

NT TravelSmart Workplaces Project Summary Report

Introduction

TravelSmart is the trademark used by community and government based Travel Demand Management (TDM) Programs which are encouraging individuals to make voluntary changes in their travel choices. TravelSmart programs throughout Australia (and TDM programs internationally) have demonstrated significant success in reducing reliance on private motor vehicles by encouraging use of public transport, cycling, walking and telecommuting.

This summary report outlines the outcomes of a small scale TDM project implemented in the Northern Territory during 2006-7.

Background

In July 2005 the Australian Government announced that funding for TravelSmart projects would be made available to State and Territory Governments through a Travel Demand Management Initiative (through the Local Government Greenhouse Action Program).

The Northern Territory Government submitted a proposal for funding under the TDM initiative for a NT TravelSmart Workplaces project. The application was successful and a funding agreement between the Australian and NT Governments was signed in March 2006.

A small scale TravelSmart workplaces project was selected as an initial TravelSmart project for the Northern Territory based on the experiences of the other smaller jurisdictions in Australia (notably the ACT) and the availability of extensive guidelines and resources available on implementing workplace projects.

The NT TravelSmart Workplaces project was a pilot travel behaviour change program aimed at reducing sole driver vehicle trips for the journey to and from work in the Darwin/Palmerston region. One of the key challenges for the project was to assess whether a TravelSmart project could be effective in Darwin, where some of the key motivators for travel behaviour change, including severe traffic congestion and high parking costs, although increasing, are not normally a characteristic of the journey to work.

Although some of these key motivators for changing travel behaviour are not a feature of the Darwin region, there are some potentially good opportunities for encouraging travel behaviour change. Cycling to work

rates are high (compared with other Australian cities) and an extensive network of cycle paths and generally low levels of traffic provide good potential for further growth in cycling and walking to work with encouragement from TravelSmart programs. Similarly, the relatively small size of workplaces and active social connections provide good potential for encouraging car pooling for the journey to work.

Project Implementation

The project was based on similar TravelSmart workplace projects implemented in other jurisdictions throughout Australia and involved a number of key steps including:

- Development of a project management plan
- Establishment of a TravelSmart Working Group
- Engagement of resources
- Development of an NT TravelSmart webpage
- Workplace surveys
- Establishment of workplace coordinators
- Development and implementation of green travel plans
- Project evaluation
- Coordination of a NT TravelSmart Workplaces forum

The project aimed to work with three NT Government workplaces in the Darwin region. The Darwin region was selected as the location for the TravelSmart trial in the NT as Darwin, and the satellite city of Palmerston, represent the largest urban area in the Northern Territory (with a population of approximately 110,000). Public sector workplaces were selected for the trial as public sector employment is high in the Darwin region and there was therefore potential for the trial to be relevant to a significant number of other workplaces in the region. The three agencies selected for the trial and the reasons for selection were:

- Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) – some previous knowledge and experience of TDM based in the Department and responsibility for public transport, cycling and other sustainable transport initiatives.
- Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA) – potential environmental benefits of the trial and with direct links to the NT Strategy for Greenhouse Action 2006.
- Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS) – potential health benefits of the trial and direct link to NT Physical Activity Strategy 2007.

A TravelSmart Project Officer was engaged by DPI in June 2006 to coordinate the implementation of the project.

NT TravelSmart Website

Development of a TravelSmart webpage was a critical tool used to promote the project, provide links to national, state and territory TravelSmart websites and provide project updates and related material. Creation of the website included development of a NT TravelSmart logo, based on national and interstate TravelSmart logos. The webpage, hosted on the DPI website, includes information about TravelSmart, the Workplace Project, links to cycling, walking and public transport webpage and other related links.

Workplace Survey

Development of a comprehensive workplace survey methodology was determined to be a critical initial step in the implementation of the project. Interstate examples of workplace surveys were used to develop a basic survey format. It was determined that to improve the response rate for the survey, a web based electronic survey format would be developed. The survey was delivered via email to over 700 staff in DPI and NRETA in November 2006.

Delivery of the survey to identified office locations within DHCS was not possible as the required software to run the survey was not available within the Department. Therefore, DHCS office locations were not involved further in the trial.

The average response rate to the survey from all work places was 43%.

		Survey results		
Location	Total staff surveyed	Survey responses	% sole driver	% consider alternative
DPI Energy House	192	81	46%	63%
DPI Cavenagh House	115	57	47%	95%
DPI Highway House	193	69	74%	40%
NRETA Goyder	199	72	68%	80%
NRETA Darwin Plaza	32	16	44%	81%

The survey data indicates some interesting trends. Sole occupancy driver numbers were lower at all three city locations (DPI Energy House, DPI Cavenagh House and NRETA Darwin Plaza) and higher at Palmerston locations (DPI Highway House and NRETA Goyder). The main reasons cited for driving at all locations were convenience and time available for travel. Other factors included hours of work, multi-destination trips (dropping children at school/childcare etc) and Darwin's climate. Willingness to consider alternative travel was considerably lower than other locations at DPI Highway House at Palmerston (40% of respondents), particularly compared to NRETA Goyder, also at Palmerston (80% of respondents).

The survey indicated that car pooling was an attractive alternative to single occupancy driving at most locations. Cycling was also considered a possible alternative at some office locations including DPI Energy House and both NRETA locations (Darwin and Palmerston).

Major motivators for changing travel behaviour were identified as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and potentially positive health outcomes as a result of increased exercise.

