Alternative Access Modes Database Project

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In this paper, methodology, results, and conclusions of the Alternative Access Modes (Al-A-Mode) database project and its method of application in the city of Bellevue, Washington, are described. The purpose of the Al-A-Mode project was to begin the development of the database needed to establish existing levels of ridesharing in the suburban King County area. The Al-A-Mode project identified specific data needs, developed a data collection methodology, and collected and compiled vehicle occupancy data from 47 suburban office buildings and office campuses. This information is now available for individual jurisdictions to use in taking the first steps in the process of setting rideshare standards and in measuring the success of transportation management plans at new developments. The city of Bellevue is using the Al-A-Mode results in the development of a transportation management program soon to be presented to the Bellevue city council.

In the Seattle area several suburban cities, King County, and the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle (Metro) are drafting transportation systems management (TSM) ordinances. The purpose of these ordinances is twofold: (a) to minimize the automobile traffic generated by new development, and (b) to define the monetary and programmatic requirements to be placed on developers and employers in order to help implement the transit, ridesharing, and road improvements necessitated by newly generated transportation demand. The city of Bellevue may include requirements for existing employers in its ordinance.

Nine jurisdictions and agencies participated in the Alternative Access Modes (Al-A-Mode) database project. The Puget Sound Council of Governments (PSCOG), Metro, King County, and the cities of Bellevue, Bothell, Kent, Kirkland, Redmond, and Seattle all contributed staff time to the project. The purpose of the project was to begin the development of the database needed to establish the existing level of ridesharing in the suburban King County area. This information is now available for individual jurisdictions to use in taking the first steps in the process of setting rideshare standards and in measuring the success of transportation management plans at new developments. The city of Bellevue is using the Al-A-Mode results in the development of a transportation management program soon to be presented to the Bellevue city council.

The existing zoning within the various jurisdictions in the Seattle area can accommodate major population and employment growth. This growth is occurring now, and it is expected to continue at a healthy pace into the foreseeable future, particularly in suburban areas. A critical by-product of the growth is increased demand on the region's transportation system, parts of which experience severe congestion even today. Unfortunately, the ability of local jurisdictions and other public agencies to provide the facilities to meet the increasing demand has not kept pace with the growth. Traditional sources of money for roads and transit are drying up, and existing residential neighborhoods offer resistance to road widening and construction to serve new growth. As a result, future growth will be accompanied by increasing traffic congestion.

In response to the difficulty in obtaining the funds and public approval necessary to provide needed transportation facilities and services, local jurisdictions and agencies are turning to demand management as a means of minimizing traffic growth, and to private sector financing as a means of paying for those facilities and services that are needed. Once a jurisdiction is past the philosophical stage of embracing these concepts, however, there are still the difficulties of transportation management plans (TMPs) that must be developed, standards and criteria that must be set, and ordinances that must be adopted. Each of these activities requires a determination of the base level of ridesharing and transit use under various conditions, such as size of development and type of land use. Each jurisdiction in developing programs and ordinances and setting standards should be working from a common base of information. For these reasons, it was important that the jurisdictions involved in demand management and developer road improvement fees have a good sense of what is happening today at existing developments in terms of ridesharing and transit usage. Because data on this subject were not available, the Al-A-Mode project was created to fill the gap.

DATA COLLECTION

The Al-A-Mode database was designed to be easily accessible to local jurisdiction and agency staff. In addition to the actual carpool transit data, information was obtained to help identify the factors that affect carpool transit rates (e.g., type and size of development, geographical location, and existence of a TMP). In was recognized from the outset that it would not be possible for the Al-A-Mode project to collect an adequate amount of data for all development types. The project therefore focused on the development type that was of the most interest to the participating jurisdictions of offices not in the central business district (CBD). Local jurisdiction staff identified data collection sites.

