

CeleBRating

Celebrating
25 Years
 OF
BEST

Happy 25th Anniversary!

Celebrating 25 years of sustainable transportation

BEST
 BETTER ENVIRONMENTALLY
 SOUND TRANSPORTATION.

Better Environmentally Sound Transportation



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Introduction

I can only imagine what the cycling scene was like way back in 1991. Neighbourhood bike routes were not yet in place, never mind protected bike lanes. Space for active transportation was a hotly contested issue, and indeed, still is. But before we had any sort of mainstreaming of sustainable transportation, we had the self-proclaimed "Bicycle People," who decided to build awareness by hosting a Ride for the Environment. In order to apply for funding they had to settle on a name. Someone spotted a poster with "Better Environmentally Sound Transportation", and BEST was born. Digging through the archives, I found reports that they tried to change the name at one point, but it was too lengthy a legal process. BEST we shall remain!

While I struggle with the grammar and ubiquitous acronym (another pun anyone?), the name fits the organization more today than it might have when it was chosen. It encompasses all forms of transportation that are better, and more environmentally sustainable. This means walking, cycling, public transit, car-share and ride-share. As you will see in this zine, BEST has promoted and encouraged all these forms of transportation in its 25 years of history. Take a look, reflect on old memories and colleagues, and appreciate the accomplishments of so many people that have helped shape this region. I know I have.

By Stephanie Williams, General Manager



THANK YOU

Thank you to our major funders, whose financial support has helped us move from strength to strength:

Vancity TRANS LINK



BRITISH COLUMBIA



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MEC

Thank you to all our members, donors, sponsors, and volunteers who over the last 25 years have given so much to BEST. Your support, inspiration, and encouragement have been very much appreciated. It's true what they say: We couldn't have done it without you.

Thank you to all the people who wrote stories for this zine (and our newsletter) about the early days of BEST:

Arthur Orsini, Richard Campbell, Cheeying Ho, Rita Koutsodimos, Carmen Mills, Margaret Mahan, Samantha Hartley-Folz, Andy Telfer and Stephanie Williams.

Thank you as well to Margaret Miller and Sinéad Stinson for their editorial expertise.

And a special thank you to Carmen Gaukel, our summer intern, for doing such a fabulous job in designing this here commemorative zine! C'est très très beau!



GO GREEN CHOICES



Sustainable Transportation goes to work

By Samantha Hartley-Folz

I'll always feel blessed that I was part of the great crew of people at BEST. I was lucky to join BEST as Manager of the Go Green Choices, Transportation Demand Management program in 2001. I stepped into a great legacy inherited from front runners Cheryl Mackniak and Kim Hendess and was lucky to also inherit a wonderful staff.

I came to it from other environmental work with a new name (I just got married), new city (I had just moved from Victoria) and new job. It was an exciting time to be in TDM and Go Green Choices was at the forefront. We ran train-the-trainer courses for workplaces around the region, helping them assess their sites and develop plans for getting people to and from work more sustainably. We were supported by good partners in Translink who recognized the benefits of TDM to their mandate and the region.

At the same time, BEST was looking at how to broaden our message. The campaign to win the first-ever Vancity Award for the Central Valley Greenway went into full swing that fall, and we were part of national discussions about TDM. Planning was in the works for the 1st National Conference on TDM, *Moving Beyond Planning*, which brought together over 200 stakeholders in TDM from Canada and some of our neighbours to the south to talk through the issues, and build on each other's work.



It's Like Riding a Bike



As MC for the Conference, I got to look out at all those planners, elected officials and TDM folks from as far away as Nova Scotia; you could feel the excitement and optimism in the room. We followed up with the Cities of Ottawa and Montreal to tell them how Go Green Choices was supporting Lower Mainland businesses, and how our lessons learned could contribute to their programs. From those conversations, we put together the proposal for our Building TDM Capacity project. The vision was to increase the capacity of local organizations in Nanaimo, Prince George, Victoria, and Whistler so that they could deliver their own TDM programs.

It was my first taste of just how different BC communities operate in their own ways, and how good ideas in the hands of people who know their communities can become that much better. BEST and Go Green Choices were ahead of the curve in promoting sustainable transportation in places where people live, work, learn and play - and I see their successes continue at every event I attend and use The Bicycle Valet program.

