

5.6 TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The region's Transportation Options (TO) program is an activity of Rogue Valley Transportation District. The goal is to reduce Single-Occupant-Vehicle (SOV) trips and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by encouraging use of other modes. It seeks to achieve these changes through better non-SOV facilities and educational programs to make the use of these modes more attractive than driving alone. TO therefore includes ride-sharing, trip reduction and also transit, cycling and walking. TO is important because of the lack of adequate funds and space to maintain and expand road infrastructure nationwide. The traffic capacity of existing roads is quickly filling up and the auto encourages sprawl that requires extra facilities and more VMT per household. The automobile is the largest producer of harmful emissions, and the largest consumer of petroleum-based fuels. TO can benefit society at a very reasonable cost compared to the cost of continuing on an SOV-focused system.

State Requirements for TO measures are based in the Oregon Highway Plan's Goal 4: "To optimize the overall efficiency and utility of the state highway system through the use of alternative modes and travel demand strategies."

Urban areas with populations over 25,000 are required by the Oregon Transportation Planning Rule to address Transportation Options in their Transportation System Plans. For these reasons, TO strategies are an integral part of the transportation planning being pursued in the Rogue Valley's Regional Transportation Plan. It is among the policy strategies in RTP Goal 6, which calls for using a variety of strategies to reduce reliance on single-occupant vehicles.



TO'S PURPOSE

The purpose of TO is to reduce the number of single-occupant vehicles using the road system while offering travel options. TO employs a variety of improvements – both structural changes such as parking areas for carpoolers, and bike lanes, as well as policy initiatives such as staggered work schedules in order to increase the capacity of the transportation system without the expense and inconvenience of major highway expansion. If implemented on an area-wide basis and actively supported by agencies, businesses, and residents, TO strategies may be able to reduce or delay the need for street improvements, save travelers some money, reduce energy consumption and improve air quality.

These benefits become increasingly important as the region continues to develop and both the land and the funding for roadway construction grow scarcer. The Federal Highway Administration predicts that strategies to manage demand will be more critical to transportation operations than strategies to increase capacity (supply) of facilities. The inability to easily and quickly add new infrastructure, coupled with the growth in passenger and freight travel, are forcing metropolitan areas to pay more attention to managing demands.

HOW TO WORKS

The current transportation system in much of the US is built around the automobile with wide streets, high speeds, sprawling development, and a lack of pedestrian, bicycling and transit-supporting infrastructure. TO seeks to revitalize urban centers and assist rural areas to become friendlier to the pedestrian and bicyclist, making the auto less attractive. TO often relies on both incentives, such as bus pass programs, and disincentives such as SOV parking surcharges. The RVMPO Policy Committee has expressed a preference for incentives rather than disincentives. Efforts have been made to encourage major trip generators such as universities and major employers to take the initiative in developing TO programs. Experience elsewhere, however, indicates that employers need encouragement and incentives to adopt TO measures affecting the work commute – a major target of TO programs.

Stakeholders in the transportation system may not see the true costs of an auto based society and observe many actions resulting in the majority of transportation funding being dedicated toward expanding and improving the road system.

The affected public needs to continue efforts to mobilize their elected officials to provide adequate transportation facilities and services for pedestrians, cyclists and transit service. Stakeholders also need to become part of a critical mass to show that non-SOV modes have interest, feasibility and merit.

An illustration of a comprehensive TO approach comes from Ashland, where an examination of long-term growth projections and travel demand led to a determination that an area-wide TO policy, combined with a set of Transportation System Management (TSM) measures (TSM is discussed in Chapter 5.1), would yield an overall street system that operates within capacity. TO measures considered in Ashland's analysis included:

1. Improved pedestrian and bicycle system connectivity, access and circulation;
2. Enhanced transit coverage and service;
3. Employer-based transit subsidy (e.g. university student pass program).

TO strategies are aimed at minimizing SOV travel or encouraging travel by a mode other than a single-occupant automobile. A community or an employer could take a number of approaches to accomplish this. First, a community could attempt to decrease peak demand, either by shifting person-trips from the peak hour of demand, or by eliminating person-trips. (Person-trips represent the number of trips made by an individual, while vehicle trips account for multiple person trips depending

upon the number of people traveling in the vehicle.) Second, for the person-trips that are necessary during the peak hours of demand, a community may encourage alternatives to single-occupant vehicles (SOVs).

There is a difference between TO outreach strategies for the employers and for the public. Employers can undertake a variety of marketing or promotional activities to support their employees not using a SOV, such as flyers, trip-reduction programs, incentives, and using the other modes themselves as a role model.

