

CommuterSmart News

March 2010

A SERVICE OF COMMUTESMART.INFO AND YOUR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION AGENCIES

Are You Blowing Your Rideshare Budget?



Chances are your rideshare program budget isn't as big as you'd like it to be, but it can seem even smaller if you're not spending your funds wisely. Watch out for these common money wasters...[Full story »](#)

Tweets & E-Alerts for the Commute

Twitter isn't just for teens, celebrities and people who feel the need to share every detail of their lives anymore. Now it's where commuters are getting up-to-the-minute bus/rail service alerts, construction updates, rideshare news and more. [Full story »](#)



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- ACT Bike to Work event

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TIPS AND IDEAS

5 key times you should promote ridesharing to employees. [Full story »](#)



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Get rideshare help and traffic information in the Inland Empire at [ie511.org](#) and in Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura counties at [go511.com](#).



NEWS FOR EMPLOYEES

Get news geared to commuters that you can forward to employees or incorporate into your own rideshare newsletter.



Are You Blowing Your Rideshare Budget?

Make the most of your rideshare budget by avoiding these **common money wasters**.

Doing it because you've always done it

Just because you've always, say, held a rideshare fair or subsidized vanpooling doesn't mean that you always should. Once a year go over your expenditures and ask, *Was it worth it? Did we get payoff in terms of awareness or increased program participation? Is it something that motivates employees to start or continue ridesharing?* If the answers are no, there might be more effective ways you could use your money.



Putting all your cash into incentives/operations and none into marketing

When budgets get squeezed, marketing is often the first thing to go. Yet "effective marketing is a critical factor in priming the pump and selling the customer," says Harvey Mackay, author of *Swim With the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*. Without it, he points out, you may have a great product...that nobody knows about, and so nobody buys.

In other words, that nice fleet of shiny vans you invested in will sit empty, or the transit subsidy you spent months getting management to approve languishes in your coffers unused...and next year, management may not approve the funds again.

Buying stuff you can get free

Employees love getting "freebies," which is why many employee transportation coordinators (ETCs) earmark part of their budget for prizes and other incentives—but if you get prizes donated, or take advantage of programs that provide free incentives, you could use that prize money for other things. Many local businesses are glad to donate gift certificates, products or services in exchange for publicity (such as including their logo or product information on a flyer or on your rideshare web site).

Another way you can save money: Look for prizes that don't cost anything but still hold value for employees. ADP in Los Angeles gives a day off after six months of ridesharing. ETC Gail Allen says, "It's one of our most popular incentives...I get emails (from employees) all the time wanting to know how close they are to their bonus day."

Your employees that rideshare may also qualify for programs sponsored by your county rideshare agency that offer [free gift certificates and other perks](#).

Promoting a mode your employees can't take

Southwest Airlines would never spend its advertising dollars promoting service to China for the simple reason that it doesn't fly there, yet many ETCs do almost the same thing by trying to get employees to take modes that aren't feasible. For example, while transit is a great alternative to driving alone, your employees can't (or won't) ride the bus or rail if there's no stop near your work site. Instead of marketing what's not there, you'd be better off first spending your dollars on establishing a shuttle that could transport employees from the nearest transit station—or investing your time in working with local transit agencies to bring service closer.

Paying too much in taxes

If you're not offering transportation fringe benefits, you could be missing out on important tax savings—click here to learn more about Commuter Choice benefits offered by the federal government (or go to [CommuteSmart.info](#)).



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Tweets & E-Alerts for the Commute

Twitter isn't just for teens, celebrities and people who feel the need to share every detail of their lives anymore. Now it's where commuters are getting up-to-the-minute bus/rail service alerts, construction updates, rideshare news and more. The best part: Because these messages (called "tweets") can't be more than 140 characters, they're a fast, easy way to find out—in the words of Twitter—*what's happening*.

Check Out These Twitter Profiles:

Go to twitter.com to sign on for regular updates from any of these transportation and clean air organizations:

- Auto Club of Southern California, gas price, safety and travel news: [@aaasocalnews](https://twitter.com/aaasocalnews)
- American Lung Association of California: [@californialung](https://twitter.com/californialung)
- Bike Commute News, bicycling advocacy: [@bikecommuteneeds](https://twitter.com/bikecommuteneeds)
- Caltrans (Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura): [@caltransdist7](https://twitter.com/caltransdist7)
- Caltrans (San Bernardino and Riverside): [@caltrans8](https://twitter.com/caltrans8)
- Construction updates I-405 project: [@I_405](https://twitter.com/I_405)
- Construction updates I-215 project: [@I215news](https://twitter.com/I215news)
- Earth Day, celebrating 40 years on April 22: [@earthdaynetwork](https://twitter.com/earthdaynetwork)
- LADOT, Dash Downtown rider updates: [@dashdowntown](https://twitter.com/dashdowntown)
- LADOT, all rider updates: [@ladottransit](https://twitter.com/ladottransit)
- Metro news: [@metrolosangeles](https://twitter.com/metrolosangeles)
- Metro, bus/rail service alerts: [@metrolaalerts](https://twitter.com/metrolaalerts)
- Metro Transportation Library, news story archive: [@metrolibrary](https://twitter.com/metrolibrary)
- Metrolink: [@metrolink](https://twitter.com/metrolink)
- Metrolink Orange County Line: [@metrolinkoc](https://twitter.com/metrolinkoc)
- Metrolink Inland Empire/OC Line: [@metrolinkieoc](https://twitter.com/metrolinkieoc)
- Metrolink Ventura County Line: [@metrolinkvc](https://twitter.com/metrolinkvc)
- Metrolink 91 Line: [@metrolink91](https://twitter.com/metrolink91)
- Metrolink Antelope Valley Line: [@metrolinkant](https://twitter.com/metrolinkant)
- Metrolink Riverside County Line: [@metrolinkriv](https://twitter.com/metrolinkriv)
- Metrolink San Bernardino County Line: [@metrolinksb](https://twitter.com/metrolinksb)
- Orange County Transportation Authority service updates: [@octabusupdates](https://twitter.com/octabusupdates)
- OCTA news and programs: [@tednguyen](https://twitter.com/tednguyen)
- Riverside County Transportation Commission news: [@rctc](https://twitter.com/rctc)
- Riverside Transit Agency: [@rtabus](https://twitter.com/rtabus)
- South Coast Air Quality Management District: [@scaqmd](https://twitter.com/scaqmd)
- Ventura County Air Pollution Control District: [@vcapcd](https://twitter.com/vcapcd)



Get E-Alerts to Your Email

Many transit providers and agencies allow you to subscribe to messages that are delivered to your email inbox—and you can often choose what type of news you want (i.e., emergency alerts only or news, discounts, promotions, etc).

Go to the websites of the transit providers that service your work site to see if they offer e-alerts.

A few that do:

- Foothill Transit: foothilltransit.org
- Omnitrans: omnitrans.org
- Riverside Transit Agency: riversidetransit.com
- Santa Monica Big Blue Bus: bigbluebus.com
- South Coast AQMD: aqmd.gov



In Brief



• Stimulus funds put high-speed rail on the fast track

California will receive \$2.25 billion, the largest amount for any state, in federal economic stimulus funds to develop a high-speed rail line running from Anaheim to San Francisco, it was announced last month. Instead of a six-hour drive, rail passengers—traveling at speeds up to 220 mph—could make the 400-mile trek in two hours and 40 minutes. The project, which is expected to cost about \$42 billion, will take 10 years to complete, with extensions to San Diego and Sacramento planned.

• Webster's names "distracted driving" word of the year

Webster's New World College Dictionary dubbed the term "distracted driving" 2009's word of the year. Defined as "what many are guilty of when they use digital devices on the go," its increasingly common use underscores the growing problem of people not paying attention while behind the wheel. The term distracted driving is also "a linguistic catch," Editor-in-Chief Mike Agnes notes. "If you think about it, the *driving* is not distracted, it's the *driver* that's distracted." A runner up for word of the year: "wallet biopsy," the examination, before medical service, of a patient's ability to pay.



• Will cutbacks in transit affect your employees?

Due to recent budget cuts and changes in how funds are being distributed, many transit agencies are shifting or eliminating service—which may mean that your employees who ride bus or rail are at risk of reverting to driving alone to work if their usual route gets disrupted. "ETCs should use this time to take stock of any changes among the agencies that provide service to their work site," advises Judy Leon with [Orange County Transportation Authority](#), which has service changes going into effect March 14. Other agencies with service changes in the works: [LADOT](#), [Metro](#) and [Metrolink](#), among others.

• Rideshare proponents turn to Facebook to spread the word

Those co-workers you see on Facebook might not just be goofing off—they could be checking on the latest transit, rideshare or clean air news. Agencies are now posting on [facebook.com](#), and when you become a "fan" of their pages, you can get updates on service changes and even special deals (for example, [Omnitrans](#) is offering a free day pass to anyone who becomes a fan of their page by March 12). Other agencies on facebook: [Association for Commuter Transportation](#), [California Bicycle Coalition](#), [Earth Day Network](#), [Foothill Transit](#), [Metro](#), [Metrolink/Orange County](#), [Orange County Transportation Authority](#), [South Coast Air Quality Management District](#) and [VPSI Vanpool](#). To sign on as a fan, you must have a facebook account, which is free.



• Park & Ride info now at [ie511.org](#)

You can now find Park & Ride lot information for Riverside and San Bernardino counties at [ie511.org](#). All area Park & Ride lots are listed, along with information such as location, number of spaces, if a permit is required, and more. The newest Park & Ride to make the list: Chino Hills, which has 77 spaces available at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church (on Peyton Dr.).

