

AWARENESS CAMPAIGN FOR CYCLING IN GHENT, BELGIUM

STAD GENT

LOS MEE DE FILES OP *

**22 september 2003
autovrije dag in Gent**

*** en win
een prijs**

Kom te voet, met de fiets, met het openbaar vervoer of gebruik de P&R-parking in Gentbrugge (tram 21/22) op 22 september en maak kans op o.a. een TREK-fiets !
Surf naar www.gent.be (verkeer) of mail carfree.day@traject.be

Awareness Campaign for Cycling in Ghent

Problem description

Since the end of the nineties, the City of Ghent has pursued a policy in favour of sustainable travel modes. In the past, the City took several initiatives to encourage the use of sustainable transport modes for home-school traffic (e.g. free public transport for under 15year olds) and in leisure related traffic (e.g. shopping bus, free public transport during weekends in December). At the present time, the City Council wants to give greater attention to sustainable home-work trips.

Description of the campaign / measure

Within the Step-by-Step project a campaign to stimulate the use of biking and public transport for home-work trips was developed. The campaign in Ghent tried to focus on the first two steps of the Tapestry approach:

- to increase the awareness of the problem
- to bring an acceptance of responsibility

The City Council agreed that the European Car Free Day, organised every year on 22nd September, was an ideal starting point for this campaign. As 22nd September fell on a working day (Monday in 2003; Wednesday in 2004) it was a good opportunity to involve employers and employees in the event. We wanted to make companies and their employees aware of the fact that they are the main cause of traffic congestion at peak hours, and of pollution due to car use and road safety problems. By making good arguments and by showing that in a lot of cases there is an alternative to individual car use; we wanted to make clear to employers and employees that they are responsible for the problems, but that they are also part of the solution.

The concrete objectives of the campaign were

- to reach the main employers in the city centre and maximise participation levels
- to reach the majority of the employees in participating companies and obtain their participation
- to supply travel advice about sustainable alternatives to all participants interested in it
- to achieve a high degree of satisfaction with regard to the sustainable travel advice provided
- on European Car Free Day, to obtain a modal shift within participating companies

Preparation : campaign European Car Free Day 2003

As part of the learning process, in 2003 a smaller campaign was organised for European Car Free Day amongst employers in a restricted area of the city centre (Ghent Zuid district). All companies (n=193) in the business area of Ghent Zuid were invited to participate in European Car Free Day on 22nd



September. A letter, signed by the alderman for mobility, was sent to the general manager of the companies.

Amongst the 193 companies receiving the mailing were a lot of small companies (including lawyers, dentists, shop owners). The bigger companies were phoned to check if they received the mailing, to give more additional information and to ask them to send back the registration form. In the end, only 11 of the 193 contacted companies agreed to participate in the campaign and to encourage their employees to use a more sustainable means of transport on 22nd September.

Because of the rather low number of participating companies, at the very last moment the campaign was opened to other employers and employees. Due to this last minute decision the announcement could only be communicated via the weekly press conference of the council and via the city's website.

In total we received 495 registrations for European Car Free Day 2003. Some 113 participants asked for travel advice, most of them looking for a safe bicycle route. The campaign was concluded by an evaluation of the travel advice and by a round table with representatives and participants of the different companies, the alderman for mobility and journalists.

Campaign European Car Free Day Ghent 2004

The lessons learned from this evaluation were used in the organisation of the campaign in September 2004: As smaller companies did not participate in 2003, only companies with at least 50 employees were invited to participate in this campaign.

As the letter to the companies had not been effective, we decided to send the invitation to participate in the 2004 campaign by e-mail only.

Finally, all of the 75 companies in Ghent who have more than 50 employees received an electronic digital invitation for participating in the campaign. Apart from these contacts, the three smaller companies who participated in 2003 were invited to participate too. Furthermore, via a letter from the Association of Ghent Port Related Companies, all 101 companies in the Port of Ghent received a participation form as well. As the City organised a promotional day for cycling (Gent Bikes-day !) on Sunday 19-09-04, a stand was organized where information about the home-work related campaign on the Car Free Day was provided, and where people could fill in a participation form.