Happy Birthday BEST! You've had some great successes and many more to come!

Samantha Hartley-Folz now works as the Manager for Policy and Programs at the BC Healthy Living Alliance.



SPOKE N WORD

Making Merry Mischief with BEST

by Carmen Mills (aka One Less Carmen)

In 1996 I was all full of biking beans, fresh out of Emily Carr's graphic design school and looking for trouble. One day at Critical Mass a handsome gap-toothed gremlin in a silver wig rode up alongside me, and invited me to a klatch at the House of Joyful Chaos. At the appointed time I walked into a house full of high-spirited strangers, and a couple of hours later, climbed back on my bike in a euphoric daze (possibly related to the refreshments passed hand to hand) as the newly crowned editor/designer/publisher of The Spoke'n'Word—the quarterly rag of the BEST bikesheviks. I didn't quite know what I had gotten myself into, but I had a feeling it would be fun.



Fun was not always at the forefront in those not-so-long-ago Bad Old Days. At the time, being a cycling or alt-trans activist in Vancouver put you out on the fringes of mainstream politics and culture. Twenty years ago the car was unquestionably king of the road. Barely a nod was given to cycling in the city, and there was close to zero existing infrastructure. Fighting for the first on-street downtown cycling lane on Pender Street, we were mocked by the Downtown Business Association and dismissed by the crusty dinosaurs on City Council. Critical Mass rides were routinely busted up by police, with riders thrown off their bikes by motorcycle cops. It could be frustrating and dangerous and lonely out there. BEST, and The Spoke, gave us a presence and a voice.

Through those early years there were giant rides to tame the terrifying Lions Gate Bridge, Dinosaurs Against Fossil Fuels running rampant in the streets, skytrain flashmobs, and some very naughty bicycle burlesque shows. There was the legendary AGM of BEST when a huge group of motorcyclists tried to oust the Board of BEST—and they almost did! Until some quick-thinking BESTies staged a filibuster, and managed to stave off the election until we could call out all the forces of non-motorized transport to save the day. And, there were lots of truly epic dance parties. Centered around celebration, the movement grew. People got on board and slowly, and then, faster and faster, Vancouver began to morph into our city of dreams. When I ride around the city now it truly blows my mind, just how far we have come in so little time.

I managed the Spoke for four years or so, from about 1996 to 1999. Then, with the help of my alt-trans/biking buddies, I moved on to co-found Momentum magazine and start up Car Free Day in Vancouver. But twenty years later I still work and protest, and party and play, with some of the same folks I met way back then—plus whole new generations of peaceful warriors, on the streets and in City Hall. Lots has happened and many more changes will come, but I still look back fondly on the day I was kidnapped by the merry pirates of BEST.

Carmen blogs at www.bicyclebuddha.org, and showcases her design work at www.emeraldcity.ca



JUNE IS BIKE MONTH

**Bike Month:
First, you thwart a coup!**

by Rita Koutsodimos

I'll never forget my first day at BEST. I practically skipped over to MEC Headquarters on my way to the BEST AGM. As I approached I noticed a line-up forming and this reinforced my excitement "Wow!", I thought, "here is an organization with an active and engaged membership!" But as I got closer, I noticed some characters who looked quite a bit tougher than the folks on the bikeways. It turned out a group of motorcyclists was trying to stack the board and take-over the organization! Later we heard rumours that this was motivated by their belief that Translink had recently announced. Luckily, a group of old BESTies put out an SOS to all their buddies (some even flagged down cyclists on the Ontario Bikeway), stacked the meeting, and thwarted the coup. So it was a crazy, dramatic start to one of the most fun jobs I've ever had. Hired in March, I had just three months to organize what would become the first Bike Month in June 2000. BEST had been running Bike to Work Week for several years at that time but it was expanded to a month to extend the reach of the campaign. The thinking was that the three extra weeks would make it easier for individuals and organizations to participate or host events. And a month would give municipalities more time to organize the openings of new bike ways or announce investments in new facilities (which were sorely needed and what we knew would ultimately be the game changer). Beyond commuter-cycling, we also wanted people to think of biking as a great way to get around for all kinds of reasons. The message was: 'June is Bike Month: bike to work, bike to school, bike to shop and bike to play!' What I loved about BEST was working with an amazing group of environmental activists and urbanistas who were absolutely committed to slowing climate change and creating vibrant communities by changing the way people get around.



