

## **A Tale of Two Cities: Workplace Travel Plan Programs in Melbourne and Perth**

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### **1 Introduction**

Travel to and from work in Australia's capital cities is dominated by the car. Of the five million people who travelled to work on the day of the 2001 Census, 70 per cent drove and seven per cent were car passengers (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003).

Australia's high level of motor vehicle use contributes to environmental and social impacts. Car emissions are a major source of urban air pollutants, with rising photochemical smog levels a concern in Australia's largest cities (Australian State of the Environment Committee 2006). Cars emitted 43.7 M tonnes of greenhouse gases in 2005 and emissions from road transport, including passenger cars, increased 27 per cent between 1990 and 2005 (Australian Greenhouse Office 2007). Congestion in Australian capital cities in 2005 was estimated to cost \$9 billion, with increasing congestion lengthening commuting times and affecting business efficiency (Cosgrove and Gargett 2007).

Commuting trips are a primary source of congestion on urban road networks. Providing additional road infrastructure to relieve congestion is costly and may simply defer the problem or even induce additional travel. The need to reduce car commuting and increase use of travel alternatives such as public transport, cycling and teleworking is recognised in government policy including metropolitan plans and sustainability strategies.

Travel behaviour change is an important element of travel demand management efforts that have arisen to address urban traffic growth. Since the late 1990s programs to encourage sustainable travel choices in Australia have developed under the banner of 'TravelSmart', starting in Western Australia and extending to most states and territories. This includes workplace-based initiatives in the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. Most of these involve workplace travel plans.

Workplace travel plans, also called green transport plans, are action plans an employer or site manager implements to reduce car travel generated by a workplace. Workplace travel plans have been used in parts of Europe and North America to address urban congestion, transport energy use and air pollution from car commuting (Rye 1999, 2002). Travel plans are an important part of sustainable transport measures in the United Kingdom where central government, the Greater London Authority and local authorities have invested in supporting their development. Workplace travel plans were piloted in Australia through the Smogbusters program in the late 1990s when Project Officers based at Conservation Councils worked with employers in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth to prepare travel plans and start putting them into action (Wake 1999).

This paper considers TravelSmart workplace programs in Melbourne and Perth. In both cities, travel plans have been developed with employers to reduce solo car commuting. The evolution of these programs, the approaches used and outcomes achieved are compared.

## **2 Program development**

In Perth the TravelSmart Workplace program was initiated by the Department of Environmental Protection in 1996 in response to concern about photochemical smog to which motor vehicle emissions are a major contributor. The program developed through a series of trials of different workplace interventions.

A pilot awareness campaign to promote travel alternatives to commuters was run in seven city workplaces in 1997, involving workplace talks, competitions and information materials. No significant change in travel behaviour was found in the post-campaign survey, however 17 per cent of respondents indicated interest in switching from solo car commuting to an alternative (Marshall 1997). Three workplace interventions were trialled in 1999-2000, including a commuter awareness campaign along the lines of the pilot, an awareness campaign with personalised travel advice for interested employees and workplace travel planning running concurrent with an awareness campaign. Comparison of before and after survey results showed greatest reduction in car commuting where personalised travel advice was offered, though organisational engagement and the potential for longer term change was judged to be higher through workplace travel planning (Baudains 2003).

Travel plans have been the focus of the TravelSmart Workplace program in Perth since 2001. Each year employers are recruited into the program and supported to develop travel plans for their workplaces, including local and state government offices, large businesses and hospitals. Travel plans are used to engage employers in managing the transport impacts they generate and so support a wider effort to improve and encourage use of sustainable travel options. Since 2002, the program has been led by the Department of Environment (now Department of Environment & Conservation) and the Department for Planning & Infrastructure. By reducing work-related car travel the program contributes to state government planning and environmental policies, including the Perth Air Quality Management Plan (Department of Environmental Protection 2000) and Network City strategy (WA Planning Commission 2004).

