Ridesharing: Private and Public Roles and Responsibilities

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One of the most controversial and difficult issues facing ridesharing in the 1980s is the question of the relative roles and responsibilities of the private and public sectors in the delivery of ridesharing services. This topic is not new. The genesis of tension that has developed in the ridesharing community is traceable to the very beginning of the current interest in ridesharing services following the Arab oil embargo of 1973 when private firms started vanpooling and public agencies started matching people. This topic is also very timely given the national debate surrounding delivery of many public services and questions about a possible shift in the public role as a consequence of the 1980 election.

The discussion about roles and responsiblities is important. A clear definition and understanding of the specific roles for both the public and private sectors and for organizations within them constitute a major portion of the policy and institutional foundation on which a ridesharing program rests. Ideally, this understanding challenges specific organizations to take specific actions for ridesharing. It also does the opposite by indicating what should not be done by some organizations or only in part by other organizations. A clearly understood framework or foundation further gives direction to individuals working in ridesharing. It provides some of the performance objectives for their job and provides some of the key expectations for these programs. It also gives consumers and suppliers of ridesharing services clear direction on where to go to buy and sell what they need.

An acceptable framework for ridesharing services and a clear definition and understanding of the roles of the public and private sectors will be extremely important to the future success of ridesharing and its ability to realize its potential.

Before discussing these questions it is helpful to look back and attempt a description of who did what in the past.

WHO DID WHAT IN THE PAST?

The marketplace satisfied the demand for ridesharing services from the end of World War II until the middle of the 1970s. Essentially, people, without assistance, got together to form and operate their own carpools or individuals took mass transit if service was convenient. The automobiles used for carpooling were individually owned and operated. Almost all parking spaces or facilities at home or work were also privately owned and managed. The public role was to build and maintain the roads and a few downtown parking facilities and to regulate their use. They also regulated mass transit until the public purchased and began to operate mass transit systems.

The proportion who rode to work rather than drove alone during this period declined in the face of a tremendous growth in both the number of automobiles per household and an increase in the number and percentage who were driving alone. The move to suburbia of homes and jobs, the extraordinary increase in personal disposable incomes that enabled purchase of additional automobiles per family, and additional new street and highway capacity resulted in a substantial decline in mass transit ridership. Little is known about the proportion of people who carpooled during this period. However, it is reasonable to assume that, similar to mass transit, the high level of carpooling to work during World War II dropped off during the 1950s and 1960s.

As ridesharing became more organized in the 1970s and new products such as vanpooling appeared, a host of ridesharing providers emerged.

Employers began to provide some organized ridesharing services in the mid-1970s with the advent of employer-sponsored vanpooling and active matching services. Some of the programs from this early stage of current ridesharing include those at 3M, TVA, Conoco, Prudential, Gulf, and state employee programs in Michigan and Minnesota. The Arab oil embargo in 1973 stimulated additional interest in efforts to organize carpools. Most of these employer efforts consisted of posting ads on bulletin boards or informal searches of employee files for individuals who might be able to ride together. In a few instances, however, more formally organized efforts at bringing employees together through manual matching or even automated programs began to appear.

The 1973 oil embargo also spurred some states and local units of government--with the encouragement of 90 percent federal funding--to provide matching services for more than just their employees. These agencies ranged from highway departments to state departments of transportation in Michigan, Minnesota, and Massachusetts; city departments in Seattle and Dallas; regional transit authorities (RTAs) in Houston, Portland, Norfolk, Omaha, and Minneapolis-St. Paul; and planning agencies in Washington, D.C., and Denver.

Public and private nonprofit organizations also began to appear in a few areas as the preferred way of organizing and delivering these emerging ridesharing services. Most notably these are found in California in Commuter Computer of Los Angeles and San Diego, and later with RIDES for the Bay Area in San Francisco, and the recent Greater Hartford Ridesharing Corporation.