Because project funding was limited, it was decided that simplified data should be collected from as many sites as possible, rather than attempting to collect comprehensive information at a few sites. Because transit usage was minimal at

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most of the sites, the data collection effort focused on gathering information that would give an indication of the level of ridesharing at the various sites, individually and collectively. In addition to the field data, a set of site characteristics for each data collection site was compiled, including location, development type, leasable space, percent occupied, number of tenants, number of employees, setting (whether office campus or not), business type (whether "high technology" or not), transit service availability, type of transportation management plan elements available, number of parking spaces, and, last but not least, proximity of restaurants.

The data collection methodology for the Al-A-Mode project was designed to provide a standard approach for continuing data collection in the future. Future data collection may be for the purpose of expanding the database, for monitoring the success of transportation management programs, or for monitoring the traffic generated by new developments. Although statistically valid results were desired, it was not possible to collect a sufficient amount of data for statistical validity as part of this project.

Several data collection approaches were considered, including a home interview survey, driveway survey/count, employee interview survey, on-board (on-street) survey/count, and combinations of them. The driveway count approach was selected because it offered a fairly simple means for collecting the maximum volume of data on carpooling at the workplace. The driveway counts involved stationing an observer at each site access point to record the occupancies of the vehicles entering and leaving the site.

The driveway counts were all done during the morning peak period. The specific time of data collection varied from site to site depending on the site's work shift schedule, but all data collection efforts lasted between 2 and 3 hr and were accomplished between 6:00 and 9:30 a.m. Although afternoon data collection would have been easier logistically, data were collected in the morning in order to measure employee commute modes as exclusively as possible. Afternoon traffic comprised a higher proportion of nonemployee, noncommute trips.

Site characteristics information also was collected. The ease or difficulty of compiling these data varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and from site to site, depending on a number of factors, the most important being the ability or lack thereof to identify a specific person from whom information could be obtained. Identifying an information source was more difficult at the multiple-tenant locations, and there were varying degrees of cooperation at each site. Another important factor was the ease or difficulty of accessing the applicable building permit records, which tended to vary with the age of the survey site. As a result of these difficulties, various elements of the site characteristics data were not collected for a number of sites. In particular, numbers of employees, tenancy, and floor area data—all commonly used in specifying parking and rideshare requirements—were often not available. In addition, the accuracy or consistency of some of the data collected was suspect. Numbers of employees—especially at multiple-tenant locations—could easily be off by a significant amount, and no one could say for sure whether the available floor area information at different sites referred to precisely the same thing. (There is a big difference between gross and leasable square feet.)

In most cases, there was an acceptable surrogate for unavailable data for the purposes of the Al-A-Mode project. For example, survey counts of the number of persons entering the site were used in place of the number of employees. Too often, however, important information was too difficult or time-consuming to obtain, and it was of questionable accuracy. As a result, the Al-A-Mode project analyses had to work around large gaps in data items such as numbers of employees, gross and leasable floor area, and building occupancy. Future analysis efforts should recognize this problem either by ensuring at the outset that the data in fact can be obtained or by basing the analyses on other data that can be obtained.

RESULTS

The site characteristics and survey data collected were entered into a Lotus 1–2–3 spreadsheet for analysis and storage. All in all, surveys were conducted at 47 sites. The size of the sites, as represented by the entering volume (i.e., the number of people entering the site minus the number of poople leaving the site during the survey period), ranged from 14 to 1,389. Average entering volume was 288 and median entering volume was 244; Figure 1 shows the distribution of entering volumes. In addition to analyses focusing on the entire 2–3 hr observation period, the survey data were also broken down into half-hour increments for analysis. This subdividing was done to determine whether ridesharing rates were dependent on the number of employees who arrived at about the same time. (Carpools may be as difficult to form for employees working different shifts at the same firm as it is for employees working at different firms.) The distribution of entering volumes for the 30-min counts is shown in Figure 2.

