



Built Environment & Active Transportation Community Planning Grant Program

A joint initiative of the BC Recreation and Parks Association and Union of BC Municipalities

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Background

The BC Recreation & Parks Association (BCRPA) and Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) are members of a provincial health coalition, the BC Healthy Living Alliance (BCHLA). The BCHLA received a one-time grant from ActNow BC to improve the health of British Columbians by promoting healthy eating, smoke-free living and the implementation of a physical activity strategy.

In May 2007, the BCHLA approved the Physical Activity Strategy (PAS). PAS is a comprehensive, integrated approach to decreasing the proportion of inactive adults in BC. This strategy supported four initiatives - including the Built Environment and Active Transportation (BEAT) Initiative.

The BEAT Initiative was focused on creating more supportive environments for physical activity by addressing community design, policy and transportation planning. One of the main components of the BEAT Initiative was the Community Planning Grant program – which was co-led by UBCM and BCRPA.

BEAT Community Planning Grant Program

Community Planning Grants were available to local governments in BC to develop new plans or amend existing plans for active transportation infrastructure. The intent was to assist local governments to undertake comprehensive planning for active transportation that considers all transportation user groups. The program was also intended to better position local governments to apply for and more effectively utilize funding that required local governments to have a plan in place, such as programs offered through provincial and federal government programs, and other funders.

Active Transportation includes all human-powered forms of travel such as walking, cycling, jogging/running, roller-, in-line and ice-skating, skateboarding, use of a wheelchair or scooter, cross-country skiing, canoeing and kayaking. The most popular forms are walking and cycling, and active transportation can be combined with other modes such as public transit.

The BEAT program was offered in two phases:

- Phase One: 10 grants totalling \$204,104.41 were disbursed in 2008/09.
- Phase Two: 14 grants totalling \$308,684.68 were disbursed in 2009/10.

Applications were considered for the development of new active transportation plans or the revision of existing transportation plans that demonstrated the ability to improve upon current active transportation options, promoted community and individual health, or linked to green house gas reduction or age-friendly planning.

Active Transportation Infrastructure is the connection of transportation corridors and amenities in a community to support a variety of activities and active transportation modes. This can include, but is not limited to:

Dedicated bicycle lanes and routes (e.g. on-road and off-road bikeways)

Multi-use paths/trails (on-road and off-road for cyclists, pedestrian, in-line skaters, etc.)

Pedestrian and cycling amenities (e.g. benches, water fountains, end of trip facilities such as bicycle parking or storage facilities)

Pedestrian and cycling friendly design (e.g. sidewalks, sloping curbs on sidewalks, street crossings, pedestrian controlled crosswalks, overpasses, 'share the road' signage, etc.)

Greenways/green spaces (in both residential and commercial neighbourhoods)

Blueways, such as rivers, lakes and ocean fronts (e.g. entry points with parking and easy launch points to increase access to water activities) and whiteways, such as cross-country and snowshoeing trails.

Public transit improvements (e.g. encouragement of multi-modal travel)

Traffic calming measures (e.g. 'round about' traffic circles, narrow road lanes)

Eligibility & Funding

The following funding priorities were considered:

- Increasing options for active transportation
- Conducting walkability, bikeability or community audits/assessments
- Incorporating active transportation priorities in Regional Growth Strategies and/or Official Community Plans
- Increasing public transit ridership and connections to active transportation options
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions through active transportation options
- Supporting initiatives aimed at:
 - Environmental health benefits
 - Age-friendly planning
 - Healthy community planning

Application Process

Local governments could apply for grants ranging from \$15,000 to \$25,000.

The application process was in two stages, beginning with a call for Expressions of Interest (EOI). BCRPA and UBCM formed an Evaluation Committee to review the EOIs and invite a number of applicants to submit full applications. The committee then extensively reviewed the applications and scored each according to its merits and alignment with the program goals.

The response to the Community Planning Grant Program revealed a high demand for funding for active transportation planning. In total, 106 EOIs were received from local governments from all regions of the province over both phases. This includes the 48 EOIs received in 2008 and the 58 EOIs received in 2009.

