area as their assigned school.

Review of literature on effects of long commutes

- Compiled a comprehensive annotated bibliography of peer-reviewed research that has established adverse effects of long commutes on:
 - o Absenteeism, retention, productivity, personal finances, work-life balance, physical health including obesity, mental health including stress, accidents, climate emissions & pollution, etc., etc.

Reviewed transportation demand management literature for possible solutions

- Identified Proximate Commutingsm approach as tested with Seattle bank branches (attention to home/work proximity at time of hiring and for internal job openings, and for peer-with-peer worksite swaps)
- Identified other tactics including:
 - o supporting biking, walking and other active commuting modes (infrastructure, incentives, procedures, etc.)
 - o connecting employees with carpool, vanpool & carshare services, possibly with incentive
 - o promoting transit use with discounted passes & supportive work scheduling, etc.
 - o guaranteed ride home for family urgencies
 - o providing vehicles and/or taxi chits for errands
 - o providing shuttle to transit stations
 - o EV and e-bike charging stations
 - o telework from home; work from remote/satellite offices and from co-working spaces
 - o shift re-scheduling/ flexibility
 - o longer & fewer "compressed" workdays
 - o disincentives for unnecessary SOV use (e.g., charging extra for SOV parking, and/or 'cash-out')
 - o selecting/moving locations of offices/branches
 - o supporting/coordinating with other existing and planned transportation programs.

Investigated potential for organizational change within public school system

- Meetings with superintendents, associate superintendents and HR directors in seven school districts, offering free management consulting/ analysis of scale as first stage of a “pilot project”; identifying barriers to change
- Interviews in person, on phone, and via email exchanges with 3 ADM-level executives in Ministry of Education
- Interview by phone and email with president-elect, president and past president of BCTF:
 - o The teachers’ unions have advocated for the commute reduction concept for over a decade. In 2007, the BC Teachers’ Federation passed a resolution: “That locals be encouraged to negotiate, as a mid-contract modification, a clause to support green lateral exchange/transfers between districts.”
- Emails exchange with BCTF researchers to offer StatCan dataset
- Interview by phone and email with head and senior executives of BCPSEA
- Meeting with Superintendent of Schools, correspondence with ADMs of finance and for governance
- Meeting with Minister of Education

Productivity and absenteeism costs to the education system

- Research indicates teachers would be mentally and physically healthier and more productive, with fewer absences. The BC Education system spends over \$150 million annually to cover for teachers’ absences [Deloitte report, 2014]

App and support development

- Developed and tested a web-based app for teachers (and other employment groups) to determine alternate school locations for closer commutes and learn about savings in emissions and commuting costs. This would allow employees to self-select and pre-register for potential openings, and also to identify peers who might swap locations.
- Developed a spreadsheet-based app for administrators to assess potential for multiple tactics to make employee commutes closer, quicker, greener, more active and less costly.
- Tested the spreadsheet app with employees of RBC
- Designed an efficient 24/7 operation to support employers’ reporting and efforts.

Investigated potential paths to BC government action to overcome the organizational inertia and other barriers within school districts and other large employers

- Meetings with Deputy Premier & Minister of Finance; Minister of Transportation & Infrastructure (and senior people in her ministry); Minister of Education (and executives); Minister of Environment & Climate Change Strategy (and senior people within his ministry).
- Email correspondence was exchanged with Minister of Labour
- Meeting with ADM at Public Service Agency and FOIPOP/emailed/phoned research with staff in that agency
- Meeting and correspondence with MLA Bowinn Ma, parliamentary secretary for TransLink; MLA Doug Routley; MLA Adam Olsen, BC Greens transportation critic and his policy analysts
- Submission to Premier’s Office (delivered by MLA Ma)

Legal research and recommendations

- Enlisted support of *Be The Change Earth Alliance* to sponsor research by University of Victoria's Environmental Law Centre
- ELC's report generally concluded that commute trip reduction analyses and actions would not present a problem with federal or provincial privacy legislation, nor with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*
- ELC's report recommends that BC's Cabinet declare Regulations under the *Climate Change Accountability Act* to require all public sector organizations (PSOs) to report annually on the carbon emissions burden associated with employees' commuting, and to make best efforts to reduce that burden. [Note: PSOs already account, minimize and offset their carbon emissions from other activities.]

The consensus from public school executives is that ***change will happen if and only if...***

- There is general agreement that action on commute reduction is worthwhile and necessary, could save the districts money in the long term, and could improve learning outcomes.
- "School administrators are constantly challenged to do so much without adequate resources." Therefore, a *requirement* to take new actions on employee commuting (no matter how noble) will not produce the intended results unless accompanied by *adequate support and resources*.
- Therefore, Government must provide BOTH a clear mandate AND adequate resources and support. A clear mandate could be given under the *Climate Control Accountability Act*, as recommended by UVic ELC report.
- Government must provide an efficient support system that reflects and respects the reality of school administration (i.e., perpetually strapped for time and money):
 - The accounting process of the carbon emissions burden must be straightforward and not time-consuming.
 - The assessment of the various commute-reducing/greening tactics should be automated, not requiring staff time or outside consultants.
 - The advantages (or lack thereof) and process to implement each tactic must be clearly laid out. Information on best practices and clear instructions are needed. Implementation should not require significant staff time.
 - Implementing some tactics will require funding (e.g., for biking, ebike and EV infrastructure), so a fund must be available that is accessible in a timely fashion - without an elaborate and lengthy application and approval process.
 - Because of the complex relationship between District administration, District Board, local unions, BCTF, BCPSEA and the Ministry of Education, support should be available for facilitating, piloting, and then sharing results of, multi-stakeholder collaborative approaches as well as for the tactics that are completely within a District's control as the employer.

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