It was the start of a new millennium, which felt like a big deal at the time, and we were all so full of optimism (albeit tempered with a healthy dose of pragmatism and a smidge of cynicism). At the time, attitudes towards cycling in the city were not quite as enlightened as they are today. It wasn't uncommon to be yelled at or derided for taking up road space. We knew if we were going to make a difference, we had to make sustainable transportation options go mainstream. So, we worked hard to break the stereotypes about cycling as just something done by lycra-clad road warriors or crunchy granola peaceniks. Our poster that year, was developed to reflect the diversity of Vancouver and the tag line was in Punjabi and Chinese as well as English.

**START SOMETHING
→ GREAT ←**

We wanted everybody to see themselves there - to visualize the fun that they would have riding around on a bike. The media was our frenemy - giving us space to discuss the issues but so often within a negative frame. I can remember sitting across from CKNW's crusty host, Peter Warren who launched into the interview with: "There's a battle between bikes and cars for the streets of Vancouver - can they really co-exist?!!" Even affable Rick Cluff once asked me why we hated cars. But things were starting to change. That year we convinced the Vancouver Sun to run a feature profiling prominent business leaders and professionals that were regular cyclists. And reporters like Frances Bula, Stephen Quinn, Kevin Griffin and Frank Luba were making the connections between growth, transportation planning, sustainability, and liveability of the region. When I look around today, and see the cycle tracks downtown or parents and kids riding to school or the number of women riding - I'm amazed at how far we've come in a relatively short time. It makes me happy and proud to be part of the BEST history. So Happy 25th Anniversary BEST! You've come a long way, baby...and you've got a bright and active future in front of you!

Rita Koutsodimos is currently working at the BC Healthy Living Alliance where she advocates for provincial funding for a BC-wide Active Transportation Strategy and other policies to make the people of BC healthier and happier.

**JUNE IS
BIKE MONTH**

#



a ribbon of green

by Richard Campbell



Twenty years ago, we lacked good bike routes across the region. Lougheed Hwy in Burnaby had a wide shoulder, but the heavy traffic made cycling it uncomfortable. The options got worst in Vancouver. When Lougheed turned into Broadway, the shoulders disappeared and all other roads in the area were very hilly and/or clogged with high speed traffic. Inspired by the Lochside Trail and Galloping Goose on Vancouver Island, it was clear that we needed good cycling routes to connect the region. Fortunately, former Burnaby Mayor Doug Drummond was a champion of greenways. Under his leadership, Burnaby made sure that right of ways were reserved for them. Over the years, time was spent exploring alternate routes. Winston had wide lanes that were okay on the weekends when traffic was low. The Millennium Line construction had left a rough trail west of Boundary that was passable, if not a bit muddy at times. The breakthrough came with the discovery of a rough sandy trail between Gilmore and Willingdon. It was then possible for the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition (now HUB) to show people a possible route. Around 20 people came on the first ride; participants included Councillor Gordon Price. Gordon took some amazing photos of the Greenway that really captured its potential and then championed the Greenway in the City of Vancouver and region. "Cycling" the route was a bit of an adventure. Still fun though. During the rides, the people pushing their bikes through the sand trap where the Costco now is typically had big smiles on their faces. When Vancity announced the competition for the first \$1 million Award, I immediately thought the Greenway would be a great candidate. Dave Thompson, BEST's Executive Director, had the same idea.

