

Commute Chat getDowntown Program December 04, 2007

Attendees:

Noree Bowbeer-DTE Biomass Energy
Gail Christopherson-Ann Arbor Credit Bureau
Shannon Tubb-Inter-Cooperative Council
Joan Lowenstein-Ann Arbor City Council/Jaffe Law Firm
Adella Harden-Ann Arbor District Library
Ken Anderson-AATA
Mary Staisak-AATA/getDowntown Program Advisory Board
Nancy Shore-getDowntown Program

Synopsis of the Meeting:

Introductions

- Everyone went around and gave introductions as well as some of the issues they are interested in talking about at Commute Chat.
- Gail (as well as others) was looking for ideas for overcoming resistance to carpooling and vanpooling.
 - One of the issues is how to get people who come from far out places to carpool and vanpool since they can't bus.
- Other participants talked about addressing concerns about cycling to the downtown.
- Others brought up the fact that they do not drive and want to be able to have the best services possible so they can get around in the best way possible.

Staff and Flexible Schedules

- Ken from the AATA asked if there was one thing that could be done to improve AATA service, what would it be. The reply was to increase the Length of Service so the buses run later.
 - This brought up the discussion of the fact that staff have very flexible schedules.
 - Adella noted that she has employees that work every day of the week and also work until 9pm. Sometimes they have to get their car from the Park and Ride Lot and park downtown so they can get home in the evening.
 - Noree from DTE explained that she has many staff who have to catch flights during the day and more frequent service might be useful to them because they need to be able to get to where they need to go quickly.

Child Care Issues

- The participants then brought up the issue of child care and the fact that many staff have children that need to be able to get to those kids during the day if they are sick and have to drop them off and pick them up.
 - One idea was to have a childcare van or shuttle like Tutor Time does.
 - This idea also brought up other ideas like having a shuttle service from the Neutral Zone or other location that would go to some of the schools, kind of like the Link, but for school-age children.
 - Nancy asked how staff generally heard about the child care options available to them. Participants said that many staff hear about child care from the Child Care Network, that

kids at public school have a newsletter and the info may be in there, and also by word of mouth.

- Mary from the AATA also brought up the fact that the solution doesn't just lie with the AATA or with transportation, but it is also important that employers are flexible so that their staff can work out a child care situation that is best for them.
- Another thought was to provide funding to child care centers who want to move downtown so that there are more options for downtown workers.
- Nancy also let the group know that she is working with the AATA to create an Emergency Ride Home program so that people who need to get to a sick child, etc will be able to get a ride when they don't drive to work. Nancy is also working on getting Zip Cars to the downtown, which will also help to provide some flexibility for workers.
- The group discussed some child care options they knew of, including the YMCA, a place in Kerrytown and perhaps a co-op at Bethlehem UCC.
- The group requested more information on child care options in the downtown. Nancy will research this and contact the Children Care Network and make sure the information is available to organizations in the downtown.

Promoting Vanpooling and Carpooling to Employees

- The next issue that was brought up was how to promote carpooling and vanpooling to employees.
 - Gail noted that many of her staff drive 20-30 miles to get to work but are not interested in carpooling or vanpooling because
 - They don't want to ride with sick people
 - They don't want to ride with strangers
 - They want to drive the vehicle
 - Several ideas were brought up to make carpooling and vanpooling easier:
 - The AATA is going to get a ridematching software program that can be used to match up downtown workers with downtown workers or only match up workers who work at a specific organization. This should be happening soon.
 - Also, Nancy noted that the DDA is open to having preferential parking for vanpools and carpools so that when people use these options they have a good space to park.
 - Another idea was to have "speedpooling" or getting people interested in carpooling that live in similar areas together for lunch or refreshments. That way, people would get to know one another before they started to carpool.
 - Another idea is that businesses can look into shuttles for their employees if their employees are all coming from a particular location. So, for example, if 12 employees drive in from Chelsea, they can all park at a location and take the shuttle to work. This might actually be cheaper for an employer than paying for parking.
 - Shannon wondered if people who signed up for carpools had to carpool 5 days a week. Ken from AATA said that no, it's whatever you decide with your carpool partners.
 - Nancy let everyone know that there is going to be a presentation on Vanpooling next Tuesday from 8-9am at the DDA on Fifth Ave for anyone interested in this option.

Wrap Up

- At the end of the get together, Nancy asked for suggestions from the group about how to make this event even better.
 - One suggestion was to solicit questions and thoughts before the next Commute Chat and then send that information to participants a couple of days before the

Commute Chat so they can mull over the questions and thoughts and be prepared for the meeting.

- Also, when people email their questions, we can be sure to get to everyone's questions before the end of the meeting.
- Also, the group suggested advertising the event in the Observer and Current as well as in the City of Ann Arbor newsletter and on buses.
- Mary Stasiak from AATA said that AATA was interested in conducting improved service surveys among passengers of the various routes but says doesn't know if there is enough staff to do this. Noree suggested that AATA solicit volunteers from those who use the service routinely and perhaps advertising on the website for volunteers might be an option. Mary thought this was a good idea.
- Someone also asked where people could go if sidewalks were not maintained. Joan said they can all 99green to complain about sidewalks, trash and other issues.

Next Commute Chat

- The group ended at around 1:05pm. The next Commute Chat is Tuesday, February 5th from 12-1pm at the Ann Arbor Chamber of Commerce. Hope to see you there!