During this period of reawakening, the federal government began to play an increasingly supportive and active role in ridesharing. The 1974 Energy Emergency Act authorized the use of 90 percent of federal funds from urban aid for a variety of ridesharing activities by state, regional, and local units of government. Also, a set of transportation planning and programming concepts, called transportation system management, called for increased ef-

ficiency in the use of existing facilities. A variety of ridesharing services and support facilities such as high-occupancy-vehicle lanes were identified as candidates for this program. The federal government also invested in the development of some ridesharing technology including computer matching, marketing to large employers and in multiemployer locations, and alternative delivery systems through its systems and research programs. The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) encouraged ridesharing in publications on various topics such as how to set up a ridesharing or vanpooling program or how to handle matching. DOT also assisted with focusing attention on some critical issues in two workshops in Williamsburg and disseminated information at conferences it sponsored in Houston, Baltimore, and San Francisco. National promotional campaigns that used media public service ads were also sponsored to increase awareness.

The federal government tried to learn more about ridesharing and promoted it by funding and evaluating a few major ridesharing demonstrations, most notably in Knoxville, San Francisco-Golden Gate, Twin Cities, and Norfolk, and by studies from universities and consultants on a number of issues. These demonstrations and other efforts aided in removing some obstacles to third-party vanpool operations, eliminated possible regulation of vanpooling, and provided much information about the markets for ridesharing services. They also, however, often raised questions about who should operate these programs, ways to organize and manage them, and their cost-effectiveness.

Finally, concerned about energy supplies and cognizant of the substantial contribution ridesharing could make to a national conservation program, President Carter appointed a task force in 1979 to help with promoting ridesharing, to advise on the elimination of barriers, and to suggest incentives that would further increase ridesharing.

In summary, ridesharing over the past 35 years declined, stabilized, and possibly began to increase in the last 2-4 years. Initially, and to a great degree today, ridesharing occurs because of actions by individuals rather than employers or public agencies. The 1970s, however, saw the rebirth of more formally organized ridesharing as we know it. These past eight years represent almost a decade of testing and experimenting, developing definitions, learning about products and markets for them, as well as beginning work on major challenges such as how to get 75 percent of the work force who work for small employers into ridesharing. In many ways ridesharing has begun to be seen as a field of work. Its importance is recognized in some national legislation and expressed in the programs of an increasing number of employers.

We are beginning to see a definition of ridesharing emerge--one that revolves around transportation by groups of people going to and from work most often in carpools, on public transit, and in vanpools, but also in shared-ride taxicabs and jitneys. It is concerned with the movement of people, not the vehicles they use or types of facilities on which they travel. This broad definition, however, causes tension, for example, in the treatment of mass transit and vanpools as equal partners and in the tough standards of ridership and vehicle occupancy by which program efforts are evaluated.

WHO IS DOING WHAT IN RIDESHARING NOW?

The most recent national work trip study (Selected Characteristics of Travel to Work in 20 Metropolitan Areas, U.S. Department of Commerce, Special Studies, No. 105, 1977, p. 23) concludes that 18 percent ride to work in carpools while 7 percent take mass transit and 72 percent drive alone. Today's level of ridesharing is the result of the efforts of numerous promoters, providers of services, and vendors of equipment and specific services. These providers or vendors include the following:

1. Individuals who purchase or lease their own van or make their own carpool arrangements. These owner-operators account for the bulk of carpools--far more than any other method of formation in spite of increasing numbers of employer and public organizational efforts. There is also some evidence that individual owner-operator vanpools are significant and is a growing way of obtaining this service.
2. Many employers are providers of one, a few, or a broad range of ridesharing services for their own employees. These services may include carpool matching, organization of groups into vanpools, purchase and ownership of a fleet of vehicles for vanpooling, the lease of discounted vehicles and insurance for carpooling and vanpooling, operation or contract of a company-sponsored bus service, partial payment for subscription bus service, payroll deduction of bus passes, and actual transportation financial allowances for employees who ride to work or drive others to work. The extent of these efforts can be impressive as is the overall level of ridesharing reported by firms with extensive programs.
3. An increased number of public and quasi-public agencies provide ridesharing services to others including employers, employees, and the general public. These programs are sponsored by state departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), cities, and by nonprofit organizations in which public agencies are members. RTAs also belong to this group; however, they are unique as they already operate a large service--mass transit. The range of services provided by this diverse group of public agencies also varies considerably. They are typified, however, by pricing policies that supply services such as matching at no cost to the customer or at less than full cost such as with vanpooling and mass transit. Tax-financed funding, for example, pays the administrative and marketing costs of many of these ridesharing programs or the subsidies to cover transit deficits.
4. A number of private vendors supply specific services such as matching, vanpooling, marketing materials, sales training, various types of vehicles, and general consulting. The buyers of these services are typically employers or public/semipublic agencies.