Key barriers to behaviour change identified through the survey included:

- For walking and cycling – the availability/capacity of shower and changing facilities and availability of secure bicycle storage;
- For bus travel – bus frequency and hours of service; and
- For car pooling – finding a partner to car pool with and concerns about trips home in event of illness etc.

Development and implementation of Green Travel Plans

Based on the survey results, simple Travel Plans were developed for each of the participating office locations. The plans summarised the survey findings, identified key barriers and incentives to behaviour change and listed actions for each workplace.

The initial action in each work place was to hold a TravelSmart information session and meet with Workplace Coordinators. The aim of the information session was to promote the TravelSmart project, present the findings of the survey, discuss the Travel Plans, distribute bus timetabling information and coordinate potential car pooling partners. The sessions were widely promoted through CEO's newsletters and were held in April 2007 to coincide with GoNT week and the launch of the NT's Physical Activity Strategy.

Most attendees were determined to try and change travel patterns at least one day a week. Actions resulting from the information sessions included combining potential car pooling pools from both agencies involved and improving bicycle storage facilities at most office locations.

Links were established between the NT TravelSmart project and other events promoting sustainable transport. In support of the first National Ride to Work Day in October, 2006 NT TravelSmart hosted a community morning tea. Such events provided an opportunity to promote the project and sustainable transport initiatives and attracted some local media coverage.

Project Evaluation

Initially the Project Management Plan proposed a re-survey of the participating workplaces. However, a delay in the initial survey being undertaken and subsequent implementation of the Green Travel Plans did not allow sufficient time to re-survey participants prior to the completion of the project. There is however, anecdotal evidence that the project raised awareness of travel options available and gained some commitment from participants to try alternative travel arrangements at least one day a week.

NT TravelSmart Workplaces Forum

In May 2007 a TravelSmart Forum was held in Darwin. The Forum aimed to bring together Territory and Local Government, non-government organisations and the broader community to discuss Travel Demand Management and its context in the Northern Territory. The Forum was publicised widely with advertisements in the local media and approximately 40 people attended. Presenters included representatives from the NT TravelSmart Workplaces Working group with presentations on transport and Climate Change and Active Transport and health. A national perspective was provided by David Meiklejohn, TDM consultant to the Victorian State Government. A summary of the NT Workplaces Project was provided by the NT TravelSmart Project Officer.

The Forum was well attended with a wide range of interests represented including local community groups and non-government organisations (such as the Heart Foundation and the Environment Centre NT/COOLmob project) Local Government and representatives from health, environment, planning, and transport areas of the Northern Territory Government. The Forum provided an opportunity for constructive discussion regarding local opportunities and challenges in implementing a TravelSmart program in a smaller regional centre. Feedback from attendees at the Forum has been very positive.

Conclusions

The implementation of the NT Workplaces TravelSmart project represented the first time any type of Travel Demand Management (TDM) program had been implemented in the Northern Territory. One of the key aims of the project was to determine whether TDM activities could be successful in a smaller, regional centre, where some of the key motivators for travel behaviour change (such as traffic congestion and high CBD parking costs) although increasing, are generally not as severe as other major urban centres. Significant TravelSmart resources are available from interstate Government and non-government organisations on implementing TDM projects and development of the NT project was based on experiences in other jurisdictions.

A major obstacle to the implementation of the project was the technological problems associated with the electronic survey software requirement. Any future TDM projects implemented in the Northern Territory will need to carefully investigate the delivery methods for initial travel surveys in order to maximise participation rates.

In general, the short project timeframe and the fact that the project was not operating within any broader, long term TDM program was a limiting factor in achieving meaningful, long term behaviour change.

The initial workplace surveys demonstrated a generally low awareness of motivating factors in travel behaviour change. In some workplaces, this was matched with a very limited interest in changing travel behaviour. Very high levels of car dependency are a feature of commuting in the Darwin region and despite good alternative transport options, including a frequent public transport service and good off road cycling facilities, it appears that achieving improvements in sustainable transport behaviours will require particularly well targeted programs.

Although the present transport conditions in the Darwin Region may not currently be conducive to large scale travel behaviour change, the NT needs to be considering options for encouraging alternative transport now, before some of the critical conditions occurring elsewhere begin to manifest.

It is clear that the motivators for change (such as congestion, increasing travel costs and growing awareness of climate change issues) are likely to increase in the future and there are promising indicators of shifts in travel modes (for example, 400 people in the NT registered to participated in a National Ride to Work Day in 2007). The extensive network of shared pedestrian/cycle paths and low levels of traffic in the Darwin region provide good potential for further growth in walking and cycling to work, given support, encouragement and education resources for workers.

The project did have some significant positive outcomes. The project raised awareness within the Northern Territory Government of Travel Demand Management as a tool and provided a good catalyst for establishing ongoing links between the transport, environment and health areas of Government. Cross agency coordination regarding transport, environment and physical activity will be maintained.

The issues raised through the workplace surveys and green travel plans, such as provision of end of trip facilities, continue to be investigated beyond the life of the TravelSmart project. Awareness of sustainable transport issues and the link between transport, health, quality of life, climate change and air quality was raised among NT Government staff in participating agencies. The project also delivered some useful resources for ongoing work in encouraging sustainable transport in the Darwin Region. The NT TravelSmart website continues to provide information on travel alternatives and includes good links to well resourced interstate links. The project has provided a basis to consider participation in and plan for, possible future travel behaviour change projects in the Northern Territory.