

SASKATCHEWAN: Yorkton Active Transportation Collaboration – A variety of sectors are mobilizing to promote community and recreational cycling and walking within Yorkton

"Out of the initial workshop came a philosophy, a commitment, a plan, and an educated group to move it forward"

Lead Organization:

Yorkton *in motion*

Key Partners:

Sunrise Health Region, Yorkton *in motion*, Yorkton Business Improvement District, City of Yorkton, Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI), RCMP, Society for the Involvement of Good Neighbours (SIGN), non-profit organizations, community champions

Community:

Yorkton, Saskatchewan

Population of Community:

15,038

Setting:

Urban

Target Group:

General Population

Project Focus:

To enhance the health of local residents through active transportation

Implementation Level:

Local

Stage of Development:

Ongoing

Background

In 2006, a community committee called "Yorkton *in motion*" sponsored a series of workshops focused on active transportation with support from Saskatchewan *in motion*. The workshops included a talk by internationally renowned walking expert Mark Fenton, and an "Active Transportation Workshop" with Go for Green's Active Transportation Coordinator, Michael Haynes. Participants went on a walkabout and assessed the "walkability" and "bikeability" of Yorkton. The workshop explored ways to create conditions necessary for physical activity, and the group created a local vision for active transportation. At this time, a spark was lit.



Just as Yorkton *in motion* began mobilizing around active transportation, an important change was taking place at the Sunrise Health Region (SHR). Their latest Health Status Report indicated that only 36% of the population in Yorkton was active, compared to

52% of other regions in Saskatchewan. The Medical Health Officer put a priority on getting people active, and the Health Region decided to shift their internal mandate away from “telling”, toward “building” relationships with the public. Active transportation represented a great segue for the Health Region to start building relationships with the local community about health and physical activity.

Partnerships

Invitations to participate in the Yorkton Active Transportation Workshop were sent through the Mayor’s office to key groups identified by the Yorkton *in motion* Committee. Yorkton *in motion* organizers felt that invitations from the Mayor would draw attention and generate a positive response. They were right. The key partners all responded positively to the request and a broad range of sectors attended including: the City of Yorkton, the SHR, Yorkton *in motion*, the Yorkton Business Improvement District, Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI), the RCMP, NGOs, and community members who have a passion for active transportation. Out of this workshop session, the Yorkton Active Transportation Collaboration was born.

Early on, the Collaboration decided to steer away from a traditional “committee” approach and adopted a Task Force or project team approach. This meant that everybody at the table had a clear role to play through their task to complete. The Task Force created an 11-point Action Plan, and members each took on a task. In this way, everyone took on a leadership role to ensure that their task was completed. The Task Force currently meets bi-annually to update each other on progress made. This approach has worked exceptionally well – especially with members of the business community who have limited time to spend on committees, but have a lot to contribute to the project. Each partner can commit to specific projects within a defined timeline.

Everyone around the table has stayed engaged and has used their passion and skills for their task. For example, the business association started the “Walk-A-Mile” project to revitalize the downtown, and encourage people to park and walk. The City of Yorkton assisted with the Cycling Network Plan, as their support was required to receive grant money to fund the study. If a task required expertise that was not around the table, the partners used their networks to find the right person.



Yorkton Business Improvement District Walk-A-Mile
Photo Credit: *Yorkton in motion*

Generating Buy-In

While there was a lot of buy-in by those around the table (especially people who had attended the active transportation workshops) there was not necessarily buy-in at the board level of partner organizations. The Task Force had to make a case to gain support from senior management. They did this by building a business case and tailoring their message to show each group “what was in it for them.” For the City, they identified opportunities for economic development. For the Health Region, the support came based on their new priority on active living. For the business community, the rationale was to increase foot traffic downtown. The Task Force built its evidence, and then made presentations to key decision-makers to make them aware of the importance of active transportation. The business case became both a strategic exercise and an educational tool.

A turning point occurred when the Mayor of Yorkton observed the committee’s second update meeting. When he heard what the group had achieved and the compelling health implications of their work, he made a move to push walking, cycling trail connections and play structures as priorities in the City’s budget.