As the number of providers of ridesharing programs and vendors of ridesharing services increases, many of them bump into each other as they pursue the marketplace. Some public and private providers may actually compete with each other for customers. In a few cases there is also competition between the ridesharing services themselves given that vanpoolers are frequently former carpoolers and occasionally former bus riders.

Overall, there is considerable confusion about what is or should be the role of the public and private sectors. For example, some employers have purchased and operated a vanpool program for their employees in communities where a public agency is beginning to promote its ridesharing program and its third-party vanpool operation. These employers question whether they should abandon their vanpool program and transfer all the participants to the public agency program since it is free. Other employers who have had automated matching programs for

their employees question what they should do when asked to turn over their files to a newly developing public agency ridesharing program.

Within the public sector there is also confusion and competition between agencies over specific roles in delivery of ridesharing programs. Differences exist, for example, between a department of transportation, the regional planning agency, an RTA, and a group of cities over who should plan and develop the ridesharing program, who should operate it, and what rules will prevail.

The lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities is further compounded by the confusion surrounding the basic ridesharing strategies or lack of them by some agencies in the public sector, private employers with programs, and ridesharing vendors. The lack of clear direction further contributes to conflict and damages ridesharing program results. This is unfortunate as most ridesharing program efforts to date (apart from some major employer efforts) have produced small changes in vehicle occupancy. New strategies to produce better results and agreement about the basic direction are what is needed, not struggles and bickering over program responsibilities and credits.

WHO SHOULD DO WHAT IN RIDESHARING IN THE FUTURE?

The future for ridesharing looks good in the 1980s. This forecast, however, assumes that

1. The price of fuel will continue to escalate faster than the increase in disposable income. Supply uncertainty and the need to reduce dependence on foreign supplies will also continue;
2. The transportation portion of household budgets will remain constant or increase as it did for part of 1979 and 1980; and
3. The labor supply in many metropolitan areas and in rural reas will get tighter due to declining birth rates, thus encouraging firms to use ridesharing for recruitment or employee retention.

While the future for ridesharing looks bright, this conclusion rests heavily on the recent observation that ridesharing increases when the cost of gasoline rises faster than incomes. This relationship occurs regardless of whether or not ridesharing programs are established.

Other assumptions about the 1980s need to be further explored before it is possible to suggest what might be the relative roles of the public and private sectors in the delivery of ridesharing. Chief among these is the conclusion that public resources for ridesharing are not likely to increase much during the 1980s. The number of public dollars will be more limited because of

1. Resistance to general tax increases;
2. A shift of public resources from operating programs into capital formation primarily for the private sector to increase productivity and facility replacement;
3. Transportation funding will likely remain heavily dependent on user revenues. This will particularly occur during the next few years when general fund expenditures for transportation are reduced and in spite of growing resistance to increases in user fees;
4. Federal highway funds will continue to be spent primarily on capital improvements, although they will increasingly be used for maintenance or rebuilding rather than new construction. Resistance to funding of noncapital and operating type projects such as ridesharing and public transit from these funds will continue; and
5. User fees collected from the mass transit fareboxes will increase but continue to fall far short of paying all the transit costs let alone providing funds for other ridesharing services such as carpooling and vanpooling. If deficits continue to increase, it is very possible public subsidies will not keep up and mass transit service will be cut.

Public-Sector Uncertainties

The public sector is not sure what its role in ridesharing should be in the future, where it fits in, what kind of return it can obtain from a major investment in this service, or the extent to which it should directly deliver these services if either employers or private-sector vendors are interested in doing the job.

