

## **Commute Solutions Program Evaluation FY07-08**

### **BACKGROUND**

As a core program of the RTC, Commute Solutions has played an essential role in providing and publicizing sustainable transportation options to employers, commuters and the general public since 1979. Commute Solutions is one of the programs that the RTC operates to help commuters manage their transportation needs through direct service delivery. It is also one way in which the Commission works toward realizing the goal of establishing a multi-modal network as expressed in its 25 year planning document, the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP.)

### **DISCUSSION**

Commute Solutions provides direct services, coaching and leadership to help citizens make more efficient use of the existing transportation network through:

- Public education and outreach
- Coordinating the efforts of sustainable transportation program providers and planning partners
- Providing personalized ridematching services for forming carpools and vanpools
- Staffing of the 429-POOL rideshare hotline
- Coordinating with local employers to provide ridesharing services to their employees
- Website maintenance, updates, and daily responses to email information requests via [commutesolutions.org](http://commutesolutions.org)
- Maintaining and promoting Park and Ride lots and developing new locations
- Seeking funding for innovative, cost-effective programs that expand the travel choices available to commuters

Commute Solutions is a key partner in supporting transportation demand management efforts in Santa Cruz County and conforms to the following Goals articulated in the *2005 Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)*.

- 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

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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.
  - 3.5.1 Support revisions to local parking requirements to ensure consistency with transportation demand management objectives.
  - 3.5.2 Consider region-wide parking management policies.
- 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 in their transportation choices through the resources and information available from Commute Solutions. The program serves commuters along any route or 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 from different employers 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 commuters can gain access to the Commute Solutions ridematching service through an instant online database available around the clock, 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, and a four-color map of local bike routes, are essential program elements. Referrals to the Metro Transit District, Bike to Work, neighboring counties' rideshare programs, and Ecology Action Transportation Membership Services' Emergency Ride Home program are also critical to a seamless provision

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of transportation resources to county residents. Commute Solutions has primary responsibility over the development of Park and Ride facilities and coordinates closely with local jurisdictions and Caltrans on maintenance and new lot development efforts.

#### **COMMUTE SOLUTIONS PROGRAM GOALS FOR FY07-08**

General Commute Solutions program goals for FY07-08 were to:

- 1) Convert single occupancy drivers to use alternative transportation modes by providing encouragement, education and incentives such as a ride home in an emergency
- 2) Reinforce behavior of existing alternative transportation users
- 3) Maintain current carpools and vanpools, and form new ones
- 4) Maintain current Park and Ride lots, and develop new ones
- 5) Expand the transportation choices available to local individuals and businesses
- 6) Increase the visibility of alternative transportation mode options and usage
- 7) Undertake TDM activities to reduce the impacts of construction during the 1/17 Merge Lanes Project
- 8) Complete an analysis of TDM programs in Santa Cruz County

**COMMUTE SOLUTIONS TASKS AND OUTCOMES FOR FY07-08  
(through May 2008)**

**Direct Services to Individuals and Businesses**

	<b>TASKS</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
1	Deliver information and referral and personalized trip planning services via phone (429-POOL) and email info@commutesolutions.org	Requests for information and items provided (phone and email): 68 Number of referrals to other agencies: 31 recorded
2	Provide matchlists (through email inquiries and phone calls), facilitate instant on-line ridematching, coordinate with Bay Area ridematch programs, download monthly reports	Matchlists provided through 429-POOL and CS website: 619 Number of commuters in Santa Cruz County database: 393 Number of new commuters in database during FY07-08: 388 Carpools placed: 141 (based on 36% placement rate) Vanpools registered in database: 22 New vanpools organized: 0 (no incentives or subsidies offered)
3	Make follow-up calls to encourage follow through on matchlists provided	Personalized follow-up calls/emails made: 21
4	Provide vanpool information to interested commuters	Number of vanpool informational requests: 5 Vanpool recruitment and follow-up: as required Number of vanpool formation meetings organized: 0
5	Attend events at employer sites and community events	Number of events attended: 5 Number of individuals present at events: 5,250
6	Work directly with employers to develop commute programs	Number of employers contacted: 104 Number of employees reached through those employers: 1,200
7	Manage website including maintenance and updates	Number of website updates: 3 special Commuter Alerts, ongoing Unique visits to website: 50,700
8	Update brochures with current information, as needed	Number of updates: 1 (True Cost of Driving Calculator updated online, Brochure update pending)
9	Create new brochures, as needed	Number of new brochures: 2 (Student Transportation Guide, "Cool" Transportation Tips)
10	Distribute materials and brochures	Number of brochures distributed: over 6,000
11	Maintain existing Park and Ride lots	Number of existing Park and Ride lots maintained: 6
12	Promote use of Park and Ride lots	Number of Park and Ride lot spaces used: 47% (219 out of 466) Number of Park & Ride lot maps distributed: 860
13	Explore new park and ride lot locations	Number of new Park and Ride locations formed: 0 Number of new park and ride concepts developed: 1 (Shop and Ride)
14	Assist commuters during project construction of Hwy 1/17 Merge Lanes Project	Number of leaflets distributed regarding ramp closures: 219

