

Television Media Campaigns To Encourage Changes in Urban Travel Behavior: A Case Study

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The University of North Carolina at Charlotte and WSOC-TV Channel 9 developed and implemented a TV-based traffic mitigation campaign for the Charlotte metropolitan region. The development process, the methods used in the campaign to encourage shifts in transportation behavior, and preliminary results from the campaign are described. Although the short-term shifts in behavior resulting from such efforts are likely to be small, longer-term impacts may be more substantial. It is concluded that cooperative ventures between the media and government can be an important component of transportation mitigation strategies in metropolitan regions and should be considered as important elements of such plans.

As metropolitan regions of the United States continue to grow, they are often confronted with problems involving transportation. The problems concern urban congestion, improvements in transit service, airport access, highway and bridge repairs, specialized services for the elderly and handicapped, air pollution, energy consumption, spreading development patterns (particularly in suburbs), and access to downtown. The Charlotte, North Carolina, metropolitan region is no exception. It has experienced these and other transportation-related problems during the last decade, as the pace of growth in the Southeast generally and the Charlotte region in particular has continued to accelerate. Numerous polls indicate that transportation problems are important to Charlotte citizens, and the recent change in city administration is attributed partially to a campaign focusing on increased need for expenditures for improved transportation systems.

Central to these arguments is the belief that consumers respond favorably to new services, but that is often not the case. Transportation officials are often frustrated by the resistance of consumers to exhortations to use transit and carpooling. In the Charlotte metropolitan region, transit usage is about 1 percent of regional work travel and less than 8 percent of downtown work travel. Single-occupant automobile use is high, averaging around 87 percent, and carpooling and park-and-ride services are not heavily patronized. The problem is compounded by the difficulty of obtaining significant federal capital funds for transit systems because the region is below UMTA thresholds for rapid transit investment. In this environment, frustrations of public officials, the public at large, the private sector, and the media can and often do rise to shrill levels.

The media have traditionally reported progress on or deterioration of transportation systems. The media often are content to report the facts, occasionally point fingers at government officials and others perceived to be slow or incompetent, or join in the campaign for more money from the state capital. Whereas all these activities can occasionally work, they generally do not improve congestion.

But the media can also participate cooperatively with government and the private sector in developing and implementing solutions for communities. The thought of the media going beyond suggesting solutions to providing solutions is revolutionary. The traditional role of the media includes informing through standard reporting, finger pointing through interpretive reporting, and suggestion through editorial page and on-air commentary. In the case study described, the media left that traditional role, identified an aspect of a problem that viewers may not have considered, then offered personalized answers through a traditional media adversary: government.

The attitude described above is changing with the change in the nature of television news that has become evident during the past 3 years. Fragmentation of audiences due to cable, VCR, and remote control pushes television news operations beyond traditional journalistic duties, and the media's role as government adversary softens with the addition of the role as public servant. In short, television news must now do much more than inform. It must offer solutions to the problems identified in news reports and offer those solutions on a personal basis. Audience fragmentation, which is documented in research conducted by the major media consulting agencies, network television, and the major ratings services, enhances the need for this change. There isn't less local news, but more competition in news time periods for audiences. The competition is as varied as the channels in a cable system, games available through Nintendo and Atari, and movies for rent for the VCR. If news broadcasts are to maintain audiences in this ultracompetitive environment, traditional "facts and nothing but the facts" presentations must be altered. Some in the media may perceive this as a co-opting process in which the media's agenda is diluted by government and its goals, but another viewpoint is that the media are also community citizens with a public responsibility to help citizens of the region in their daily lives.

In this spirit the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC), in cooperation with WSOC, Channel 9, embarked on an effort to change urban commuting and travel behavior patterns. The reasoning behind the approach stems from their joint view that existing transportation systems, though not

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completely adequate, can better serve commuting demands if those demands are bent to fit the system's capabilities. Commuters and citizens need to understand the cumulative effect of their individual behaviors on highway congestion generally, the importance of government investment and the balance between the capabilities of government and the capabilities of private citizens, and the cumulative effect of individual actions concerning transportation and land use on society. A "can-do" media campaign that focuses on helping individuals to cope with problems, reduce them, and understand their source is an approach that has had less attention, but that, it is believed, has potential.