The federal government has traditionally seen itself as funding and giving direction to transportation by setting standards for and investing in capital facilities and vehicles, e.g., highway, traffic signals, locks, airports, ships, buses, and subways. In a few cases, such as waterways, the federal role was to both build and operate these facilities at little or no cost to the users. Similarly, in recent years the federal government began to substantially pick up part of the operating deficits of public transit through Section 5 general funds. However, the construction, maintenance, and operation of highways are largely viewed as state responsibility while the federal government shares in funding their construction. The private role was to supply, maintain, and shelter vehicles and to fill them with passengers or goods.

This traditional arrangement poses some problems for ridesharing that in its marketing-matching activities tends to have a more operational character. Its focus is on encouraging the software movement of people rather than on hardware, such as vehicles or facilities, that are capital in nature. With ridesharing compared with air travel, for example, we are talking more about an airline-reservation-type service that is managed and provided by private air carriers or private brokers, rather than about building and maintaining airport runways or operating traffic controls, which are services traditionally provided by the public sector.

These traditional roles are slowly changing. However, these changes often appear to reaffirm traditional roles and categories rather than broaden the roles to include new programs and services. For example, a recent proposal from Secretary of Transportation Drew Lewis appears to be silent on ridesharing yet calls for phasing out operating subsidies for transit and for reductions in subsidies for waterways as user taxes are increased. It also calls for turning off federal urban aid and secondary funds, primary sources of funding for public agency ridesharing programs.

In the recent past it appeared that the federal government favored ridesharing because of its energy conservation and transportation management benefits. But it was not sure what federal action would be most helpful. Should the federal government market and sell ridesharing to larger employers? promote ridesharing with a major ad campaign? collect and disseminate information? provide technical assistance teams? train persons for ridesharing responsibilities? provide incentives for individuals and employers to get into ridesharing? or provide a lot of money to state, regional, and local agencies to do the job? The current approach of the federal government is to do a little of all the above with the hope that, if ridesharing becomes more important in the future, it can have a signifi-

cant role and might better know what to do to be most effective.

Confusion about the public sector's role is equally perplexing at the level of the states, regions, and local units of government. There is no uniform pattern to the activities of state and local units of government throughout the country. Some states are doing nothing while others have almost total responsibility for ridesharing within their state and are indeed becoming the sole provider of these services. At the regional level, a few transit authorities have added ridesharing as one of their services. However, most transit authorities have not. A few MPOs have moved to develop and operate automated matching programs and to contract for delivery of vanpool services. Again, however, most MPOs have not done this. In a few cases, MPOs have incorporated policies that recognize and give prominence to ridesharing. Others in their policies say nothing. Finally, a few cities have begun to either provide and operate ridesharing services in their community or are cooperating substantially with local business organizations in putting together and operating a ridesharing program. Overall, in spite of the increase in the number of agencies and the number of public dollars spent on ridesharing at the state and local levels, there remains little unanimity about the respective roles of individual units of government in the delivery of ridesharing services.

Private-Sector Uncertainties

The private sector similarly is not sure what roles it might best play in ridesharing. The private sector handles the matching of people for various travel services such as the buses and airlines. It also insures people and firms against various risks and supplies many employee benefits. Some have suggested the private sector should also be brokering or selling rides for commuters and selling ridesharing as a form of insurance for emergencies or as an employee benefit. This would make ridesharing a service product of a business. One of the difficulties with this concept is that, while this brokering function might present some business opportunities, almost all the vehicles used for carpooling are owned by individuals rather than by a few firms. These individual carpool drivers often may not have the incentive to fill their car as firms would have to fill vehicles they own. In addition the rates charged for carpooling, if any, vary considerably as they result from personal negotiation that considers many variables. This lack of uniformity contributes to the difficulty of managing carpooling. Vanpools, however, have different characteristics that may make them more amenable to a business product model.

If ridesharing does not become a regular business, maybe it will be more like some social service where private employers join together, create nonprofit delivery organizations, and then assist with publicity, employee solicitation, management, and fund raising.