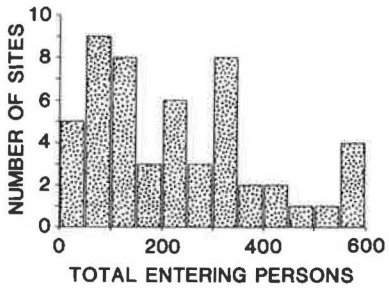

FIGURE 1 Entering volumes at survey sites for the full observation period.

The most basic statistic for describing the level of ridesharing is the average vehicle occupancy (AVO), which is simply

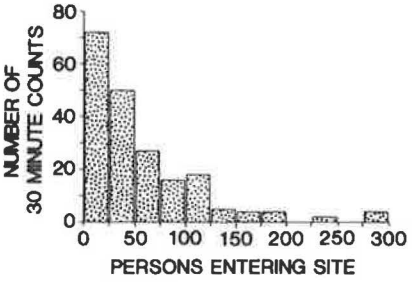

FIGURE 2 Entering volumes at survey sites in 30-min increments.

the average number of people riding in a car. For purposes of comparison, it should be noted that the overall regionwide AVO value for all types of trips was 1.38 riders/car in 1980. The AVO is forecasted to reach 1.46 riders/car in 2000, although current data indicate that it may have actually decreased

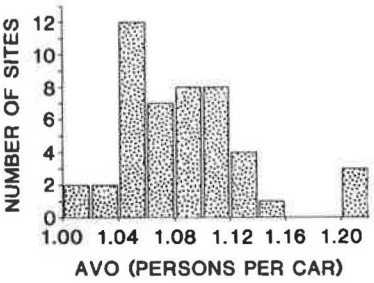

FIGURE 3 AVO at survey sites.

since 1980. For home-based work trips (i.e., home-to-work or work-to-home trips), the AVO value is significantly lower. The individual site AVOs obtained from the Al-A-Mode project surveys are compiled in Figure 3. The average AVO for the 47 sites surveyed was 1.10 riders/car. The median site AVO was a bit lower (1.08 riders/car), with nearly two-third of the sites having an AVO loss than 1.10 riders/car. The composite AVO for all vehicles entering all sites (1.10 riders/car) was the same as the average of the individual site AVOs. This fact indicates that the site AVO values were fairly homogeneous; for example, if several large sites pulled the average AVO up or down, the composite AVO would not be the same as the average site AVO. The relationship between site AVO and entering volume is shown in Figure 4. Entering volumes and AVO did not exhibit a significant relationship, although a slight increase in AVO with increasing entering volume might be inferred if a few of the most widely scattered data points were ignored. The relationship between site AVO and 30-min entering volume is shown in Figure 5. For the half-hour periods, entering volumes and AVO exhibited an even weaker relationship than they did for the full observation period data. As a result, it cannot be concluded that there is any definable relationship between AVO and site-entering volume on either a 30-min or 3-hr basis.

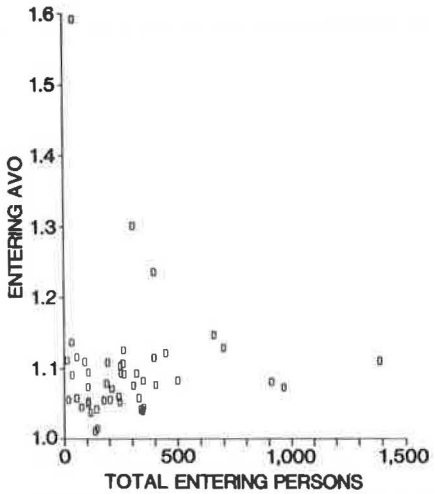

FIGURE 4 Entering volumes versus AVO for the full observation period.