A "media campaign" in the sense of advertising or public affairs is not what is meant. The WSOC-TV news operation, a for-profit entity, viewed the campaign as an opportunity to educate, provide a public service, and dominate traffic and highway reporting in the Charlotte market. A media campaign in the traditional sense would include advertising built around a central theme like "take the bus."

WSOC-TV and UNCC's purpose was to allow travelers to see that they are part of the problem and that solutions lie in each person's behavior. This is a concept not previously presented in this market. The series offered advice, the opportunity for direct government contact, and a way out of the traffic jam.

Technical literature on how the media can encourage changes in transportation behavior is sparse. Seat belt campaigns and anti-drunk-driving campaigns have appeared in news broadcasts, but only in recent years have they become interactive or featured partnerships with government agencies. Though the authors did find material on similar subjects (e.g., use of the media to improve community health, use of TV to monitor traffic, and use of TV to avoid travel), no references were found on the specific topics. The subject is essentially unresearched.

More information is available on the theory of altruistic efforts. For instance, Macauley and Berkowitz (1) describe a number of theories of altruism—helping behavior—on the basis that altruism is "behavior carried out to benefit another without anticipation of rewards from external sources." However, the many studies reported by Macauley and Berkowitz suggest the presence of strong personal, situational, and motivational components (such as alleviation of guilt or assumption of risk or adventure) in many altruistic behaviors. Schwartz's more cynical model (2) suggests an involvement process building on perceived gains to the players. In the case described here, the TV station, UNCC, and the government stand to gain by cooperation in the campaign, so pure altruism models do not apply. The campaign is better thought of as a mutually beneficial activity with a socially positive goal (reducing traffic congestion) rather than as an altruistic effort.

The process by which UNCC and WSOC-TV developed a campaign to change travel behavior is described. The focus is on the processes used in the campaign, the steps undertaken, and preliminary results.

OBJECTIVES

Discussions between WSOC and UNCC to establish reasonable objectives began in spring 1989. It was recognized that huge changes in travel behavior were not likely to be achieved. In addition, it was recognized that the budget and time frame

would be limited. Therefore, the following goals were established:

1. Inform citizens about transportation problems in clear terms.
2. Help citizens cope with transportation issues by suggesting alternative behaviors.
3. Improve Charlotte's quality of life.
4. Preempt the traffic issue for Channel 9 and its affiliates; become *the* traffic station for Charlotte.

The team recognized that the easy stories—finger pointing, construction plans, and so forth—were already done; what was needed was a concerted effort to make things better. This meant understanding why people traveled, the choices available, and the costs to society when many people travel at the same time. The following fundamental ideas were to be developed:

- **Mobility:** Everyone wants to be able to travel at any time because mobility allows people to engage in activities that are associated with a high quality of life. But when everyone travels extensively, traffic congestion reduces the quality of life.
- **Choices:** Society provides many options for living patterns, modes of travel, and destinations. It was decided to let marketplace competition increase or reduce options.
- **Balance:** Travel time is balanced with activity time; travel must be worth less than the activity it permits.

In short, the value of mobility is high, but its negative effect on society can be significant.

Several major activities to be undertaken were identified:

- A public opinion survey on traffic issues intended to support ongoing stories;
- A week-long series of reports termed the "Bumper-to-Bumper Blues" series, each report to be 3½ min in length and to run in the hour-long evening news time slot;
- Cooperative assistance by local governments in solving personal transportation problems and encouraging ride-sharing and transit usage; and
- A follow-up plan focusing on issues that would continue into the spring and summer.

The team recognized that all the possible material could not be covered in a week-long series but that over time more material could be introduced. To compress the time frame and make the project manageable, the team focused on six elements:

1. Causes of traffic congestion,
2. Severity of traffic congestion,
3. Mobility—what it is and why people want it,
4. Choices for commuters,
5. Social costs and health effects, and
6. The future—new technology.