Over \$2.2 million was requested in the EOIs, including requests for:

- 57 Active Transportation Plans
- 36 Trail Network/Master Plan (multi-use pathway or trail)
- 7 Bicycle Network Plan
- 6 Other Planning Processes (i.e. Wheelability Assessment)

In both 2008 and 2009, a limited number of applicants were asked to submit a complete application package. In 2008, 14 of the 48 EOIs (29%) proceeded to full application and in 2009, 19 of the 58 EOIs (33%) were invited to proceed. Less than 25% of the EOIs received were funded.

It is important to note that additional projects were funded in 2009 because it was obvious from the number of EOIs received that the demand remained high for active transportation planning. Based on this, the Physical Activity Strategy Steering Committee approved an increase to the grant budget in an attempt to support additional applications.



Site meeting in Central Coast Regional District.



Program Highlights

Highlights from both phases include:

- In Phase 1 (2008/09), 10 local governments received \$204,104.41
- In Phase 2 (2009/10), 14 local governments received \$308,684.68
- \$512,789.09 has been awarded to improve conditions and safety for walking, cycling and rolling

Funding Priorities

As part of the application and final report process, applicants are required to indicate which funding priorities they are addressing. Based on the final reports, it is clear that the majority of applications were for the creation or revision of an active transportation plan, although reducing greenhouse gas emissions and integrating with other planning processes (such as age-friendly and accessibility planning and Smart Planning for Communities) were a focus in half of the funded projects.

Table 1 provides a summary of the funding priorities of all 24 funded projects.

	#	%
New/revised active transportation plan	22	92
Reduce greenhouse gas emissions	12	50
Integration with other planning processes	12	50
Increase options for active transportation	11	46
Incorporate active transportation in Regional Growth Strategy or Official Community Plan	8	33
Improve active transportation connections to public transit	6	25

Table 1: Funding priorities addressed in both phases.

In addition, a funding priority that was not identified in the BEAT program materials was apparent in both phases of the program – integration with accessibility planning. In Phase 1, the City of Colwood linked accessibility issues into the active transportation plan by emphasizing the needs of people with disabilities within the sidewalk assessment that was undertaken. In Phase 2, the City of New Westminster completed a Wheelability Assessment; which was a unique approach to incorporating accessibility and age-friendly design considerations into active transportation planning.

Distribution of Funded Communities

The evaluation of BEAT EOIs and full applications included a consideration of provincial distribution of grants as well as an urban/rural balance. Based on this, the provincial distribution for both phases is outlined in Table 2.

	#	%
Association of Kootenay Boundary Local Governments	5	21
Association of Vancouver Island & Coastal Communities	7	29
Lower Mainland Local Government Association	2	8
North Central Local Government Association	5	21
South Interior Local Government Association	5	21

Table 2: Provincial distribution of funds by Area Association

Of communities funded in 2008 and 2009, the majority were communities with a population of 15,000 or less; perhaps indicating that small and medium size communities relied on additional funding to hire staff or consultants to undertake this type of work.



Challenges & Opportunities

The planning processes funded by the BEAT highlighted a number of challenges that local governments face in developing active transportation infrastructure. Although many of the challenges that came to light may be difficult for local governments to overcome, it is encouraging to note that one funded community, the City of Armstrong noted that their biggest challenge was the “the positive way in which the agencies and community at large embraced the opportunity.”

Need for Additional Funds

Over 60% of the funded communities identified the need for additional funding in order to proceed with projects identified through the community planning process. For the most part, the need for additional funding is related to land acquisitions that are required to develop or connect trails, greenways and paths. In many funded communities, such as the City of Rossland, the plans that were developed highlight available assets, such as unused road right of ways or other land owned by local government, however, the acquisition of private land is still often required.

“Funding the implementation projects will also be a challenge, but it is hoped that one successful project will stimulate enthusiasm for future projects” – City of Rossland

In addition, specific active transportation infrastructure needs, such as bridges, overpasses or underpasses, were also identified, as well as the need for additional planning or studies. As well, the City of Colwood identified the need to focus on active transportation in a routine fashion and reported, “A major lesson (we) learned is that detailed inventories of active transportation facilities should be taken more often.”

