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Advanced search

[Our Newspapers](#) | [Seattle Classifieds](#) | [Local Communities](#) | [Directory](#) | [Commercial Printing](#) | [Home](#)

Thursday 1 May, 2003 Home > News > Content

News

- Top Stories
- In the Schools
- Entertainment
- Police Log
- Obituaries
- National News

Classifieds
Links
Business Directory
Our Newspaper
Community
Fun and Games
Consumer Guide
Administrative
Personal Finance
Lifestyles
In the Schools
Top Stories

Finding another way to go; Queen Anne family gives up second car for nine weeks through city program

By Sharon Thomas-Hearns , Freelance Writer

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Last year, the Seattle-Everett area tied with Washington, D.C., for the fifth-worst traffic congestion in the country, according to the Urban Mobility Report released by Texas Transportation Institute (TTI). The study also revealed that the cost of congestion came to \$67.5 billion nationally, resulting in 3.6 billion hours of traffic delay and consumption of 5.7 billion gallons of excess fuel.

Last fall, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) conducted a study that they hope in the long run will help increase Seattle's traffic flow and decrease the amount of toxins released into the air. The 12-week study, called One-Less-Car, is an initiative under Way to Go Seattle. The Way to Go Seattle program is the city of Seattle's "umbrella for a variety of initiatives intended to reduce auto-mobile usage."

One Queen Anne family - Susan Sanem, Greg Bjarko and their son, Eddie - decided to participate in the One-Less-Car study. For three weeks, Sanem and Bjarko recorded the number of miles they drove and the number of trips they took. Afterward, the couple gave up their second car for nine weeks.

"I try to be eco-friendly and aware of traffic," Sanem said. "[This study] gave us the opportunity to explore some options."

Throughout the study's nine weeks, Sanem and Bjarko combined errands, walked to their Fremont businesses and rode the bus to Mariners games. As a result, the couple drove 111 fewer trips and 123 fewer miles. They also saved an average of \$83 a week, 15 pounds of carbon di-oxide (greenhouse gases) and six pounds of carbon monoxide (smog). To accomplish this, Sanem, who was pregnant at the time, scheduled doctor appointments around the couple's work schedule, Bjarko's client appointments and taking Eddie to and from preschool.

"It wasn't as hard as I thought," Sanem said. "It took some planning, which isn't our strong suit. Greg thought it was a little harder [with-out the second vehicle], but he really enjoyed walking to work. I think that really surprised him."

In exchange for not using their second vehicle for nine weeks, the study's 41 participants were given a stipend worth the average amount they would save if they sold their second vehicle.

The Seattle Department of Transportation hoped that participants could see how much money they would save if they didn't own a sec-ond car - an average of \$70 a week

- while at the same time alleviating traffic congestion and reducing pol-lutants released into the air.

Study participants walked, rode the bus, bicycled, carpoled, combined errands and tried Flexcar.

"We're encouraging folks to be able to get where they're going with driving less," said David Allen, senior

transportation planner for

the Seattle Department of Transportation. "We wanted them to see they were spending a lot of money [on a second car]."

During the study, participants reduced their driving by a total of 25,000 miles and prevented 17,000 pounds of pollutants, enough to fill nine swimming pools, from entering the air.

"People saved enough trips to drive around the whole planet," Allen said. "We're not telling everyone to sell their car but want to let them know other options are out

there to get them where they're going, and they'll save money and stress."

Funding for three rounds of studies came from federal grants. Now that the studies are completed, the Seattle Department of Transportation plans to initiate a broader citywide campaign paid for by independent funding sources. The department also anticipates working with such partners as Flexcar to make the program more enticing to try.

Since January, three participants have sold their extra car, 10 are thinking about it and three plan to continue to use their second vehicle, but a lot less

than they previously did. As for Sanem and Bjar-ko, they're planning to keep their extra car - a 1985 Volkswagen Vanagon.

"We knew we would never get rid of the second car," Sanem said. "We use it to take a bunch of kids somewhere or to go camping. Our objective was to drive the van less, and I do feel we drive it less.

"If each person cuts a couple of trips, it will have a big impact on traffic and pollution but the key is all [people need to do it]," she continued.

Freelance writer Sharon Thomas-Hearns is a Seattle-area resident. She can be reached at qanews@nwlinc.com.

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Back to top 



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