CAMPAIGN PLANNING

The idea for a sweep series on traffic congestion entered in-station discussions after a short study indicated that many

summer road projects were scheduled for major thoroughfares. Traffic congestion, compounded by road construction, would stress commuters in just a few months. However, most of the sweeps series—groups of reports with high-interest subject matter designed to increase viewership when ratings are compiled—were already in production, and most newsroom personnel already were assigned to prepare sweeps or had other assignments.

Therefore, the traffic reporting segments had to operate with limited manpower and budget, yet generate a level of viewer interest that would increase ratings. Subject matter was to emphasize the innovative in explaining the traffic situation, and more important, offer solutions to the drivers.

The focus on solutions required reporters who regularly offer advice and options to viewers or who have more credibility than the average beat reporter. The news managers decided to assign five reporters to work the five separate segments of the story. Each was either a specialist or a high-profile reporter. Three specialists were chosen in the health, consumer, and technology areas. Two reporters who often anchor on weekends and in substitute roles took two of the reports.

Four reporters each took one of the six elements, and a fifth reporter took two for an overview segment. A producer with a specialization in technology took management control of the project. The production schedule was compressed, running just 9 days and finishing 1 week before air date.

News managers decided to place the series in the first week of the month-long sweeps period. That “week” actually began at midweek. However, five parts, running Monday through Friday, allowed advertising to be developed and put in place

the weekend before the series began; it was hoped that the advertising would build momentum and viewership into the first 2 or 3 days of the sweeps period.

The advertising campaign was to emphasize the expertise of the reporters in offering solutions to the problems of the Charlotte area commuter—the health specialist reporting health information, the consumer specialist reporting consumer information, the high-profile reporter giving the viewer information about traffic congestion that the viewer probably did not know, and offering a way out of jams at the same time. High-profile, recognizable people were offering new information on an old subject. Advertising targeted print, radio, and television viewers in off-news time periods.

Some consideration was given to development of a pamphlet outlining potential traffic bottlenecks and offering alternative routes. Consumers would pick up the map free from a commercial sponsor, probably a supermarket chain, and use it as they commuted. The pamphlet would be both a marketing tool for the station and the project and a self-help mechanism to encourage behavioral change in drivers, because it offered advice on route and trip planning. But the compressed production time, the lack of a commercial sponsor, and difficulties in producing workable maps for the pamphlet killed that idea.

AIR-TIME STORIES

A preliminary list of suggested material was developed focusing on the goals described earlier and concentrating the subject matter into seven areas. Figure 1 shows the initial material

(1)	Benefits of mobility	
	Family's day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> follow a family around, add up the miles and activities (av. family 50+ mi.).
	I love my Chevy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> why do people love their cars; car as personality and freedom - provider.
(2)	What causes traffic congestion	
	Get out of my way!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> go along on the commuter trip; sit in traffic.
	Where is that store?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> show how land use spreading generates traffic
	Big car/Little street!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> old inadequate street designs
(3)	How bad is it?	
	Charlotte traffic woes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic Index for Charlotte, reported quarterly/monthly Poll - readings on what people think
	How bad will it get?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future projections ("war-of-worlds")

FIGURE 1 Preliminary material for “Bumper-to-Bumper Blues” series.
(continued on next page)

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|---|---|
| <p>(4) Costs of Traffic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dollar costs • Accidents • Stress • "Social" - congestion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - air pollution - energy - land use & "sprawl" <p>(5) Government Costs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road Construction • Other Services <p>(6) Choices for commuters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transit • Carpooling • Flextime • Route choices • Walking and bicycling <p>(7) The longer term prospects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transit • Mixed land uses • Telecommuting • "Smart" cars • "Smart" roads | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family car purchase • gasoline • insurance • costs of injury and repairs • imitiation levels (medical) • show clogged streets, low-density subdivisions • I-85, Independence Blvd. • '88 Bond issue • as land use spreads, other services are needed • show bus riders, park-and-ride • employee pools, neighborhood pools • Leave earlier or later • Show how to choose other routes • Charlotte bike trails and parks • Show light rail in other cities • University Place/clusters • People using computers/phones while working at homes • Project "Prometheus" and Calif. projects • On-board and roadside vehicle navigation. |
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FIGURE 1 (continued)

used as a guide for story development. Ultimately, not all of this material was covered.