Planning & Implementation

The Active Transportation workshops were the biggest influence for the Task Force and provided the initial vision to move the group forward. Similarly, Mark Fenton’s philosophy about how to change your community has been a good fit. From a health perspective, the group was influenced by the work of Kim Bergeron at Queen’s University, who developed a checklist for planners to design active communities. Louise Bélanger, SHR’s representative on the task force, attended a webinar on Bergeron’s work and then brought this data back to the group. Every partner did some research and brought it to the table.

Public consultation was also a part of the process. At the Yorkton Exhibition/Fair they set up a survey booth to get feedback on residents’ preferred routes and destinations. They then hosted a “Ride-A-Long” with key community leaders to select and refine the preferred route options on their bikes. Engagement has taken many forms, with an emphasis on getting people out in the community.

Lessons Learned

Key lessons learned include:

- Hosting the initial active transportation workshops was the single most important driver. Out of these workshops came a philosophy, a commitment, a plan, and an educated group to move it forward;
- Using the “11 Point” action plan really worked. It allowed partners to choose their level of involvement, and kept people engaged;
- Having invitations come from the Mayor added credibility and garnered a lot of attention;
- Participating in some form of audit can really bring home the message. Those who took part in the walkability and bikeability audits realized that while Yorkton is a small city, it can be difficult to get from point A to point B without a car;
- Educating officials and executives was most successful when the Task Force promoted “what is in it for them”; and
- Using published Canadian research helped to build the case.

From a health perspective, the relationship of partner organizations with the Health Region has been strengthened. Partners on the Task Force had to learn a lot about each other, including how to speak a common language. The health sector had to learn to frame the “population health” message so it makes sense to the other stakeholders, in a language that they can use. The project was an opportunity for the health partners to educate public officials about the role of public health and health promotion, and show them that it is not just about immunization. “It has opened up a realm of understanding about the role of public health.”

Now if another project comes up, the Community Health Educator can make a phone call to partners and ask if there is anything the Health Region can do to help. The project has created an extended network that partners can go back to.

One unanticipated spin-off was an invitation to the SHR to attend a developer’s charrette. This was the first time in Yorkton that health was invited to sit at the table with developers. SHR is now working with the developer of a new sub-division who has agreed to incorporate standards for designing active communities. The project has also spurred an annual Sidewalk Clearing Contest – a local business has decided to give away a prize to the person in the community who kept their sidewalk clear all year.

Next steps for the Task Force may include:

- Developing a three-year Strategic Education Awareness Plan;
- Preparing a demonstration site (painting trial bike lanes on a street) and hosting on-site education sessions for cycling safety; and
- Advocating for the appointment of the Active Transportation Task Force to the City of Yorkton Planning and Development Commission, to ensure active living principles are considered in every new development in the City.

Advice to Other Communities

The process developed by the Task Force is not complicated: the walkabouts, audits and presentations can be replicated at any scale. The Task Force intends to package their process and take it to outlying communities within the SHR.

Their advice to other communities is to start with a high visibility project that requires low effort, and then work up from there. The Walk-A-Mile project developed by the Yorkton Business Improvement District was an example of an action that required little work and funding, and had a huge impact.



Ride-A-Long.

Photo Credit: Yorkton *in motion*

Evaluation and Impact

The group now has plans to do a follow-up community "Ride-A-Long" to ensure signage is in place and cycling routes are being maintained as called for in the Cycling Network Plan. There are also plans to engage the community to submit their walking and cycling stories – these will be posted on a web-based forum such as Facebook or a website. The Health Region will be using data collected by the RCMP and Sunrise Emergency in order to track cycling injuries over time. The group is starting to put the foundations in place to measure health outcomes over the long term. Physical inactivity will be one of the key categories in the next update of the Health Status Report, and health outcomes will begin to be documented there. From an observational standpoint, more people are out walking and cycling, including people riding their bikes in the snow.

The project has involved a great deal of ongoing education and creating awareness to get to this phase. As the Cycling Network Plan is implemented, the network will continue to grow.