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City of Vancouver Sets Transportation Records During 2010 Winter Games

Vancouver residents and visitors set records for sustainable travel during the 2010 Olympic Winter Games, more than doubling the number of trips typically taken by public transit, biking or walking, according to a University of British Columbia study completed for the City of Vancouver.

The Host City Olympic Transportation Plan Downtown Monitoring Study looked at how people got around during the February 12-28 Winter Games, and compared the findings to previous transportation monitoring efforts conducted by the City of Vancouver and its partners. On an average Olympic Games weekday there were approximately 1.17 million trips into or out of the downtown Vancouver peninsula close to 44 per cent higher than the pre-Games weekday average of 813,000 person-trips.

Findings show that for almost two thirds, or 61 per cent, of all trips to and from downtown Vancouver, the majority of people took public transit, while others chose to bike or walk. The remaining 39 per cent of trips taken were in automobiles.

"The findings show that local residents and visitors can adjust to travel in a much more sustainable manner than normal," says UBC Civil Engineering Prof. Tarek Sayed, who conducted the study for the City of Vancouver with transportation engineer Clark Lim of Acure Consulting and with research support from TransLink and Transport Canada.

"In fact, the total number of automobiles dropped by almost 16 per cent during the Games compared to pre-Games conditions, a remarkable feat considering the 44 per cent increase of total trips during the Games," says Tarek, a transportation and road safety expert in the Faculty of Applied Science.

Prior to the games, people made just over 350,000 trips per day to and from downtown Vancouver via bike, transit or walking. These sustainable trip modes jumped to over

713,100 trips during the Games while the number of trips by automobile, as both drivers and passengers, remained essentially the same.

Trips taken by taxi were up by 25 per cent, while truck volumes were reduced by almost 38 per cent, mostly within the mid-day period. City policies seemed to have worked in encouraging trucks to deliver goods during the early mornings as volumes increased by 90 per cent between midnight and 6 a.m., effectively reducing and avoiding congestion during peak and mid-day periods.

Focusing specifically on Games spectator travel to Olympic venues such as ice hockey games or Live City events, almost 80 per cent of the travel was by transit, walking, or cycling -- the highest sustainable mode share ever to a downtown Vancouver event, including Celebration of Lights, the summer fireworks competitions which typically account for a 60-65 per cent sustainable mode share.

"These findings provide important insights into transportation planning and behavior and will be helpful for other agencies planning large-scale events in Vancouver and the Metro region," says Sayed.

The study deployed almost 80 engineering students who surveyed traffic in the field. Over three separate 24-hour periods, the students monitored all people entering or leaving the downtown area by all modes over the course of the Winter Games. As well, the study targeted spectators and participants at downtown Olympic-related venues to further capture their specific travel behavior and choices.

"The research allowed students to practice their technical

skills in the field, as well as exposing them to some of the social and policy aspects of the study,” says co-author Lim, an expert in transportation planning and policy and a UBC Engineering PhD candidate working with Sayed.

“In fact,” says Lim, “the study is significant in that it ‘raises the policy bar’ of what we can achieve as a region in terms of our sustainable transportation objectives, and how teamwork between government, private sector and citizens is required to meet those goals.”

This monitoring study was part of the legacy of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games to the Host City of Vancouver and is valuable transportation information for the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC), the International Olympic Committee and future Organizing Committees for Olympic Games.