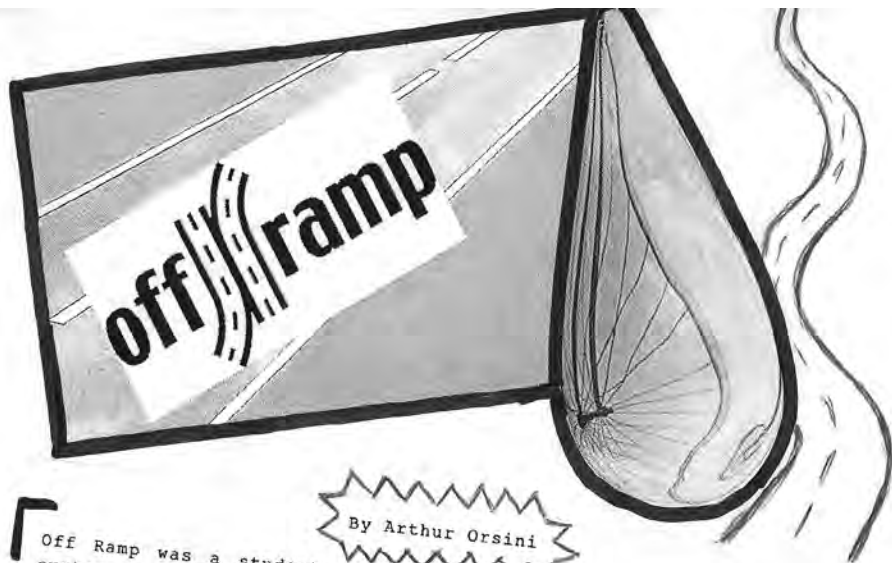


'Made in Canada'



We met and decided to go for it. Most transportation issues in the day were complicated. This was simple. We just had to find Vancity members and encourage them to vote yes. The winning of the Vancity Award in 2001 both raised the profile of the CVG and provided funding that enable people at BEST -- including Marion Town, Keith Ross, Ray Straatsma and Samantha Hartley-Folz -- to build public and political support. Several rides along the route over the next few years brought more people a glimpse of its potential. The next competition for the Greenway was the Federal Urban Transportation Showcase. Gavin Davidson and Tamin Raad made sure that the Greenway was a big part of the Showcase and, as a result, in 2003 the region received \$3.5 million for the CVG. With the Federal funding the CVG became a great example of all levels of government working together. TransLink coordinated the efforts of Vancouver, Burnaby and New Westminster. TransLink and municipalities also provided much of the funding. Back then, TransLink had up to \$6 million per year for cycling. Funding also came from the Provincial Government's Local Motion program that totalled \$40 million for cycling and other projects across the Province. Still, there is much to be done. Due to lack of funding, key improvements including a separated path along Winston and a bridge over the rail yards west of Clark were cut. HUB and others are working to get a connection from the CVG to the Port Mann Bridge and PoCo Trail. Yet another reason why we need a \$1 billion from the Province for cycling and walking! More at: bccc.bc.ca/cvg.

Richard Campbell is Executive Director of the BC Cycling Coalition, which is working to enable everyone in BC to walk and cycle for their daily trips.



By Arthur Orsini

Off Ramp was a student leader mentoring program to increase the number of teenagers walking, cycling and taking transit to high school. From 1999 to 2004 I had the privilege of directing the leadership efforts of hundreds of student leaders across Vancouver, Victoria and beyond in regional training workshops and on-site support within their own school communities.

The name Off Ramp was chosen after a series of discussions with the student leaders in the earliest pilot schools. They liked the 'vagueness' of the name's reference to going off the beaten path; the sense of making a change in the way we do things; and of not just continuing to go in the same direction.

As an extra-curricular program, Off Ramp ran outside of the classroom - most often as an extension of the Environmental Club. At that time there was very little effort being directed to sustainable transportation issues for teenagers. When BEST was awarded Climate Change Action Funding, I was hired to adapt our workplaces program for a teenage audience.

