

The State of Active Transportation in Canada: an overview



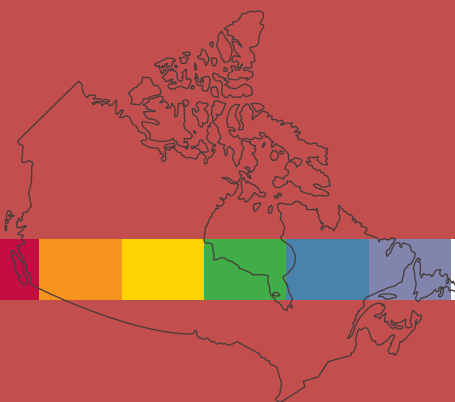
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for the *On the move
in the Community!* Conference
June 2010

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This report was prepared for the *On the Move in the Community* conference on June 3, 2010. The objective of this event – the first to bring together active transportation stakeholders from across Canada – is to take a closer look at the elements that have helped to create cycling- and walking-friendly environments in our cities, towns and neighbourhoods, be it through mobility-related policy-making, technical infrastructure development or promotional and communication efforts.

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Active Transportation and Schools: The Canadian Experience

Until recently, “active transportation” has been more of an abstract concept than a concrete reality. Of course active transportation has always been around, but people who walk to work or school have generally done so out of necessity, rather than as a way of getting their exercise or, for that matter, saving the planet. Today, however, the rapid deterioration of air quality in our cities and the growing trend toward a sedentary lifestyle force us to consider a broad range of solutions to promote the daily use of active transportation to travel to school and work.

In recent years, a growing commitment toward encouraging this new lifestyle choice at the school level has been seen in communities around the world. In the United Kingdom, Sustrans has been a trailblazer in this regard with its *Safe Routes to Schools* program, which has shown that tremendous progress can be made with this form of active mobility when it is supported by community engagement and infrastructure development. The movement has spread quickly throughout Europe and, in the past decade, made great strides in the United States and Canada as well.

This report on the state of active transportation in Canada is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis. Rather, it is an overview of the most promising and inspiring experiences from across the country to provide food for thought for Vélo Québec and fellow members of the *Canadian Active & Safe Routes to School Partnership*. Naturally, these initiatives have been influenced by the means and resources available from one province or territory to another. But they have all emerged as a result of the creativity and commitment of their respective advocates.



Different contexts, one common goal

Almost all children can walk, bike, skate or roll to their destinations on a daily basis – naturally and effortlessly. By opting for active transportation, they become more self-sufficient and self-reliant. They feel more responsible. They become healthier and fitter. They become more familiar with their surroundings. And they have fun!

These are the goals of various programs across the country, supported by numerous partners who are devoted to promoting safe and active ways for children to travel to and from school. These partners are pulling out all the stops – educating, motivating, advocating, influencing and promoting – in order to increase the number of school children who choose active, sustainable and safe transportation alternatives. They are investing in tomorrow's generation who, more and more, are using human-powered transportation to get around. All over the country.



A connector trail

Aware of the need to make active transportation more accessible, the School Travel Planning Committee at Shatford Memorial Elementary School in Hubbards, near Halifax, has decided to build a connector trail from the school grounds to the existing Rails to Trails corridor that passes through the community. Following a summit in June 2009 of various stakeholders and project advocates, the initial trail planning was completed in kind by the municipal Parkland Planning Department. Construction of the trail is scheduled to begin in summer 2010 and will be funded by municipal, provincial and other partners.

For further information:
www.saferoutesns.ca

A very active decade in Nova Scotia...

In Nova Scotia, since 2001, the Active & Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) program has been encouraging children, youth and their families to use active transportation – such as walking and cycling – to support the environment, physical activity and traffic safety. Over 300 schools and organizations have taken part in the program, which includes a compelling array of activities, among them WOW (We Often Walk or Wheel) days, walking school buses, the Pace Car anti-speeding initiative, International Walk to School Month, Winter Walk Day and Making Tracks safety skill training.