At this stage, the effort focused on allocating the material to reporter assignments and making it fit the time constraints. Separate subjects were developed for the 5-day series. The series began at 6 p.m. Monday on "Eyewitness News."

Day 1: What Causes Congestion? How Bad Is It?

The first report provided an overview of traffic in the Charlotte area and examined the elements that had produced high growth in development and matching growth in congestion. It was introduced by using an "Eyewitness News" poll of viewer perceptions of Charlotte area traffic. The poll contained information that most viewers already knew—traffic was Charlotte's most serious problem and the majority of Charlotte commuters preferred to drive alone—but the report helped them understand what had happened. No effort was

made to find a culprit. Charlotte was simply a victim of its own success.

An editorial decision put the reporter, a high-profile weekend and substitute anchor, "live" in a helicopter over a busy intersection on a highway that rates level-of-service F for congestion in peak periods. The report was timed to air just as the evening peak slowed. Live remote broadcasts are used to showcase and emphasize stories. Show producers and the editorial staff believed that a live broadcast would add appeal to the subject matter, especially for viewers who had just encountered the evening peak or who were waiting for breadwinners to arrive home.

In the story, the lead (anchor) reporter developed a multilevel picture of congestion at the national, local, and personal level. Content focused on establishing the causes of Charlotte's rapid recent congestion growth, comparing it with that of other cities, and getting on-the-street driver reactions. Local experts who were consulted indicated in on-camera interviews that Charlotte is probably in the top 15 to 20 or

even in the top 10 cities nationally in traffic congestion. The increase in congestion was attributed to a squeeze: the cumulative effect of drivers and developers adding traffic to static street capacity. The prognosis for the next few years was viewed as not good, and the streets due to be repaired were highlighted. But 61 percent of those polled wanted to widen existing roads and build new ones.

The segment ended with a theme that would be reinforced in later reports: you and your attitudes should be part of the solution. Another reference to the "Eyewitness News" poll indicated that road construction was the commuters' preferred solution. UNCC traffic experts suggested that this was not likely to solve congestion under present circumstances.

Day 2: What Is Mobility? Why Do People Want It?

Part 2 picked up where Part 1 left off, delivering a new concept to viewers: people's habits, not an outmoded highway system, contribute substantially to traffic problems. The "Eyewitness News" poll focused on Charlotte's love for the automobile, noting the use of two, three, and even four cars per family.

A multiple-car household was sought to demonstrate how a family, in a sense, abused its mobility with overuse of cars. The reporter, again a high-profile weekend and substitute anchor, found a two-car family to fit the profile. A couple in their 30s with three pre-teen girls and two cars was asked and agreed to participate (they were friends of a friend of the reporter). Two news photography crews followed them throughout the day and recorded travel for later analysis. Their activities revealed what became a working title: "travel junkies," people whose lifestyles relied completely on the ease of access and mobility provided by the automobile, generating much travel and contributing to the city's congestion.

In telling the family's story, the reporter emphasized the family's similarities to many others in the Charlotte area. The report examined travel frequency, hoping to shock viewers who shared the lifestyle. The piece was produced in a form of time lapse, using the lower left-hand portion of the screen as a clock that allowed the viewer to equate time of day with driving chore.

Dedication of two news crews to any one project for a full day is a major manpower commitment for a newsroom the size of WSOC. On a given day, from 4:30 a.m. to midnight, WSOC averages eight crews on the street. Cutting that number by two full crews, working toward a story that will not air on the day of the shoot, indicates that the project is manpower intensive.

