

SPECIAL



BCT Transit

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PARK THE CAR, TAKE THE BUS, HELP THE ENVIRONMENT

Only a fraction of people use public transit, but Gord Lovegrove is hoping to change that.

The assistant professor in the School of Engineering at UBC's Okanagan campus is looking into ways to encourage entire families to take advantage of the local bus system.

ComPASS is a concept where mom, dad and the children all receive bus passes and leave the family car parked as much as possible.

Lovegrove says not only will taking the bus generate an economic benefit for the family, but it will also benefit the environment.

"The average trip in our city is five kilometres," says Lovegrove, who rides his bike or takes the bus to work. "People don't need to drive five kilometres. They can walk, or take a bus or ride a bike. Only two per cent of people (in the area) take public transit."

Lovegrove is basing ComPASS on a similar program that has proved very successful in Boulder, Colorado with ridership reaching an impressive 33 per cent of the population. Another 33 per cent ride their bikes, while the remainder still hit the gas pedal to get to their destination.

Reaching those numbers in Kelowna is possible, as 85 per cent of area neighbourhoods have access to public transit. The Glenmore neighbourhood of Kelowna is providing test families for the trial.

Lovegrove is partnering with the city and other agencies to provide 18 families with free bus passes for three months. As an additional incentive to walk, cycle, and/or take transit, local merchants are also getting involved, including passes to the local Parkinson Recreation Centre, which got on board by reducing the price of activity passes for the university project by 50 per cent. This reflects the Community Revenue Neutral Model (CRNM) that has worked so well in Boulder, whereby prices paid are based on actual revenues received from the group of participating residents.

Using this CRNM, the City of Kelowna has also provided reduced-price transit passes so Lovegrove could conduct the study.

The 18 volunteer families will then be monitored for 12 weeks to see how much they actually ride the bus. Based on the success of the Boulder program, Lovegrove is expecting some impressive results and he anticipates ridership could double.

"That has happened elsewhere," he says. "It means less car use and that's the direction we want to go. It's about a more sustainable community - what can we do in our neck of the woods?"

Phase one of the project found strong support for ComPASS, with 75 per cent of the people surveyed in the Glenmore neighbourhood either saying they would participate or are interested in the idea.

"We're engaging the community. This makes sense economically and it helps the environment. People really want to do the right thing," he says. "People want to prove this is possible. I've already had interest from Rutland. There are of neighbourhoods in Kelowna where this can succeed."

Lovegrove says first-phase results showed residents were willing to pay an average of \$30.50 for their preferred ComPASS package. Based on the community revenue neutral model and assuming 100 per cent participation in the study area, these components could be offered for less than \$20 per household per month, which is significantly less than the average willingness to pay.

Residents overall indicated that they are willing to use more active modes of transportation given a safe and convenient opportunity.

With high support, willingness to change, and the ability to provide a ComPASS at an attractive price, the viability of a ComPASS in the Glenmore community looks promising. ●