ASRTS is coordinated by the Ecology Action Centre in partnership with the Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection as part of the Active Kids, Healthy Kids initiative. Various other partners are involved with the program on a project-specific basis.

Putting the brakes on speeding

Nova Scotia's innovative Pace Car program was developed to help stop speeding on neighbourhood streets. Participants in the program agree to drive within the speed limit in given areas, thus becoming "mobile speed bumps" and slowing the traffic behind them. They also agree to be more aware of and courteous to other road users, especially pedestrians and cyclists. Drivers who sign the Pace Car pledge receive two Pace Car decals to place on the back of their vehicles. Various other promotional material is also distributed to support the campaign, the success of which depends entirely on the participating teams. The Pace Car program is operated at the neighbourhood level.

First piloted in late 2006, the program has grown to over 20 schools or communities with approximately 2,000 Pace Car drivers across the province. Other provinces, as well as Safe Kids Canada, have adopted the materials and approach developed in Nova Scotia. The original Pace Car concept was the brainchild of Australian David Engwicht. Nova Scotia was the first to implement it in Canada.

The program is an initiative of the Ecology Action Centre in association with the Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and other partners.



In Quebec: On the Move to School!

Vélo Québec established the On the Move to School! program in 2005 to encourage elementary and high school students to integrate active transportation into their daily routine. This program is quickly gaining in popularity and will be present in 16 of Quebec's administrative regions and 210 schools as of the 2010–2011 school year. Quite the success story!

The program extends over a three-year period and focuses on three areas: awareness, engagement and infrastructure. Vélo Québec works in conjunction with a number of well-established local partners that are strategically positioned to initiate and promote activities in their respective communities.

On the move in L'Ancienne-Lorette

In 2006, École Le Ruisselet was one of the first schools in the Quebec City area to join the On the Move to School! program. The ongoing dedication of various stakeholders from the municipality and the school made it possible to implement a number of awareness activities for parents and students alike. A parent committee and members of the school's governing board meet with parents twice a year, at the beginning of the school day, and distribute flyers that remind everyone of the safety rules to follow in the area around the school (no full turns in the school parking lot, the importance of dropping children off at a sidewalk, etc.).

The students at École Le Ruisselet have also enjoyed in-class activities during the three-year program. They have taken part in group walks to mark the beginning of the program, an activity day at the Centre culture et environnement Frédéric Back in Quebec City and the Getting to School, Without the Fuel! challenge, which encourages students to use active transportation as much as possible to get back and forth to school for an entire week.

As part of the On the Move to School! program, a school travel plan was developed, the purpose of which is to improve conditions for students travelling by foot or by bicycle. Several long-term infrastructure upgrades have already been made in the vicinity of the school to provide a safer environment for young walkers and cyclists, including:

- Narrowing of the school bus drop-off/pick-up zone
- Delineation of a pedestrian zone for students
- Road markings
- Traffic-calming measures (street furniture incorporated into the middle of the roadway)
- Multipurpose lane for users of active transportation

A modal shift away from the automobile and toward the bicycle has been observed, as has a slight shift from walking to cycling. So there's no doubt about it: the students at École Le Ruisselet love biking to school! The development of suitable cycling facilities has obviously made it easier for them to indulge!

This is a prime example of people joining together to embrace the On the Move to School! program and the positive impact this can have on the use of active transportation at the school level.



Partners

Accès transports viables et Vivre en Ville
(Quebec City area and the Chaudière–Appalaches region)

Réseaux Plein Air Drummond
(Centre-du-Québec region)

Conseil régional de l'environnement de l'Estrie (Eastern Townships)

Groupe Plein Air Terrebonne
(Lanaudière region)

Nature-Action Québec
(Montérégie and Laurentides areas)

Sports Laval

Unité régionale de loisir et de sport de la Mauricie (Mauricie region)

Loisir sport Outaouais
(Outaouais region)

There are three partners covering the Island of Montreal:

Réseau des établissements scolaires nord de la CSDM (Saint-Michel), **Solidarité Mercier Est** and **Vélo Québec Association**.