By contrast, not being organized around a workplace, the general population needs to be attracted into non-SOV travel with public outreach through special events such as Car Free Day. They can also take advantage of transportation-efficient mortgages, the real estate profit of having greenways nearby, and feeling secure about their kids walking to school on a sidewalk. Reaching this population relies on general marketing such as brochures, commercials, etc. and being available to be a personal consultant if needed.

Bicycling and walking options are most applicable for short trips, while ridesharing and transit may be preferable for intermediate and long trips. Telework may be used as a trip alternative regardless of the distance. Finally, a community may reduce the demand on its surface transportation system by decreasing the distances traveled by vehicle trips. Some methods for reducing trip lengths include transit-oriented designs and compact, mixed-use developments. There is an important inter-relationship between the transportation options and land use.

TO EXAMPLES

The following are examples of policies and programs that can support TO.

Alternative Work Arrangements – Local governments and major employers (greater than 50 employees) encourage work arrangements providing an alternative to the 8-to-5 work schedule. These arrangements may include employee flextime programs, staggered work hours and compressed work weeks.

Employee Flex-Time Programs – One opportunity employers have to affect total trip demand is through influencing their own employees' peak versus off-peak travel behavior. A flexible schedule may allow employees to match their work hours with transit schedules, make carpool arrangements, or merely avoid peak congestion times. Active promotion of alternative schedules might slightly decrease total peak hour traffic. Flextime is most useful in offices, particularly for administrative and information workers. It may not be as applicable for non-office employers since their employees often have to work hours that are not during the peak hour of traffic demand anyway (e.g., retail employers), or because their work requires continuous communication between workers. In addition, flextime may be difficult for small employers to implement.

Staggered Work Hours – Staggered work hours is a policy of established starting and finishing times for different groups of employees. Unlike flextime, the employer,

not the employee, determines the staggered work hours. Like flextime, this tool has greater applicability to employees of large offices, since many non-office employees already work staggered work hours, or work in an interdependent manner. Currently, some metropolitan area employers have staggered work hours due to the nature of their business. To have a significant impact on peak period traffic, however, a change in work hours would need to be much more widespread than it is today.

Government agencies could take a lead by establishing a standard work schedule that differs from the typical 8 a.m.-5 p.m. schedule. For example, employees can be encouraged to work a 7-to-4 or 9-to-6 day work schedule. This is often done for the street and parks crews in public works situations because of summer hours and weather conditions. It might also be established for other employees although some agencies and local governments have encountered opposition from employee groups claiming they should have additional compensation for unusual work hours. Staggered work hours have to be considered in light of the need to have service desk hours that meet the needs of residents, but could actually increase the opportunities for resident contact.

Compressed Work Week – Compressed workweeks involve employees working fewer days and more hours per day. One common form of this policy is the 4-day/40-hour week where the employee works four 10-hour days. A second common form is the 9-day/80 hour schedule, in which the employee works 9 days and 80 hours over a two-week period. With the 4/40 schedule, the employee gets one business day off each week; with the 9/80 schedule, the employee gets one business day off each two weeks.

Because of the extended hours, both policies usually shift at least one leg of a work trip per working day (either the arriving or departing leg) out of the peak hours. The 4/40 policy additionally eliminates an entire work trip every five business days (1/5 of the work trips). The 9/80 policy eliminates an entire work trip every 10 business days (1/10 of the work trips). One of the problems with a compressed work schedule is the potential for increases in non-work trips during the "off day." Increases in non-work travel may offset reductions in work related driving. Such trips, however, are often taken during non-peak periods and can be expected to provide benefits by reducing peak hour congestion and by improving air quality.

Telecommuting – Telecommuting is another way employers can reduce total trip demand. Telecommuting or telework is work done away from the worksite with the assistance of telecommunications technologies, serving to reduce trips to and from the worksite. Phones, pagers, faxes, emails, computers, and the Internet all are telework tools. Telecommuting for one or two days per week could save significant trip miles and still allow the benefits of working at the central work site. Telecommuting arrangements also may involve more than one employee, e.g., when an employer provides a satellite work center connected to the principal work center. Another telecommuting alternative is a neighborhood work center operated by more than one employer, or by an agency. Recent advances in communications technology should greatly enhance telecommuting options.

Due to the distance and volume of trips between Medford and Ashland, trips between these two cities may be the easiest to replace with telecommuting. Southern Oregon University in Ashland would be a logical site for a telecommuting center if sufficient demand exists among Medford employers. Similarly, Rogue Community College might be able to service telecommute trips between Grants Pass and Medford.

