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Way to Go, Seattle! Families Park Their “Extra” Car All Save Money, Some Give Up Car For Good

23 Seattle families completed a City of Seattle pilot program to see if people could get along without their extra car for six weeks. The results are impressive. At least four families liked it so much that they're selling the car. Some families didn't need to participate in the program to be convinced. By determining the cost of owning their car on the City's web site, they sold their extra car without even participating in the program!

“We can all take small steps to improve our transportation system,” said Mayor Paul Schell. “These families have proven that we can make choices about how we get around and enjoy spending less time in our cars.”

All the families in the study saved money, and most saved about \$64 per week. They all found they could get around on transit, walking, bicycling and taking taxis when needed for about \$21 a week, far less than the \$85 per week cost of an average second car. Most families tell us they will continue to take the bus or ride their bike, and think about whether they need to drive to where they want to go.

“We hope more people will see they don't need that extra car,” said Jemae Hoffman, project manager. “Families making smart decisions about transportation can cut down on vehicle trips, congestion, gasoline use and, of course, air pollution.”

The best experience for Richard Kielbowitz and Linda Lawson of the Hawthorne Hills neighborhood was "watching the price of gas rise for other people". "When we heard reports of traffic jams, we counted our blessings that we were not caught up in them," they said. After participating in the program, Kielbowitz and Lawson sold their second car.

"Before I would have driven north for movies or shopping. Now, I headed downtown on the bus," said Lori Goodwin of the Queen Anne neighborhood. "It was a fun experience. Same movies, same shopping, but was wonderful not to have to deal with a huge parking lot."

(more)

Seattle's Strategic Planning Office paid the participating families \$85 per week for keeping a daily diary of their transportation activities and expenses during the six weeks they did not to use their extra cars. Families were able to use the \$85, the national average cost of owning and operating a second car, for bus fares, joining a car-sharing service such as Flex Car or taxis when needed. Most families spent only about \$21 getting around without the car, saving an average of \$49 per week.

Through trying different ways of getting around and more carefully planning; the 23 families made nearly 200 fewer car trips per week during the study. The 200 fewer trips per week equaled about 1,260 miles and a significant cut in air-polluting emissions.

Less driving by just these 23 families meant about 6,100 fewer pounds of carbon dioxide, CO₂, were pumped into the atmosphere. If that CO₂ were compressed into elemental carbon such as charcoal, it would fill more than 167 10-pound bags, equal to roughly three 6-lane swimming pools in volume – NOT in our air!

Other pollutants that did not end up in the atmosphere as a result of just this brief experiment included nearly 200 pounds of carbon monoxide, about 40 pounds of nitrogen oxides and more than 12 pounds of unburned hydrocarbons. Oxides of nitrogen and unburned hydrocarbons are the two major components of smog.

What comes next? Seattle's Strategic Planning Office plans to use these results to encourage others to think about how much it costs them to own and operate their cars – and determine if they, like other families, would rather have the money they saved, over \$3200 a year, to spend on vacations. Maybe you'll join the five other families who sold their extra car once they figured out how much it cost them! The City also hopes to do a last and final program next Spring. If you wish to be on the waiting list for the last demonstration, apply on the web at www.cityofseattle.net/waytogo or call (206) 615-1550 to be mailed a copy of the web page application.

The goal of the project is to demonstrate ways to ease neighborhood traffic and automobile-caused air pollution. If every household in Seattle did what the 23 Way to Go! families did, nearly 16 million miles of automobile traffic would be kept out of our neighborhoods and 7160 tons of carbon dioxide and 357 tons of other pollutants would be kept out of our air **each week**.

Car Smart Community Challenge Grants are also available on this web site to pay for projects organized by individuals or groups that reduce car trips by encouraging alternative modes of travel. The **Way to Go, Seattle** program is part of Mayor Paul Schell's Transportation Blueprint and effort to provide more transportation choices and encourage people to use them.