

Commute Solutions Program Evaluation

FY 03/04

BACKGROUND

On June 5, 2003, the Commission approved funding the Commute Solutions Program for fiscal year 2003/2004 with Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds. The Commission funded the program along with four other on-going programs being evaluated concurrently. As part of the funding decision, a stipulation was made that evaluations measuring effectiveness of the programs be submitted before future funds are released. On September 4, 2003, the Commission accepted a Task/Outcome format for the program evaluations. The current evaluation for Commute Solutions follows the approved format.

Prior to receiving CMAQ funding, the Commute Solutions Program received State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds. When STIP funds became unavailable, CMAQ funds were sought as a temporary funding mechanism for FY 03/04. With STIP funding unavailable for FY 04/05 as well, the Commission approved the transfer of FY 03/04 CMAQ funds that were originally programmed to the Don't Drive One in Five campaign to continue funding of the Commute Solutions program.

While only half of FY 04/05 CMAQ funding will be available due to the discontinued access to CMAQ funds by Santa Cruz County, the \$150,000 in funding currently planned for Commute Solutions' FY 04/05 budget are actually FY03/04 funds for the "Don't Drive One in Five" campaign and are therefore still available in their entirety.

DISCUSSION

As a core program of the RTC, Commute Solutions has played an essential role in publicizing sustainable transportation options to commuters and the general public since 1979. Commute Solutions is one of several programs that the RTC operates to assist commuters manage their transportation needs through direct services. Commute Solutions has provided Santa Cruz County leadership in trip reduction efforts through:

- public education and outreach efforts
- coordination between sustainable transportation program providers and planning partners
- special promotions such as Rideshare Week, Clean Air Transportation Fairs, and the Don't Drive One in Five campaign
- personalized ridematching services for the formation of carpools and vanpools
- staffing of the 429-POOL call-in phone line
- web page maintenance, updates, and daily responses to internet requests
- provision of incentives for commuters and attendance at special events
- maintenance of eight current Park and Ride lots and development of new locations.

Commute Solutions is a key partner in transportation demand management efforts supporting and conforms to the *2001 Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Plan's* Goals as follows:

1.3 Improve road and transit efficiency by increasing vehicle occupancy and transit ridership, and by providing cost-effective specialized transportation services.

1.3.1 Support all forms of transportation demand management strategies for school and work trips, including, but not limited to, flextime, carpooling, bus pass programs, preferential parking and telecommuting.

1.3.2 Encourage employers to join Transportation Management Associations.

1.3.3 Encourage multi-employer vanpooling.

1.3.10 Encourage school districts and other public agencies to plan and implement transportation demand management and alternative transportation strategies.

2.3 Reduce the automobile's impact on the region by increasing opportunities for transit use by residents, commuters, students, employees and visitors to the area, in a manner which best achieves the Commission's transit ridership goal of 10 percent of all trips.

2.3.3 Emphasize commuter transit services on congested corridors.

2.4.9 Support park-and-ride lot development where appropriate, including links with express bus service to key employment and education centers and other alternative transportation modes.

3.5 Support parking management principles which reduce transportation demand at employer sites and commercial areas without negatively impacting neighborhoods.

4.1 Emphasize sustainable transportation modes consistent with regional environmental policies.

4.2.2 Encourage alternate/clean fuel technology for trucks, transit and school buses operated in the region.

5.3.4 Seek additional funding sources to support and expand alternative transportation mode facilities and services.

5.4.12 Give priority to any long-term measures which reduce dependence on single-occupancy vehicles.

The Commute Solutions ridematching program is a unique service free to all people residing or working in Santa Cruz County which provides an important way of enhancing efficient use of the local transportation network. Any commuter interested in saving money, reducing the stress associated with driving alone, or saving time on their commute, has the opportunity to make an immediate change to their transportation situation through the resources and information available from Commute Solutions. The program serves commuters along any route or any corridor traveling to, from, or within Santa Cruz County and acts as a link between the Santa Cruz, Monterey and Santa Clara County commuters. No other program in Santa Cruz County provides the essential services of facilitating communication between commuters who share the same route and schedule.