Planning in a Local Context

For many funded communities (about 30%), the local lay of the land is one of the biggest challenges to developing a sustainable active transportation network. For example, the City of Nelson cited challenges with mountainous terrain and the Columbia-Shuswap Regional District highlighted issues they will have due to riparian features and rock cuts.

The City of Rossland identified another unique challenge: identified active transportation routes are also well used bear trails, and the risks of human/wildlife conflict will be a challenge. It is also interesting to note that the Village of Burns Lake turned one of their biggest challenges – the northern climate – into an asset as they developed an active transportation plan specifically for a community that spends many months under snow.

Active Transportation Across Multiple Jurisdictions

Similar to road networks, water and sewer infrastructure and park lands, active transportation networks are generally not contained within a single local government. With this in mind, it is encouraging to note the number of funded projects that involved more than one local government or the participation of provincial ministries.

For example, the Town of Golden has clearly identified that the success of their active transportation plan will be based on the involvement of the Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure and that the main goal will be to integrate local government and Ministry plans for future development. A similar need was identified in the City of Quesnel, where the Ministry has committed to working with the City to complete trail development for a local project, Two Mile Flat.

However, in moving forward to implementation, the following cross-jurisdictional issues will need to be addressed in many communities:

- Working with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure on any active transportation routes that are on or in close proximity to provincial highways.
- Ensuring active transportation projects are permitted uses on farmland that is within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) or applying to the Agricultural Land Commission to have land excluded from the ALR for active transportation purposes.
- Collaborating with First Nations to ensure that reserve lands under the jurisdiction of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada are included in active transportation plans.
- Following local government processes regulated by the Riparian Areas Act, such as Environmental Development Permits, for active transportation projects within identified riparian areas.



Community consultation in District of Sparwood

Responding to Challenges

For many communities, significant momentum was realized because of the BEAT-funded active transportation planning process and many local governments have found ways to balance the challenges of implementation with the positive energy that has been generated.

One strategy, used in about 30% of the funded communities, has been the identification of specific priority projects for the implementation stage. For example, in the District of Sparwood, focus has been placed on increasing the connectivity between existing trails; and in the Town of Ladysmith implementation projects have been divided between low- and high-priority projects.

In the City of Colwood more concrete steps have been taken and smaller, lower cost projects that can be done under regular maintenance budget have been identified as a means of improving the walkability of local sidewalks. In addition, an existing list of future sidewalk capital projects was re-evaluated to take into account cycling priorities - resulting in a new priority list.



Outcomes

For the most part, the main outcome in each of the 24 funded communities is the creation of a new or revised active transportation plan. A list of all completed plans is included in Appendix A and includes:

- 18 comprehensive Active Transportation Plans
- 4 Bicycle Network Plans
- 1 Greenways Master Plan
- 1 Wheelability Assessment

“This project has generated considerable interest and is the first greenway project of its kind to become shovel ready in the regional district” – Columbia Shuswap Regional District

These completed plans will guide future infrastructure improvements – through the incorporation of policies into Official Community Plans or Regional Growth Strategies, other local government bylaws or in operating procedures. The plans also serve as a strong indication that active transportation is a viable option in every community in BC, including the north. This was an important outcome in the Village of Burns Lake, who reported “it is possible to develop an active transportation plan for a community that spends four to five months under the snow.”

To support other local governments to learn from the experience of the 24 funded communities, the completed plans are available on both the BCRPA and UBCM websites.

Partnerships, Collaboration & Community Participation

In each of the funded communities, partnerships, collaboration and community participation were a foundational element of collecting data and developing a locally appropriate plan. For example, the City of Armstrong experienced the value of local relationships through a Walkability Assessment Group that they considered “very integral in planning for healthy, active and safe communities.”

As outlined in Table 3, local relationship building took place through various media and degrees of collaboration. Where applicable, the table includes the percentage of funded communities that used different approaches.

Community consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open houses • Community workshops • Public information meetings
Public participation (63%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community mapping • Advisory committees (38%) • Engagement of specific community members (seniors, mobility aid users, etc)
On-line and social networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-line/e-mail submissions • Facebook groups • Blogs
Partnerships with community organizations (46%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trails, cycling and Nordic clubs • Seniors centre/association • Service clubs • Chamber of Commerce • Environmental organizations • Residents/neighbourhood associations • Business improvement association
Government collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board of education or schools (42%) • Provincial and federal ministries (38%) • Other local governments (29%) • Recreation centres (25%) • First Nations (13%)

Table 3: Examples of partnership, collaboration and community participation in BEAT processes.

