

Changing Commuter Behavior

How to increase participation in your
commute trip reduction program

Fall 2023



By the end of this training...

- Understand what barriers and cognitive biases contribute to commuters choosing SOVs for their commute
- Identify opportunities to change commuter behavior
- Learn what elements belong in a successful incentive program
- Understand the Easy, Attractive, Social, Timely (EAST) model for incentives
- Understand the Transtheoretical Model of Change



Reasons commuters prefer SOV trips

- Many **cognitive biases** contribute to commuting choice
 - Cognitive biases can be both beneficial and detrimental
- Those who already want to try alternate commute methods may face **barriers**



Identifying barriers – status quo bias

- **Status quo bias** – preferring the current state of affairs over change
- Default options:
 - Driving alone to work
 - Sitting in traffic
 - Paying for parking
 - Expanding budget for increasing fuel costs



Identifying barriers – information

- The **cognitive load** it takes to plan a trip may be overwhelming
- **Ambiguity aversion:** Commuters may fear the uncertainty of riding the bus
 - What will happen if the bus is late?
 - What if I miss my stop?
 - What if I take the wrong bus?



Identifying barriers - information

- **Availability bias:** the recency and vividness of *uncommon* events may make riding the bus appear dangerous
- In reality, the American Public Transportation Association found that using public transit is 10 times safer than traveling by vehicle



Identifying barriers – making habits

- **Sunk cost fallacy:** A phenomenon where a person is reluctant to abandon a strategy or course of action because they have invested heavily in it, even when abandonment would be more beneficial
- But when we do the mental accounting...



Identifying barriers – making habits

- **Mental accounting:** I could take the bus to work for free, but I drive alone to work because I should use the car I own (even though gas and car maintenance is increasingly expensive).
 - At \$5.50/gallon, you're spending \$264+ on gas monthly
 - An ET monthly pass is \$72



Barriers and solutions: identity

Personal identity can play a role as both a barrier and a solution:



Barriers and solutions: loss aversion

Loss aversion can be both a barrier and a solution:

- What do I lose by changing my commute method?
 - Morning routine changes
 - Travel route changes
 - Different set of expectations/obstacles



Barriers and solutions: loss aversion

Loss aversion can be both a barrier and a solution:

- What am I losing with my current commute method?
 - Mental sanity spent in traffic
 - Money spent on car maintenance
 - Time that could be spent doing other activities
 - Employer provided commuter benefits



Solutions to barriers – reduce ambiguity

- Promote the benefits of **alternative transportation options**
- Educate commuters about the **Guaranteed Ride Home** program
- Show commuters how to **plan their trips** to take transit to your worksite
 - Everett Transit has trip planning services available at (425) 257-7777
- Share **bike maps** for safe routes
- Highlight your CTR program during **new hire orientations**



Solutions to barriers – fresh start effect

Habit disruption can provide an opportunity for commuters to try something new- riding their bike, taking the bus, walking everyday.

New Year, New Me!



Solutions to barriers – personalization

- What options would be more feasible and exciting for your worksite?
 - Consider location and employee commute distances
- Support employees as they explore different transportation options
 - Help them plan a route
 - Provide recommendations for bike shops



Solutions to barriers – framing

Biking to work may take longer, but at least you get your daily exercise out of the way!



Your bus commute may be a little longer than by car, but you can work on your goal to read more!



Solutions to barriers – commitment

Get commuters to **commit** to trying alternate commute modes

- Champion the cause
- Model commitment yourself
- Listen for feedback



Designing a successful incentive program: The EAST Model

Easy – Reduce the ‘hassle factor’ of taking up a service by setting an option as a default and simplifying messages.

Attractive – Attract attention with images, color, or personalization. Design rewards and sanctions for maximum effect.

Social – Showcase people who perform the desired behavior. Use the power of networks. Encourage people to make a commitment to others.

Timely – Prompt people when they are likely to be most responsive. Consider immediate costs and benefits.



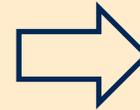
How people change: The Transtheoretical Model of Change

1. **Precontemplation** – no awareness of alternate commuting options
2. **Contemplation** – awareness and desire for use of alternate commuting options in the near future
3. **Preparation** – planning to take action and implement new commute mode
4. **Action** – practicing desired behavior for a short period of time
5. **Maintenance** – sustained and continued use of alternate commuting modes



Conclusion

What can you do to shift the narrative for alternative transportation methods?



References

- [EAST Four simple ways to apply behavioral insights](#)
- [Sunk Cost Fallacy: Not Quitting When It's the Most Rational Thing To Do](#)
- [Family Safety: Public Transportation is 10 times safer than traveling by car](#)
- [Breaking Bias Public Transport](#)
- [Family Biking: What is Car Culture and how does it affect us?](#)
- [18 Cognitive Bias Examples Show Why Mental Mistakes Get Made](#)



Thank you!



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This Commute Trip Reduction Program brought to you by a partnership between WSDOT and Everett Transit.