This family's travel activity was traditional in many ways. The family clearly divided its roles, with husband working and wife nurturing. The wife made a total of 18 trips, totaling 42 mi, primarily to and from school to deliver and pick up the children; she also rotated chauffeur duties with other families. She made extensive use of neighborhood streets and shortcuts, avoiding main-street congestion. During a 7-hr day, she spent 2 hr 6 min in the vehicle. The husband went to a breakfast meeting, then to work, and then to lunch and afternoon meetings. He made nine trips totaling 55 mi in 1.5 hr, all as a solo driver. For one activity—to view a daughter's school dance recital—husband and wife were together during the day. The family indicated that they did not even think about the amount of travel—almost 100 mi—because it was necessary to their lifestyle.

The family's travel pattern was shown to a traffic analyst. The analyst's view was that the wife had done a good job of carpooling, using side streets, and planning. Some of the roles—shopping and some chauffeuring, for example—could be shifted to the husband, and the husband could have carpooled. The story also had suggestions for drivers: (a) plan trips, (b) combine errands, (c) change the time of trips, (d) use side streets, and (e) share duties. The story was rounded out with more data on the poll, focusing on the percentage of families that regularly carpool.

Extreme situations always catch the eye of journalists. Driving 100 mi/day in a small area both highlights an extreme situation and offers information that can be promoted by the television station. The realities of audience fragmentation make excellent promotion essential for motivating viewers to stay with a report or a newscast.

Finally, the reporter offered advice to reduce the travel—trip planning. Planning, the advice offered, will lead to more effective use of trips and less hassle.

The reporter closed the segment from a news studio equipped as a phone bank. Workers from Charlotte's Rideshare and Information Program staffed the phone lines, and the reporter offered their services to establish carpools to save time for the harassed commuter. Again, the theme of cooperating with government and providing solutions came through.

Day 3: Commuting Options

The third segment focused on the automobile as the primary transportation tool for the working individual. People who choose suburban and exurban lifestyles choose reliance on the personal vehicle for transportation to and from work. Do they have other options?

The reporter, a specialist in consumer affairs, offered several options, starting with the vanpool. Vanpooling, the reporter suggested, is good advice for a consumer of *time*. A description of life in the vanpool was followed by a demonstration of time and money saved. The vanpool allowed the reporter to suggest other alternatives for both travel and driving style, including leaving for work at off-peak times, changing routes, involving the employer in mass transit, and using mass transit.

Data from the "Eyewitness News" poll indicated that changes in commuter behavior were coming. Poll data were used to show commuting modes and report on what people would do if congestion increased; 54 percent would start to work earlier, 24 percent would change routes, and 20 percent would do nothing.

The reporter closed his segment with radical advice: give up the car. And, working from the Rideshare and Information phone bank, he offered its services in setting up vanpools, park-and-ride, carpools, and mass transit service. The theme of cooperation and advice to "beat those bumper-to-bumper blues" closed the segment.

Day 4: Health Effects

The fourth segment used health dangers to persuade commuters to change their behavior. The station's "Healthbeat" reporter provided the expertise, focusing on stress and the commuter.

The piece used time lapse, deadlines, and the force of habit to show health traps for a subject commuter, a Charlotte businessman whose daily travel included a trip to pick up his children from day care. A doctor went along on the trip. The discussion of dangers included stress, risk taking, and poor air quality. The doctor and the reporter offered advice to make the ride tolerable, safe, and healthy. The story closed on an upbeat, noting that commutes may be great for people who prefer country living and like using drive time as personal time.

Day 5: The Future

This segment portrayed the commute as an "eternal" task and offered some hope through technology. The station's "Breakthrough" reporter, a science and technology specialist, described research projects and inventions that may provide relief. Smart cars, smart highways, home offices, automobile-based fax machines, and lap-top computers all may someday make drive time useful for completion of work and personal tasks.

The story focused on advanced-technology (electric, solar) cars, on-board maps and vehicle navigation, and centrally controlled traffic signal systems of the future. It was couched in simple terms, describing both "what's here now" and "what's coming." The story also covered futuristic trains, vehicle-reading toll systems, fuel-efficient cars, and car-as-office environments.

