



## TRANSPORTATION DAY WEBSITES

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### *Geography Awareness Week 2009*

*Canadian Association of Geographers*

The introductions to Transportation Day 2007 and 2008 contain many of the basic elements in the connection between geography and transportation, and serve as background for 2009. As a result, the focus of commentaries for 2009 is on important, prevailing geography-transportation processes and trends that are captured by websites selected for the Transportation Day component of Geography Awareness Week 2009.

Before introducing the websites selected for Geography Awareness Week 2009, I want to emphasize that most of the websites selected for Transportation Day 2007 and 2008 are updated regularly, and continue to make outstanding contributions to elaborating the geography-transportation connection. I therefore urge visitors to this page to periodically re-visit the sites selected for 2007 and 2008.

Further, I am pleased to inform visitors that both the *Applied Geography Showcase Sampler* and the *Geoskills Showcase Sampler* that were initiated in 2008 are continued for 2009. The *Samplers* contain details on how to access geography-transportation reports published in 2008 and 2009 which are available online, and provide an exceptional communication medium for those interested in sharing information and learning about client-driven research projects and geoskills-related activities materials.

As readers may recall, the most “newsy” transportation story in 2008 involved the increasing cost of fossil fuel. That story continues into 2009, but with a serious twist. The consequences of an international economic downturn have gone far beyond concerns about the cost of fossil fuel, and are now causing governments around the world, including federal, provincial, and municipal governments in Canada, to try to figure out how to salvage all or parts of the entire motor vehicle sector while spending multi-millions of dollars to maintain highway systems.

There are other significant aspects of the geography-transport connection, however, and many of those that were touched on in 2007 and 2008 continue to be important to ordinary citizens, as well as to governments and business. These concerns, some of which have been expressed for decades, include the heavy emphasis in Canada on



## ● **TRANSPORTATION DAY**

private motor vehicles for moving people (cars, minivans, SUVs) and freight (trucks), and the inevitable increase in costs when demand for gasoline and diesel fuel outstrips the supply of easy-to-access and easy-to-process raw materials.

In regard to proposed alternatives, and as was previously noted in 2007 and 2008, they include more people trips by walking, cycling and transit, and more movement of freight by rail. Further, due to the growing realization of the intimate connection between transportation and land use, much more consideration is being given to ways to reduce the need for transport by private motor vehicle (e.g. teleworking).

Ideas receiving attention as ways to promote more trips by walking, cycling, and transit include changing planning and zoning practices so that sprawl is replaced by intensification of existing neighbourhoods, and increasing the densities of new developments and re-developments in downtown and inner city areas. Further, sustainable transport advocates are increasingly calling for much more money to be spent on sidewalks, bike paths, and bus and rail transit, and much less on roads.

I am pleased to say that all the websites selected for Transportation Day 2009 contain materials on these geographically important matters. Further, I believe viewers will quickly appreciate that when the websites selected for 2009 are combined with those of 2007 and 2008, they provide an exceptional overview for anyone wanting to learn more about the political, economic, social, health, demographic, energy, pollution, and other important aspects of Canada's sustainable, active, or alternative transportation geography.

In terms of organization, the websites which are national in scale are presented first, followed by those which involve geography-transport topics, issues, etc., that have a provincial, regional or local orientation. The following topics are among those that are frequently mentioned in many and in some cases all the websites:

- Geography and sustainable transportation
- Geography and transportation analysis
- Geography and transportation futures
- Geography and transportation infrastructure(s)
- Geography and transportation issues
- Geography and transportation networks
- Geography and transportation patterns
- Geography and transportation planning
- Geography and transportation research
- Geography and transportation strategies
- Geography and transportation systems

Finally, both the *Applied Geography Showcase* and the *GeoSkills Showcase* contain examples of transportation projects which serve as excellent extensions to the



## ● **TRANSPORTATION DAY**

Transportation Day website materials. In addition, however, the *Showcases* also help to illustrate the wide range of transportation topics under consideration by governments, associations, corporations, university researchers, advocacy groups, and so on. And, not to be overlooked, the *Showcases* also provide a means to give recognition to and learn about the individuals and organizations making important contributions to Canada's geography-transportation connection.

The websites for Transportation Day 2009 were selected by Barry Wellar, Professor Emeritus, University of Ottawa, Distinguished Research Fellow at Transport Canada 2000, and Principal, Wellar Consulting Inc.

