

11 REGIONAL RIDESHARE CONCEPTS AND STANDARDS

INTRODUCTION

From a programmatic perspective, creation of a more formalized, long-term regional rideshare program will enable the Central Minnesota region to achieve a number of its goals for improving commuter transportation. By providing dedicated staff that can implement and administer certain commuter transportation programs, a regional rideshare program can work with commuters, employers, transit agencies, and other stakeholders to provide a comprehensive set of commuter transportation services.

A regional rideshare program would implement and oversee the operations of a number of the commuter transportation tools discussed in Chapter 8. Key services provided would likely include assistance with vanpool formation (or even full administration of a vanpool program), rideshare matching services, administration of a District 3 guaranteed ride home (GRH) program, marketing to employers and employees, and providing employers with assistance in implementing and marketing employer-based commute incentives and supportive programs.

FUNCTIONS OF A CENTRAL MINNESOTA REGIONAL RIDESHARE PROGRAM

This discussion is conceptual, but the basic function of a regional rideshare program should be to provide support and information to facilitate and encourage the use of alternatives to driving alone (such as carpooling, vanpooling, riding transit, bicycling, telecommuting, and walking). Programs typically focus on providing several key services and comprehensive information about available commute options. They also market their services and promote the use of alternatives to driving alone to the public and employers. The primary advantage of a regional rideshare program is its ability to provide a comprehensive set of information, programs and services to the public and employers. This has proven to be a critical element in influencing people's travel behavior and successfully encouraging a reduction in solo driving.

A rideshare program for the Central Minnesota region most likely would provide the following services:

- **Guaranteed ride home program** – For Central Minnesota, a GRH program will provide the additional “peace of mind” that many commuters will need in order to feel comfortable leaving their cars at home and using transit or ridesharing to get to work. The focus groups found significant interest in such a program, while some participants familiar with the Metropolitan Council's GRH program talked about how it does not meet the needs of commuters in District 3. For this reason, a new program could be developed,

or a District 3-based program could potentially supplement the Metropolitan Council program for commutes to the Twin Cities. Administration of a GRH program requires dedicated staff to administer the program on a day-to-day basis as well as additional funding for taxi and/or rental car reimbursements. To be effective, GRH programs are packaged together with other programs and services as part of a comprehensive set of commute options.

- **Facilitated rideshare matching** – Facilitated rideshare matching should be a web-based program (which could also have a phone or fax/mail option for those without internet access) that provides participants with potential commute partners and connects them with other rideshare program services and information. There is an opportunity to build on existing web-based ridematching services provided by Tri-CAP’s Transportation Resource Center and the Metropolitan Council’s services.
- **Regional vanpool program** – A regional vanpool program is seen as an integral part of the regional commuter strategy presented in this study. At a minimum, administration of a vanpool program would consist of providing information on vehicle lease options, costs, and how to form a vanpool, as well as marketing the program to potential commuters. The regional rideshare program would also need to coordinate vanpool information and marketing with other services and programs, especially the GRH and rideshare matching programs. A more robust program would be similar to the one operated by the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit (as discussed in Chapter 8).
- **Comprehensive information and resources** – At a minimum, a rideshare program can provide all information about commute options and services in one, easy-to-access location (typically a website or brochure). Additional services could include online or over-the-phone trip planning and personal commute advice.
- **Marketing program** – Marketing goes beyond the provision of information to actively promote commute alternatives to employers and the public. Program marketing would include all available transportation options, including transit services. Marketing activities could include program branding and strategic advertising, individual meetings with employers, commuter transportation fairs, and other promotions.
- **Employer services** – An employer’s active promotion and facilitation of commute alternatives can make a significant difference in reducing employees’ solo driving. An employer-focused program can include one or more of the following elements:
 - Ongoing outreach and coordination – This may consist of working to establish a transportation coordinator at an employer (a current employee who volunteers or is assigned additional duties and responsibilities related to providing employees with information about and promoting commute alternatives) and then providing initial training and ongoing support and assistance.
 - Technical assistance – This may include assistance with establishing a telecommuting program, setting up a commute benefit program, etc.
 - Partnership programs – This includes on-site transportation fairs, employee presentations, and distribution of information and materials to employees.

Additional regional rideshare program activities are also likely to include coordination with other service providers and agencies and strategic planning. Chapter 14 discusses potential administrative structures for a regional rideshare program.

RECOMMENDED MEASURES AND STANDARDS FOR EVALUATING SUCCESS

Just as performance-based measures are recommended for transit, vanpools, and park-and-rides, measuring performance also provides invaluable feedback on how well a rideshare agency’s or organization’s activities are accomplishing its goals and objectives. It also demonstrates a program’s effectiveness to policymakers, funders and the general public, and enhances accountability and transparency.

The goals and objectives discussed in Chapter 7 that are applicable to the regional rideshare program are outlined in Figure 11-1.