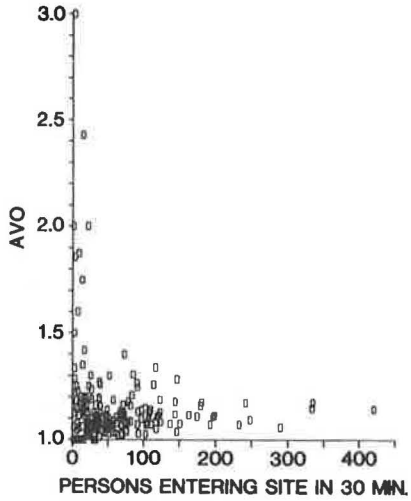

FIGURE 5 Entering volumes versus AVO in 30-min increments.

A second commonly used statistic is the percentage of people who drive alone (percentage in single-occupant vehicles, SOVs). Three-fourths of the survey sites had 80 percent or more of entering persons in SOVs. The composite for all sites surveyed was 82.5 percent in SOVs, which is much higher than the 64 percent in SOVs for Seattle-Everett region work trips derived from 1980 census data.

The complete set of survey data was analyzed in terms of people as well as in terms of sites. Because the AVO did not vary significantly with the size of survey site, the results of analyses based on person volumes could be expected to and did mirror the results of site-related analyses. For example, 50 percent of all persons were entering sites with an AVO of 1.08 riders/car or less, and 90 percent were entering sites with an AVO of 1.14 riders/car or less.

Parking availability and use were assessed by analyzing counts of parking spaces and the number of cars parked at the end of the observation period. Parking use rates at the survey sites were fairly evenly distributed over a range stretching from 40 to 100 percent. The availability of ample free parking at the workplace was widely considered to be an important if not the overriding factor in limiting commuters' use of ridesharing and transit. In order to analyze this hypothesis, parking use was compared to AVO at the Al-A-Mode project survey sites. When plotted, the dispersed state of the data points gave no clue as to how the relationship between AVO and parking use might be described, mathematically or otherwise. This lack of a demonstrable relationship between AVO and parking use in the survey data was assumed to result from the difficulties inherent in relating parking use to specific suburban work sites, where neighboring surface lots or on-street parking may be readily available.

In order to investigate the role of development size in ridesharing, the survey data were divided into three smaller data sets. The first data set contained the survey data from the largest sites, comprising the five sites with entering volume of persons greater than 500. These five sites represented 11 percent of the survey sites, but they accounted for 34 percent of the total of the entering volumes at all sites. The two other data sets included sites with entering volumes of 250–500 and

TABLE 1 SURVEY RESULTS: ACCESS MODES, SITE SIZE

	All Sites	Entering Volume			All 30-Min Counts	30-Min Entering Volume	
		>500	250–500	100–500		75–200	25–75
No. of sites	47	5	12	17	202	47	79
Composite AVO (riders/car)	1.10	1.10	1.09	1.09	1.10	1.12	1.10
Average AVO (riders/car)	1.10	1.11	1.09	1.08	1.10	1.13	1.10
Composite persons (%)							
SOV	82.5	80.7	84.3	83.3	82.5	81.6	85.3
2OV	12.5	15.1	10.8	10.9	12.5	12.9	10.9
3+ OV	3.0	2.3	3.5	3.6	3.0	3.7	2.0
Walk/bus	2.0	1.9	1.4	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.8
Composite vehicles (%)							
SOV	92.2	90.8	93.2	92.9	92.2	91.7	93.5
2OV	7.0	8.5	6.0	6.1	7.0	7.3	6.0
3+ OV	0.8	0.7	0.9	1.0	0.8	1.0	0.6

TABLE 2 SURVEY RESULTS: ACCESS MODES, GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS

