

Greater Investment Required in Transportation Choices

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The federal and provincial governments are currently key investors in trying to resolve the transportation crises facing Canada's mega-cities. Think of Toronto's congestion issues; Montreal's aging transit system; or the explosion in the number of personal vehicles in Vancouver. These cities need costly, immediate reactive solutions.

The traditional solution to congestion is to widen roads, pave more lanes and basically add new capacity that will add to overall maintenance costs. Past experience has suggested that more lanes only create more demand. Innovative solutions to reduce the number of vehicles on the road are now becoming more commonplace. Two questions emerge from our current dilemma – have these reactive solutions come too late, and can these same situations be prevented in other cities not yet in crisis (i.e. through preventive solutions)?

Beyond Reactive Solutions

Transportation gridlock issues tend to overshadow the need to plan and invest wisely to prevent crises. It is

easier to fund them because there is immediate evidence and need. Canadian municipalities without major transportation issues will continue to struggle with the necessary investments required to implement preventive transportation measures such as transit system improvements, bicycle infrastructure and workplace-specific travel choices to minimize demand and long-term costs. Equal attention must be given by the federal and provincial governments to investing in preventive solutions that can be used to keep these cities from facing urgent problems. This latter requirement is currently lacking across Canada, shadowed by the attention being paid to mega-city issues and reactive solutions.

Municipalities struggle with the annual budgeting process around long-term investments required to ensure that all transportation choices receive equal attention to building more roads. This becomes even more challenging in municipalities without a transportation crisis, as it is difficult to maintain the level of awareness to prevent one. It should be noted that, although transit is a key means of moving people efficiently around a city, it is not the only solution. Active transportation is an essential component of transit, as most transit trips involve walking or cycling links and provide more options for individuals. However, many alternative forms of

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transportation – walking, cycling and carpooling – lack influential local advocacy groups that can champion these solutions and keep them in the public eye.

Transportation Demand Management

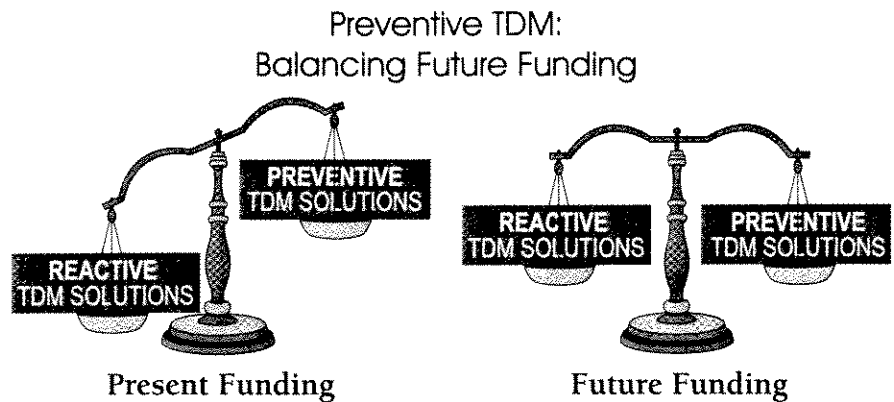
Transportation Demand Management (TDM) is defined as: “Various strategies that change travel behaviour (how, when and where people travel) in order to increase transport system efficiency and achieve specific objectives such as reduced traffic congestion, road and parking cost savings, increased safety, improved mobility for non-drivers, energy conservation and pollution emission reductions.”¹ Increasingly, Canadian municipal and regional governments are recognizing TDM as a way of slowing the demand for automobile infrastructure and prolonging a transportation system’s lifespan.

Encouraging and facilitating sustainable transportation (such as transit, carpooling, walking and cycling) supports several sustainable community pillars, including liveability, creative cities, tourism, health, and a competitive business location. TDM also bridges the gap between land use and transportation practices, often dealt with in isolation at the municipal level.

Learning From Cities in Crisis

All levels of government can learn from the hardships now being endured by mega-cities. However, we must also accept that the difficulties experienced in some cities have little relationship to cities without major transportation issues. The reality is that the electorate and taxpayers have other priorities.

In the Greater Toronto Area, it has been estimated that the cost of congestion to businesses could reach \$3 billion annually by 2021.² Had TDM initiatives that created competitive options to driving been implemented, the GTA might not be faced with such staggering losses. These losses affect



residents and businesses in the area, and have consequences for other surrounding communities as well. However, the research conducted to determine these figures has little relevance for communities like Sudbury, Winnipeg, Halifax or London.

Estimates have also been produced that illustrate potential savings. For example, in Vancouver it is estimated that a 10 percent improvement in fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) and ozone emissions would produce \$195 million in health benefits.³ Definitely interesting, but can TDM professionals use these estimates in other cities?