### **1. Google Maps**

<http://maps.google.ca/>

Students of transportation geography are familiar with terms and concepts such as points, nodes, vertices, links, segments, networks, connectivity, accessibility, etc., but there really is nothing like a map to put things in their relative locations, and to permit us to take trips anywhere without leaving home. One of the marvels of Google Maps is that you can go almost anywhere, and back, by clicking on the URL, and then going, virtually, wherever you want as quickly as you want, and with minimum expense.

Further, Google Maps is more than just an educational and entertaining website; it is useful in many fields of geography, including recreation geography. As a case in point, and using the satellite imagery option to get the "big picture", I checked out the routes for our trips this summer, first from Ottawa to Latchford, Cobalt, New Liskeard and Kirkland Lake via Highways 17, 564 and 11 in Ontario, and 101 in Quebec. We are going to one of the best blueberry-picking regions in the world, and Google Maps with the 'zoom in' feature does a great job of depicting the transportation-geography connections that get us to the patches in the shortest time over the shortest distances and easiest terrain.

Our second trip is from Ottawa to Sault Ste. Marie via Highway 17, with a stopover on Manitoulin Island (Hwy 6), and numerous other stops along the way. A key feature of this trip involves fish, and I am not at liberty to say more about that at this time. However, the satellite images and terrain and road maps hold clues about where to go to get the big ones. Good luck!

Google Maps, what a concept, what an operation, and what an excellent base to start the commentaries for Transportation Day 2009.



## ● **TRANSPORTATION DAY**

### **2. The Great Canadian Adventure Company**

<http://www.adventures.ca>

Canada is a country of great outdoor adventures, with geography creating the different types and regions of adventures, and transportation being the means of making the connections with and between the adventures. Indeed, some modes of transportation, including walking/touring, cycling/touring canoeing, kayaking, whitewater rafting, hang gliding, sailing, boating, and RV'ing can be part-and-parcel of the adventure.

The website of the Great Canadian Adventure Company combines text and graphics in a very entertaining and educational manner, and includes a number of very informative maps. Overall, this website creates a comprehensive and informative environment in which to study the various geography-transportation adventures that make Canada a world-leading country for travel purposes. Moreover, it effectively illustrates how the Internet can be used for a combined educational and commercial purpose.

So, if you are planning an active adventure trip in Canada, this website is a great place to start your journey.

### **3. The Trans Canada Trail**

<http://www.tctrail.ca/home.php>

The following excerpt from the Trans Canada Trail (TCT) home page summarizes the scope and purpose of the Trail:

“The Trans Canada Trail is a 21,500-kilometre recreational trail winding its way through every province and territory, from the Atlantic to Pacific to Arctic Oceans. When completed, it will be the world's longest recreational trail, linking close to 1000 communities and over 33 million Canadians. Today almost 70 percent (14,500 kilometres) is developed. Thousands of people are taking to the Trail to walk, hike, cycle, ski, horseback ride, canoe and snowmobile.”

There is a tendency in much of the academic, professional, business, and government transportation literature to focus on the air, marine, rail, and road modes, and to ignore active or alternative transport trips like those noted above. Inclusion of the Trans Canada Trail website brings an element of balance into the regard that deserves to be shown for all modes of transport.

To more fully appreciate the geographical aspects of the Trail and the comments on different segments, I suggest that viewers take the time to relate this website with that of Google Maps identified above. I expect that many more Canadians fly over, drive through, drive on, or drive by the Trans Canada Trail than use it, and these two websites



## ● **TRANSPORTATION DAY**

not only reveal what we are missing, but might even engender more respect for those who become actively engaged in the Trail experience through walking, hiking, cycling, horseback riding, canoeing, and snowmobiling. The Trans Canada Trail website presents transportation and geography up close and personal. Well worth a visit.

### **4. ecoACTION, Government of Canada**

<http://www.ecoaction.gc.ca>

There are several parts of this website that are “must visits” for research-oriented Transportation Day viewers. First, a click on ecoTRANSPORT strategy takes you to the ecoMOBILITY Program and the ecoFREIGHT Program, two initiatives which contain geographic-specific features. On the other hand, however, the general absence of geographic considerations from initiatives such as the ecoAUTO Rebate Program, ecoENERGY for Fleets, and ecoENERGY for Private Vehicles informs us that the work of geographers is not finished when it comes to major parts of the ecoENERGY Strategy. Several of the websites listed below contain suggestions in that regard, as do several websites from each of the 2007 and 2008 selections.