In our mailing to the companies we emphasized the need for keeping the city, and hence employment locations, accessible (increasing awareness of the problem). In the same way, we made clear that in future more employees should choose for cycling, using public transport or another sustainable solution for their home-work trip (accepting responsibility).

The same arguments were used in the mailing to the employees: companies participating in the campaign received an e-mail and subscription form that they could send to their employees. The fact that employees could ask for travel advice was a tool for appealing to their sense of responsibility. A lot of people take the car for home-work trips because they claim not to have a good alternative ("unsafe bicycle routes", "no public transport connection"). By giving personalised travel advice, most people are faced with the fact that there is a good alternative. This means one excuse less for taking the car.



Employees were also encouraged to use bicycles or public transport by a prize draw. Participants on the Car Free Day could win one of the more than 140 prizes. These prizes were related to sustainable transport modes (e.g. a folding bike, a membership to a carsharing company, public transport tickets).

Who is the driving force behind it? Who is the beneficiary?

The campaign initiator is Traject but the campaign was developed and implemented in consultation with the Mobility Department City of Ghent and the Flemish Association of Public Transport Users. The target groups were employers, employees using the car for their home-work trip (to encourage them to try out a sustainable alternative) and employees already cycling or using public transport to the office (affirming their choice and even, for example by providing a better bicycle route, helping them to use their bike more frequently for home-work trips).

Main slogan / statement

Help “dissolve” the traffic jams! We show you which bicycle route or public transport connection is perfect for you. Try it out on European Car Free Day and win a prize!!

Results

In total 495 employees participated in the first campaign (Car Free Day 2003), which was organised on a smaller scale. For the larger campaign in 2004 we could count on the collaboration of 38 employers: 4 companies located in the port of Ghent, and 34 in the city centre. The participation level of the bigger companies (> 50 employees) in the city centre was very high: 34 of the 75 contacted companies participated!

We received 1039 subscriptions for the Car Free Day: 1011 participants working in one of the 38 companies and 28 individual subscriptions. 289 participants (28%) general use their car for the daily home-work trip and chose another mode for their trip on Car Free Day. However, most of the employees participating in the campaign already exhibited sustainable mobility behaviour.

The majority (76%) of the car drivers choose the bike as an alternative mode on 22nd September. Some 19% wanted to try out public transport. These 289 cars kept out of town on the European Car Free Day can be seen as 1,75km less traffic jam and / or 2 football fields less parking area needed!

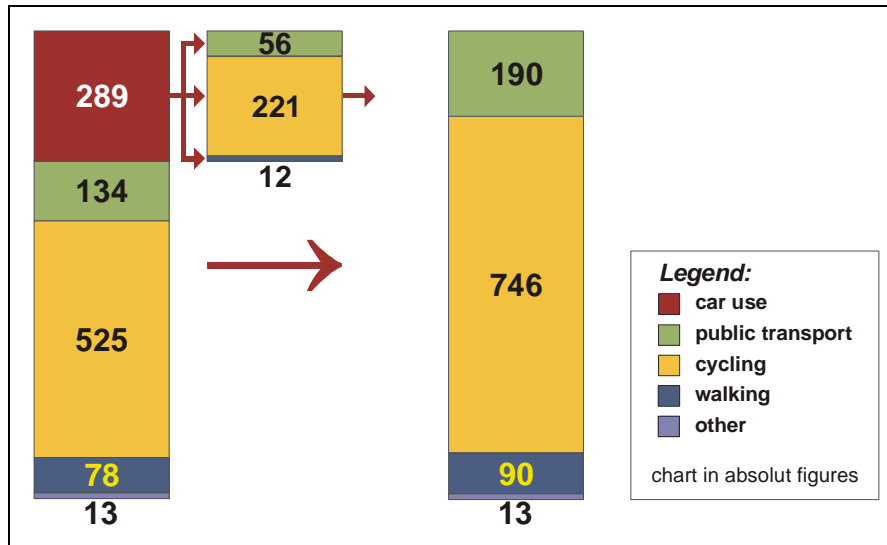


Figure 1: Modal split participants on „normal“ working day and on Car Free Day.