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

To put the series in perspective, a small public opinion survey on travel behavior and attitudes of local residents was conducted. A short telephone survey instrument was developed with questions concerning perceptions of traffic problems, travel patterns to work and shopping (distance, time, and mode), and planned behavior if congestion were to increase. The survey was administered to 280 residents of Mecklenburg County (Charlotte) and surrounding counties. Data were coded manually and simple charts were prepared for use with the TV series. An effort was made to simplify the statistics for the public.

In general, the poll confirmed staff perceptions of traffic problems and consumer behavior. Residents put traffic congestion at the top of the list of traffic problems by a wide margin and identified southeast Charlotte as the most congested area. It is significant that people outside Mecklenburg County, who probably do not often drive in southeast Charlotte, still regard it as a congested area. However, most people drove to work alone. If congestion increased, most would start earlier or later, change routes, or just cope; only 4 percent said they would carpool or take a bus. Citizens believed that the government should concentrate primarily on widening existing streets (32 percent) and building more streets (27 percent), not on light rail (3 percent) or carpooling (4 percent). Table 1 shows the results.

To simplify the presentation, only a few of the statistics were highlighted and used with reporter stories. Table 2 shows the simplified data and the reporter voice-overs.

TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF POLL RESULTS

Issues

1. Thinking about traffic problems here, what do you think is the #1 problem?	
	<u>% Response</u>
1. too much traffic congestion on the routes I use	51
2. have to wait for signals	9
3. not enough parking	-
4. roadway construction ties up traffic	12
5. traffic accidents	-
6. potholes and poor street conditions	5
7. other	12
(8. Lack of roads	6)
(9. Roads need widening	5)

2. Where do you think these problems are most severe?

1. Uptown Charlotte	5
2. UNCC Corridor (N. Tryon, US 49, I-85 East)	7
3. Southeast (Independence Blvd., Rt. 51, Matthews)	56
4. Southwest (Park, Tyvola, I-77, Southpark)	15
5. West (Billy Graham, West St., Wilkinson Blvd.)	3
6. Northwest (Freedom Drive, Brookshire Parkway)	1
7. North (Beaties Ford Rd., I-77 North, Graham St.)	3
(8. Other/All	10)

Work Travel

3. How far is it to your school/work? (If respondent doesn't work or is in school, go to Question 8).	
_____ miles	12 mi. av.
4. How long does the trip normally take?	
_____ minutes	23 min. av

TABLE 1 (continued on next page)

TABLE 1 (continued)

5.	How do you usually get to work?	
	1. drive alone (car or light truck)	87
	2. passenger with family member	2
	3. carpool with someone else	10
	4. bus	-
	5. walk or bicycle	1
	6. other _____	-
6.	Thinking about the traffic congestion you encounter on your <u>usual route to work</u> , how would you grade it (A-F)?	
	1. A - no congestion, lightly traveled street	11
	2. B - light traffic, 55 mph	10
	3. C - moderate traffic, 50-55 mph	26
	4. D - heavy traffic, 45-50 mph	25
	5. E - slow going, 30-45 mph	16
	6. F - stop and go traffic, 0-30 mph	12
7.	Suppose traffic congestion of this route were to increase substantially to Level F most of the time (read Level definition). Please tell me if you would be willing to do any of the following to deal with that? [Circle all that are mentioned. If level F already, start with "Please..." above.]	
	• Change the route you use	24
	1. move 1 street over	
	2. move 2 streets over	
	3. further away	
	• Start the work trip earlier or later	49
	4. 15 min. earlier or later	
	5. 30 min. earlier or later	
	6. Carpool to work	3
	7. Take a bus	1
	8. Walk or bike to work	-
	9. Combine shopping and work trips	1
	10. Move closer to work	1
	11. Change to a job closer to home	-
	12. Move away (change both jobs and home)	1
	13. Nothing - just cope!	20
	[Go to Question 11.]	
	<u>Shopping Travel (if don't work)</u>	
8.	How far is it to your usual (most frequently visited) shopping stores?	
	_____ miles	3 mi. av.
9.	How long does the trip normally take?	
	_____ minutes	11 min. av
10.	How do you usually get to shopping?	
	1. drive alone (car or light truck)	69
	2. passenger with family member	23
	3. carpool with someone else	3
	4. bus	2
	5. walk or bicycle	3
	6. other _____	-
	<u>Government Actions</u>	
11.	What is the one thing you think government should do to help reduce traffic congestion?	
	1. build more freeways and expressways	29
	2. upgrade and widen existing streets	32
	3. better traffic signal timing	3
	4. reduce access to driveways and side streets	2
	5. increase bus services	3
	6. build light rail transit lines	3
	7. encourage carpooling	4
	8. encourage flexible work hours	-
	9. encourage mixed land uses	-
	10. other _____	9
	(11. don't know	15)

