

Commute Chat getDowntown Program February 05, 2008

Attendees:

Noree Bowbeer-DTE Biomass Energy
Ed Vielmetti-Pure Visibility
Lorel Vidlund-Mike Green and Associates
Jane Black-Bank of Ann Arbor
Joe Wywrot-JJR
Nancy Shore-getDowntown Program

Synopsis of the Meeting:

Initial Thoughts

- We all introduced one another and the group shared some initial thoughts
- Nancy passed around a manual with some information on how commute options, how to promote them, and frequently asked questions about them.
- One participant wondered if we could create HOV lanes for buses.
- In other larger cities there is a practice called “slugging” where people wait at busy streets and someone going into town picks them up. Could we do that in Ann Arbor?
- One participant noted that parking is a big issue for employees’ downtown.
- Employees need to have a car available nearby to get to meetings on short notice

Zipcar

- Nancy discussed the possibility of having Zipcars in the downtown area. These are cars that employees can rent by the hour to use to run errands, go to meetings, etc. The Zipcars will be parked at designated spaces so that employees don’t have to worry about finding a place to park the Zipcar once they are done using it.
- Joe from JJR noted that JJR currently has a deal with Enterprise, but having Zipcars in the downtown would also be useful.
- Participants asked about the cost of these Zipcars. Nancy said that at the UM it costs \$35 for a yearly membership and \$8 an hour to rent. Nancy is working with the DDA to provide Zipcars to employees with go!passes at either the same or less cost.

Emergency Ride Home Program

- Nancy discussed the proposed Emergency Ride Home Program that getDowntown and AATA are working on. This Program would be coupled with a new carpool/vanpool matching software and preferential parking spaces for carpool/vanpools.
- Emergency Ride Home would work by allowing employees who carpool and vanpool to get a taxi ride in an emergency situation, such as if they have a sick child or need to go to the hospital.
- Participants noted that in order for Emergency Ride Home to work, we need to make sure the service is quick. The currently Yellow Cab service can take 20 minutes to arrive and that is not going to work for many downtown employees.

Moped/Motorcycle Parking

- The group discussed mopeds and motorcycles as a more environmentally-friendly option for downtown commuters.
- One participant said she had parked her moped downtown at bike hoops and had gotten a ticket for it. She noted that there is generally confusion about where mopeds and motorcycles can park and that this is a challenge.
- Nancy noted that this is a concern raised by others and that it will be discussed at the next Alternative Transportation Committee Meeting on February 14 at the DDA. The DDA has also discussed adding more bike hoops in the downtown and designating them as Moped parking.

2X Bus and express service

- One participant stated that the 2X bus has been a great new addition. One of his employees now gets to work a lot faster because of the 2X
- A suggestion was made to create an express bus service from Ypsilanti to Ann Arbor. Nancy noted that the challenge to creating this type of service is that the AATA is funded by a millage from Ann Arbor taxpayers. So any service that is outside of the City of Ann Arbor has to be paid by the City or Township where the service is located. Ypsilanti would need to pay more money to the AATA in order to think about creating an express service from Ypsilanti to Ann Arbor. Until other funding sources are created, it will be hard to create a bus service from Ypsilanti to Ann Arbor.

Challenges to and Benefits of alternative transportation

- One participant noted that a big challenge to getting employees to use alternative modes is that employees want the convenience of driving their own car.
- Another issue is that downtown employees don't necessarily have access to success stories about people who have changed modes and like it. This would be helpful.
- The group discussed some of the benefits of alternative transportation.
 - One benefit is that you really get to know people when you vanpool with them.
 - Since options like vanpooling and buses are on a schedule, people will get to work on time, which is a good benefit to the employer.
 - Another benefit is the sense of community you get when you take the bus or carpool/vanpool.
- One challenge that relates to the benefits is that people can be lazier when they have their own car. They don't have to worry about keeping their car clean or getting out the door at a certain time.
 - Ed from Pure Visibility said he can be lazy and ride the bus.

Event Carpooling

- Ed from Pure Visibility discussed another carpooling option for employees, which is setting up carpools to go to the events.
 - Goloco.org is an online service (which is also a Facebook Application) that can help employees connect with one another to form carpools for events.
 - Another option is to just email employees you know are going to the same event and set up a carpool together.

Michigan Flyer

- Participants discussed Michigan Flyer as a good option for getting to the airport and possibly getting to Lansing.
- The cost is \$15 one way
- One participant noted that Michigan Flyer needs to expand their hours. They do not run very late in the evening.

Encouraging Employees to use alternative transportation

- One suggestion for encouraging more employees to use alternative transportation is to show people like them who ride the bus.
- Perhaps have these individuals at presentations to work sites so they can share their story and motivate others to try a new mode.
- This could even be done with a video that could be shown at presentations.
- Another way to encourage employees is to more readily tie the cost of parking to their choices. If it doesn't cost that much to pay for parking, then employees are less motivated to seek out alternatives. If they are given money and then told that they can choose to spend the money on parking or spend it on another mode and still have money left over, this might be a good motivator.
- Another good way to encourage employees to use alternative modes is to have management provide some endorsement of alternative transportation. What if management gave up their parking space for a month to try alternative transportation? This would send a powerful message to employees.