Ridesharing – Ridesharing includes two principal categories: carpooling and vanpooling. Carpooling uses an employee’s private vehicle to carry other people to work or other destination, either by using one car and sharing expenses, or by rotating driving responsibilities and vehicles. Vanpooling involves the use of a passenger van consistently driven by one or more of the participating employees, with the costs partially paid by the other riders through monthly fares. A common feature of vanpooling is that the van is often owned by the employer, a public agency (such as a transit district), or a private, non-profit corporation set up for that purpose. Otherwise a lease agreement can be set up.



Ridesharing can be greatly influenced by special treatment at the work place. Participation can be increased by employer actions that make ridesharing more convenient, such as providing guaranteed ride home services, preferential car/vanpool parking, and area-wide and employer-based commuter matching services.

Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) – A guaranteed ride home often makes ridesharing more attractive. Surveys have shown that many employees drive to work because they feel they need their automobile during the day or because they may work late. In some cases, they need their automobile for work trips or errands or want it available for emergencies. Therefore, provision of daytime and emergency transportation, by allowing use of a company vehicle or employer-sponsored free taxi, can encourage ridesharing. RVTD began a GRH program in 2004 and it can be used by any employer that adopts TO strategies. The program is set up so that the employer must be the first responsible party for securing a ride home and if this is not an option RVTD’s Translink call service for the Valley Lift program will schedule a taxi for the employee at no charge to the employee.

Preferential Parking – Preferential carpool and vanpool parking is another simple, inexpensive way for an employer to encourage employees to rideshare by increasing the ease of access to the workplace. Ideally preferential carpool and vanpool parking spaces are provided close to the building entrance to provide convenient access to the building, particularly during inclement weather conditions. Adequate enforcement strategies need to be in place so that the spaces are not filled with SOV.

Ride-matching – Commuter matching services, whether area-wide or employer-based, help commuters find others with similar locations and schedules. An employer-based matching service offers the advantage of a shared destination, but presents the disadvantage of limiting the pool of potential riders. A carpool matching service can be one-time or continuous. For the study area, the Rogue Valley Transportation District serves as the carpooling agency and performs a variety of services to support and encourage the use of carpools, including matching of potential riders. They lease a website created by the City of Portland (www.CarpoolMatchNW.org) and offered for free to participating counties.

Support for TO – Oregon State, County and City policies and goals include provisions to embrace TO measures. Health officials, real estate professionals, insurance companies, credit agencies, environmental stewards, people under the age of 16, people with disabilities, low-income populations can all benefit from TO measures.

RVTD TO Program - RVTD has had a TO program in place since 1993. Current TO activities include: Alternative Transportation education programs that reach several thousand students during the school year are expanding to add a Senior Education program;



- Public outreach to promote TO and non-SOV transportation modes; Employer bus-pass programs;
- Free assistance with carpools, vanpools, Business Energy Tax Credits, telework, and trip-reduction incentives;
- Free employer trip-reduction analysis;
- On site transportation fairs for employers;

- Distribution of free materials in the community such as pedestrian and cycling reflectors, brochures, water bottles, bicycle helmets;
- Government outreach to educate officials about TO measures, attending meetings to promote the use of TO measures, and reviewing planning documents and site design for TO-supportive policies and infrastructure;
- Supporting parking construction mitigation- reducing the need for parking expansion with TO measures;
- Bicycle parking review and site design;
- Trip Reduction Incentive Programs- Creating and assisting with building and maintaining a Trip Reduction program that tracks employees' trips and rewards those who use non-SOV modes;
- Coordination of events to raise awareness of efficient transportation such as Car Free Day, Reflect on Walking, Safe Routes to School; and
- Marketing of TO through general advertising in various media.

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ABOUT TO

Education and marketing are important parts of any TO program. It is possible for education by itself to be an incentive or disincentive that causes positive transportation behavior changes. Education and marketing complement any incentive/disincentive programs in place by increasing awareness and understanding of those programs. Education can be hands-on such as supporting a bus/bike-buddy program or it can be through traditional media such as newspaper, radio and TV advertisement, flyers and brochures, transportation exhibits, attending public meetings and giving testimony to public officials. Education that would promote using alternative modes of transportation would consist of highlighting the health and economic benefits, the environmental benefits as well as the facilities that a person can use. Marketing that would make driving a car less attractive could show the true cost of owning a car, the environmental impact, how it increases sprawl and dependence on foreign oil, to name a few. Although education and marketing are basic building blocks to a successful program they can only supply so much initiative for using alternative transportation. An example would be that many people know what times to catch a bus and where the bus stop is from successful education and marketing but they cannot use it because their work schedule runs after service hours, or possibly there is not connected sidewalk access from their work to the bus stop and they feel unsafe.