Of all alternative transportation modes, carpooling is perceived to be the most easily implemented option thereby making ridematching one of Commute Solutions' key functions. While recently a greater emphasis has been placed on providing commuters access to ridematching through an instant online database, staff performs many functions aimed at providing individualized assistance and encouragement to commuters. General information brochures on topics such as the True Cost of Driving, the Benefits of Bicycling, the Vanpool Incentive Program, and Walking are essential program elements. Referrals to the Metro Transit District, Electric Bike Incentive Program, Bike to Work, neighboring counties' rideshare programs, the Transportation Management Associations' Emergency Guaranteed Ride Home program, etc are also critical to a seamless provision of transportation resources to county residents. Commute Solutions has primary responsibility over the development of Park and Ride and coordinates closely with local jurisdictions and Caltrans on maintenance and new lot development efforts.

Although difficult to form, vanpools stay on the road for 5-10 years on average. Commute Solutions therefore developed a Vanpool Incentive Program to provide support and subsidies to ease commuters' initial financial outlay, reward drivers, provide empty seat subsidies, as well breath new life into "critical condition" vanpools.

Over the past 2 years, a large scale "Don't Drive One in Five" advertising promotion was conducted as a complement to the Commute Solutions Program. The campaign featured radio ads, print ads, development of collateral materials for use by employers and as give-aways, as well as special promotions. A comprehensive campaign report and evaluation was presented to the RTC by the consulting firm Riester-Robb at the February 5th, 2004 meeting.

COMMUTE SOLUTIONS PROGRAM GOALS

As defined in the CMAQ Tasks/Outcomes, Commute Solutions program goals are to:

- 1) Convert single occupancy drivers to using alternative transportation modes
- 2) Increase visibility of alternative transportation mode options and usage; provide encouragement; reinforce behavior of alternative transportation users
- 3) Maintain current carpools and vanpools, and form new ones
- 4) Maintain current Park and Ride lots, and develop new ones

COMMUTE SOLUTIONS TASKS AND OUTCOMES FOR FY 03/04 (through March 2004)

TASKS	OUTCOMES – Indicators*
1) Staff 429-POOL phone line and provide internet access through info@commutesolutions.org email address	Requests for information and items provided (phone and email): 439
2) Provide matchlists (through email inquiries and phone calls) or facilitate instant on-line ridematching	Matchlists provided through 429-POOL and CS website: 122 Commuters serviced by Santa Cruz County

	<p>database: 688 Number of new commuters in database: 343 Carpools placed: 118 Vanpools organized: 1 new, 3 re-organized and prevented from folding</p>
3) Make follow-up calls to encourage follow through on matchlists provided	Personalized follow-up calls/emails made: 52
4) Provide vanpool information to interested commuters	<p>Number of vanpool informational requests: 33 Vanpool recruitment and follow-up: 34 Vanpool subsidies provided: 86 New rider vanpool incentives requests received: 10</p>
5) Generate vanpool interest	Number of vanpool formations meetings organized: 1
6) Attend events at employer sites and community events	Number of events attended: 12
7) Maintain contact with business community and major employers	<p>Number of employers contacted: over 400 (includes Santa Clara employers with Santa Cruz commuters) Number of employees reached through those employers: approximately 875 at events.</p>
8) Maintain web site	Number of website updates: 11 additions. Currently in progress: creating clearing-house to add approximately 30 new transportation links
9) Update brochures with current information, as needed	Number of updates: none needed
10) Create new brochures, as needed	Number of new brochures: 1
11) Distribute materials, brochures	<p>Number of brochures distributed: over 1,500 Number of collateral materials: over 1,500 Misc promotional info & pledges received (not including Toyota give-away): approx 1,360</p>
12) Post brochures, on web site, as appropriate	Number of brochures/informational items posted: 1
13) Maintain existing Park and Ride lots	Number of existing Park and Ride lots maintained: 8
14) Promote use of Park and Ride lots	<p>Number of used Park and Ride lot spaces (increased usage): to be surveyed Number of Park & Ride lot maps distributed: 148</p>
15) Explore new park and ride lot	Number of new Park and Ride locations

locations	formed: 1 in progress
16) Coordination with partnering agencies (TMAs, Bike to Work, Electric Bike Incentive Program, Community Traffic Safety Coalition, Ways to Work, Metro)	Number of meetings attended: 38 Number of referrals to other agencies: 82 recorded