Partnerships represent one of the most valuable outcomes of the planning processes undertaken with BEAT funding. In many cases, the relationships that have been formed are an integral part of moving towards implementation. This has been the case in particular with relationships that were developed or strengthened with the Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure. For example, the City of Armstrong has reported that a stronger relationship with the Ministry will provide a “great ability to utilize planning expertise we don’t have on staff.”

In addition, other funded communities have reported on the value of partnerships in undertaking the planning process – and in sustaining the momentum to see new active transportation plans through to implementation:

- “The partnerships were very supportive and strengthened ties between (the City’s) Engineering department, advisory committees and people with different backgrounds and interests who use active transportation facilities” – City of Colwood
- “The (District) is lucky to have a strong working relationship with the local school district ... this relationship forms the foundation for creating the community that Council and our residents wish to see” – District of Invermere
- “The education and promotional aspects are wide reaching and will require resources and strong partnerships in order to be implemented” – City of Prince George

Local Government Outcomes

The original intent of the BEAT Community Planning program was to better position local governments to apply for and more effectively utilize funding that required local governments to have an active transportation plan in place. For the majority of funded communities, this has resulted in the development of a shelf- or shovel-ready plan.

However, this has not been the only local government outcome. In some communities, the BEAT planning process has helped to inform elected Councils and Boards and staff so that they are now better positioned to consider active transportation in land use decisions. This was perhaps best seen in the City of New Westminster:

“One of the real strengths of the project was that it ... involved City councillors and staff, who make or influence decision-making. This involvement and the knowledge gained will ensure that wheelability is a consideration in all public and private developments (and) will create advocates and champions within City Hall”

Other funded communities have documented additional municipal or regional outcomes that will help to sustain the momentum generated by planning activities and ultimately result in changes to the built environment:

Amendments to Official Community Plans

As a statement of objectives and policies used to guide planning and land use decisions, Official Community Plans (OCP) are a key tool for visioning and implementing active transportation projects. Over half (54%) of the funded projects have identified specific amendments to OCP that have been endorsed by Council or Board or that are pending review as part of a planned OCP review process.

For example, the City of Colwood amended their OCP as a result of the BEAT process when a busy road was found to have not been dedicated as a pedestrian and cycling route. In the City of Rossland, the new Active Transportation Plan is being incorporated into the OCP to ensure that insight gained from the planning process continues to be part of land use decision-making in the future. The value of embedding policy outcomes in the OCP was also realized in the Town of Qualicum Beach, who reported that their new Cycling Plan “will greatly influence the next review of OCP, as well as future trail development and infrastructure investment.”

Development or Revision of Other Plans, Bylaws or Policies

Land use plans, such as neighbourhood or downtown plans, and local government bylaws and policies form the toolkit of resources that planners and elected Councils and Boards rely on to facilitate community planning and improvements to the built environment. This can include everything from decisions regarding major capital expenditures to the timing and availability of municipal services, such as snow removal.

Over 45% of funded communities have indicated that plans, bylaws or policies were amended, or are under review, because of the BEAT planning process. For some, the impacts will be very specific; for example, in the City of Nelson, amendments could result in a change to the snow removal procedures to ensure that key sidewalks are ploughed prior to the start of morning commute and that active transportation is a viable option. In other communities, the changes will mark general trend toward embracing active transportation. This is the case in the City of Quesnel, that reported that a resolution to amend the Bicycle Network Plan provided Council with a “renewed interest in the development of this important segment of the City’s network plan.”

Table 4 provides of summary of other plans, standards, policies and procedures that have been positively impacted by BEAT projects.

	Plan	Design Standard	Policy/Procedure
Burns Lake			Snow removal policy
Kent	Agriculture Area Plan, Transit Plan		Community-based Leisure Needs Assessment
Nelson			Snow removal procedure
New Westminster	Downtown Plan, Transportation Master Plan, Comprehensive Road Safety Plan	Curb ramp and sidewalk design standards	
North Cowichan		Engineering design standards	
Prince George	Land use bylaws	Servicing standards	Maintenance procedures, capital budget
Quesnel	Bicycle Network Plan		
Revelstoke	Community Transportation Strategy		

Table 4: Plans, standards, policies and procedures impacted from BEAT plan development.