Finally, employers face a larger issue when discussing ridesharing than just who delivers which services. This issue speaks to their historic role and relationship with their employees. Traditionally, employers simply required that employees be at work at the appointed hour. Employees had the responsibility of getting to work on their own. With the advent of vanpooling and with some carpool assistance programs, however, a growing number of employers have decided to help their employees. Others are moving to do this to save parking costs or to ensure that employees get to work during an emergency. Some nagging questions remain, however: How much should employers do for their employees? To what extent do they have a responsibility for the home-to-work trip? and Should they attempt to help employees--particularly if in doing so it enables their own employees to more readily get to work?

Public-Private Partnership

In spite of many uncertainties there is a consensus that ridesharing is a good thing and that it should be encouraged and promoted. An increasing number of voices further suggests that the way to do this is by a public-private partnership. The partnership idea appears to provide some hope for certainty and for productivity and effectiveness at a time when very few know exactly what the private and public sectors should do. This idea is also a response to the recognition that public budgets are tight and declining and therefore the public sector may not be able to afford to be a prime actor in ridesharing. It also recognizes that ridesharing will not reach its potential without a joining of employer support and commitment with employer and public resources.

Yet, the critical question today is not whether a partnership is desirable but what are the terms of the partnership? The possibilities are many, each of them calling for different institutions, relationships, responsibilities, and expectations by the involved parties. The euphoria in discovering that partnership provides a means of resolving many questions, that it gives some comfort in uncertainty since the parties come together, and that it holds promise for clear direction is at best illusory. This euphoria quickly disappears with the realization that the tough work of defining the roles and responsibilities of the partners still lies ahead.

The most successful ridesharing programs not only supply a number of services, but more importantly are built on a continuing set of incentives that encourage the use of ridesharing and disincentives that discourage driving alone. These actions can be taken by employers, suppliers of services, or public authorities. In the larger context of managing transportation through ridesharing, these efforts may become much more important than who actually does the matching or the advertising or supplies the vehicles. Ridesharing may become a major way of increasing vehicle occupancy, thereby increasing the use of existing roadway capacity, of saving energy, and reducing pollution. However before this occurs there is a series of critical strategic issues that will heavily influence decisions about what is done by whom. These issues include the following:

1. Is ridesharing basically a public service that should be available to all at little or no cost? If so, it has the character of an essential public service provided by the public sector and readily available to all persons living or working in the territory served by the agency providing the service. To implement this service major appropriations of public funds will be needed. As an alternative, is ridesharing an employment-related service that also has some public benefits? In this case, it is not available to all but only to participating employers and employees--not necessarily to the general public. Here, employers are seen as the basic providers, but program costs may be shared by the employer, the employee, and the public.

2. If it is more appropriate for the private sector through employers, employer organizations, developers, or building owners to be primarily responsible for organizing and delivering ridesharing services, how can the public sector encourage them to do it?

3. What kind of incentives can the public sector

adopt that will substantially spur these groups into taking the desired action?

4. What kinds of incentives need to be provided for public and nonprofit employers who cannot respond, for example, to tax credit incentives?

5. What kinds of disincentives might be considered that will encourage employers to establish ridesharing programs? However, most disincentives will not be warmly received and may have a limited impact unless there is a severe emergency that compels action.

6. To what extent should incentives be directed to individuals who drive others to work or who ride to work compared with incentives directed to employers or disincentives for persons who drive alone?

7. To what extent can rules or regulations requiring consideration of ridesharing in public plans, zoning codes, and annual or long-range work programs for capital facilities be helpful to ridesharing?

8. Should incentives be provided by federal, state, and local units of government?

Many of these strategy issues deal fundamentally with how ridesharing can be most effectively increased. The strategic choice, for example, of an incentive approach to ridesharing rather than provision of a set of public services can have far-reaching impact. Both the set of subsequent issues and the kinds of decisions that need to be made will be quite different. The important thing to remember when sorting out these questions and finding solutions is to weigh each solution in light of its relative contribution toward increasing ridesharing. This objective measurement of ridesharing results needs to be the standard by which we determine and weigh the relative benefits of these alternatives.