FACILITY AND SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

TO addresses travel behavior – the choices people make – and seeks to establish conditions under which people will change a long-established habit of driving themselves to destinations. Providing the right kinds of facilities and services are crucial to the success of many of the policy changes and programs described in the preceding section. Several of those strategies are closely tied to land use planning and the provision of adequate pedestrian/bicycle facilities and transit services, and modifying parking requirements. Another example is that TO could include constructing of High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) or “diamond” lanes or an exclusive busway.

Specific actions related to parking are included in the Parking Chapter. Strategies aimed at improving pedestrian and bicycle facilities are discussed separately in the Bicycle and Pedestrian chapter. Transit service improvements are discussed in the Transit System Chapter. One key to the success of several TO strategies is establishment of park-and-ride facilities. These facilities increase efficiency of the transportation system, reduce energy consumption and provide options to the single-occupant vehicle trip. Park-and-ride facilities increase the effectiveness of transit service by expanding the area from which a transit draws riders. Patrons living beyond walking distance of an established transit stop can drive or bike to the park-and-ride and use transit or meet carpool partners, instead of driving alone or cycling long distances to their destination. Having free easy-to-access, secure and safe, easy to understand layouts, and direct pedestrian and bicyclist connections make the use of park-and-ride lots desirable.

Park-and-rides are frequently located near freeway interchanges or at transit stations and may be either shared-use, such as at a church or Transit Oriented Development (TOD) center, or exclusive-use. Shared-use facilities are generally

designated and maintained through agreements reached between the local transit operator and nearby businesses, churches, or other entities.

The expansion of transit is a key TO strategy element; however, RVTD service expansion is limited by funding. Nonetheless, strong public support for expanded bus service (nights, weekends, greater frequency, and expanded routes) is high.

Public opinion also has indicated that SOV use continues to be the desirable option at least in part because of the relative lack of serious highway congestion and safety problems in the region. In short, driving isn't difficult enough to force people to look for alternatives. While that attitude speaks well of our roads, it indicates that success with TO measures will be difficult. A challenge for the region in the short-term will be to set the conditions in place now to support greater transit use in the future – when more drivers will be looking for easier traveling alternatives. Those conditions include reserving space for High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV), Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) or carpool lanes, and park-and-ride areas, as well as securing funds to expand transit service for those who need it.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

TO relies on efficient land use planning, education, and making the use of walking, cycling, carpooling and transit attractive. The 25-year outlook for TO should focus on how the cities in the RVMPO can begin having incentives for developers to make compact development accessible for pedestrians and bicyclists, and on how education can promote the use of these facilities. By engaging in these activities driving a car will become less and less attractive as an option. Transit is only one component of TO; pedestrians and cyclists need to be part of the program also.

Home-to-work and return trips comprise about one-fifth of total daily trips, and about half of the peak period traffic. Although all other types of trips are potential targets for TO alternatives, the effect is likely to be considerably less because the trips are not as regularly scheduled (e.g., shopping or business trips), often already have a higher vehicle occupancy (e.g., school trips), and sometimes involve the transfer of goods (e.g., shopping trips). Therefore, TO strategies recommended for the metropolitan area focus primarily on home-to-work and return trips. Strategies include establishing alternative work arrangements, promoting telecommuting and ridesharing, and, possibly, adopting a trip reduction ordinance.

Informal public survey activities have shown that transit could become an alternative to driving to and from work, easing the most serious of the region's traffic congestion problems if transit service were improved in key areas. These improvements include greater bus frequency, availability of evening service, and availability of park-and-ride facilities, which also would support carpooling. As the region grows, these improvements will become more economically viable.

POLICY ISSUES AND ACTIONS

There are several actions that can be taken to further the aims of TO. They include:

- Identifying, encouraging and assisting role models who use alternative transportation. This can be done through awards, incentives and events.
- Encouraging developers to build high-density, multi-use buildings.
- Adopting maximum parking space requirements and an option to decrease parking further with the use of TO measures such as having attractive bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and carpool spaces within ¼ mile of transit service.
- Partnering with city government to encourage employers with more than 50 employees to adopt TO strategies.
- Prioritizing all city and county TSP bicycle and pedestrian construction projects to be completed in the earlier phases of this Plan.
- Encouraging developments with a large footprint to have a bicycle and pedestrian circulation plan. Securing funding for street aesthetics such as street furniture, landscaping, lighting, and creating dispersed tiny public places.
- Supporting the use of transit among major employers by encouraging the purchase of individual or subsidized group transit passes, having a bus shelter added nearby or other actions to reduce commuting trips;
- Encouraging development of discount transit fare programs and shuttle services by event sponsors; and
- Engaging in public, government and employer outreach to raise awareness about the use of TO strategies, including actively marketing to groups that have the greatest potential for reducing SOV trips.

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