TravelSmart Workplaces in Melbourne evolved out of a presentation in 2000 about a workplace travel planning program, Travel for Work, in Cambridge, UK. Travel for Work was run by two Australians (Teresa Broadstock and David Meiklejohn) who were interested in replicating this successful program in an Australian setting. The Victorian government recognised the need for innovative responses to traffic congestion and its environmental effects. The Department of Human Services, Department of Infrastructure and Sustainable Energy Authority of Victoria jointly funded a three-year pilot project in 2001 to test workplace travel plans.

The pilot, called Better Ways to Work, involved six employers in the City of Darebin – an inner Melbourne municipality. The project was expanded to cover more areas following interest from other local councils, with the participating councils playing a key role in travel planning with their local workplaces. An interest in trying different approaches and opportunities provided by funding gave rise to further TravelSmart Workplaces projects. Major destinations were the focus of a project in 2003. Individualised information packs and incentives were offered to staff at the Alfred Hospital and first year students at Monash University to encourage uptake of travel alternatives. This was followed by work on longer-term travel plans for both locations, using travel surveys and focus groups to develop behaviour change measures. TravelSmart worked on travel plans with other large employers with the idea of establishing leaders within key industry sectors.

In 2004, businesses along Melbourne's St Kilda Road corridor were recruited into a travel plan project to trial larger scale implementation. In 2006, travel planning extended to medium-to-large employers in the CBD to help reduce car commuting during the

Commonwealth Games. Building relationships with employers and actively assisting them to prepare and implement travel plans for their workplaces were important aspects of both projects. These projects significantly increased employer participation in the program and project funding allowed the employment of additional TravelSmart staff, enhancing the level of support that could be offered to workplaces.

Responsibility for leading TravelSmart Workplaces transferred from the Sustainable Energy Authority to the Department of Infrastructure in 2001. Managing travel demand in Melbourne workplaces addresses government policy commitments for sustainable urban transport and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including the Melbourne 2030 strategy (Department of Infrastructure 2002) and Victorian Greenhouse Strategy (Department of Natural Resources and Environment 2002).

### **3 Workplace travel planning**

Workplace travel planning involves employers in managing travel to and from their workplaces. A travel plan is a package of actions the employer implements, usually aimed at reducing car trips and their impacts. TravelSmart programs in Melbourne and Perth use similar steps in developing travel plans, however there are differences in expectations of employers and support provided for planning and implementation.

Key steps in travel planning are summarised in Table 1. In both programs recruitment includes direct approaches to employers and employers contacting the lead agency. In Melbourne, recruitment has recently focused on defined precincts to achieve high uptake to reduce local congestion. In Perth, many of the employers recruited have been state government agencies – partly due to a Sustainability Code of Practice requirement for agencies to develop travel plans (Government of WA 2004). Several local councils have participated too, mostly those with TravelSmart Officers. The commitment of Perth employers to complete a travel plan is confirmed via a letter from the CEO and public acknowledgement of employers joining the program.

The employer nominates a staff member as coordinator for the travel plan and usually forms a working group to assist with work towards the plan. The coordinator may be an Environment or TravelSmart Officer, but in other cases someone for whom transport is unrelated to their position. A working group may comprise interested employees, preferably with representation from parts of the organisation that manage workplace facilities, the vehicle fleet and human resources.

A site assessment and employee survey are used to understand current travel behaviour and potential for change at each workplace. The site assessment covers issues like cycling facilities, public transport services and car parking at and near each workplace. For both programs an online survey is used and all employees at a workplace are encouraged to take part. Typically between 30 and 50 per cent of employees in a workplace complete the survey. In Perth, planning workshops are usually held to seek employee input on potential travel plan measures.

In Perth the program seeks to engage the employer in understanding travel to their workplace and creating a plan tailored to their location and culture. The logic here is that by developing the plan themselves the employer will be committed to putting it into action and integrating travel plan measures into good business practice. Using this approach, it can take six months or so to complete the plan depending on staff time dedicated to the task by the employer. Travel plans for major destinations are more complex and have taken longer to develop.