The main barrier to increased walking and cycling is the lack of routes and facilities that offer a safe, comfortable and convenient transportation alternative. Vélo Québec's latest publication, entitled *Planning and Design for Pedestrians and Cyclists*, presents key concepts, explores best practices and provides information critical to raising awareness about the importance of developing high-quality infrastructure that caters to the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. This fully illustrated, 168-page guide urges readers to rethink the way our towns and cities are designed in order to encourage people to reconsider the merits of active transportation. The material it contains is based on the input of a panel of experts in municipal and mobility matters.

Tools, facilities and ambassadors

In order to develop an environment where active transportation to school is safer and more pleasant, municipalities must be involved in and committed to the process. Hence the reason Vélo Québec created the On the Move in the Community program, the goal of which is to provide municipal stakeholders with the required tools to secure their engagement over the long term.

Since last year, this initiative has generated a great deal of interest among decision-makers as well as those involved in planning and front-line operations. Municipalities that adhere to the "active community" concept agree to appoint an "active transportation ambassador" within their administration and to offer their employees the opportunity to receive training from Vélo Québec on how to create walking- and cycling-friendly environments. Finally, "active communities" agree to take part in an annual review of their facilities and policies designed to promote active transportation.

A winning formula for sharing the road

In spring 2009, parents at 12 elementary schools in the central Montreal borough of Le Plateau-Mont-Royal, along with residents, teachers, daycare workers and students, signed a promise to conscientiously share the road with other users. Participants were given a decal bearing the *La rue pour tous!* logo to proudly display in the window of their car or home. The goal of this awareness campaign, established by Vélo Québec in conjunction with the Commission scolaire de Montréal, is to make it easier, safer and more enjoyable for all types of users to share the road. In 2010, the campaign will cover a number of boroughs in Montreal and municipalities throughout the province.

Carefully planned routes to school

Using the Sustrans model in the United Kingdom as its inspiration, Vélo Québec incorporated the concept of a school travel plan into the On the Move to School pilot project introduced in eight schools in Quebec in September 2005. The school travel plan is one of the cornerstones of this initiative, which today is in place at 135 schools throughout Quebec. Between November 2007 and March 2009, thanks to Green Communities Canada, similar pilot projects were launched in four other Canadian provinces. The concept will soon be available nation-wide.

The school travel plan has three main goals: ensuring safer routes to school, encouraging and maintaining active transportation for elementary school students and promoting a collaborative approach among parents, students, school administrations and municipal authorities in the planning of pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly infrastructure.

The reference document provides an overview of the travel patterns of students and their parents, identifies the main obstacles to active transportation and puts forward recommendations to improve conditions for families travelling between home and school. To this end, a questionnaire is distributed to parents and a map showing the geographical distribution of the school population is prepared.

Following this, a "walkabout" activity is organized in the area around the school, which local elected officials, municipal representatives, school staff, parents and students are invited to attend. Participants are asked to be on the lookout for risky behaviour on the part of road users, inadequate signage and other problem areas that may jeopardize safety.

The recommendations of this study are submitted to the school, the local police and the municipal departments responsible for public facilities. Vélo Québec supports subsequent school initiatives and works with municipal authorities to put these recommendations into practice.

For further information:
http://www.velo.qc.ca/monecole/index_e.php

Keeping school children active and safe in Ontario

In 1996, the Active & Safe Routes to School pilot project was started in Ontario at three Toronto schools. Since then, the program has grown in scope and popularity, with support from Green Communities Canada, an association dedicated to environmental solutions. Some 2,500 schools and 600,000 students currently benefit from the various resources available through Green Communities Canada. This is a prime example of how a project can bring people together.