Tips & Ideas—5 key times you should promote ridesharing to employees

It's said that timing is everything, and that's certainly true when it comes to pitching your rideshare program to employees. While it's never a bad time to get the word out, there are times when employees are more likely to be receptive to your message. Here, we give you five...

1. The first day on the job

Introduce rideshare options to employees before they can get entrenched in a routine of driving alone.

As part of the new-hire process, give employees a packet that includes a RideGuide, transit schedules and information about your rideshare program. Even better: Schedule a one-on-one so you can answer questions and really make your pitch.



2. When an employee moves

After a move people have enough to worry about—like unpacking boxes and deciding where to put the couch. When you help them find a route to work, they're often grateful since that's one more thing they can check off their to-do list. Plus, "when an employee moves it often opens up new commute options," says Metro's Donna Blanchard. "They might be closer to a bus stop or down the street from a co-worker who wants to carpool."

Of course, it works the other way: An employee who rideshares may suddenly be too far from his or her usual arrangement. "There's a risk they'll turn to driving alone unless an ETC can offer another solution," adds Blanchard.

Ask human resources to update you any time an employee changes home location. If that's not possible, at least send a message to staff that you're there as a resource if they move.

3. When you distribute RideGuides

RideGuides are packed with valuable commute information, so don't let them get lost in employee in-boxes when you hand them out. Send emails, set up a contest, hold a party, offer prizes...whatever it takes to generate awareness.



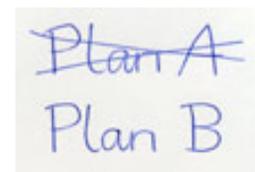
4. During a relocation

It's not easy to go from a short commute to one that's much longer. Helping workers find a rideshare arrangement can ease stress and defray their extra commute costs.

When Los Angeles World Airports relocated employees after closing terminals at the Ontario Airport, rideshare staff worked individually with those affected to discuss rideshare options. Before the move, only 16% shared the ride, according to ETC Devon Deming. Now most do.

5. Before an emergency

If you want your employees to be able to get to work in the event of an incident—such as road construction, a transit strike, an earthquake or an outbreak of the H1N1 virus—"the time to make sure that happens is before anything happens," says Elham Shirazi, principal for e-planning.



She suggests you work with management to establish policies like telework and flexible hours that maintain your company's productivity.

"In addition, let employees know that—in the same way they carry a flashlight and jumper cables in their trunk in case of emergency—it's smart to have a backup plan for the commute," adds Shirazi. They should keep a list of potential carpool partners at home and a print-out of a bus/rail itinerary. "Even if they don't want to rideshare now, they'll need it if their regular route to work is disrupted."

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Calendar of Events

EVENTS

Telecommuter Appreciation Week - runs through March 6, sponsored by the American Telecommuting Association, 1.800.ATA4YOU, yourata.com



ACT Bike to Work event and marketing certificate class is March 17 in Long Beach, act-southernca.org, kristina.valenzuela@caltech.edu



Metro rideshare marketing workshop is April 20, 8 a.m.-noon at the Metro offices in downtown Los Angeles; contact blanchardd@metro.net

Earth Day celebrates 40 years on April 22, earthday.net

Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) marketing class will be held April 28, 8:30 - 11:30 a.m. at the OCTA offices in Orange; for more information or to RSVP, email sharetheride@octa.net

NETWORK MEETINGS

Coachella Valley ETC Network meets bi-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.
Glendale TMA meets regularly; call 818.543.7641.

Orange County Network meets regularly; call 714.560.5358 or email commuterconnection@octa.net

Pasadena TMA meets every other month; call John Miranda at 818.354.7433.

Riverside County ETC Network meets tri-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.

San Bernardino County ETC Network meets tri-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.

Santa Monica ETC Network meets regularly; call 310.458.8956.

South Bay/Westside TMA meets monthly; contact Christina Corrales at 310.642.0066, email christina_corrales@equityoffice.com

Torrance Transportation Network meets regularly; call Kim Fuentes at 310.784.7902.

Warner Center TMO meets monthly; call 818.716.5520.

TRAINING

Metro Commute Services upcoming briefings—where Los Angeles area employers can learn about the transportation survey process and services Metro has to offer—are March 10, 9:30-11:30 a.m.; April 14, 1 - 3 p.m. and May 19, 9:30-11:30 a.m. For more information or to reserve a space, email blanchardd@metro.net.

South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD)

offers one-day ETC training for \$154.81. Upcoming sessions are March 3 and April 8 at AQMD offices in Diamond Bar, March 24 in downtown Los Angeles, April 21 in Culver City and April 28 in Riverside. Contact the AQMD's training program at etctraining@aqmd.gov or visit the AQMD at aqmd.gov

COMMUTESMART NEWS

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