Terms of the Partnership: Possible Models and Relationships

Before a working partnership can develop, alternative models and relationships should be explored. This partnership can mean fundamentally different roles for the parties and possibly substantially different results.

What does it mean for the public and private sectors to be in a partnership? Does it mean the private sector should simply cooperate with public agencies that provide ridesharing services by supplying them with applicants and occasionally publicizing the service? Does it mean that larger private (and public) employers beyond a certain size should provide ridesharing services for their own employees and then move to assist employees or nearby employers? In doing this, what information and what relationship should they develop with any public agency program, particularly for those employees they cannot directly serve? If the larger employers assume responsibility for their own employees and those of nearby employers, who should assist employees of smaller employers who are not close to large employers or not aided by these large employers? Does it mean employers in the private sector should join together and sponsor a private, nonprofit ridesharing organization? Should the public be invited to join as an employer? as a supplier of services? or a supplier of funds? Does it mean public agencies should provide all of the ridesharing services for all employers, employees, and the general public?

Each of these alternatives obviously calls for a different set of expectations from the parties, establishes different relationships, requires different procedures and sometimes the creation of different institutions. Each of them may be aided or never realized, depending on the basic approach and design of national program efforts.

The private sector can have a determinative influence on the direction of the partnership and the success of a public-agency-only approach by the initiatives it takes. If the private sector moves to organize the delivery of ridesharing services, or if major employers aggressively provide the services to their employees and further extend them to nonemployees, the major ridesharing organizational efforts will be within the private sector. Lacking this high level of commitment and activity by the private sector, the temptation exists to let the public sector do the job whether or not the job is one that the public sector can do well. However, there is serious question about whether the job will result in any significant ridesharing increases with the support and commitment. The selection of a model should depend not only on the local situation but respond to the question about how in-depth, sustained employer commitment to ridesharing is best obtained. Is this with a partnership in which ridesharing services are provided for them, with them, or by them?

Functional Analysis and Marketing and Operational Issues

Before deciding whether a ridesharing program should be built primarily by the public or private sector or by some combination of the two, it might be helpful to review a number of the program functions and determine which group can handle the job better or which sector possesses the needed skills. Some of the questions to be answered include:

1. Can the marketing-sales activity of a ridesharing program be done more effectively by the private or public sectors?

2. Should this marketing-sales activity be centralized within a state, region, local community, or within a work site and in the private or public sector? Or, instead, should this marketing activity be essentially decentralized to a local community or work-site organization and in the private or public sectors?

3. Which markets can and will the private sector best reach and serve? Which markets are better served by a joint public-private marketing effort? Which markets can the public sector either better or only serve?

4. Is the marketing activity so tied to the delivery of services in successful ridesharing programs that it must be provided by the same organization? Or, can marketing be performed, for example, by the public sector with services delivered by the private sector? Or, is the reverse better?

5. Is the matching function by its nature and available technology something that should be centralized to the most efficient or should it be decentralized within the state, region, or community to be more responsive to customer demands?

6. Is a centralized or decentralized matching service more able to respond in an energy or mass transit emergency?

7. If centralized, who should be responsible for this activity--a regional or state public agency, a consortium of employers, or a single employer?

8. If decentralized, who should be responsible--a city, county, employer organization, or single employer?

Influence of Decision Making on Partners

In setting up and operating a ridesharing program it

is desirable to know something about the marketplace, the customers, their current travel behavior, the cost of driving alone, and the cost of ridesharing alternatives. As these data are assembled, however, a number of policy questions arise relating to roles and the public and private sectors. These issues include

1. Should ridesharing services be integrated as part of a plan, and controlled in their delivery and selection, to assure that customers take the most appropriate service consistent with the plan? For example, if the plan calls for an individual to take mass transit rather than a more convenient vanpool, should the person be required to take the bus or be denied the vanpool service?
2. This integrated plan and controlled delivery system require at least a set of rules and some enforcement mechanism. It would probably have to be run by the public sector. Yet, which public agency should promulgate the plans and exercise these controls?
3. Should the selection of ridesharing service be left to the marketplace with customers deciding which service they want to take from a variety of vendors? This choice leaves the mix of forms of ridesharing to the marketplace. It would mean, for example, that, if a person could take a carpool or a bus to work but chooses the carpool, he or she would receive carpool assistance.