Figure 11-1 Goals and Objectives that Apply to Regional Rideshare

Goals	Objectives
Goal 1: Develop effective services for commuter transportation markets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure commuter services are easy to understand. ▪ Manage an effective set of rideshare options to meet the needs of individuals for whom regional transit service is not available.
Goal 3: Coordinate commuter services with transit providers in the greater region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure promotion of vanpools and other ridesharing opportunities at major employers throughout District 3.
Goal 6: Increase the visibility and elevate the image of ridesharing and public transportation programs in District 3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage regional collaboration for more effective communications and marketing tools to promote transit use and ridesharing. ▪ Partner with local organizations, businesses, municipalities and other agencies to enhance access to and the quality of transportation information available in District 3.

What to Measure

While measuring performance is a valuable use of resources, it needs to be accomplished cost effectively. Consequently, it is important to ensure that program activities are in line with overall goals and objectives and that the right information is collected and analyzed in order to evaluate progress.

Performance measures for a regional rideshare program can be organized into four general types¹:

- **Inputs** – Activities and efforts initiated by the program; for example, outreach events, employer presentations, and other marketing efforts.
- **Outputs** – Participation in program-sponsored activities and efforts; for example, ridematch signups, vanpool formations, GRH participants, web hits, program awareness, etc.

¹ Ryan Thompson and Sonya Suter, “Submission #12-0501: Developing Standard Performance Measures for Transportation Demand Management Programs” (Paper submitted for presentation at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board and publication in the Transportation Research Record, Washington D.C., January 2012.)

- **Outcomes** – Results of the input activities and efforts; for example, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduced, gallons of gasoline saved, etc.
- **Cost-effectiveness** – A measurement of cost per input, output or outcome; for example, cost per cost per employer transportation fair, cost per new vanpool participant, and cost per VMT reduced.

Figure 11-2 lists the performance measures that are most applicable to a new Central Minnesota regional rideshare program.

Figure 11-2 Applicable Rideshare Performance Measures

Category	Type of Measure	Performance Measure
Inputs	Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of employer meetings and events ▪ Number of employers recruited to participate ▪ Amount of literature distributed
	Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of advertising spots placed (print, radio) ▪ Number of Facebook or Google ad words
Outputs	Use of non Single-Occupant-Vehicle (SOV) modes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percent of employees using a non-SOV mode ▪ Number of ride matches available ▪ Number of new carpools formed ▪ Number of new vanpools formed ▪ Number of GRH participants
	Awareness/Client Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percent of commuters and/or employers who are familiar with or who have used the program ▪ Awareness of commute programs amongst employees of participating employers ▪ Satisfaction with services received ▪ Number of complaints received and resolved ▪ Customer comments ▪ Number of web site hits ▪ Number of phone inquiries received
Outcomes	Travel impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SOV trips reduced ▪ VMT reduced
	Emissions/Energy Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Estimated fuel savings (gallons of gasoline saved) ▪ Tons of emissions reduced (pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions)
	Cost Savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Estimated savings on auto operation and maintenance

How to Measure

Rideshare programs collect some performance data as part of normal program administration and some through surveys of employers, employees and the broader public. Because administrative data typically is collected continually, performance can be analyzed on a monthly or quarterly basis. For data that requires collection via survey (which is more resource intensive), data is collected and performance is assessed on an annual basis.

Once methods and practices are established, collection of administrative data is relatively easy and inexpensive. Data for the following performance measures are generally collected administratively:

- Number of employer meetings and events
- Number of employers recruited to participate
- Amount of literature distributed
- Number of advertising spots placed (print, radio)
- Number of Facebook or Google ad words
- Number of ride matches available
- Number of new carpools formed
- Number of new vanpools formed
- Number of GRH participants
- Number of complaints received and resolved
- Customer comments
- Number of web site hits
- Number of phone inquiries received

Surveys of program participants can be administered relatively easily via the internet or by paper since the program already has individuals' contact information. Surveys of the general public are more resource intensive and require either phone surveys or mail distribution.

The following data are typically collected through surveys of employees, employers of the general public:

- Percent of employees using a non-SOV mode
- Percent of commuters and/or employers who are familiar with or who have used the program
- Awareness of commute programs among employees of participating employers
- Satisfaction with services received
- Customer comments
- SOV trips reduced (can also be based on new carpools, vanpools formed)
- VMT reduced (estimated from SOV trips reduced based on average or reported trip length)
- Estimated fuel savings (gallons of gasoline saved based on estimated gas mileage and trip length for SOV trips reduced)
- Tons of emissions reduced (pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions based on SOV trips reduced and reported or estimated trip length)
- Estimated savings on auto operation and maintenance (based on SOV trips reduced and reported or estimated trip length and average operating cost per mile)

Setting Performance Standards

Performance standards provide staff, decision makers and the public with clear expectations as to what is to be achieved within a given timeframe. Performance standards should be established using a baseline level of performance and reasonable objectives for future progress. They should

set clear targets to be achieved within a defined timeline (e.g., 10 new vanpools formed within one year).

Standards or performance targets should be realistic in terms of what can be achieved given program resources and other circumstances, but should also seek to incentivize improvements and progress. Performance standards and targets should be reevaluated on an annual basis and whenever significant changes are made to program activities or resources.

CONCLUSION

A regional rideshare program is assumed to be a component of a regional commuter service, and could be administered by an agency responsible for administering regional commuter bus services or vanpool services. Chapter 14 discusses potential administrative considerations for oversight and management of regional commuter services.