* INFO PROVIDED IS THROUGH MARCH, 2004 (COMPLETE FY03/04 NOT YET AVAILABLE)

Overall outcomes can be summarized, as follows:

- 1) New single occupancy drivers using sustainable modes:
 - Rides for Bay Area Commuters' survey of Santa Cruz County commuters shows a 15.5% placement rate in switching from single occupancy driving to carpools or vanpools through direct assistance from Commute Solutions. While 107 commuters can be accounted for switching from single occupancy vehicle (SOV) use to some type of ridesharing for FY03/04 (through March), many others switched through resources provided by Commute Solutions that are not quantified through the survey, such as transit schedules, information about bicycling, walking, and telecommuting, as well as other program referral. **
 - In addition to the 107 commuters switching permanently to ridesharing options, an additional 9.4 %, or approximately 65 Santa Cruz County commuters, switched from one HOV mode to another HOV mode rather than returning to a SOV for FY03/04 (through March). **
- 2) New carpool and vanpool placements:
 - 24.9% positive change in mode placement rate for database participants. **
- 3) Commute Solutions program recognition - A poll conducted through the Don't Drive One in Five campaign indicated that 6 percent of the residents indicated an unaided awareness of the online matching system for finding carpool partners. When asked directly about the system, 26 percent indicated awareness.
- 4) Recognition of alternative transportation mode promotions - According to the Don't Drive One in Five campaign poll, 75% of Santa Cruz County residents had seen or heard some component of the campaign. An impressive 48% of respondents indicated they tried to take some type of action in response to the campaign.

** RIDES for Bay Area Commuters Client Survey Results for the Second Quarter October-December FY 2003-2004. Santa Cruz County commuters are included in the survey.

MEASURE OF PROGRAM SUCCESS

As part of the evaluation report, a summary of the relative success of the program to date and recommendations for continuing or modifying program direction was to be considered. Staff suggests a change in direction in order to respond to the RTC's current project priorities.

Future Commute Solutions Program Direction

While program evaluation indicates a successful promotion of alternative transportation modes and service provision, staff recognizes an opportunity for a well-timed and necessary expansion to the Commission's Transportation Demand Management (TDM) tasks provided under the umbrella of the Commute Solutions Program. To incorporate some new priorities resulting from the Highway 1 HOV Lane project and in response to anticipated needs to mitigate construction related impacts as a result of the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes project, staff plans focusing on the following:

- Expand the current emphasis on shifting mode choice by including other TDM measures that increase passenger capacity of the existing transportation network such as trip linking, off-peak travel, telecommuting, etc.
- Make the Commission's TDM web page (currently www.CommuteSolutions.org) a more comprehensive tool for identifying and accessing county wide alternative transportation programs. Encourage the public to rely on this web site as a centralized source of local travel information and resources, including construction updates.
- Consider changing the web site name to reflect a broader direction (www.SantaCruzMoves.org is a possible consideration).
- Capitalize on the investment already made during the "Don't Drive One in Five" campaign by using purchased collateral materials to advance mode choice messages and encourage use of vanpools, carpool ridematching, and SCMTD's expanded over the hill bus service.
- As planned, hold a TDM Collaboration workshop in the near future to review and coordinate current and planned sustainable transportation programs and promotions. The TDM Workshop will provide guidance and direction to all alternative transportation providers and generate ideas about ways to make alternative program provision more seamless to the public.
- Work with Caltrans and the Highway Construction Authority to consider establishing a public information store-front location as construction on the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes project and the Highway 1 HOV Lane project get under way.

Prepared by: Cory Irimes, SCCRTC Transportation Planner