These questions primarily arise when alternative public-sector ridesharing delivery models, the membership of a joint private-public organization, or a joint organization to advise a public agency that is providing ridesharing services are discussed. Interest in limiting customer selection of ridesharing modes is voiced most often by those who supply or finance these services.

Public-Sector Agencies and Roles

Apart from the difficult questions about relative roles and responsibilities between the public and private sectors, an equally thorny set of issues is posed in looking at alternative public agencies for delivery and operation of a ridesharing program. There is general agreement that the public sector at all levels should support ridesharing in its transportation policies by taking steps that will encourage additional ridesharing such as developing preferential access to freeways, setting aside diamond lanes, and establishing high-occupancy-vehicle lanes. Additional work is also needed by local public agencies to make land use, zoning, and parking policies reflect support for ridesharing with changes that reward developers and parking operators when they incorporate ridesharing in their plans and activities.

The public sector clearly has important policy, facility, and development responsibilities for ridesharing. However, if the conclusion from the discussion about the private and public roles is that the public sector should provide and deliver some ridesharing services, then the question is, Which agencies should do it? Second, who can make this governmental decision? This is a classic intergovernmental problem.

There is no good reason, if ridesharing is an extremely desirable and attractive service, why every possible public agency should not seek to provide ridesharing service to the public. After all, it is a new and attractive service at a time when more traditional programs are often shrinking or finding they no longer have a broad constituency of users. The dilemma, however, is that there is no institution that can clearly make the choice between potential public delivery organizations. In addition, there is no agreement on how this should be done.

The federal government, for example, cannot pick and choose between public agencies and regional or local units of government. Instead, it must rely on the states or funding organizations within each state or region that allocate local federal highway funds to do this job. The federal government, however, may influence this decision by means of requirements or eligibility standards attached to its funding.

States, on the other hand, have the power to decide but are often politically paralyzed in the struggle among state departments, regional agencies, and local units of government. Some suggest an urban region is the most appropriate level for these programs and that the MPOs or RTAs should deliver the services while others suggest cities or counties should do it. In some locations there is a struggle between the MPO and the RTA or between one or the other of them and the local units. Finally, cities and counties may be increasingly inclined to become delivery organizations on their own in their local community.

When establishing a ridesharing program, the cost, time, and success of mechanisms to resolve these intergovernmental struggles need to be considered particularly in view of an alternative that is to leave the delivery of ridesharing services to the marketplace.

Optional Methods of Service Delivery

Even as public agencies decide that they will provide or deliver ridesharing services, or when specific public or public-private agencies are deemed appropriate to do this, they should proceed with considerable caution and flexibility. They should look toward contracting for these services, including marketing and matching, before they decide to deliver these services with their own employees. This contractual approach permits considerable flexibility by different groups and by using different techniques in delivering services. Contracting also allows public agencies to obtain personnel trained or knowledgeable about ridesharing rather than retraining employees from totally unrelated job areas. One of the difficulties of leaning on some public agencies for delivery of ridesharing services today is that they are tempted to use a number of public employees for a ridesharing program who otherwise might be laid off as traditional programs shrink and old jobs vanish. Finally, the contractual approach allows the agency to either expand or reduce activities in response to both the market and the experience to date.

In delivering ridesharing services agencies should initially concentrate their efforts on defining what they want and the expected results regardless of how they deliver the services. This initial effort will set up performance objectives that enable the agency to become an effective buyer of services and an evaluator of what has happened as the service is delivered.

CONCLUSION

The relative roles of the private and public sectors will vary from one place to another. The actual public and private actors will also vary. Nevertheless, it is important that a thoughtful, conscious effort be made to develop a sound set of ridesharing strategies and to think through the terms of a partnership.