A second menu item of appeal to researchers involved in issues of geographic consequence is Tools and Calculators. As readers may appreciate, Tools and Calculators is one of many synonyms for GeoSkills. Consequently, this part of the ecoACTION website warrants a careful look by geographers with an interest in the design, development, and testing aspects of geoskills (methods and techniques), and in (client-driven) applied research and applications.

Few if any non-trivial measures or indexes get it totally correct the first time, and as a rule measures and indexes which are used or being considered for use are subject to modification at one or more of the theoretical, methodological, or operational stages. In this case it appears that calculators such as “Calculate Your Commute”, “Fuel Consumption” and “Idling Calculator” could be strengthened by incorporating more defining geographic features. And, I believe that the same comment holds for tools such as the Air Quality Health Index, and CarpoolTool.com. A summary comment is that this is a strong geography-transportation website, with the potential for becoming even more informative through an increased geographic presence in the Calculators and Tools section.

### **5. Canadian Train Vacations**

<http://www.canadiantrainvacations.com/home>

If you want to visit a website that incorporates regional geography, physical geography, human geography, recreation/tourism geography, commercial geography, urban geography, and transportation geography, and represents them all through the use of



## ● TRANSPORTATION DAY

exceptional visual aids, then check out this site. Clearly, the people who built the railroads, operate the rolling stock, and organize these tours know about and use all those geographies in the course of doing business. (Confession: I enjoy travelling by train, and have made many trips by that mode, including the Rocky Mountaineer run from Banff to Vancouver. However, my perspicacity did not bias my selection of this website.)

As for those who visit this website and get a tremendous urge to take a train trip to experience Canada's extraordinary geographies, I say **"Go for it!"**

### 6. La Route verte au Quebec

[http://www.routeverte.com/rv/index\\_e.php?page=diapo2\\_e&image=17](http://www.routeverte.com/rv/index_e.php?page=diapo2_e&image=17)

The homepage note about la Route verte puts this website in context.

**"The best bicycle route in the world.** The Route verte has won two prestigious awards: the Prix Ulysse, one of the Grands Prix du tourisme québécois for the Montreal region, and first place, among the ten best bicycle routes in the world, selected by the National Geographic Society."

As for the website itself, the designers have done an excellent job in their presentation of the transportation-geography connection in maps, text, and visuals. There is a (small scale) overview map of the entire route as well as (large scale) detail maps for each of the 18 Route verte regions, and the texts that accompany each region are mini-geography travelogues that touch on physical geography, regional geography, tourism geography, cultural geography, historical geography, and, of course, transportation geography.

### 7. Government of Saskatchewan: Highways and Infrastructure

<http://highways.gov.sk.ca/capitalplan/>

A brief excerpt provides the rationale for selecting this website:

**"These are exciting times in Saskatchewan.**

Our province is experiencing unprecedented growth. The demand for Saskatchewan's commodities has never been higher and our province's future looks very exciting. While this is all good news, our economy is based on our ability to get our products to market quickly and efficiently.

Whether it is agricultural implements made in St. Brieux, potash mined at Lanigan, uranium from the far north, natural gas from Leader or steel pipe from here in Regina our key industries need to be connected to markets across Canada, throughout North America and around the world.



## ● TRANSPORTATION DAY

In fact, exports account for about two-thirds of Saskatchewan's economic output. Transportation creates jobs, sustains growth and links our communities. However, building and maintaining our provincial highway system is a challenge - at 26,000 km, our system is equivalent to six return trips from Regina to Vancouver.

The Government of Saskatchewan recognizes the need to address this challenge. But money alone will not solve the transportation challenges facing the province. A strategic approach is needed to guide our transportation investments. We can not make knee-jerk or reactionary decisions. Investments must be targeted to the projects where they will have the most impact.”

The numerous references to geography in the excerpt are supported by the results of keyword searches of All Government Sites; ‘Geography’ yields 585 results, ‘Geography and transportation’ 288, and ‘Geography and highways’ 134. Other combinations include Geography and walking (67), and cycling (35), and transit (34), and rail (75), and trucks/trucking (45), and cars (55).

Further, and in support of the declaration, “**Saskatchewan!** Opening up the province through a strong transportation system”, a section titled RELATED DOCUMENTS contains a number of maps that illustrate where and when highway construction is to occur.