TABLE 2 POLL MATERIAL USED IN TV STATISTICS

	Material Shown on TV	Voice-Over
(1)	What is our Number One Traffic Problem? Congestion 51% Road Construction 12% Traffic Lights 9%	"An eyewitness news poll puts traffic congestion above everything else as the number one traffic problem"
(2)	Where do you think problems are most severe? Southeast 56% Southwest 15% UNCC Area 7%	"Southeast Charlotte leads as the top trouble spot for driving around here"
(3)	Traffic solutions? Widen streets 32% Build more freeways 29% Suggest carpools 4%	"Nobody wants to give up that freedom"
(4)	87% drive alone to work 69% drive alone to shop 46% have 2 cars 62% in Gaston have 2 cars 64% in Cabarrus have 2 cars	"Most of us drive alone to work" "A lot of us have 2 cars"
(5)	[how change behavior during rush hour] 24% change routes start to work earlier? 45% in Mecklenburg Co. 74% in Gaston Co. 58% in York Co. 20% just cope	"45% are getting up earlier" "20% are just gritting their teeth"

GOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

To provide carpooling assistance, WSOC-TV arranged with Rideshare, a local government agency, to provide carpool-match services for 3 hr (4:30 to 7:30 p.m.) on each of 3 days of the series. The Rideshare workers were shown on TV.

Governmental cooperation came at two levels. The primary level involved Charlotte's Rideshare and Information Office. Rideshare and Information works in the city's Department of Transportation to develop strategies for use of mass transit, park-and-ride, carpools, and vanpools. WSOC-TV offered Rideshare and Information the opportunity to work from an in-studio phone bank for a total of 6 hr during 2 days of the "Bumper-to-Bumper Blues" series. Three to four staff members would operate the telephones beginning at 4:30 p.m. and continuing through the afternoon news access, newscast, and the first ½ hr of prime time access programming, ending at 7:30 p.m. Rideshare and Information was featured during afternoon news headlines and throughout the 6 p.m. newscast, and a phone number was put on the screen to encourage viewers to call and use the service. The phone banks operated in conjunction with reports that identified Rideshare and Information services as options for commuters seeking relief from traffic congestion.

Despite the access offered, calls to the phone bank were disappointing. The director of Rideshare and Information said

that approximately 29 people called the WSOC phone bank during the 2 days it was active (interview with M. Swinson, July 11, 1989). Most of the callers needed information on carpools and vanpools. Callers were asked to give information for computer matches (location of residence and workplace, etc.). The information was fed into a computer that identified potential matches. Information on matches was sent to the caller through the mail. Callers who were not matched were also notified by mail. After the series, Rideshare received 10 additional calls from people who "saw about it on TV." Rideshare does no television advertising, so it believes that the 10 callers saw the series. The director judged the series to be neither helpful nor a hindrance. She believed that it shows that people are not yet unhappy enough to carpool. She indicated a willingness to participate again.

This service fit into one of the primary aims of the series: to offer solutions to traffic problems identified by the reports. Rideshare and Information programs certainly fit the solutions offered in the report, and the agency was happy to participate.

