



**Center for Research and Intervention on Suicide and
Euthanasia**

**Signage Promoting Help Seeking Along At-
Risk Areas of Tracks to Reduce the
Incidence of Railway Suicide**

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This document describes in detail the implementation of a potential test of using signs only to prevent railway suicides in Canada. At the end of this document a section describes the proposed evaluation of the implementation and the effects of this project. Research has shown that when a person is experiencing a suicidal crisis and help is made immediately available, the suicide may be preventable. Therefore, a relevant strategy is to promote help seeking by advertising telephone help and encourage help seeking behaviour. The present document describes the content, implementation, and cost of a pilot project for a signage/poster based railway suicide prevention strategy in Canada as a means of providing a cost effective alternative to our “telephone and signs” proposal.

This strategy aims at installing signage in the identified areas to encourage people to use help. Several studies have shown that suicidal people generally do not have a cellular telephone with them. Other studies have suggested that signage on its own may not prevent suicide in at risk areas. However, it can be argued that the use of cellular telephones is changing very rapidly in Canada. As an example, Statistics Canada indicates that in 2007, 20 million Canadians had access to a cellular telephone. The same year, 42.5% of households in the lower quintile of income had access to cell phones. In 2008, 72% of Canadian households had access to cell phones. There is a global trend toward increased access to cell phones all across the social gradient. There are no data that indicates whether or not vulnerable groups, such as suicidal and mentally ill people, have increasing access to cellular phones.

An intervention to install signage that promotes the use of help along sensitive areas of tracks can therefore be designed. The scope of potential effect would be lower than an intervention including publicly accessible phones as described in the “telephones and signage” project, but be cost effective nonetheless.

Intervention characteristics

There are two components to this intervention, the signage and the helplines who will answer calls.

Nature of the messages on signs

Included are examples of telephone messages used on signs in various areas of the world. A simple message indicating that help is available and a telephone number appears to be the most appropriate approach.





Selecting locations to implement the strategy

We identified approximately 800 miles of tracks in 8 sections of subdivisions that could be good sites for the implementation of the telephones and signs strategy. Because this information is confidential, we do not include any specifics in this document. For additional information regarding at-risk areas of tracks, suicides, existing telephones, and additional telephones needed, as identified by our study, please contact: [railway suicides@uqam.ca](mailto:railway_suicides@uqam.ca) . We can discuss your needs and provide you with adequate information

Signs cannot be implemented just anywhere but there are more options than for telephones. Signs can be placed along the tracks, on railway property, along pathways, on bypasses, bridges, in parks and car parks.

As indicated previously in the document “Evaluation of the Implementation and Effectiveness of Telephones and Signs along At-Risk Areas of Tracks,” the cost of installing signs may be reduced by using alternatives to metal signs. Alternatively, some signs may be placed on existing poles and by getting local organizations to sponsor the placement of signs in their locality.



Collaboration of telephone helplines

There will be a need to inform helpline staff members of the implementation of the help seeking promotion campaign. However, they will answer these calls as they do with any other suicidal caller. We have been in contact with Distress Centres Ontario, the British Columbia Distress Centre and Suicide Prevention Centres in Quebec. All have enthusiastically endorsed this initiative and would be willing to participate in this project.

Timeline to implementation

The intensity of the intervention is a key factor to success. This means that all equipment should be installed in a small period of time and the degradation of signage should be monitored over time.

Implementation process – telephones and signs

Timeline	Phases of Implementation
Month 1-3	Identify contractors for signs Identify precise areas of installation of signages Establish a protocol for monitoring calls with local helplines
Month 3- 5	Installation of equipment along the 8 areas of track selected
Month 13	Survey of equipment for adjustments, data on calls to helplines
Month 25	Survey of equipment for adjustments, data on calls to helplines
Month 37	Survey of equipment for adjustments, data on calls to helplines
Month 49-50	Evaluation and decision about the continuation of the service

The associated costs of such an intervention would be:

Item	Unit price	Quantity	Total price
Design of post - Repro UQAM	500\$		500\$
Signs Metallic sign	700\$ (production) 140\$ (installation) 20\$ (Authorisations)	844 signs	725 840\$+tax
Total			726 340\$ +tax



Evaluation plan

This project's implementation would be evaluated. An evaluation of the implementation would assess how well the interventions have been implemented as planned. There would also be an evaluation of the effects. We would assess if people in crisis use more often the crisis services advertised in the signs and if there is a significant impact in reducing the incidence of railway suicides.