Table 1. Travel planning steps

| Step                                     | Melbourne  | Perth  |
|--|--|--|
| Recruiting employers                     | Targeted recruitment in focus areas including 'cold calling'<br>Some employers approach program direct   | Mix of targeted recruitment and employers contacting program<br>CEO confirms participation by letter<br>Annual launch to welcome employers into program                              |
| Setting up                               | Initial meeting with workplace representatives to clarify expectations and next steps<br>Working group may be established or existing committee used                             | Workplace coordinator nominated<br>Working group formed<br>Scope the plan including employer's goals, target site and trips, timetable for key steps                                 |
| Understand the workplace                 | Site assessment completed (workplace facilities, local transport)<br>Baseline survey of employee travel; survey report prepared<br>Employee focus groups (at major destinations) | Workplace access audit (workplace facilities and practices and local transport)<br>Baseline survey of employee travel<br>Employee focus groups (at major destinations)               |
| Identifying actions and writing the plan | Travel plan created using template<br>Actions selected from checklist based on site assessment and survey findings   | Actions identified using barriers and opportunities from audit and survey<br>Planning workshop help to seek employee input<br>Travel plan drafted by workplace coordinator (usually) |
| Securing approval                        | Workplace coordinator seeks management sign-off<br>Business case tool may be used to justify action  | Workplace coordinator seeks management sign-off<br>Employer recognised at annual program launch  |
| Implementing the plan                    | Information materials provided<br>Carpooling software<br>Walking and cycling schemes<br>Travel plan advice   | Information materials provided<br>Training/networking sessions and newsletters for workplace coordinators<br>Travel plan advice  |

In Melbourne, the planning process is less intensive, using a template and action checklist to expedite preparation of the travel plan. The program has taken on a greater role in preparing travel plans in response to employer concerns. Results of a simple site assessment and the employee travel survey are used to select appropriate actions from a standard checklist, providing the basis for a concise travel plan document.

TravelSmart supports employers to implement their travel plans. Information materials are provided to promote travel options to employees. In both cities, local access guides showing public transport and cycling routes have proven popular. Other resources available to Melbourne employers include:

- Business case tool – Software allowing employers to input factors related to their staff's current travel habits, both commuting and on business, and assess the true cost of this travel. This has been used to help employers test whether running a travel behaviour change program in their workplace will help them save money.

- Carpooling software – Built on VicRoads research which showed that the key to a successful carpooling program was recruiting large numbers of potential users at the beginning to increase the chances of finding a match.
- WalkSmart and CycleSmart – Active commuting schemes based on distributing pedometers and cycle odometers to staff committing to walk or cycle all or part of the way to work. Participants were also given access to websites to record their daily steps walked or kilometres cycled, as well as receive encouraging information and incentives from TravelSmart.

In Perth, workplace coordinators are provided with opportunities for networking and training including quarterly forums and an annual workshop for major destinations. TravelSmart programs in both cities produce newsletters with local case studies and news on resources and events. Employers are encouraged to participate in annual cycling and walking activities, such as entering workplace teams in Ride to Work Day in Melbourne and Perth's Bike to Work and Walk to Work challenges.

#### **4 Program delivery**

Different delivery mechanisms have been used in the TravelSmart Workplaces projects in Melbourne. Program staff worked with workplaces in the initial Better Ways to Work project in Darebin. When this was expanded to other municipalities the participating councils were asked to engage a Project Officer and develop a travel plan for their own office. The thinking was that once the local government had a clear idea of what was involved in developing and implementing a workplace travel plan they would be in a better position to promote that methodology to local employers. TravelSmart supported local government officers through the provision of materials, information, training sessions, networking and by centralising some activities, such as data collection and analysis from annual workplace surveys.

This process was followed for a number of years but was generally hampered by a common problem: local government was reluctant to invest significant funds in such a new project for returns they were either not confident would materialise or that they could understand, by comparison to traditional traffic management approaches, such as engineering. As a consequence, local governments tended to hire only junior staff who had limited experience, both in travel demand management and in making their case within council, but also relegated travel demand management activities to sections not best served to have a wider impact. Opportunities to integrate travel demand management with strategic planning or economic development have generally been missed.

