

Smart Commute Case Study High Meadows Fund Learning Event

March 15, 2011 from 1-4:30pm | The Wilder Center, Wilder, VT

Participants: Aaron Brown (UVTMA staff), Bob Walker (SERG), Brian Shupe (VNRC), Nadine Barnicle (ACTR), Gabe Zoerheide (UVMTA staff), James Kerrigan (Resource Systems Group), Joanna Whitcomb (UVTMA board), Karen Glitman (UVM TRC), Matt Coogan (New England Transportation Institute), Matt Mann (Windham Regional Commission), Megan Shannon (UVTMA staff), Patricia Higgins (UVTMA board), Paul Cameron (Brattleboro Climate Protection), Rita Seto (Two Rivers Ottaquechee Regional Planning Commission), Ross MacDonald (V-Trans), Russ Hirschler (UV Trails Alliance), Ruthie Schwab (High Meadows Fund), Shawn Donovan (UVTMA board), Stacy Chiochio (Hypertherm); **Facilitator:** Stephanie Lahar, Stephanie Lahar & Associates

Summary of Barriers for Employers

Lack of buy in from top/decision makers

- Person in charge has too many other responsibilities
- Lack of a clearly articulated or compelling problem to solve; not perceived to affect bottom line
- Lack of quantifiable information and incentives

Logistics

- Rideshare database and matching, getting employees into carpools
- Guaranteed Ride Home
- Capacity to run errands, move among buildings
- Lack of public transit options and Park & Rides

Lack of info about how to frame and market options to employees

- Lack of info on what options are available
- Difficulty in getting the right/most effective message out (and how to reach employees)

Cultural resistance/inertia to limits on SOVs

- Rural area residents are not accustomed to paying for parking (external costs not realized)
- Status quo; “people like me don’t share rides”

Larger social, economic, and cultural contexts

- Cheap gas
- Land use patterns
- Zoning bias

Summary of Motivators for Employers

- Strong identification with/commitment to social responsibility
- Business conducted in the carpool, builds stronger work relationships (greater productivity)
- Attract employees from wider area
- Need to provide less parking; eg Co-op and DHMC don’t have enough parking
- Price of fuel—offer lower cost transport to employees
- Employee recruitment and retention

Think like a CEO

1. *What would make Smart Commute programs important to your key business goals, e.g. financial bottom line, and your reputation/status with customers, suppliers and the larger business community?*

I need good employees; my employees suffer from high costs; quantified and aggregated costs of commuting really add up; Smart Commute will save my employees more than I thought

2. *What opportunities will be lost if you do not take action?*

We have limits on expanding parking, which also limits corporate expansion; if gas prices go up business could be adversely affected (employees can no longer afford to get to work)

3. *What information and what message bearers would most strongly influence your thinking and commitments?*

CSR growing trend; others are participating and getting recognition; we are falling behind; message bearers will vary (Chambers of Commerce, VT Businesses for Social Responsibility, etc.)

Measurements & Indicators

Smart Commute does an annual survey that shows baseline commuter patterns and changes over time—perhaps supplement this with independent data on carpools formed in the area

Additional suggestions from participants:

- Collect indicators that would inform/reinforce value for employers (avg cost/benefit)
- Do not be afraid of simple indicators that are more output than outcome focused
 - o How many organizations did we get to join into Smart Commute?
 - o Creation of new alternative transport incentives, eg carpool-only spots in participating employers
 - o Maybe not all end result based, focused on outputs rather than outcomes
 - o Number of carpools registered, one step before actual successful carpools made

Suggestions for Smart Commute

- Create efficient logistical solutions
- Develop business appropriate cases—benefits and avoidance of risks such as employee productivity and retention
- Showcase early business leaders and success stories
- Show other companies' actual use patterns, such as how little GRH program actually used
- Access to simple info employers can share with employees, eg cost savings calculator
- Develop case studies of best practices (paying employees to share or charging to park) before (costs of current system) and after (cost/benefit to changing system), making choice obvious
- Create support groups for employers, eg TMAs and ETC gatherings
- Public outreach/advertisements
- Advocacy for supporting infrastructure, eg advocacy for more Park and Rides