	All Sites	Bellevue	Redmond	S. King Co. Auburn, Kent, Tukwila	N.E. King Co. Bothell, Kirkland	N.W. King Co. N. Seattle
No. of sites	47	28	6	6	4	3
Composite AVO (riders/car)	1.10	1.08	1.11	1.12	1.09	1.09
Average AVO (riders/car)	1.10	1.10	1.09	1.13	1.08	1.10
Composite persons (%)						
SOV	82.5	85.0	81.5	78.1	83.8	81.3
2OV	12.5	10.3	12.7	15.7	13.5	13.1
3+ OV	3.0	2.5	4.5	3.9	2.3	2.4
Walk/bus	2.0	2.2	1.3	2.3	0.4	3.1
Composite vehicles (%)						
SOV	92.2	93.6	91.7	89.9	92.0	91.8
2OV	7.0	5.7	7.1	9.0	7.4	7.4
3+ OV	0.8	0.7	1.1	1.1	0.6	0.8

100–250. There were 17 sites with 250–500 entering volume, representing 36 percent of the survey sites and 43 percent of the total of the entering volumes at all sites. The 12 sites with 100–250 entering volume accounted for 26 percent of the survey sites and 20 percent of the total of the entering volumes. Table 1 presents the results of the analysis of the data compiled by size. The results were virtually identical for the three site size categories, with AVO values of 1.09–1.10 riders/car and percent in SOVs of 81–84 percent. Neither did the three categories differ much from the averages for the full set of data.

To some extent, the same conclusions held for the 30-min data also presented in Table 1. Two data sets were taken from the full set. One set contained data for 30-min periods with entering volume of 75–200, including 47 of the 202 30-min counts, and the other set contained periods with entering volume of 25–75 including 79 of the 202. Although the AVO values of the two subsets differed by only 0.02 riders/car (1.12 versus 1.10 riders/car), the percentage of carpoolers in vehicles of three or more occupants in the higher-volume half-hour periods was nearly double the percentage in the lower-volume periods. The percentage of persons in two-occupant cars also was larger in the higher-volume periods.

The data were divided by jurisdiction to determine if rideshare rates differed by location. Table 2 presents the results of the analysis of the data compiled by geographical area. The results for the various locales differed little with one another or with the totals and averages for the entire data set. AVO values ranged from 1.08 to 1.12 riders/car, and percentage in SOVs from 78 to 85 percent.

Several data sets were extracted from the full data set for use in assessing whether certain types of land uses, activity types, or occupancy types had above- or below-average ridesharing rates. Data were analyzed for 22 single-tenant sites, 10 mixed-use (office and light industrial) sites, and 12 high-technology sites. Tables 3 and 4 contain the results of the analysis of the data compiled by land use and activity type. The data for AVO values and percentage in SOVs for single-tenant, mixed-use, and high-technology sites were all the same as for the entire data set. In each case, the full data set had a higher percentage of transit walk-ins, while the single-tenant locations had a carpool percentage half again as large as the overall average.

The site characteristics data identified which of eight TMP elements, if any, were available at a survey site. These data were available for 33 of the 47 sites surveyed. The available data were of limited applicability because no attempt was made to assess the level of commitment that any of the various sponsors brought to their TMPs. This level of commitment and the intensity of the program have a signicant effect on the effectiveness of the program in increasing ridesharing rates. Also, all of the TMPs at survey sites were voluntary. (Mandatory programs have usually been found to be more effective

TABLE 3 SURVEY RESULTS: ACCESS MODES, AND SITE TENANCY AND USE

	All Sites	Single-Tenant	Mixed use: Office/Light Industrial	High-Tech
No. of sites	47	22	10	12
Composite AVO (riders/car)	1.10	1.11	1.11	1.09
Average AVO (riders/car)	1.10	1.12	1.10	1.08
Composite persons (%):				
SOV	82.5	80.5	81.5	83.6
2OV	12.5	13.5	14.4	12.8
3+ OV	3.0	4.5	3.4	2.4
Walk/bus	2.0	1.5	0.7	1.2
Composite vehicles (%):				
SOV	92.2	91.2	91.0	92.3
2OV	7.0	7.6	8.1	7.1
3+ OV	0.8	1.2	0.9	0.6

