

Case Study

OREGON SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE

COMMUTE OPTIONS & CASCADES EAST TRANSIT

PARTNERS IN A SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYEE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM



Featured Category

Increase Transit Use



Location

Bend, Oregon

Milestones

- 1996: Commute Options formed
- 2010: Cascades East Transit formed
- 2014: Group Pass Program launched

Applicable GHG Reduction Strategies

- [Transportation Demand Management](#)
- [Transit Pricing](#)

Unique Attributes

- Partnership between a nonprofit and Transit Service Provider
- Allows small employers to pool together in order to meet minimum employee requirement
- Provides businesses a low cost benefit for employees
- Offers transit agency a dependable source of revenue that can be used for the local match required in federal grants

This case study is an illustration of strategies from the Transportation and Land Use Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reduction Toolkit, and is intended to help local jurisdictions explore actions and programs that can reduce GHG emissions from transportation.

Challenges

Cascades East Transit is the largest transit system in Oregon without a dedicated funding source. How do you increase services without the money to do so?

The Group Pass program provides a dependable revenue stream that can be used to increase service. The money from the program can also be used as the local cash match for federal grants, which do not allow unsecured fare box revenues to be used for matching purposes.

The City of Bend had previously been offering the Group Pass program, but it wasn't being utilized due to limited visibility. How do you bring awareness to your program with limited resources?

Partnering with Commute Options gave CET a cost-effective solution while taking advantage of the nonprofit's 24 years of expertise in communications and outreach work, in their core mission of providing commute options in Bend and central Oregon.

Background

Commute Options was formed in 1991 and serves as the Transportation Management Association for all of central Oregon. Cascades East Transit is a small regional transit provider serving fixed route transit in Bend and Dial-a-Ride services to the surrounding communities in Central Oregon.

Cascades East Transit had previously offered a Group Pass program, but the program was not being actively marketed and participation was low. A group of university, transit, government, and business leaders came together to come up with ideas to do boost engagement. In 2014, Commute Options partnered with Cascades East Transit to market an affordable Group Bus pass to local businesses and organizations. The partnership led to mutual benefits between the agencies. Commute Options, which was already marketing transit as an alternative mode of transportation, got a way to offer more incentives to commuters. Cascades East Transit gained the marketing and outreach expertise that Commute Options specializes in.

The program works by signing contracts with local employers and organizations. Once enrolled, employers enter into an annual contract for services with Cascades East Transit for a rate of \$2.50 per month, per full time employee. Businesses or organizations must have at least 10 full time employees to enroll in the program, but businesses under 10 employees can combine with other business to reach the minimum number to qualify. All employees at the enrolled business receive a free bus pass good for unlimited rides for the year. The employer's Group Pass expenses qualify for tax benefits, giving them additional incentive to participate.



Conclusions

Providing good transit service to small urban and rural areas with limited funding is more likely to be successful with collaboration and partnerships with businesses and large institutions. Leveraging these partnerships is a way transit providers can increase services with a predictable source of increased revenue. When a large employer is enrolled in the program, the provider can increase service to the routes serving that employer with the additional revenue.

Smaller sized cities and transit providers should consider the Group Bus Pass model as a cost effective way to increase transit service and expose more people to transit. The low cost per employee is a manageable expense for employers, but can add up to a significant amount of revenue for small transit agencies. Unlike fare box revenue, the revenue from Group Pass contracts can be used as a local cash match for federal grants, providing more flexibility and opportunity for transit providers. In addition to the flexibility, the program provides better certainty for budgeting and planning.

The partnership between the transit provider and a Transportation Management Association has shown to add value to the core mission of both agencies. Commute Options has successfully marketed the program beyond what had previously been possible by adding their expertise in public outreach and education. Initial findings from the program suggest providing a free bus pass to someone increases their willingness to take transit. The program has so far shown great potential to attract “choice” riders, or riders who might otherwise choose to drive.

The Group Pass program is an example for other agencies that seek to support local businesses while working towards better transit service. The Group Pass program serves as a prime example of an effective program to encourage employees to use healthy commute modes and provide employers with low cost incentives to offer to their workers. It is particularly useful as a model that offers benefits usually found in larger institutions to small businesses.

Key Successes

- A stakeholder group comprised of transit, government, university, and business interests helped implement the program with input from the public.
- The program has already enrolled the City of Bend, Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council, Visit Bend, and the Downtown Bend Business Association and is now in talks with larger employers in the region.

Quantifying GHG Reduction

The Transportation and Land Use Greenhouse Gas Reduction Toolkit estimates reduction ranges for several of the strategies mentioned in this case study. Those strategies with Quantified reduction ranges are:

- Transportation Demand Management (up to 1.7%)

While strategies are often combined to maximize effectiveness, the reduction ranges are not necessarily additive.

The Toolkit is a component of the Oregon Sustainable Transportation Initiative (OSTI), which was formed to address the requirements of Senate Bill 1059 (2010).

For more information please visit:

<https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Planning/Pages/GHG-Toolkit.aspx>



Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development