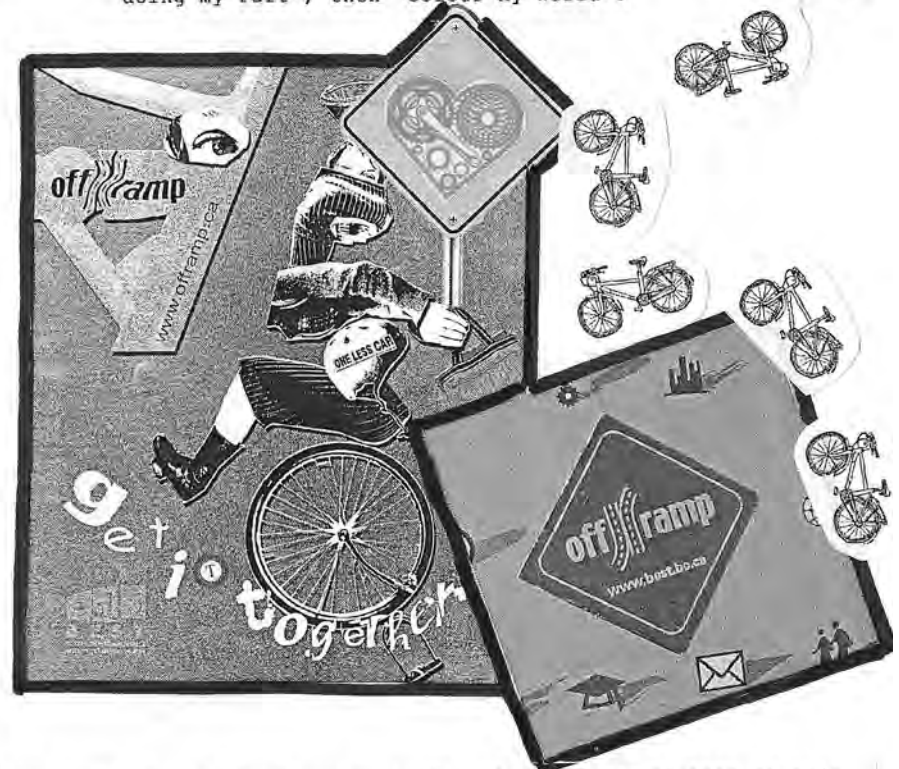
Off Ramp began with a primary aim to reduce vehicle-trips to school, but as a youth engagement effort a foundational goal became apparent: to generate tools and a student leader mentoring framework to promote sustainable transportation. In turn, the Off Ramp leaders were then tasked with the goals of changing attitudes and circumstances so that their peers would increasingly walk, bike and take transit to secondary school.

(smart living by bike)

The events and activities put on by the Off Ramp leaders aimed to draw the attention of their peers and challenge the youths' dependence on their parents for a ride, or permission to borrow the car.

The program won the "Sustainability and Youth" award from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2000 and our tools and program framework were borrowed by communities across Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand.

Off Ramp evolved over the years according to funding needs and guidelines; during my time the secondary school program later became 'hundred and one ways for youth to take action on sustainable transportation.' After I went to Auckland, New Zealand to start up a high school program there it became 'I'm doing my Part', then 'Colour My World'.



I am hugely proud of my years working at BEST. The culture of this organization and the support of its leaders made for a truly great program. Off Ramp helped to raise the bar for all environmental programs aimed at secondary schools by strengthening the need to cultivate youth leaders rather than distribute pre-package program binders to teachers.

Arthur Orsini is now an Active Transportation Facilitator for Vancouver Coastal Health.

Bike to Work Week and the Commuter Challenge

When the folks at BEST asked me to write a story about Bike to Work Week and the Commuter Challenge, I got really excited: here was a chance to reflect on the beginnings of these now well-known household terms! But when I started thinking back about the days when we started these events, it wasn't so easy! It was a long time ago! I was the first Executive Director of BEST at the time - around the year 1995. BEST was then a very grass-roots, volunteer driven and run organization. Board members were all hard-core bicycle activists, and were associated with events such as the regular Critical Mass rides, including naked bike rides through Stanley Park. Our Community Bikes - a do-it-yourself or have-a-mechanic-help-you bike store was started by BEST (and is still running).

The Spoke 'n' Word bike mag was published by BEST and was quite 'out there' as a two-wheeled advocacy vehicle at the time. When I was hired as the Executive Director, I started wondering how we could make cycling more mainstream. We wanted to encourage people to give cycling a try, perhaps even start by biking to work one day. Creating a campaign to encourage people to bike to work for a week in the summer, with lots of fun activities and incentives, grew as an idea between BEST, the City of Vancouver, and some Vancouver businesses.

The City of Vancouver was a fabulous partner! Transportation and bicycle engineer Doug Smith (now head of Sustainability at the City) and former City Councillor Gordon Price were big cycling advocates who helped make Bike to Work Week work. The City was just starting to build bike routes - the Adanac Bikeway was the first one created with bike signage and bike priority. The City also provided the Bike to Work Week signs - those green signs with white stenciled bicycles brought attention to the week and to cyclists.