TABLE 4 SURVEY RESULTS: ACCESS MODES, TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT PLANS

	All Sites	No TMP	TMP, No TC	TMP, Plus TC
No. of sites	47	14	8	11
Composite AVO (riders/car)	1.10	1.07	1.10	1.11
Average AVO (riders/car)	1.10	1.07	1.10	1.11
Composite persons (%):				
SOV	82.5	85.9	80.8	81.6
2OV	12.5	10.6	14.0	12.9
3+ OV	3.0	1.3	2.3	4.6
Walk/bus	2.0	2.2	2.9	0.9
Composite vehicles (%):				
SOV	92.2	93.8	91.4	91.6
2OV	7.0	5.8	7.9	7.3
3+ OV	0.8	0.4	0.7	1.1

than voluntary programs.) In suburban locations, few employers are motivated to establish intensive programs with active transportation coordinators, carpool or vanpool subsidies, or sustained promotion. Even if required by local regulations, the ridesharing program is often one in name only. The Al-A-Mode project surveyed several such sites with low-effort programs, and not surprisingly they were found to have low ridesharing rates. When the ridesharing program has involved intensive marketing and financial incentives, however, significant increases in ridesharing have been achieved. Such cases are few in number (two or three in the Bellevue area), and they were not directly analyzed by the Al-A-Mode project.

A rather aggravating side effect of the compilation of TMP information for the Al-A-Mode project was the misinterpretation of the data by several readers and reviewers, who concluded that ridesharing programs in general are ineffective. Of course, no such conclusion can be validly drawn from the available data.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions and recommendations for the Al-A-Mode project focused almost exclusively on the collection and application of the data. The purpose of the Al-A-Mode project was not to draw conclusions regarding rideshare potential but to measure current levels of ridesharing. The data collected indicated that ridesharing levels at non-CBD office buildings were lower than levels achieved elsewhere (e.g., in CBDs and for non-work-related trips). Fairly significant traffic reductions can be achieved if ridesharing levels at non-CBD offices can be increased to the levels reached elsewhere in the region; it is with this hope that local jurisdictions are looking at transportation management ordinances. Other conclusions and recommendations of the project include the following:

1. There is no geographical difference in AVO in suburban King County. Therefore, data are applicable throughout the suburban King County area.
2. An ongoing data collection and database management effort should be established to build on the information assembled by the Al-A-Mode project. In so doing, a sound quantitative basis can be provided for rideshare, transit use, and traffic generation standards and criteria. Such a database can also eventually provide valuable insight into how, why, and where ridesharing works.
3. Rideshare and traffic generation standards, criteria, and performance measures should be based on data that can be easily and accurately obtained. For example, standards based on numbers of employees or floor area measures may be simple to identify at the time of plat approval or building permit issuance, but monitoring could be problematic. Furthermore, due to the difficulty in obtaining employee counts and floor area information for existing developments, there may not be sufficient data from which to develop standards in which much confidence can be placed.
4. If rideshare and traffic generation standards, criteria, and performance measures are to be based on difficult-to-obtain measures such as gross or leasable floor area, building permit recordkeeping systems should be redesigned to make the needed information accessible.
5. Although parking availability has been shown to be a major factor affecting ridesharing, parking availability and use were almost impossible to quantify in a meaningful or useful way in the Al-A-Mode project. This is a result of two main factors: (a) the observed cross-pollination of parking lots that occurs when cars from one development park in the lot of another, and (b) the varying availability and use of on-street parking.
6. The ability to analyze the effects of various TMP elements using the data collected by the Al-A-Mode project is complicated by the fact that some sites house a single tenant, though other sites have multiple tenants. The relationship between TMP elements and rideshare data (e.g., site AVO, site percentage in SOVs, and site percentage in carpools) can be accurately assessed for sites that have a single tenant or a uniform TMP for several tenants. However, the relationship is difficult, if not impossible, to establish at locations that have multiple tenants with different TMPS.
7. The effectiveness of TMP elements can vary from site to site depending on the commitment of the sponsor and other factors. The Al-A-Mode project did not attempt to measure the effectiveness of the various TMP elements identified at the data collection sites; therefore, the survey results do not provide adequate information for evaluating

TMP effectiveness. In order to be able to evaluate TMP effectiveness, future data must include measures of the commitment to and intensity of the TMPs.

