

Smart Commute Upper Valley Case Study

Behavioral goals, benchmarks, and target audiences

The Upper Valley Transportation Management Association (UVTMA), Upper Valley Rideshare, and the Upper Valley Trails Alliance have established a unique partnership to reduce single occupancy vehicle commuting by 2.5% in the Upper Valley, which includes 10,000 workers.

To achieve this goal, Smart Commute partners will work with up to 15 employers in the region. We are learning about community based social marketing (CBSM), with the goal of applying its principles to promote sustainable behavior change. Vital Communities, who hosts the UVTMA, is also committed to integrating community based social marketing techniques throughout the organization; Smart Commute is our trial run for understanding how to make these methods work.

We recently conducted focus groups at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center and will pursue research with other employers, including King Arthur Flour. To date, we've identified several barriers—such as inflexible schedules and lack of awareness of options—and motivators—for example, saving money—to best inform our outreach strategies and promotional materials.

To hold ourselves accountable, we will measure our success by the behaviors we help to change—numbers of carpools and transit riders, for example—and not simply how many flyers we distribute or the number of clicks on the website. Other measurements of success could include reduced gas usage, vehicle miles traveled, and cost reductions for commuters. These data will be collected using employee surveys taken at year-long intervals before and after Smart Commute efforts. Additional supporting data will come from registration and participation in commuter challenge events in the spring, when participants track their commuting behavior. Our results will then be reported to the US Department of Energy and the High Meadows Fund.

Results to date

More than 90 employees attended our focus groups at Dartmouth Hitchcock, which was a big success. Participants helped us rank the top three barriers, benefits and motivators for using alternative modes of commuting. This information has proved invaluable. For example, we learned that the best motivator for changing commuter behavior is the opportunity to save money—so that will be a key message as we move forward with the campaign.

Now that we have good information on what is important to employees in changing commuter behavior, the biggest barrier that we face is getting employer buy-in. How can we encourage employers to create incentives for their workers? How can we institutionalize commuter benefits, commuter challenges, and establish new workplace norms?

We held a Smart Commute transit coordinator seminar for Upper Valley employers at the end of February. These transit coordinators are “early adopters” and are best positioned to address workplace barriers and create incentives for positive change. Through this seminar and other programs, we are

creating a space for coordinators to share their challenges, as well as learn from an HR Director that has successfully institutionalized commuter benefits. In preparation for our upcoming discussion, we took the opportunity to ask some initial questions of the transit coordinators about what they need as employers to participate more fully.

We need your help

With the understanding that these workplace transit coordinators have the potential to become our strongest allies, how do we best use our knowledge of behavior change principles, along with the data collected from surveys and focus groups, to make it easy for employers to participate?

Focus questions for discussion at the March 15th event:

1. What do we know about the barriers and motivations for employers to create, promote and manage programs and incentives that encourage employees to change their transportation behaviors? We will share data from our work to date, but we are also interested in adding your experience and ideas to our discussion.
2. What can we do to better mobilize employers to act? What are the leverage points? Can you suggest fresh or enhanced strategies?
3. What indicators can Smart Commute use to measure our progress with this work?

Thanks! We are looking forward to seeing you on March 15th.