ONE LESS CAR

BETTER ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND TRANSPORTATION (B.E.S.T) www.best.bc.ca (604) 669-2860

Lots of activities and promotions encouraged newbies to cycle to work. We also tried variations on the Bike to Work Week theme, and tried Bike to Work Month for a couple of years, and even changed the name to Bike Week. In the end, we went back to Bike to Work Week as it was catchier, and people liked it. What started as a fledgling event has now become an annual high profile event; the Vancouver event is now run by our friends at HUB and there are close to 50 other communities in BC participating. While Bike to Work Week encouraged people to bike to work, play and school, we also wanted other ways for people to start changing their transportation behaviour from solo-commuting. So we launched the Commuter Challenge, a one-day event during Bike to Work Week that encouraged people to take an alternative to the single occupancy vehicle to work.



Businesses were encouraged to sign up and get their employees involved. The challenge was to see which business had the highest number of participants in their categories by size - winning organizations claimed a much-coveted Commuter Challenge award. Again, what started as a simple challenge to carpool, take transit, bike or walk to work, has become a much more sophisticated event involving workplaces across BC and Canada that measures kilometres travelled, kilograms of CO2 saved, litres of fuel saved, and calories burned.

Although Bike to Work Week and the Commuter Challenge were fun events, the best thing is that they definitely helped to inspire change. Anecdotally, we've heard many regular cyclists claim that they started bike commuting during a Bike to Work Week. We are sure that the City of Vancouver's growth in cycling is partially due to the culture created by Bike to Work Week and other BEST initiatives (and of course, by the proliferation of bike routes and bike lanes). And now the norm for new office buildings is to install change rooms, showers and bike lockers for those who choose to get to work in a more healthy, revitalizing way. Congratulations to BEST for creating these iconic, successful and community-changing events. Ride on!

Checying Ho is now the Executive Director of the Whistler Centre for Sustainability. She is a frequent speaker on leading practices in sustainability strategy, engagement and community planning.



OUR COMMUNITY BIKES

Hit the wall and just keep riding!

By Andy Telfer

In the early 90s Jeff Hohner and I were dedicated clean air activists. We'd rejected car ownership, organized direct actions and helped to create BEST. We also wanted, after visiting progressive bike projects from Toronto to Portland, to start our own program in Vancouver. A few rejected proposals later, with a small Vancity grant we bought "Zen Bikes" at 17th & Cambie. With the help of friends we renovated it and opened "Our Community Bikes" (OCB). OCB almost failed... twice. Our small grant was soon spent, we learned that volunteers alone could not run the shop, and our initial wave of customers declined. After an anxious half year, our proposal to the Vancity Environmental Grant succeeded, bringing \$25,000 and renewed interest in the project. We hired staff. We recycled and sold even more bikes, ran repair programs, and shipped bikes and parts to impoverished communities in Central America. We were even noticed by hit recording artist John Mellencamp, who donated 100 copies of his "Human Wheels" CD to the cause! And then, we hit the wall again. This time, a payment to Revenue Canada we almost forgot forced us to lay off staff; just two months' rent remained. At the same time, Jeff moved to Nelson and I focused on the birth of my first child. The Vancouver Sun ran a story about OCB closing. Things looked bad! Luckily, two amazing people would not let OCB shut its doors: bike activist Guy Wera, and later Paul Bogaert, all but volunteered to keep it alive. BEST offered organizational help, and with the formation of PEDAL programs grew again. The rest is history. Jeff and I spent four years developing OCB, but not alone. We are indebted to Richard, Po, Guy, Suzanne, Paul, Andrew, John, Tim, Gavin, Volker and others too many to mention. Well done!

Today, Andy Telfer continues to work with charities, is Vice President at Volunteer BC, and lives with his family in Qualicum Beach, BC. And he still rides.