APPLICATION IN BELLEVUE

Bellevue, Washington, is a city of 82,000 people located just east of Seattle across Lake Washington. Like most post-World War II emerging cities, Bellevue was built for people who loved to drive. Over the past decade, Bellevue commuters have crowded onto the Lake Washington floating bridges, heading to Seattle in the morning, and returning in the evening. In recent years, the bridges have become congested in both directions morning and evening, as growing employment opportunities in Bellevue and other eastside areas have drawn increasing numbers of reverse commuters. Dwarfing the numbers of cross-lake commuters are the eastsiders commuting to Bellevue and eastside jobs.

With transit service focused on Seattle as a destination, people commuting to Bellevue have brought their cars to work in ever-increasing numbers, creating traffic congestion downtown and in outlying areas of the city. In an attempt to reduce increasing congestion in the future, Bellevue may reduce the number of automobile trips on the street system. Emphasis is being placed on transit and ridesharing programs as part of an overall strategy to maintain mobility.

Although much attention has focused on downtown Bellevue's transportation problems and opportunities, the outlying area of the city, with twice the employment of the downtown, has inspired few concerted efforts to reduce automobile trips, and no wonder. The city's 46,000 nondowntown employees are loosely clustered in several major and minor business districts characterized by small office parks with an average work force of approximately 300 employees and even smaller employers, 90 percent of which have fewer than 25 employees. Generous supplies of free parking and low levels of transit service complete the picture, the result of which is the pervasive drive-alone-to-work commuting environment.

Although the efforts of a strong ridesharing agency (formerly Seattle/King County Commuter Pool, now Metro) have facilitated isolated instances of strong suburban employer ridesharing programs, for the most part successful programs at office parks and at smaller employers have remained elusive. Among the Bellevue examples of successful programs, extraordinary circumstances such as company relocation have always been the motive for establishing the employee ridesharing programs.

Recognizing that stronger measures would be needed to effect changes in commuter behavior, the Bellevue city council has directed staff to develop a TMP for non-CBD districts. The Al-A-Mode project is an essential first step in the city's approach to developing this program. By measuring the extent of current ridesharing and transit use, a background level against which future progress can be measured has been established. Also, the intensity of the program needed to meet the goals of the City Comprehensive Plan of 20 percent ridesharing and 5 percent transit use by 1995 can be estimated. In fact, given the extremely low levels of alternative commute mode use revealed by the Al-A-Mode project, Bellevue may need to set less ambitious goals for the TMP.

Bellevue planning staff are still in the preliminary stages of designing the non-CBD TMP. The current intention is to develop a two-part program aimed at large new developments as well as existing employment concentrations. The city government would play a predominant role in program implementation, thus taking on a larger role than in many TMPs, where employers and developers are required to shoulder major responsibility for employee automobile trip reduction. The rationale for strong city government participation is that the suburban Bellevue environment does not at this time provide the necessary motivation for committed private sector action. For example, traffic congestion, although increasing, is not yet perceived to be critical by the business community.

Examples of program features that the city government or a contractor such as Metro could administer might include bus pass subsidies; a vanpool program; transportation coordinators for work sites; carpool certification for preferential parking programs; guaranteed rides home for carpoolers; and other carpool incentives, such as partial reimbursement for carpool gasoline costs.

If the Bellevue city council approves this general approach, staff will likely recommend several demonstration programs in which these strategies and incentives can be tested. The lack of model suburban programs for small employers and office parks provides an uncertain environment in which to propose broad new public programs. The Al-A-Mode project and Bellevue's suburban pilot program if approved by the city council will provide valuable research in the little known and potentially highly productive suburban ridesharing market.

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