



Commuter ChoiceSM Leadership Initiative Phone Forum Commuter Choice on Campus October 23, 2002

Available exclusively to Commuter ChoiceSM Employers, phone forums provide cutting-edge information on a range of topics related to commuter benefits. Moderated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), these forums feature experts on key topic areas.

On October 23, 2002, the Commuter ChoiceSM Leadership Initiative held a phone forum focusing on college and university commuter choice programs. Patrice Thornton, EPA forum moderator, provided opening remarks and introduced the featured participants.

Featured Participant Presentations

Deborah Freed, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Deborah Freed is the transportation demand management (TDM) coordinator at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). Several years ago, UNC received funding to develop many new facilities, including more campus housing. UNC projected a significant increase in transportation demand, but agreed not to increase the amount of parking available on campus. As a result, UNC realized it needed to find other ways to meet the increased commuting needs.

In conjunction with local government authorities, UNC implemented the Commuter Alternatives Program in January 2002. Through the program, UNC offers free transit to everyone boarding a Chapel Hill transit bus, free park and ride services, occasional use permits, discounts for local merchants, and an Emergency Ride Home program to students and university employees. In addition,

UNC raised the price of parking. With 1,600 users currently enrolled in the program, UNC has well exceeded its first year enrollment goal of 750 users. One of UNC's successful marketing slogans is "Be part of the solution."

Ms. Freed credits the collaboration between UNC and local authorities in Chapel Hill and nearby Carrboro, for much of the program's success. She said the biggest challenge now is ensuring that the quality of transit services keeps up with growing use.

Information on the Commuter Alternatives Program can be found on the web at: <www.dps.unc.edu/dps/alternatives/commuter_alternatives_program.htm>. If you have questions regarding the program at UNC, contact <Debby_Freed@unc.edu>.

Robin Rolls, Stanford University

Robin Rolls is the TDM coordinator at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. Because of high traffic congestion in the local area, Stanford is required to mitigate new development so that there is no more than a 1 percent increase annually in peak hour commute traffic. In response, Stanford aggressively promotes commute alternatives through the Commute Club, a new program that consolidated many of the campus's existing services—such as free shuttles, a charter bus service, and a bike program—and promoted several new initiatives. Highlights of the program include a \$160 Clean Air Cash award that is added to the paycheck of any employee who signs up for the program and does not purchase a parking permit, and the Marguerite shuttle that runs from campus to the local Caltrain station.

On a trial basis, Stanford also offers Eco Passes to faculty and staff that provide free access to transit services in Santa Clara County. Stanford also bans freshman from keeping cars on campus.

Stanford developed a comprehensive Commute Club marketing plan that includes brochures, flyers, mugs, pins, and other materials with catchy logos and tag lines. The materials are customized for the campus's diverse population, which includes students, faculty, administration, and staff from the university and its associated hospital. Stanford also markets the program through the campus newsletter and through multiple mailings to individuals who are set to renew their parking permits. When marketing, Stanford uses slogans like "Don't let habit drive you," which appeal to users' sense of responsibility and intellectual merit.

Stanford's program has been a huge success. The program was launched in September 2002 and more than 2,000 users are already enrolled. Ms. Rolls expects the program to continue to grow and has set a goal of 20 percent participation. Correspondingly, she is working to build a feeling of membership in the Commute Club by offering incentives including prize give-aways and rewards for employees that recruit coworkers into the program.

Colleen Fisher, The University of Texas at Austin

Colleen Fisher is the TDM coordinator at The University of Texas at Austin (UT). Several years ago, UT conducted a master plan process and decided to convert many surface parking lots into new buildings. UT averages 70,000 incoming visitors, staff, and students each day, but only has 14,500 parking spaces. To address the resulting parking shortage, and to fight congestion and air pollution, UT implemented the UT Share program, which promotes ridesharing and environmental responsibility using slogans such as "Share

the ride" and "You too can do your share." The program includes preferred and discounted parking for carpools and vanpools, a Guaranteed Ride Home program, ridesharing services, and free transit passes.

Joe Richmond, from the local transit authority, explained how the university and the transit authority collaborate to provide a shuttle service, which includes 87 buses that handle 7 million boardings per year. The shuttles have proven to be a very popular and effective method for handling users' diverse schedules. Students also have unlimited access to the county's other transit services. Mr. Richmond recommends having key personnel in place to coordinate activities between the university, the transit authority, and third-party contractors.

Open Discussion

Following the featured speakers' presentations, other forum participants asked questions and provided additional information on some of the points discussed.

- Eyedin Zonobi from San Jose State University (SJSU) explained that SJSU has similar programs as Stanford and continues to expand its services to cope with a recent 10 percent increase in enrollment. SJSU also uses a Geographic Information System (GIS) to map students' residences and plan and market transit services.
- Participants discussed the feasibility of prohibiting freshman from keeping cars on campus. Robin Rolls noted that Stanford has received very few complaints about the rule from new students and only received 20 waiver requests last year.
- David Cook from the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU) asked about UNC's experience with occasional-use passes. Deborah Freed explained that employees in the Commuter Alternatives Program receive nine 1-day permits per year and students

are eligible for one per semester. UNC might adjust the pricing structure so that it is not more cost effective for frequent alternative transit users to purchase full passes.

- UNC and UT described the lottery systems they use to allocate parking spaces for resident students. UNC students that do not receive a spot have access to an off-campus storage lot that is linked by shuttle bus. UT has a similar lot and keeps prices high to discourage use.
- Participants discussed how they have quantified program performance. David Cook said that CU surveys employees every year. The rate of weekly participation in alternative transit modes increased from 18 percent in 2001 to 31 percent in 2002. CU also calculated the number of parking spaces reduced and

associated cost savings (the equivalent cost of building and maintaining more parking). SJSU calculated a reduction of 1,000 drivers per day since the last academic year.

Closing

Patrice Thornton closed by thanking the featured participants for their enlightening presentations and thanking all Commuter ChoiceSM Employers for participating in the forum. She invited employers to provide suggestions and ideas for future forums and reminded them that the Commuter ChoiceSM Leadership Initiative is available for assistance by contacting <commuterchoice@epa.gov> or calling the hotline at 888 856-3131.