

# Diet for a green planet: carrots

**T**he debate over whether or not human activity is contributing to global warming is (almost) over, but controversy over the best way to get people to reduce their carbon emissions rages on. Reducing home energy use has been underway for several years with people switching to more energy-efficient appliances, lighting and heating options. And recycling and composting have become a rather mainstream routine these days.

In a recent poll, Mustel Group asked British Columbians what steps, if any, they have taken to address global warming. The most commonly cited was recycling or waste reduction (60 per cent). Another 45 per cent reported reducing their energy consumption by either turning off lights, buying energy efficient products, turning thermostats down, limiting use of air conditioning, replacing light bulbs, using less hot water and/or making efforts to buy locally. While some are using “peersuasion” to convince others to recycle or reduce.

One habit that is going to be hard to change will be our dependence on cars. According to the B.C. Ministry of Environment, 44 per cent of a household’s greenhouse gas emissions come from our vehicles. What will work best to change our car habits? The stick – increased fuel costs, carbon taxes – or the carrot, such as rebates on low emission vehicles,

better transit service, more bike lanes, or walkable communities? This is a question that public policy makers are debating, with the public weighing in with their views quite vocally.

A cocktail of carrots and sticks likely will be necessary. And without a doubt, people are already using their cars less or differently. In a poll commissioned by Global TV and News 1130, almost 50 per cent of Metro Vancouver residents claimed to have changed their travel habits in the past year. Among those who have made changes, the most common are shopping more locally (84 per cent), avoiding rush hour when possible (81 per cent), walking or biking more (55 per cent), eliminating trips completely (54 per cent), carpooling (42 per cent), taking transit more often (37 per cent), an option chosen more by City of Vancouver dwellers than those residing in the suburbs.

But surprisingly, it is not primarily the 35-cent-or-so increase in gas prices over the past year that has been the main, *ahem*, driver of these changes, but rather traffic congestion on our streets and highways. When asked which has been a greater factor, 47 per cent of Metro Vancouver residents replied car congestion in contrast to 33 per cent responding gas prices (with the remainder contributing their changes to both equally). Eight in ten residents find that car congestion has gotten worse in the past year in Metro Vancouver and one-third of commuters reported that daily commute times have increased, an average of 14 minutes (with overall commute times averaging a total of 30 minutes).

So even with surging gas prices, it is the irritation and inconvenience of congestion that has led to change. Hardly considered a carrot, but this demonstrates the challenge for public policy makers in trying to predict what will be most effective in altering our habits. **VLM**



## Do you find the level of car congestion over the past year in the Lower Mainland has:

78%	Increased
1%	Decreased
21%	Stayed about the same



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Illustration by Bernie Lyon