Active & Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) promotes efficient forms of active transportation between home and school on a daily basis. It addresses clearly identified health and road safety issues and proposes concrete solutions for those interested in fighting air pollution and climate change.

Ontario's school travel planning initiative, which served as a model for a national pilot project, owes its success to the drive and determination of its community champions, with active support from provincial ASRTS experts that includes access to resources, consultation, advice and peer networking. ASRTS programming is part of Green Communities Canada's group of walking initiatives identified as Canada Walks.



Halton Region: Setting the pace

Halton Region in southern Ontario is pushing past the limitations of school-level advocacy toward a sustainable model of active transportation that can reach out to more children over a prolonged period. A steering committee that includes representation from the four municipalities that make up Halton Region, several municipal departments and district school boards allowed

Halton Region to complete a successful school travel planning pilot project at eight schools in 2008.

The popularity of the program prompted the Halton District School Board to contribute \$125,000 to extend and expand the project in 2009-2010. Inspired by this move, the Catholic District School Board has also joined the project. In total, 25 new schools will see school travel planning programs. But this is just the beginning! The region is aligned for even more great work in the future.

New school, new approach

In January 2010, Halton Region took another step in the right direction at P. L. Robertson Public School, a new school in Milton. From day one, children have been strongly encouraged to walk, bike or skate to and from school. It helps that 98% of students live close by but, for those in outlying areas, there are designated drop-off points that still allow them a healthy walk to reach the school. The capital cost for the designation of this "walking only" school was largely for bicycle racks – enough for 280 bicycles.

The school administration is pleased with the prospect of helping to create a healthier community. "We need to have students arrive by foot, bike or any other form of active transportation all year long," says Vice-Principal Joyce Jermyn. "This will create a green, healthy environment for the student body."

For further information:
www.saferoutestoschool.ca/schooltravel.asp

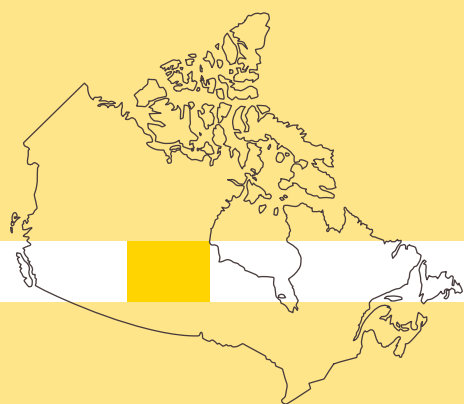




A role model

The collaborative relationship between the Mystery Lake School Division and the City of Thompson is another exciting success story. Located approximately 800 kilometres north of Winnipeg, Thompson is a community dedicated to reducing greenhouse gases, promoting healthy living and encouraging school zone safety. They are the first municipality and school division to collaborate on the establishment of an active school travel facilitator to work with schools on the development of a division-wide travel plan ensuring safe routes for all students.

For further information:
<http://www.resourceconservation.mb.ca/gci/ASRTS/1main.html>



Manitoba: A province rich in resources

The non-profit organization Resource Conservation Manitoba, whose mission is to promote ecological sustainability through environmental education and to develop alternatives to current practices, has been offering its Active & Safe Routes to School program since 2002. Over

the years, the organization has worked with 500 schools on special events like International Walk to School Month and Clean Air Day, as well as providing them with hands-on support to establish walking programs and walking school buses and to raise public awareness about idling, speed and safety.

Last year, the program was expanded to include school travel planning. Currently, Resource Conservation Manitoba is evaluating how to sustainably build capacity in local communities for the program.

An invigorating initiative

Schools across Manitoba are doing great things to promote active transportation. Ruth Hooker School in Selkirk, for one, encourages active living through a school-wide walking school bus program. Another example is Balmoral Hall School, an all-girls school in Winnipeg. In October, students, staff members and parents participated in an adapted version of the walking school bus. Since less than 10% of the school population lives close enough to walk to school, parents have been given the option of dropping their children off at a designated off-site location and letting them walk the rest of the way as a group. The 20-minute walk has proven to be an excellent way to start the day. As one Grade 2 student put it, "I feel so invigorated!"