The BICYCLE

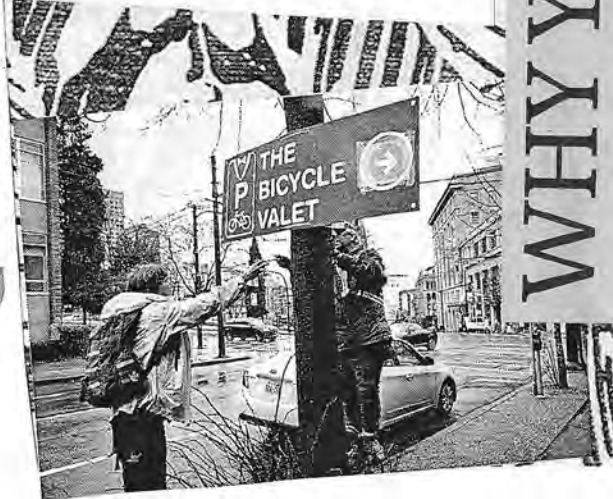
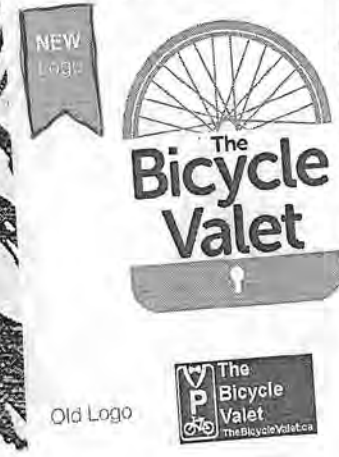


By Marg Mahan

WHEN SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CAME TO BEST

When I first came to BEST Sarah Albertson was running the community outreach program, and among the innovative things in that project (including guerrilla gardening with flower bombs) was a bicycle valet parking service to 6 Canadians games in the summer of 2007. As the funding the organization had been relying on disappeared just before my tenure, and with other indications for worse to come in the years immediately ahead, it seemed that developing some stable sources of revenue would be a good idea. And in this way social enterprise came to BEST. While some of the folks in the office said no one would ever pay for bike parking, (and they were right in the sense that cyclists will lock up somewhere else if there is a mandatory fee), we thought that we could design something that would make it an attractive service to big events in Vancouver. TransLink came on as our first sponsor - Gavin Davidson understood the potential trajectory of a Bicycle Valet service to change riding habits, especially of families. Cam Brewster ran it for us the first year, then Geoffrey Vincent. For those early years we rented a U-haul truck, and rented the bike racks and scraped together external fencing. We tried on several models before we settled on the light weight and space and storage efficient tube system. We worked hard at it, but as we were building the service without any real capitalization, it still looked pretty amateurish.

WHY YOU NEED IT



The first year we parked 600 bikes, the second 1200, and the third 1350. Our rates to community events were low, in fact less than it cost us to be there, but we were building goodwill and the expectation amongst cyclists that The Bicycle Valet would show up at events they wanted. The Farmers Market was one early adopter, facilitated by a small grant from Vancity. As we grew, we occasionally had event managers decide to do their own BV service after a year with us. The deceptively simple looking operation in fact had matured and so appearances were indeed deceptive. Those events almost always came back to us after their experiment in bringing the service in house. The City of Vancouver gave us a huge boost with funding for a complete Bicycle Valet service for the Olympics in 2010. That grant also staved off a disaster with cash flow for BEST, and we will always be grateful to the City for that vote of confidence. In the summer and fall of 2009 we had a young new employee named Stephanie, who helped Steve to run the Bicycle Valet - between the 2 of them they really built it out. I had to fight with them sometimes - the issue of collecting email addresses from clients on the tags was a hot topic as I recall. Steady growth, solid leadership from Steve and then Stephanie, maintaining excellent service, making a volunteer experience that is fun, and keeping a close eye on the bottom line - all these things have made a successful operation. It gives to the community, it gives to the organization in terms of public presence, cash flow and now even contribution to BEST projects. I'm proud to have been associated with birthing this wholly good thing in Vancouver and BC.

Marg was the ED of BEST from 2007-2014, creating The Bicycle Valet and other new programs. She now devotes her energy to the teaching of the classical Indian subjects that she has studied for the past 25 years.



