

FCM Sustainable Communities Awards**2012 Winner – Transportation**

City of Sainte-Julie, Quebec

Population: 30,000



Mayor Suzanne Roy at the wheel with young residents of Sainte-Julie and Councillor Henri Corbin
Credit: City of Sainte-Julie

Taxi 12-17**Summary**

Taxi 12-17 allows the young people of Sainte-Julie to socialize with their friends and get to recreational activities at low cost and on a flexible schedule. As a complement to the fixed-schedule bus service, this award-winning public transit program is experiencing an increase in popularity among teens and parents alike.

The city invested an initial \$7,500 to get the project going, compared to approximately \$75,000 to add new bus routes. Sainte-Julie was able to achieve substantial savings. Taxi 12-17 also motivates young people to use public transit rather than their parents' vehicles and teaches them a code of ethics to become respectful and responsible citizens.

Background

Located on the South Shore of Montréal and surrounded by Varennes, Saint-Bruno, Beloeil and Boucherville, the municipality of Sainte-Julie has a population of approximately 30,000 with a median age below 37. It is 49 square kilometres in area, largely French-speaking, and governed by a mayor and eight city councillors.

The city was addressing the needs of young families in Sainte-Julie when it began working on a youth action plan in 2008. This plan, as well as the city's green plan — in which Sainte-Julie plans to promote carpooling and assess the relevance of public transit during non-peak hours — was behind the city's launch of a new transportation program: a communal taxi service. Taxi 12-17 was the result of consultations with young people, who said it was important for them to be able to get to their friends' houses (who may not necessarily live in Sainte-Julie) or to recreational places that may be far away. A highway divides Sainte-Julie in two, with key recreational areas for young people scattered on both sides of the highway. In addition, the cinemas, major stores, ski hills and other places of interest are located in neighbouring communities.

Project Development and Implementation

The Taxi 12–17 program was made possible first and foremost because of the commitment of Sainte-Julie's municipal council. As the city wanted to provide its young families with a solid social structure, its members listened attentively to residents. Their ability to listen to young people and incorporate their solutions —as in other projects — came into play with Taxi 12–17. By encouraging teens to work with the city on the project, the administration ensured not only the project's viability but also its smooth operation. It is worth noting that, the city has not received a single complaint regarding youths using Taxi 12–17 and there have been no reports of vandalism.

Once the project's foundation was established, Sainte-Julie employed various means to promote it. The city produced a flyer; gave away key tags to all Taxi 12–17 members; and publicized the project at events such as Family Day, among youth organizations, and at colleges and high schools.

In May of 2010, Sainte-Julie presented Taxi 12–17 at the *Congrès de l'Union des municipalités du Québec* (an annual convention held by the Union of Quebec Municipalities). The project was awarded a major prize (the *Prix Ovation*), which could inspire other municipalities that want to provide their young people with safe public transit during non-peak hours. Before carrying out the project, the Sainte-Julie administration approached young people to ask what they wanted and to involve them in finding the right solutions. Through public consultations, the city's youth expressed a desire to be able to get together, go to the movies, go skiing and so forth, outside of normal bus-service hours. This gave birth to the idea of a communal taxi expressly for young residents, that made it possible for them to get to get around on their own.

Designed in part by the young people for whom the program was intended, Taxi 12–17 first saw the light of day as a summer pilot project. This experiment offered an opportunity to assess the project's feasibility and make adjustments based on the needs and feedback of the young consumers. At the outset, Sainte-Julie established a partnership with a local taxi company. The city wanted to control the quality of service to ensure drivers' reliability and their respect of the city's youth integrity policy. Drivers must also keep a log of all trips made by their young passengers that includes the membership number of the fare requesting the service, the time, the destination and the number of passengers.

To use the service, teens must get a membership card and respect a code of ethics. The card, which costs \$10, is valid until the age of 17. A trip within the municipal territory costs \$5, and outside trips cost \$10. The fare is fixed, regardless of the number of passengers (up to six), and can be shared. This flexible and safe means of public transit costs less than a regular bus ticket. The balance of the taxi company's operating costs is covered by the city of Sainte-Julie, and allows transportation outside of rush hour without the need to add regular bus routes.

There are several places where teens can begin their cab rides: at their homes, at a park, or at a public building. After dark, their final trip must be to their homes so that everyone gets home safely. Members must make a reservation to take a taxi. However, reservation time was decreased from two hours to one, and is now fixed at 30 minutes. The length of the trip was also reduced from two hours to one hour. Once up and running, the service was in effect from Thursday to Sunday, between noon and midnight. The schedule was improved to allow teens to use the service from Monday to Friday between 4 pm and midnight, and service starts at 10 am on weekends.

Any municipality located on the outskirts of a large city that does not provide public transit during evenings and weekends could offer a similar service for its young people. Taxi 12–17 is a safe and inexpensive mode of public transit that promotes group outings among teens going to the same destinations.

Results

In addition to providing teens with a safe means of getting about on their own, making it easier for them to have an active social life and teaching them to become responsible citizens, Taxi 12–17 has resulted in significant savings. Teens using the service must pay a fixed price (\$5 within the city and \$10 outside), splitting the fare among the number of passengers. The city makes up the difference between the user fee and the cost charged by the taxi company. Everyone win: teens, who get transportation on demand that doesn't cost a lot; the city, that pays much less than it would to add traditional bus routes; the taxi company, that benefits from a new source of revenue; and parents, who can rest assured that their teenagers are getting around safely without having to drive them all the time.

Lessons Learned

- TRUST YOUNG PEOPLE TO FIND SOLUTIONS. “We need to trust our young people and help them find solutions to their problems,” says Suzanne Roy, mayor of Sainte-Julie.
- KEEP IT SIMPLE. “It’s important,” she adds, “to envision the simplest system possible, one that can be realized and is ready to put into operation. This is why the pilot project is a valuable step, as it makes it possible to see how feasible the project is, to put the procedure and its proper functioning in place, as well as to make adjustments as needed.” During the trial period, municipal managers were able to adjust the project’s parameters before the final phase, based mainly on comments made by the young users.
- BE PREPARED FOR HIGHS AND LOWS. The city found that teens are more spread out during the summer. That’s also when they get around by other means of transport, such as on foot, skateboard and bicycle.
- A MODEL THAT CAN WORK FOR ALL. Any municipality could create a similar project by adapting this model to its own context.

Related and Future Initiatives

Along with the Taxi 12–17 program, Sainte-Julie provides free bus transportation to youth traveling to schools located over 30 km from the city, which also eliminates the need for car travel. The city has also set up another program, *En toute confiance vers l’école* (Getting to School Safely), aimed at schoolchildren. It establishes safe school routes designed to get the youngest residents to and from school on foot or by bicycle. The city also educates children to be prepared to use public transit and continue the tradition of sustainable development. As part of the city’s partnership with the taxi company, it provides a shuttle service for major events so that citizens can leave their cars at home.

Partners and Collaboration

This program could not have happened without the help of the City’s communications department, which created awareness among citizens; the recreation interns, who met with young people; the finance department, which closely monitored the project’s budget; and last but not least, the local taxi company that provides the transportation.

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