Opportunities / barriers

Factors of influence and criteria of success

- focus on bigger companies (at least 50 employees). Letters and mails to smaller companies have less effect
- the best way to reach employees is via the employers. If you can count on the participation of the company, the information to the employees will be supported by the management and will be more effective
- on the other hand, if someone decides to participate on his own initiative, use this opportunity to inform his colleagues and the whole company as well.
- the opportunity to receive travel advice was very effective. Even regular bikers were not always aware of the best cycle route to their office
- organise a prize draw: it is not principally the fact that participants can win something that is important, but rather that, in every company, people are looking forward to hearing who won a prize. This further raises the profile “sustainable mobility”.
- the fact the media was involved was a great stimulus for companies to participate.

Possible barriers

- avoid focusing completely on “one day switchers” - the people who use a sustainable transport mode only once a year, on Car Free Day. Pay at least equal attention to people who use sustainable transport modes on a daily basis.



- it is not always easy to give suitable travel advice for every participant. For example: some people prefer to catch a bus close to their home but with a longer travel time than taking a faster train or bus from a stop further away, while others will chose the opposite.

Steps for implementation – Frequently asked questions

Working steps for introduction

- create a campaign team and distribute the tasks : contacting sponsors, looking for a communication partner etc.
- reach employers / obtain participation
- reach employees in participating companies / obtain participation
- reach the public in general: communicate in mass media about campaign
- give travel advice to everyone asking for it
- organise a prize draw and a “photo opportunity” on the Car Free Day itself (e.g. round table with some participants)
- carry out an evaluation of the campaign and bear this in mind when organising one again in future

Time of implementation and Frequently asked questions

Link the campaign to other initiatives like Mobility Weeks or a Car Free Day.

Examples

The same methodology including travel advice and a mobility lottery, was used in several other campaigns in Flanders:

- Car Free Day 2004 industrial areas Tienen en Landen (10 companies)
Contact : Pascal Degreef, pdg@gomvlaamsbrabant.be, + 32 2 257 03 76
- Autoluwe Werkdag 2004 (“Working day with less cars”) organised by Modidesk Limburg in 39 companies.
Contact : Katrien Backx, kab@mobidesklimburg.be, + 32 11 870 930
- Because the success of the Autoluwe Werkdag in 2004, the Province of Limburg and Mobidesk Limburg will repeat this campaign in 2005 but instead of having a working day they will organise a working month with less cars (15 may – 15 June 2005).
Contact : Rik Schreurs, rischreurs@limburg.be, + 32 11 23 83 51 or Katrien Backx, kab@mobidesklimburg.be, + 32 11 870 930

Information

More information about the campaing in Ghent or the general mobility policy can be obtained from Yves Debaets, yves.debaets@gent.be, +32 9 266 77 70



Cost / Benefits

The cost of a promotional campaign like the one organised on the Car Free Days depends on the choice of the communication tools (hard copy information or only digital) and on the scale on which the campaign is organised. Our experience is that a digital communication campaign is cheaper and more efficient than a hard copy campaign.

Another factor influencing the cost is the availability of easily accessible information on public transport connections. If they are available, the efforts and costs of providing travel advice can be much reduced.

In general, a campaign at the level of a medium-sized European city (Ghent has 100,000 inhabitants) focussing on larger companies (those with at least 50 employees) can be done for 15.000 euros.

The benefits are even more difficult to calculate although it is clear that on Car Free Day 289 employees from the participating companies left their car at home and choose a sustainable transport mode instead. This meant at least 1,75 km less traffic jam and 2 football fields less parking area occupied. As 68% of the people who received travel advice indicated that they will keep on following that advice, we can assume that this kind of campaign has a long term benefit on energy consumption and traffic congestion.

Link and or article for more information

More information can be obtained from the final report of the STEP BY STEP project which can be downloaded from the projects website: www.eu-stepbystep.org