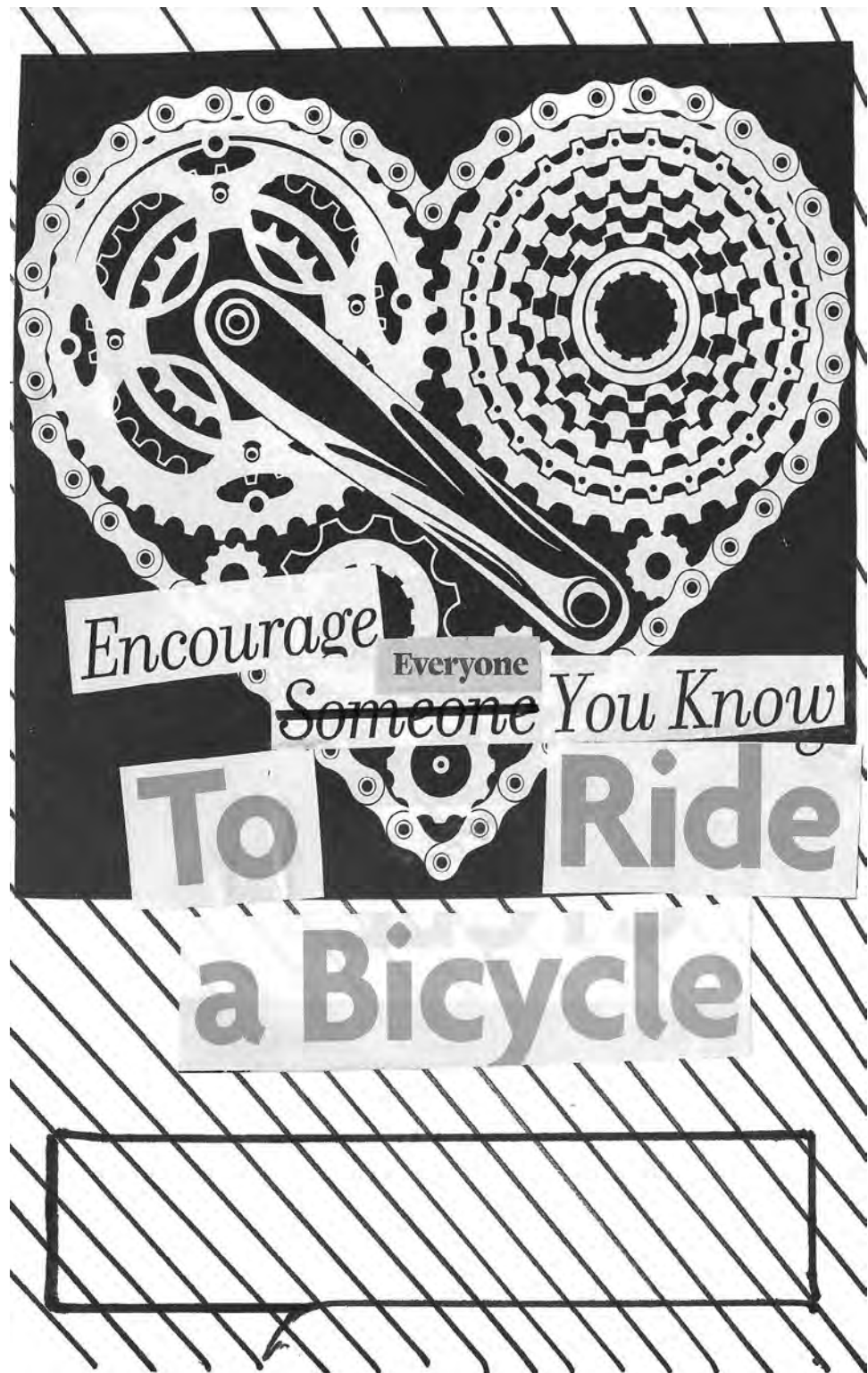



CONCLUSION

When we realized BEST would be turning 25 in 2016 we knew we had to do something special. A celebration of some kind. What I didn't expect was how it would afford the opportunity to connect and reconnect with so many incredible people who have used their passion and dedication to make BEST what it is today. Most of these people are still advocates of sustainable transportation and are involved in other aspects of their communities.

BEST could not have survived, and indeed thrive, in the last 25 years if it wasn't constantly adapting and reinventing itself. This year, while looking back we're also looking forward to the future to see where we can best (pun intended) concentrate our efforts and encourage sustainable transportation. Wherever that takes us, one thing is certain -- that we will continue towards our vision of vibrant, healthy communities built around walking, cycling, public transit, car and ride-shares.

By *Stephanie Williams, General Manager*



METRO

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