

# APPENDIX D

## Employer Interview Findings





# TOWN OF AJAX TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT PLAN



June 2015

Employer Interview Findings  
Report

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Appendix A – Employer Interview Questions

## 1. Introduction

The Town of Ajax is developing a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan to help alleviate traffic congestion and encourage the use of alternatives to single-occupant automobiles. As part of the development of the TDM Plan, interviews were conducted with large employers located within Ajax to gain an understanding of workplace commuter behaviour and the potential for sustainable transportation program participation. Interview discussion topics included:

- Identifying local interests, motivations and barriers relating to the use of sustainable transportation modes;
- Identifying transportation needs and challenges in key areas of Downtown Ajax and at their work sites;
- Identifying whether employers offer or plan to offer TDM programs; and
- Identifying potential partners and community champions.

## 2. Methodology

Eight large employers in Ajax were invited to participate in a 30 minute interview to discuss their workplace commuter practices. A total of six organizations agreed to participate in the interviews. Interviews were scheduled in advance at convenient time for the employer. Interviews were conducted over the telephone and lasted approximately 30 minutes. They were guided by a list of key questions and the conversations documented.

Interviews were conducted during September and October of 2014 with six large employers located in Ajax. Interviewees were reassured that their comments would be kept confidential and that their input would be used in aggregate format.

## 3. Summary of Participant Feedback

The following summary of participant feedback is organized into common themes and areas of discussion. The interview questions that guided the conversations can be found in Appendix A.

### *Organization Profile & Current Practices*

**Role of Interviewees** – Interviewees represented the following departments within their organizations:

- Administration
- Human Resources
- Environment, Health, and Safety
- Customer Service and Special Projects
- Site Management

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**Size of Organization** – Employer organizations had between 80 and 700 employees travelling to and from the workplace daily (self-reported approximation). The size of the organization did not appear to influence the level of current involvement in sustainable transportation practices or programming.

**Employee Travel Origin** – According to all interviewees, the majority of employees live outside of Ajax but within Durham Region (70-90% reported). It was estimated that the remaining employees live within the Greater Toronto Area or within the Town of Ajax.

**Employee Travel Modes** – All participants expressed that the majority of employees travel to work by single-occupant vehicle. In most cases, very few employees are reported to use public transit, cycling or carpooling. Three organizations reported that carpooling is encouraged amongst their employees.

**Effects of Congestion** – All participants expressed that they think traffic congestion has been getting worse over time. One organization identified the winter months as being particularly challenging in terms of traffic delays. Nevertheless, a few participants expressed that staff appear to be able to manage traffic congestion issues well and as a result staff rarely arrive late.

### *Transportation Programs & Facilities*

**Smart Commute Members** – Two organizations are active members of the Smart Commute Program and participate in transportation programming on a regular basis. These organizations offer programs and incentives such as carpool matching, emergency ride home program, transit pass reimbursement, bike lending and also participate in various engaging events such as Bike to Work Day, Carpool Week, Clean Air Commute, educational sessions and giveaways.

These organizations also offer facilities such as bike racks, change rooms and showers, reserved parking for carpool vehicles, and electric vehicle charging stations to help facilitate the use of more sustainable transportation modes.

Both organizations commented on the ease of working collaboratively with Smart Commute and setting out a plan of activities they are able to lead given their available internal resources.

**Non-Smart Commute Members** – Among organizations that are not Smart Commute members, there was little to no involvement in transportation programming reported, with the exception of one organization that offers an electronic message board for carpool matching with a participation rate of approximately 35%.

Two organizations reported offering company vehicles for carpooling to offsite meetings but no other carpooling incentives, such as reserved parking. Bike racks and showers were also available at most facilities.