Evaluation process – telephones and signs

Timeline	Phases of implementation evaluation	Phases of effect evaluation
Month 1-3	Identification and negotiation with implementation partners	Data collection, establishing protocols with coroners, railway companies and helplines
Month 1-3	Design of evaluation documents and protocols	
Month 3	Data collection after implementation	
Month 4	Implementation data analysis	
Month 4-5	Post implementation report (1)	
Month 4-12	Data collection year 1	Data collection year 1
Month 13	Data analysis Year 1	Data analysis Year 1
Month 13-14	Year 1 report (2)	Year 1 report (1)
Month 13-24	Data collection year 2	Data collection year 2
Month 25	Data analysis Year 2	Data analysis Year 2
Month 25-26	Year 2 report (3)	Year 2 report (2)
Month 25-36	Data collection year 3	Data collection year 3
Month 37	Data analysis Year 3	Data analysis Year 3
Month 37-38	Year 3 report (4)	Year 3 report (3)
Month 37-48	Data collection year 4	Data collection year 4
Month 49	Data analysis Year 4	Data analysis Year 4
Month 49-50	Final implementation evaluation report (5)	Final effect evaluation report (4)

Evaluation of the implementation

The evaluation of implementation aims at describing and testing how the signs were implemented in the chosen area. To achieve this objective, different aspects of the implementation of the project would be measured:

- Obstacles and facilitators to the installation of equipment (negotiations with



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- local government, physical, architectural and geographical difficulties)
- Collaboration of local helplines (offering support, monitoring calls from the areas where signs have been implemented)
 - Maintenance of the equipment (signs)
 - Changes from the original implementation plan (changes in locations of signage)

Type of data to be gathered

Qualitative data:

- Information on negotiations with different partners (town governing bodies, railways, signs companies and helplines).
- Information on potential media coverage of the implementation of the project and on mental health and/or suicide prevention campaigns during the time of experimentation

Quantitative data: This data will be collected by different partners of the project with the support of the research team.

- Helplines will provide us with number of calls and referrals received
- Railway companies will also provide us with the traffic data and its variation on selected tracks

There are no existing standard instruments we can use to perform these evaluative tasks. Instruments will have to be designed in collaboration with partners who will use them locally.

This data will be compiled and gathered in reports on the process of implementation of signs at different stages of the project (after first implementation, yearly and at the end of the project – 5 reports).



Evaluation of effects

Evaluation of the effects of the signs project would be done on 2 levels :

- Use of helplines and support services
- Changes in the targeted behaviours (numbers of trespassers and suicides).

This evaluation would take place over a 4 years period so that we could eventually demonstrate a potential significant impact. Since the number of suicides each year is quite low, it is important to obtain data from several years in order to be able to determine if there are significant changes in suicide rates.

Types of data to be gathered

- Railway companies will provide us with their incident reports and if possible, we would like to have crew members take note of what happened along the areas of tracks involved in the pilot testing.
- We will monitor the suicide rates in the areas covered by the pilot testing and the rest of Canada in order to evaluate the impact of the preventive measure on overall suicide rates as well as railway suicide rates.



Evaluation costs

Budget for the evaluation of telephones and signs

Salaries	
1 research assistant 2 days / week for 48 months (4 years) who will organise data collection and compilation with onsite partners throughout the project - 23\$ / hour	67 000
1 Project coordinator 2 day/week for 50 months and 60 days of data analysis and report writing – 47\$/hour	170 000
Services and Equipment	
Computers – one high performance lap top to manage interactive maps	1 500
Telephone calls (28h of calls)	1 000
Ink, prints, stationary, post office	2 000
Indirect fees 40%	96 600
Project final reports design and printing for 50 copies	2 000
Transportation and lodging employees	
We plan at least 2 visits per year by a research assistant to each site	24 032
○ One trip to the Québec Sites: car rental 45\$/day x3 days, 3 nights (90\$ per night and per diem 53\$) = 564\$ (x8 visits = 4 512\$)	
○ One trip to the Toronto areas: car rental 45\$/day x4 days, 3 nights (130\$/night and per diem 85\$), train ticket (160\$ or plane 250\$) = 1 075\$ (x8visits = 8 600\$)	
○ One trip to Vancouver sites: plane ticket 800\$, car rental 45\$/day x3days, 2 nights (130\$ per night and per diem 85\$) = 1 365\$ (x8visits = 10 920\$)	
Transportation and lodging partners	10 000
We will have to compensate local partners for their travels to conduct data gathering	5 000
Presentations of results in scientific meetings	
Knowledge transfer activities	
2 conferences	4 000
Professional services (translation) 23cents per word	20 000
Total	403 132