Walking the talk

Westglen School in Edmonton has been involved in the SHAPE program from the beginning and has a winning plan in place to promote walking in various ways. The school's "Earth Patrols" (Grade 6 students in the environmental club) play a decisive role in this regard. One of their strategies is to go from class to class to draw attention to the benefits of the program.

On the morning of the walks, all walkers are encouraged to come into the school through the front doors, which are usually reserved for visitors. Children who are normally driven are dropped off a few blocks away from the school. As they arrive, the Earth Patrol greets them with pom-poms and cheering. It's

an amazing experience!

At 10 a.m., students and their guests (including daycare and playschool children, seniors and members of a nearby fitness club) meet in the gym, with their SHAPE stickers on. Local junior high school students act as mascots or escorts. The local high school has even sent their cheer team several times. After the Earth Patrol talks briefly about the physical and environmental benefits of walking, the fun begins. The group leaves the gym, with music playing, and circles the city block for 15 minutes. Children then have their recess. The event is hyped by inviting special guests and mascots – including an Olympic race-walking athlete – to join in on the fun.

For further information:
www.shapeab.ca



Way to go!

The students at Monsignor J.S. Smith School in Calgary participate in a walking school bus program, which runs from September to October and then again from April to June, Wednesdays through Fridays. A consistent group of students walk the entire route from home to school. However, many parent drivers stop and allow their children to join in when they see other kids walking to school. One senior student ensures the safety of the children while en route.

Promotion is vital and a big draw is the much-loved walking school bus mascot. Other great ideas have been to include reminders in home newsletters and to have senior students in the leadership program design and display promotional posters. In addition, every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, there is a meeting place set up for those who walk to school. This activity also represents a unique opportunity for participating parents to get to know one another.

SHAPE-ing up Alberta

In Alberta, the SHAPE (Safe Healthy Active People Everywhere) program started from a pilot project in 2000 at 10 Edmonton schools due to transportation congestion issues around school and evolved to a province-wide program promoting active and safe routes to school in 2001.

The name of the SHAPE program reflects the key elements of health, safety and the involvement of everyone in the program. Encouraging active transportation and working together with all stakeholders have been the cornerstones of SHAPE's work.

A world record

SHAPE promotes various activities such as International Walk to School Day. In 2005, SHAPE and Alberta were successful in setting a Guinness World Record for the most people walking simultaneously, with 79,815 people at 321 sites. SHAPE also initiated Winter Walk Day in 2007 to encourage Albertans to walk during the colder months. To date, over 200,000 people of all ages have participated in this event. And why stop there? The new Alberta Bike to School event will be launched in June 2010. Time to saddle up!

A new challenge for British Columbia

In British Columbia, the Active & Safe Routes to School program is currently at a crossroads. For years, ASRTS in the more populated areas of the province was coordinated by the Way To Go! school program, which provided advice and resources and ran large-scale events and campaigns. After Way To Go! wrapped up in 2008, a number of municipalities were able to maintain activities on their own. Nevertheless, a gap remained that needed to be filled. That is where HASTE BC has come in, to shoulder some of the load.

HASTE BC provides assistance for schools working on transportation issues. Based on a decade's worth of progress made under the Way To Go! program, HASTE BC helps coordinate large-scale campaigns and events such as International Walk to School Month and Bike to School Week, orchestrates the school travel planning program and consults on and operates ASRTS initiatives with local and regional partners.

www.hastebc.org

New and unique support for school communities:

- Active Travel Grants
- MyTravel Calculator
- Online Route Planner

Three stories, three models

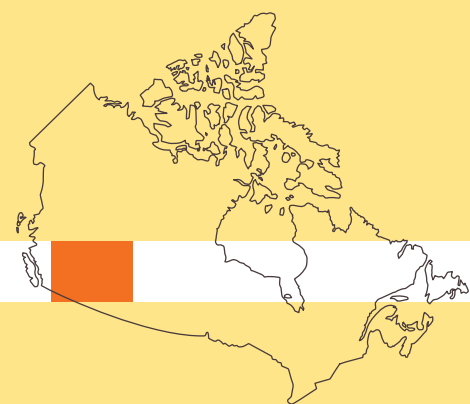
At Glenmore Elementary School in Kelowna, a community initiative known as Cool Ways to School is under way to promote active transportation at the school and neighbourhood levels. The goal is to encourage walking and cycling through education, community support and infrastructure planning. Eight nursing students are collaborating with the Cool Ways to School Committee to develop a sustainable walking school bus model that does not rely exclusively on volunteer parent "bus drivers," as well as a four-week bike skills program. These students also promote active and healthy lifestyles through a series of class presentations.

At Queen Mary Elementary, the parent advisory council (PAC) has created a "safe walking zone" around the school. Parent volunteers monitor the area before and after school, and families are encouraged to park outside of the zone and walk the last few blocks to school.

Families unwilling or unable to park-and-walk are monitored by volunteers to ensure participant safety. Additionally, upper-level students at Queen Mary do community outreach as part of the program, educating their parents about the carbon monoxide emissions produced by daily driving to school.

The City of New Westminster recently launched its own Active & Safe Routes to School initiative as part of the city's transportation demand management program. For each school, a series of ASRTS information kits will be developed and education and non-financial incentives will be introduced to promote walking, biking and transit to school. An automobile trip reduction program will also be implemented at three selected elementary schools. The mapping component of the initiative relies heavily on participation by and consultation of the school communities. Future infrastructure planning by the city's transportation department will be informed by the report generated as part of this community engagement process.

For further information: www.hastebc.org



A challenge north of 60

The Active Yukon Schools program is a school-based initiative, administered by Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon, that furthers the integration of daily physical activity and healthy living. As of February 2009, 24 schools had registered as Active Yukon Schools and thus had access to the Active & Safe Routes to School program, International Walk to School Day, the Commuter Challenge and the Pedometer Loan-Out Program.

The Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon is hoping to create a school travel planning committee in the future, which is no small feat in a territory with a mere 34,000 residents. Introducing active transportation in such a sparsely populated area is indeed a considerable challenge.



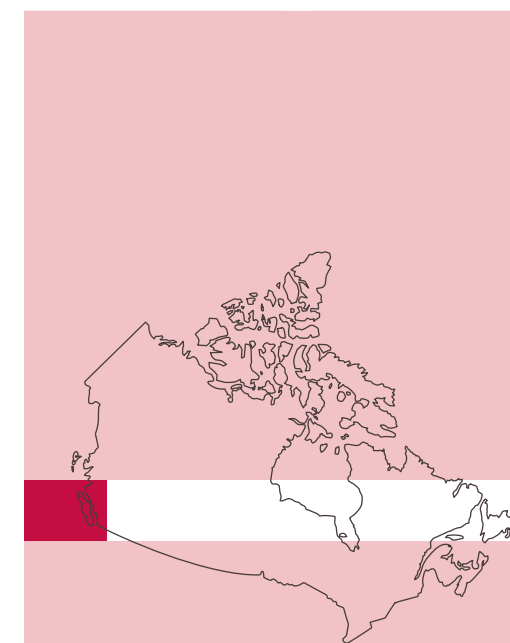
Whitehorse Moves

The City of Whitehorse has a population of 20,500 residents. In the past four years, with the creation of the Whitehorse Moves program, efforts have been made to pave a path to increase active transportation opportunities. The development of the City's trail plan in 1997 and

a transportation plan for 2002–2004 were the first steps in setting the stage for the current initiative. The barriers identified during the consultation stages were quickly turned into infrastructure projects including a "road diet" (reduction in the number of automobile traffic lanes), new bicycle lanes and paths, a new bridge for pedestrians and cyclists and bicycle parking facilities.