Sustaining the Outcomes

In many of the funded communities, the immediate focus after the conclusion of planning exercises was to sustain the momentum that was generated through the development or revision of an active transportation plan. This was the case in the Town of Qualicum Beach where “the (funding) has stimulated a significant amount of interest, momentum and investment in the direction of active transportation.”

As outlined above, in many communities this has meant embedding policy outcomes into Official Community Plans or other planning documents. However, many other directions are being pursued in order to keep active transportation at the top of local priority lists and to move planning towards implementation:

“Throughout the year as this project has gone to the public, been advertised on Facebook and taken to community events, the support from the public has been tremendous. It has brought the community together in a direction towards a common goal in a very positive manner. First Nations, community residents and tourists are in full support of the planning and the goal of having a multi-use path built through some of this spectacular forest” – Central Coast Regional District

Pursue Funding Options for Implementation

Nearly half (46%) of funded communities have identified additional funding as a paramount factor in implementing active transportation projects. As previously outlined, local terrain, existing infrastructure and the need to purchase land are major cost barriers. In many local governments, existing capital and/or maintenance budgets are already tightly stretched and new, dedicated funds are the only means by which larger-scale active transportation projects will be implemented.

Due to this, many funded communities are now looking for funding to pursue projects. For example, the District of Wells has been active in identifying potential funding options and the Village of Burns Lake has applied for Job Opportunities Program funds in the amount of \$250,000 to address the Saul Creek Ravine Crossing in partnership with the Lake Babine Nation.

Perhaps most encouraging, the Town of Qualicum Beach was successful in using the shelf ready plan they developed with BEAT funds to apply for a Local Motion grant - which they were awarded in the amount of \$100,000 for upgrades to the multi-use network in a major town corridor.

Undertake Projects or Include Active Transportation Projects in Annual Budgeting

Although capital budgets are stretched tight in many local governments, about 30% of funded communities have identified immediate actions and some have managed to complete small projects.

For example, in the District of Sparwood some aspects of the Active Transportation Plan cleared the budgeting process and projects were to be underway in the summer of 2009. In the City of Roseland, the local government was able to commit \$20,000 to match future grant opportunities for active transportation or undertake a smaller project.

In other communities, projects are now in process or planned to start soon. In the Town of Qualicum Beach the construction of an 800 m separated active transportation path along major collector road is now in progress and in the City of Nelson two trails are to be completed in 2010 and a number of others to be completed in short term.

Commitment of Councils or Boards

As the main decision-makers within local governments for land-use and development changes, elected officials have the ability to champion active transportation and to ensure that proposals to amend zoning or Official Community Plan bylaws or to allow development permits demonstrate a commitment to key principles such as walkability.

For many funded communities (20%), supporting municipal Councils or regional district Boards to become better informed about active transportation has translated into a commitment by elected officials to maintaining a focus on active transportation. In the City of Armstrong, a commitment to active transportation has been proven by the Planning and Development Committee that will review the new plan section by section as part of a new, regular agenda item.

In addition, the Town of Qualicum Beach has reported that the newly elected Council has identified trail development as one of its highest priorities and in the District of Kent a February 2009 strategic planning session resulted in Council listing trail development as a priority.

Demand for Active Transportation Planning

The BEAT Initiative Community Planning Grant program also highlighted the demand that exists in BC for the opportunity to embark on active transportation planning.