**Perceived Benefits to Employees** – The perceived benefits to employees for using more sustainable transportation modes were:

- Reduced travel expenses
- Reduced stress

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- Improved health through active lifestyle

**Perceived Benefits to the Company** – The perceived benefits to the company for promoting more sustainable transportation modes were:

- Reduced constraints of limited parking availability
- Demonstrates that the company cares about its staff and their wellbeing
- Promotes good morale amongst employees by showing a commitment to the environment

**Perceived Barriers** – The perceived barriers to individuals to using more sustainable transportation modes were:

- Limited/inflexible public transit schedules
  - Several organizations indicated that the transit schedules were not compatible with employees' personal schedules (e.g. picking up children from school/daycare). It was also expressed that the GO Train and local bus schedules are not synchronized, causing long and undesirable transfer wait times.
- Lack of transit routes near home or workplace
- Safety of bike routes
- Conflict of interest with business objectives (i.e. automobile company wants employees to experience their product)

**Challenges for the Organization** – Participants were asked about why their organizations had little involvement in promoting sustainable transportation and the associated challenges:

- Lack of human resources to dedicate to leading programming
- Financial constraints of the organization – initiatives must be low cost to implement
- Perception that all employees that would be interested in taking sustainable transportation modes already do so
- Value-added to employees needs to be strong and tangible for the organization to consider participating

### *Work Practices*

**Telecommuting** – Several interviewees expressed that being on-site is a requirement of the job for many employees within their organization and therefore telecommuting is not a viable option. However, three participants expressed that if the job allows for it, employees can telecommute and currently do so occasionally. Only one participant reported that telecommuting is increasing in popularity and a formal program will be rolled out in the near future allowing all eligible staff to telecommute one day every two weeks.

**Challenges for Implementing Telecommuting** – According to participants, some of the challenges in allowing staff to telecommute are:

- Monitoring work productivity when staff work from home

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- Accommodating the technology requirements for staff to work from home can be costly (i.e. setting up secure telephone and network access remotely)

**Flexible Work Hours** – All interviewees reported that their organizations allow some degree of flexibility in the daily work schedule so long as the required daily work hours are reached, with the exception of one company where shift workers must operate on a 24-hour set schedule. It was clear that having the option of working flexible hours is highly valued by employees. Frequently cited benefits to having flexible work hours are avoiding the peak travel time and associated congestion and allowing employees to choose a schedule that fits best with their routines.

One negative aspect raised regarding flexible work hours was the added difficulty in scheduling carpooling if employees are travelling to and from work at various times.

### *Incentives*

Smart Commute member organizations offer employee incentives for using sustainable transportation through various engagement events (low cost raffles and giveaways), reserved parking for carpooling, free electric vehicle charging and reduced-cost transit passes.

Among organizations that are not Smart Commute members, no incentives are currently offered for using sustainable transportation. Furthermore, a few participants also felt that reduced-cost transit passes likely would not appeal to employees unless it was a significant discount.

### *Resources*

**Human Resources** – Only one organization had a dedicated person on staff to organize transportation programs. It was expressed by many participants that staff do not have time to take on extra projects. Some interviewees felt that they would be open to implementing programs as long as they received external planning and organizational support.

**Financial Support** – Financial support was not raised as a major barrier to promoting sustainable transportation; however, it was noted that funding to allocate towards engagement activities (e.g. prizes, giveaways) and telecommuting software would be beneficial.

**Marketing and Promotional Support** – It was noted that assistance with creative communications about the value of sustainable transportation programs would be beneficial for organizations. Lunch and learns were also suggested as a useful tool.

## 4. Opportunities for Employers

Based on the series of interviews with large employers in the Town of Ajax, a number of opportunities have become apparent to assist organizations in promoting sustainable workplace commuting:

1. **Identify a local champion and/or a staff role dedicated to transportation-related initiatives.** This was raised as a key to success by both organizations currently participating in Smart Commute programs.
2. **Tie sustainable transportation to existing employee engagement efforts.** Healthy and active living is a common topic that employees are engaged in. Cycling and walking have a strong connection to this and opportunities for synergies should be explored.
3. **Take advantage of the support and resources currently provided by Smart Commute Durham.**
4. **Gain support and buy-in from senior management** by demonstrating tangible benefits to both employees and the organization.
5. To overcome incompatible GO train and bus connection times, **explore the use of an employee shuttle program.**
6. **Promote the benefits of offering flexible work hours and encourage employees to shift work outside of peak travel times.**

## 7. Considerations for the Town of Ajax

The Town of Ajax will play an important role in encouraging the use of sustainable workplace commuting options. Based on the feedback received through these interviews, employers, the Town, and community partners should collaborate. The Town of Ajax should consider the following to assist local organizations to engage their staff in sustainable commuting:

1. **Encourage broader participation in Smart Commute.** There was a clear distinction in the level of involvement in transportation-related programs and incentives between the organizations who participate in Smart Commute and the organizations that do not. To ensure resources are used efficiently, the Town should work collaboratively with Smart Commute to enhance and increase uptake of currently offered programs as well as identify and develop new programs.
2. **Explore providing effective marketing and promotional communications materials to assist with program participation.** Interviewees identified the need for externally developed engagement materials to communicate the benefits of sustainable transportation.
3. **Facilitate educational sessions and/or lunch and learns.** Suggested topics are: road safety for cyclists and drivers, training on how to operate the bicycle rack on local buses, how to find a carpool match, etc.
4. **Advocate for local transit schedules that are synchronized with GO Train schedules.**

## 5. Next Steps

The feedback provided during the employer interviews will be used to support the development of the Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan for the Town of Ajax, along with input from the general public and the Town of Ajax. A draft of the Plan will be presented to the community for further comment and feedback at a Public Open House in early 2015. The final TDM Plan is anticipated for completion in 2015.

# Ajax Transportation Demand Management Plan

## Employer Interview Questions

### Introductory Questions

1. What is your role at your organization?
2. Approximately how many employees travel to your workplace daily?
3. Where do most employees live?
  - a. In Ajax
  - b. Outside Ajax (where?)
4. What modes of transportation do employees use to travel to work? (estimate % breakdown of travel modes) (employer shuttle, single person vehicle, carpooling, walking, cycling and taking transit)
5. Has your organization ever conducted a staff transportation survey? If yes, would they be willing to share the results with us?

### Perceptions of Congestion

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, how does traffic congestion affect your organization? 1=not at all, 5=all the time. (I.e. delayed movement of goods, staff arriving late, etc.)
7. Do you think the traffic congestion problem is getting worse? (Yes/No/Maybe)

### Transportation Programs

8. Please tell me about any initiatives that encourage employees to take alternative modes of transportation to and from work (employer shuttle, carpooling, transit, cycling/walking).
  - a. What are they?
  - b. How do they work?
  - c. How many people participate?
  - d. What motivates employees to participate?
  - e. How are people encouraged to participate?
  - f. What are the benefits to employees?
  - g. What are the benefits to the company?
9. Have there been any programs in the past or that you have considered but never implemented? Please tell me about them and why they are not active.
  - a. What happened/why didn't they work?
  - b. Would you consider reinstating them?
  - c. What would help make them work?
10. Have you heard about Smart Commute?
  - a. What do you know about it?
  - b. Does your company participate? Why or why not?

### Transportation Facilities

11. Please tell me about any facilities at your workplace that help facilitate the use of more sustainable transportation modes – such as a shuttle, reserved carpool parking, bike racks, showers, etc.
12. Have employees ever requested any additional facilities? What sort of things are they looking for?

### Work Practices

13. Are employees able to telecommute (e.g. work from home)? Please tell me about how this works.
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. If yes:
    - i. Is this available to everyone?
    - ii. What are the benefits to employees? To the company?
    - iii. Do people use it? How frequently?
    - iv. Are there any issues? How are they being addressed or overcome?
  - c. If no:
    - i. Would or has the option been considered?
    - ii. What would encourage the company to allow telecommuting?
    - iii. What is needed to help?
14. Are employees able to work flexible hours (e.g. condensed work week or flexible start and/or finish times)? Please tell me about how this works.
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. If yes:
    - i. Is this available to everyone?
    - ii. What are the benefits to employees? To the company?
    - iii. Do people do it? How frequently?
    - iv. Are there any issues? How are they being addressed or overcome?
  - c. If no:
    - i. Would or has the option been considered?
    - ii. What would encourage the company to allow flexible work hours?
    - iii. What is needed to help?

### Incentives

15. Are there any employee incentive programs or perks for using sustainable transportation?
16. Would things like free or reduced-cost transit passes appeal to employees?
17. Would the company be willing to explore some sort of employee commuting assistance program?

### Required Resources

18. Whose responsibility should it be to organize sustainable transportation programs?
19. What resources would your company benefit from to start or expand sustainable/active transportation programs? (Examples: funding, staff education/training, software)