To have residents make good use of these pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly environments, public education and outreach campaigns were organized. Tools such as a commuter cycling map were made available using a community-based social marketing approach. The key message was that alternative commuting can be a convenient, safe and positive experience for everyone.

The recent strides made in Whitehorse show that active transportation programs also have a place in smaller, low-density cities.



Active transportation advocates

The success of initiatives designed to promote active transportation relies heavily on the creativity of their proponents and their ability to motivate others, as the experiences described in this report clearly show.

The member organizations of the Canadian Active & Safe Routes to School Partnership are hard at work across the country. Although these organizations vary in size, they all share a common goal: empowering school children to use active transportation to get to school safely and independently. The Partnership is a leader in terms of community outreach and education with respect to active transportation. It plays a role in policy-making to ensure access to pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly environments.

Ecology Action Centre

The Ecology Action Centre has acted as a voice for Nova Scotia's environment since it was founded in 1971. The EAC has been voted the top activist organization by readers of Halifax's *The Coast* magazine for six years running. It has helped to build a healthier, more sustainable Nova Scotia, working closely with social and natural scientists and making strong use of science in communicating its message to the public. The EAC has 1,000 members and is supported by 250 volunteers and employees.

adopted by all school boards throughout the province. In total, 2,500 schools participate in the program.

Resource Conservation Manitoba (RCM)

Resource Conservation Manitoba is a not-for-profit organization that raises public awareness about protecting the environment and applying the principles of ecological sustainability. Households, workplaces, schools and communities look to RCM for practical information on active transportation, composting, waste reduction and resource conservation. With the help of its partners and community networks, RCM identifies and proposes solutions to reduce the impact of climate change, traffic congestion, overconsumption and waste.

Vélo Québec Association

Established in 1967, Vélo Québec Association is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting the development of cycling and other forms of active transportation. Although it is perhaps best known for its efforts to promote cycling as a recreational pursuit and tourist activity (notably via the Route verte), Vélo Québec Association has also become a leader in the field of sustainable personal transportation in recent years. Through various technical publications, including the recent *Planning and Design for Pedestrians and Cyclists*, the association shares its expertise with numerous private- and public-sector organizations. With its On the Move to School! program, it has reached out to 11 regions throughout Quebec and had an impact on 135 schools, 50,000 primary and high school students and 73,000 parents. Based in Montreal, Vélo Québec Association is an active presence in Quebec and the rest of Canada, as well as the United States and Europe. Its team works closely with the more than 100 employees of its sister organizations, including Vélo Québec Éditions (publishers of guides and magazines), Vélo Québec Événements (organizers of such events as the Tour de l'Île de Montréal) and Vélo Québec Voyages (a travel agency that every year helps 5,000 people enjoy cycling vacations and tours around the world).

Safe, Healthy, Active People Everywhere (SHAPE)

SHAPE has been promoting safe, active transportation for school children in Alberta since 2001. The non-profit organization receives support from several partners committed to safety, health and environment issues, including Eco-Action, the Alberta Sport, Recreation Parks & Wildlife Foundation and Alberta Tourism. SHAPE works with 260 schools and their communities to encourage children and youth to regularly walk or bike to school. In addition, SHAPE distributes information on active and safe routes to school to the 2,500 schools throughout the province.

Green Communities Canada (GCC)

Green Communities Canada is a national association of some 30 non-profit community-based organizations dedicated to promoting sustainable development. GCC oversees the implementation of joint programs for some of its members and offers environmental programs and services to households and municipalities in Ontario. Launched in Toronto in 1996, the Active & Safe Routes to School program has since been

Hub for Action on School Transportation Emissions (HASTE)

The HASTE project supports schools and their communities taking action to reduce transportation emissions in British Columbia. This online networking centre allows teachers, students and school administrations to have access to tools and information and to interact with their peers in order to improve the health and quality of the environment in their community.