A recent experiment, using Vancouver as a model, asked what would happen if the slate was wiped clean and the city had originally been developed with a more compact, mixed-use form. Some of the findings include: societal benefits of \$50 billion due to the new land use pattern over the 20-year analysis period; a decrease in total vehicle-kilometres of 56 percent; and a decrease in emissions of 53 percent.⁴ Overall, with a more compact land use, hundreds of kilometres of roads and utilities would not need to be constructed, and the mode split would be 65 percent for sustainable modes – as opposed to the present situation, where approximately 27 percent is by sustainable modes.

Ontario health researchers have pointed to the alarming cost of smog-related air pollution – \$507 million in health care costs related to air pollution in 2005, increasing to

nearly \$702 million by 2026; and \$374 million in lost time, increasing to \$466 million by 2026.⁵ This research shows that providing options to use active transportation (including transit) in a favourably built environment would save millions of dollars in health care costs at the provincial level.

There is a vast area of technical and practical innovation missing in Canada, currently being filled primarily by theoretical explanations and estimates of how to apply experience in other communities. Theory can be tough to fund at municipal budget time, though. Implementing preventive TDM initiatives over the next five to 10 years will offset, or in some cases reduce, significant future costs for municipalities not in a crisis.

Funding Creative Solutions

All levels of government would show foresight if they funded preven-

1 *TDM Encyclopedia*, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2005. <www.vtpi.org/tdm/tdm61.htm>.

2 *A Strategy for Rail-Based Transit in the GTA*, Toronto Board of Trade, 2001. <www.toronto.ca/taf/pdf/strategy_railtransit_execsummary.pdf>.

3 *Promoting Public Health Through Smart Growth*, SmartGrowth BC, 2006. <www.smartgrowth.bc.ca/downloads/SGBC_Health%20Report%20Final.pdf>.

4 *Of Mice and Elephants*, Institute of Transportation Engineers' *ITE Journal*, September 2005.

5 *The Illness Costs of Air Pollution*, Ontario Medical Association, 2005. <www.oma.org/Health/smog/report/ICAP2005_Report.pdf>.

tive TDM projects. For example, this funding ties in directly with the federal government's new approach for a made-in-Canada plan to reduce greenhouse gases. A first step may be to invest in understanding the monitoring and measurement efforts of small, medium and large municipalities, and disseminate to others. This information could be shared across Canada by groups like the Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT) of Canada. It must be recognized, however, that when it comes to TDM solutions, what's innovative in one community cannot necessarily be replicated in another. Individual communities need to develop creative initiatives that consider their unique circumstances. It is imperative that empirical data be available for these analyses.

The debate over funding preventive initiatives versus reactive solutions needs to be raised now. TDM research and practical demonstrations are necessary to facilitate cost/benefit analyses from a solid base of information. The short-term costs of preventive programs and infrastructure far outweigh the enormous costs of remedial actions later.

Current initiatives like federal infrastructure funding, Transport Canada's Urban Transportation Showcase Program, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Green Municipal Fund are an encouraging start. The federal and provincial governments must show greater support for preventive solutions based on practical applications that are easily transferable.

Benefits of TDM include decreased traffic congestion, healthier residents, and decreased air pollution, which are not readily apparent. Too often, crises are rewarded with funding for short-term, reactive solutions. The goal of TDM, for the majority of cities in Canada, is to implement long-term, preventive solutions that will avoid the need to continually spend money on projects that do not address the root of the problem.

Learning from Programs

TDM professionals can learn a lot from other environmental behaviour initiatives, such as municipal recycling programs. The first ever curbside blue box recycling program was launched in Kitchener, Ontario in 1981. By the end of the decade, this environmental initiative spread across many parts of Canada. Today, the vast majority of urban municipalities in Canada have had a recycling program in place for well over 10 years. The type of recycling program may vary from a simple blue box, to a combination of boxes, to a rollout cart.

The majority of Canadian cities do not have waste disposal crises, but they offer choices to disposal, some regulated, others voluntary. It has been determined that a recycling program is an overall good community investment, and widely supported by taxpayers. The supporting infrastructure and human resources have grown with this movement. The wealth of empirical data on recycling is over-

whelming. There are clearly lessons that can be learned from this initiative that can be applied to TDM. Transportation choices can follow a similar path, encouraging the use of sustainable transportation as a norm in society.

Next Steps

What is needed now is dedicated federal and provincial investment to evaluate the success of existing preventive efforts, and to implement measurable demonstration projects that can be used by cities not in crisis. Applied to the local context, and incorporating community desires and capacity, action can be taken with the support of all levels of government.

If significant progress is made in the next few years, small, medium and large cities have an opportunity to be proactive and address issues that will affect us in the not-too-distant future. Support for this much needed work is required now. MW

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