The few exceptions, such as the City of Darebin, where funding for the position of a project officer has been increased and where travel demand management has been recognised as an integral part of local government transport activities, have resulted in those local governments being able to attract funding for other travel behaviour change projects. Workplaces have not been a priority for most local councils (especially when compared to traffic congestion generated by schools) and only a handful continue to directly engage with their local employers to do workplace travel plans.

A consultant with overseas experience in transport planning and behaviour change was engaged to undertake the TravelSmart projects with the Alfred Hospital and Monash University. This allowed the development and trial of a hybrid model involving personalised information on travel options as well as initiation of travel plans. In contrast, the St Kilda Road and CBD projects were delivered by the Department of Infrastructure with funding allowing engagement of additional program staff to work with employers in these areas.

In Perth travel planning has been supported by staff in the Department of Environment & Conservation and Department for Planning & Infrastructure who jointly deliver the program. In 2007, five local councils took part in the TravelSmart Workplace program to complete travel plans for their own workplaces. As with the Melbourne model, the aim is to 'skill up' local TravelSmart Officers in these councils to enable them to deliver travel planning to local employers in the following years. The councils receive support from the Department for Planning & Infrastructure (including Australian Greenhouse Office funding) to employ the officers, and delivery of TravelSmart Workplace is part of this funding agreement. It is hoped that this commitment together with continuing networking, training and support will avoid problems encountered in Melbourne.

A recent innovation in Perth has been a series of workshops during the travel planning process. Workplace coordinators came together at workshops every six months to learn about and share experiences with each step in developing a travel plan. This provided practical guidance and peer support to enable timely completion of the plans. Guidance notes and templates were also developed to help employers.

Currently, TravelSmart Victoria is testing the development of two transportation management associations in the CDB and in the Box Hill activity centre in Melbourne's east. Another two areas (St Kilda Road and Dandenong) have been identified for potential future development. It is anticipated that, if successful, such transportation management associations will play the key roles in managing and delivering workplace travel behaviour change programs in the future, though there will continue to be a need for support for local governments working with local employers, as well as with employers not located in an obvious transportation management association area.

Table 2 lists advantages and disadvantages of possible options for travel plan delivery drawing on experience in Melbourne and Perth. Delivery by state government agencies has generally had positive results, however scaling-up may be a problem because of resource constraints particularly program staff. Working through local government has had mixed results, achieving successful travel plans where local councils embrace travel behaviour change as a key part of their transport management effort. Transportation Management Associations offer a way to use collaboration between employers to deliver workplace-based interventions but are unproven in Australia. A few employers have 'gone it alone' in preparing a travel plan but their longevity and effects are not known.

Table 2. Delivery options

| Delivery option                        | Advantages   | Disadvantages   |
|--|--|---|
| State government                       | Consistent approach<br>Evaluation capability<br>Highest level of experience in delivering the program              | Less resources can be directed towards strategic planning<br>May be difficult to significantly expand travel plan application |
| Local government                       | Use local contacts and response to local opportunities<br>Start to integrate into transport planning activities    | Potential for quality of travel planning and evaluation to decrease   |
| Transportation Management Associations | Successful application overseas<br>Low cost to government<br>High employer engagement and ownership of travel plan | Yet to be proven in Australian context<br>Business benefits need to be established  |
| Do-it-yourself                         | Low cost to government<br>High employer engagement and ownership of travel plan                                    | Uncertain that many employers would take on without support<br>Lack of sharing of experience and resources                    |

Adapted from Meiklejohn, DeGruyter and Dean 2006.

## 5 Travel plan outcomes

TravelSmart workplace projects in Melbourne have involved 166 employers, with about half of these completing a travel plan. The attrition rate varied between projects, with those offering greater support for travel planning and implementation achieving a higher proportion of active workplaces. Interviews were conducted with employers to understand why any did not follow through to complete or implement a travel plan. Reasons for 'dropping out' included poor timing given organisational changes and loss of key people, lack of time or resources or because the plan was considered unnecessary or inappropriate for the organisation (Biggs 2005).