I hasten to add, however, that the documents are in pdf format, and as a result the maps are not of sharp quality, and in some cases they are very difficult to interpret for reasons of design. Perhaps the Province of Saskatchewan could apply more of the geoskills identified in the *GeoSkills Showcase*, and significantly improve this feature of an otherwise informative website.

### 8. ScaleDown Windsor

<http://www.scaledown.ca/>

The Vision of ScaleDown Windsor (ON) is “To connect every Windsorite to their (sic) own walkable neighborhood that has its own public spaces, local independent businesses and artists”. With a vision statement that combines transportation and geography, ScaleDown Windsor it is an excellent fit for Transportation Day 2009. I hasten to note, however, that the Vision seriously understates the means and the content used to make the connections between Windsorites and their neighborhoods.

First, and this will no doubt appeal most to those who are technologically “ept”, but the means of information sharing of this website include blog, video and audio, and there is also a news button that tracks media items. A lot of very good work goes into the infrastructure of this website, and it is needed to support the outstanding transportation content that is assembled.



## ● TRANSPORTATION DAY

Second, and by way of brief reference to the content, Tag Clouds (domains) that are directly related to transportation-geography include ‘alternative transportation’, ‘mobility’, ‘pedestrian’, ‘transportation costs’, ‘urban sprawl’, and ‘walkable’. Other transportation geography-related tags include ‘official plan’ and ‘urban design’.

Windsor is a fascinating transportation-geography story due to factors such as its automotive industry, its border crossing role, its proximity to Detroit/Michigan, and its ties to all modes of people and freight transport. ScaleDown provides a great take on the transportation-geography aspects of Windsor.

### 9. Raise the Hammer

<http://www.raisethehammer.org>

Raise the Hammer is a Hamilton entity, and several of its core principles establish the basis for its selection:

“The public life of the city is in its streets, or it's nowhere.”

“The built environment should support a vibrant street life: wide sidewalks, street walls, street-level businesses, and mixed uses.”

“Streets are for [everyone](#), not just drivers. Two way streets, lower speed limits, and market priced curbside parking can slow the cars, make it easier for [cyclists](#) to share the road, and make sidewalks safer and more relaxing for pedestrians.”

“One way streets are [de facto expressways](#) right through the city. No one wants to walk, stand, or sit next to an expressway.”

“It looks very much like cheap energy is soon going to be a [thing of the past](#). Our [transportation infrastructure](#) should reflect this fact, emphasizing and promoting the least energy-intensive ways of getting around.”

Raise the Hammer has a healthy regard for the geography-transportation connection, and it is illustrated by text and video items in Recent Articles as well as in such Blog Archive Categories as aerotropolis, climate change, environment, light rail, neighbourhoods, sprawl, sustainability, and transportation. It is emphasized that the website is a medium for personal, that is, individual opinions, and as a result its overall content differs from those of institutions such as governments, or enterprises such as businesses. As a result, it is not as structured as the websites of institutions and enterprises. However, text contains a considerable amount of interactive dialogue that brings a variety of geographic perspectives to bear on the geography-transportation connection.



# TRANSPORTATION DAY

## 10. Ottawa Light Rail Video Pages

<http://web.ncf.ca/fd978/SE Transitway 2008>

This is a “video city” type of website on LRT (light rail transit), but do not be fooled by the title. True, there are about 17 videos of Ottawa’s LRT story, but there are also videos of actual and proposed LRT and tram systems in other cities, including Edmonton, Montreal, and Toronto in Canada; Denver, Detroit, Norfolk, Phoenix, Portland, Sacramento and Seattle in the U.S.; and, from further away, Dnipropetrovsk in Ukraine, Saar in Germany, Paris, France, and Singapore. And, there could be more by Geography Awareness Week!

The location of light rail transit routes in Ottawa has been an issue since the onset of serious LRT discussion some nine years ago, and this website explicitly and implicitly makes reference to a number of the geographic aspects of the discourse. In addition, the Ottawa videos also provide information about the pros and cons of bus transit route issues in Ottawa.

The videos “from away” are most informative in regard to the connections that are made between transportation and the various fields of geography (e.g., urban, regional, economic, industrial, human). They serve as a useful comparative basis for viewing and reviewing the Ottawa-based videos which are the focus of this website, and also lend support to the idea of including extra-Canada websites in future theme day selections.