This was initially signalled by the high number of EOs that were received for both phases, but is also echoed in a number of comments provided by funded communities:

- “The opportunities to review a very specific component of our community in a very focused manner, through the auspices of a specific grant like this one, do not come along very often ... It was very refreshing to see this process unfold and a unique opportunity was afforded with the availability of a local consultant to lead the process ... We now have a very valuable tool to utilize to make our community a better place.” – City of Armstrong
- “We really appreciate the funding from UBCM/BEAT; without it we would not have been able to embark on this much needed process for years to come” – District of North Cowichan
- “We have also very much come to understand that active transportation is not necessarily a choice for many residents, but rather a way of life. That is why a comprehensive plan is so desperately needed and will greatly assist in gaining the needed funding and support for the plan’s initiatives” – City of Prince George



Accessibility assessment in the Town of Golden



Moving Forward

Active transportation planning and infrastructure improvements bring multiple benefits to a community. Creating environments for people to choose walking, cycling and rolling over single occupancy car use:

- Promotes integrated, sustainable community planning
- Supports compact community development
- Helps local governments to achieve reductions in green house gas emissions - in keeping with the intent of the BC Climate Action Charter
- Promotes healthy active living and connects neighbours
- Contributes to healthier residents and addresses many root causes of health issues

“We now have a blueprint for active, sustainable ... development in our Village. We look forward to implementation” – Village of Burns Lake

The final report has highlighted the successes and outcomes of the BEAT Community Planning Grant program by highlighting the impact of relatively modest funding on 24 communities across BC. For most, the planning work is now completed, but the positive energy, commitment and local government focus on active transportation that has been generated continues to impact local decision-making:

- “This process has also helped us to focus on what we are already doing right and what we can do to enhance and build on those things.” – City of Armstrong
- “...The momentum gathered in this process will continue and the impact on the community will be significant” – Town of Qualicum Beach

- “Local government, the Nuxalk Nation and businesses will be required to work together on developing the project just as they have worked together on planning” – Central Coast Regional District
- “We have a comprehensive... northern specific plan with realistic and achievable implementation strategies” – Village of Burns Lake

The shared success stories from the 24 local governments of the BEAT community planning grant program reveal there is a demand for funding for active transportation planning activities – as well as a need for support to undertake infrastructure improvements.

Planning is only the first step for these communities; dedicated support, resources and funds for active transportation will be foundational in order to fully realize the active transportation potential identified in the plans funded by the BEAT program.



Site meeting in Central Coast Regional District

Appendix 1:

List of Completed Active Transportation Plans

Phase 1

- City of Colwood (\$9,965) – Colwood Active Transportation Plan
- Town of Golden (\$10,730.80) – Town of Golden Active Transportation Plan
- District of Invermere (\$24,937.50) – Active Transportation Network Plan
- District of Kent (\$25,000) – District of Kent Active Transportation Plan
- Regional District of Nanaimo (\$21,471.11) – Electoral Area 'A' Active Transportation Plan
- City of Prince George (\$22,500) – City of Prince George Active Transportation Plan
- Town of Qualicum Beach (\$20,000) – Qualicum Beach Cycling Plan
- City of Quesnel (\$25,000) – Built Environment & Active Transportation Trail Plan
- City of Rossland (\$22,000) – City of Rossland Active Transportation Plan
- District of Sparwood (\$22,500) – Sparwood Active Transportation Plan

Total disbursed in Phase 1: \$204,104.41

Phase 2

- City of Armstrong (\$20,962.33) – City of Armstrong Active Transportation Plan
- District of Barriere (\$25,000) – Active Transportation Plan
- Village of Burns Lake (20,000) – Burns Lake Active Transportation Plan
- Central Coast Regional District (\$20,000) – Multi-Use Pathway Connecting Bella Coola to Four Mile Town
- Columbia-Shuswap Regional District (\$23,000) – Squilax to Scotch Creek Greenway Master Plan
- Town of Ladysmith (\$21,000) – Ladysmith Bicycle Plan: Ladysmith Gets Rolling
- City of Nelson (\$24,770) – City of Nelson Comprehensive Active Transportation Plan
- City of New Westminster (\$24,928.03) – Wheelability Assessment
- District of North Cowichan (\$25,000) – Chemainus Active Transportation Strategy
- City of Revelstoke (\$20,000) – Revelstoke Active Transportation Plan
- District of Sechelt (\$21,000) – Sechelt Active Transportation Plan
- City of Terrace (\$24,709.88) – City of Terrace Active Transportation Plan
- Village of Warfield (\$17,500) – Active Transportation Plan
- District of Wells (20,814.44) – Wells-Barkerville Bike Route Study

Total disbursed in Phase 2: \$308,684.68