In Perth, 31 employers were recruited with all but one completing a travel plan. One 'employer' is a major health campus with five large and several small organisations. Two thirds of employers are known to be actively implementing behaviour change measures at the 70 sites covered by travel plans. The longevity of travel plans has varied; some have become inactive after one or two years however many have been in place for over three years. An evaluation of 13 workplaces with travel plans developed under the program found that most depended on a few enthusiastic employees driving the travel behaviour change effort (Wake 2004). This suggests that demand management measures are yet to be integrated into the way the organisations work.

Across both programs typical travel plan actions include provision of information on travel options to employees, promotional activities including employee participation in public walking and cycling challenges and improvements to workplace cycling facilities. Carpooling schemes have been set up in several workplaces to promote carpooling to and for work. Some employers have offered incentives to encourage commuting by travel alternatives, e.g. gift vouchers if a target is met. Some have also reduced or proposed charges for employee car parking and commuter use of fleet vehicles. Through software, information materials and advice, TravelSmart has supported implementation of many of these measures.

Employee surveys show that in most workplaces where a travel plan has been implemented, solo car commuting declines by an average of ten per cent. Some employers have recorded reductions of 30 per cent or more, usually after changes to employer-provided car parking and active promotional efforts. Reductions in this range are consistent with experience in the UK (Cairns et al. 2002).

More funding and staff resources have been dedicated to supporting workplace travel plans in Melbourne than in Perth. This reflects a larger budget commitment for travel demand management measures and has provided the opportunity to implement a mix of approaches and significantly greater employer recruitment. The Perth program has had a modest budget and employer involvement is being scaled-up by incorporating different delivery methods.

Outcomes and resourcing of the two programs are compared in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of program resourcing and outcomes

| Aspect                               | Melbourne                      | Perth                       |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Employers recruited                  | 166                            | 31                          |
| Travel plans completed               | 79<br>(48%)                    | 30<br>(97%)                 |
| Employees covered by plans           | 25,000                         | 21,400                      |
| Solo car commute reduction (average) | 10%                            | 10%                         |
| Plan longevity                       | 3 yrs +                        | 3 yrs +                     |
| Program funding                      | Approx \$100,000 pa<br>3 FTE + | Approx \$40,000 pa<br>2 FTE |

## 5 Discussion

Workplace travel plans can successfully engage employers in enabling sustainable travel choices by their employees for commute and even business travel. Reduced solo car commuting, matched with increased use of public transport, cycling and other alternatives, has been achieved by most workplaces that develop and implement a travel plan. The different approaches used in travel planning suggest that adequate support for the preparation of plans and follow up assistance with implementation is important. Results suggest that a more in-depth effort produces better and longer lasting results.

Program delivery through a state government agency has been more successful than other methods tried, however with adequate capacity and support local government could play a significant role in extending travel plans to many more employers. Transport Management Associations are another option worth trialling – harnessing employer cooperation to improve accessibility and environmental benefits in defined areas.

Another means of extending employer engagement in travel plans is by requiring them through the planning process. Some local governments in Melbourne have established a requirement for a travel plans for certain developments as a way of managing transport impacts from new or expanded land use activities (Cooper and Myers 2006).

Most travel plans have focused on commute trips and shifting travel to greener modes, like public transport. More could be done to address business travel by employees, visitor trips and travel alternatives such as teleworking and trip planning to reduce travel demand.

As more workplaces are covered by travel plans, a challenge for TravelSmart is working out how best to manage the existing employers in the programs as well as continue to expand in the future. Demonstrating the business benefits of travel plans and finding ways to integrate implementation into good human resource, fleet and facility management will be important in mainstreaming travel plans. Further evaluation of changes in employee travel behaviour as well as organisational practices will aid future development of workplace travel plans in Australia.

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