The subject of roles, responsibilities, and

strategies is a legitimate concern of research. Institutional research through case histories and identification of institutional and role variables in demonstrations should be done. This type of work can be very revealing even though it sometimes deals with conflict and bears on the sensitivities of organizations, managers, and decision makers. The process of sorting out who is doing what in both the private and public sectors may provide a key to understanding what is occurring in a given community or state and to the success or failure of a ridesharing program reaching its objectives. A careful effort to construct a strategy for ridesharing that recognizes the strengths and abilities of various actors from the private and public sectors may hold the key to ridesharing's success and ability to realize its potential even more than better marketing efforts or matching techniques.

Two Ways of Thinking About Productivity and Ridesharing

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Ridesharing organizations, like other tax-financed agencies, are under pressure to produce results and produce them at a reasonable cost. The question this paper addresses is, What knowledge, gleaned from research, could help ridesharing organizations increase their productivity?

Before addressing this question, we need to pose a more basic one: Do ridesharing organizations have a productivity "problem"--and, if so, why?

PRODUCTIVITY AND RIDESHARING

The managers of ridesharing programs say they do have a productivity problem and they characterize it in terms of low closure rates. A closure rate is the number of persons placed in carpools or vanpools relative to the number requesting assistance and the still larger number offered assistance. So there is a perceived productivity problem, and it is reflected in the fact that the number of carpools and vanpools actually formed is disappointingly low compared with the number of requests for assistance and the number of tripmakers offered assistance. Program evaluation data support this perception.

Why do ridesharing organizations have a productivity problem? My answer is a controversial one. I believe the pressure to produce results has hurt productivity. Ridesharing organizations might be more productive if they were under less pressure to show results.

This proposition is more reasonable than it sounds if we distinguish between short-run and long-run results. The typical ridesharing organization--for reasons of funding--is under pressure to produce short-term results. It does not usually have the luxury of laying the groundwork for long-term results even if those results would be larger and the effort eventually more productive.

Let me distinguish between (a) the current practice of managing for short-term results and (b) what I think would be involved in managing for long-run results and higher productivity.

Managing for Short-Term Results

The quarterly and annual reports of ridesharing organizations typically report

1. The number of vans placed on the road,
2. The number of carpool applications in the agency's match files, and
3. The number of companies and institutions requesting and receiving matching services.

Those that use surveys to audit their results also report estimates of gasoline saved, pollution averted, and travel expenses avoided.

The performance and productivity of ridesharing organizations are judged by numbers such as these; thus, program managers are motivated to increase the volume of transactions in which the agency is involved: for example, employer contacts, placement requests, and names in the match file. One strategy is to increase output (carpool and vanpool placement) by increasing input (requests for placement). This is usually accomplished by increasing the pace of employer contact and streamlining the procedure for disseminating, collecting, and coding requests for carpool-matching assistance. A second strategy is to increase output by improving service. This usually means reducing the time lag between a request for matching assistance and the provision of that assistance, usually a computer listing. Some agencies also think about the quality of service in terms of the proximity of carpool trip ends, and they have tried to improve the quality of their matchlists by closer geographic fitting. Still others emphasize computer file updating to improve the quality of the matchlist in terms of its timeliness.

Thus, many ridesharing organizations are trying to improve their quarterly and year-end results by increasing the volume and velocity of their operations. In turn, most organizations focus on improved computer operations as their strategy for increasing throughput.

The quick-in and quick-out efficiency that can be achieved in servicing either individuals or organizations is both extraordinary and seductive. And, given the pressure for short-run results, quick-in and quick-out efficiency becomes a matter of organizational pride and a central organizational goal.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence that such efficiency increases the rate of closure, although it can increase the number of pools formed. Increasing throughput masks the productivity problems of ridesharing organizations; it does not solve them.

How then can closure rates be improved? The answer may lie in less volume and slower velocity.

Developing a Long-Run Commitment

The managers of most ridesharing agencies agree that employer-based campaigns are their most effective operations. They also agree that the most effective results can be obtained when employers commit to a sustained placement program rather than a one-shot matching effort. But in dealing with employers, most ridesharing organizations operate in the mode