**COMMUTE SOLUTIONS TASKS AND OUTCOMES FOR FY07-08  
(through May 2008)**

**Administrative and Planning Activities**

	<b>TASKS</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
1	Analyze and evaluate Transportation Demand Management programs and needs countywide	Delivered draft report December 2007, final recommendations approved March 2008
2	Provide administrative oversight of TDM programs receiving funding by or passed-through the RTC	Oversight of CMAQ Projects: 1 Oversight of TDA Projects: 2 Pass-through of Air District Grants: 2
3	Coordinate with partnering agencies (TMAs, Bike to Work, Community Traffic Safety Coalition, Santa Cruz Metro)	Number of organizations which whom we coordinated: 16
4	Participate in major multi-modal planning efforts such as Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail, 511 travelers information system, Hwy 1 HOV Lanes Project	Number of project teams on which CS staff participated: 5
5	Develop, implement and track more complete performance measures for Commute Solutions activities	Number of internal tracking measures: 13 data points/month Number of reports downloaded from 511.org: 17/month Website hosting logs downloaded (bandwidth used, # visits, popular pages, referrals from other sites, search strings): 1/month
6	Seek new funding for TDM programs	Grant applications developed and submitted: 2 Grant applications act as public agency sponsor: 1 Grant application letter of support written and submitted: 1

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#### **MEASURES OF PROGRAM SUCCESS IN FY07-08**

Overall outcomes for the past 10 months can be summarized, as follows:

1. Implemented more thorough performance metrics
  - a. Developed a comprehensive system for tracking Commute Solutions activity
    - i. Track and combine data from 511.org, website host cruzio.com, as well as internally collected data.
2. Completed comprehensive TDM Report
  - a. Described background of TDM activity in Santa Cruz County
  - b. Surveyed all local TDM providers to identify programs, populations served and outcomes
  - c. Recommended actions approved by the RTC regarding existing and planned TDM programs
3. Successfully placed people in carpools
  - a. Provided 691 carpool matchlists to 393 commuters in the ridematching database
  - b. 141 people successfully placed in carpool arrangements
  - c. New people requesting matchlists in 4/08 grew by 30% over 4/07. Higher gas prices probably helped. Matchlists delivered in the same period increased by 8%. The disparity between the number of new requesters vs. matchlists can be attributed to increased success in finding carpool partners leading to reduced need for return visits to database or to decreased matchlist quality leading to abandonment of the ridematching system. Follow-up will provide better analysis in the future.

#### **PROGRAM GOALS FOR FY08-09**

The TDM analysis provided a series of recommendations approved by the Commission in March 2008 for continuing and modifying the Commute Solutions program. Recommendations approved by the Commission are included in Attachment 4 and are incorporated into program goals for FY08-09.

In light of awareness about spiraling gas prices, reducing carbon emissions and global warming, reducing traffic congestion, and interest in adopting healthier lifestyles, staff recognizes the opportunity for a well-timed and necessary expansion of the Commission's Transportation Demand Management (TDM) tasks provided under the umbrella of the Commute Solutions Program. Based on the TDM analysis recommendations, goals for FY08-09 include:

- In light of the need to travel smarter all of the time, expand the current program focus on the commute trip to include school, shopping and recreation trips as well. Also, include other TDM measures that increase passenger capacity of the existing transportation network such as trip linking, off-peak travel, and telecommuting.
- Foster coordination, collaboration, and partnership by forming and hosting a TDM Alliance with other TDM service providers in Santa Cruz for information and referral, marketing and promotion and to avoid duplication of work programs.

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- Overhaul the content and redesign the Commission's TDM website (currently [www.CommuteSolutions.org](http://www.CommuteSolutions.org)) to make it a more comprehensive tool for identifying and accessing countywide alternative transportation programs. Publicize the refurbished website as a centralized source of local travel information and resources.
- Develop new and updated printed brochures as required.
- Explore flexible ridematching systems that cover casual carpooling, incentives and offer automated evaluation and tracking systems.