The agency's air access came during key viewer time periods. Afternoon news access on WSOC-TV routinely carries audience shares ranging from 39 percent to 45 percent. These are some of the highest-rated television programs in the Charlotte market ("The Oprah Winfrey Show," "The Andy Griffith Show," and "The Cosby Show"), and Rideshare and Infor-

mation services were featured twice per day in this period during the 2 days the phone bank operated. The 6 p.m. edition of "Eyewitness News" also commands up to 39 percent of the audience share for the time period, and the phone bank was featured up to three times per newscast.

The second area of government cooperation was in providing reporters with information for their segments. The Charlotte Department of Transportation, Charlotte Rideshare and Information, the North Carolina Department of Transportation, and the South Carolina Department of Transportation provided information to aid reporters. The level of cooperation was high, and it enabled the reporters to develop an accurate analysis of the area's history, problems, and future.

COSTS AND RESULTS

Major costs for the series were in advertising and staff preparation time. WSOC spent about \$50,000 on pre-series advertising (\$25,000 for value of on-air spots; \$8,750 for advertising in *TV Guide*, *TV Week*, and similar publications; and \$16,250 for selected radio advertising). In addition, reporter, producer, and camera crew time was estimated to cost about \$20,000; the public opinion poll cost another \$1,300.

Results were generally positive, but the picture was not clear. Table 3 shows the percentages viewing the series and a subsequent series for WSOC and its major competitor. Compared with year-before statistics, the series-week share declined according to one monitoring system and increased according to another.

After the "Bumper-to-Bumper Blues" series ended, in-house analysis concluded that the reports were successful on several levels.

- Production quality: the quality of production in the five segments was graded A or B by news managers. The reports were visually interesting, touched areas not previously seen by WSOC viewers, and presented the city's legendary traffic problems in a manner never before attempted by Charlotte area media.

- Audience interaction: Despite the low number of calls to the Rideshare and Information telephone bank, news managers considered the attempt at audience interaction somewhat successful. The reports identified problems, offered solutions, and even offered help in implementing the solutions for the interested viewer. Those moved enough by what they saw were offered the service instantly.

- Ratings: Arbitron (*Audience Estimates in the Arbitron Ratings Market of Charlotte, North Carolina*) and Nielsen

(*Viewers in Profile, Charlotte, North Carolina*) ratings analysis for May 1989 indicated no significant jump or decline in ratings for the week the series aired. Ratings for that week were mixed compared with ratings for May 1988 and were down from February 1989. The decline from February is common in winter-spring trends.

One other form of follow-up remains in development: creation of a specialist position in traffic reporting in the newsroom. There are enough traffic-related stories in Charlotte to merit such attention, but the beat is nontraditional and would pull manpower from a daily use role. The concept remains under consideration.

CONCLUSIONS

The effort indicated that an interesting series can be done on traffic without resorting to the usual "who's at fault" focus. This series, concentrating instead on explaining problems and helping people find personal solutions, was interesting, well received, and constructive.

Television news should not be undersold in considering a governmental role in shaping a series similar to that outlined here. As audiences fragment and news becomes available at any time of the day or night, there is less and less traditional material offered through local television news that cannot be found elsewhere at a time convenient to the viewer.

Local television news must generate material significantly different from that generated by its network and cable rivals and package it in a manner attractive enough to guarantee tune-in at 6 p.m. Public service subjects are becoming more and more prominent in the newscast as stations try to reach that goal. In the past year, WSOC-TV has used the Internal Revenue Service to help viewers with income tax returns, the Better Business Bureau to help viewers with retail problems, the North Carolina Attorney General's office to help viewers who have problems with used cars, the Charlotte Employment and Training Office to help teenagers find summer jobs, the Mecklenburg County Medical Society to provide viewers with telephone help for medical problems, the Charlotte Social Security Office to answer questions relating to Social Security, and now the Charlotte Rideshare and Information Office to assist with commuting problems. Instant identification of problem areas comes from the agencies involved, but so do potential solutions. No discussion is given to the merits of the government-offered solutions, but their availability is put in the forefront. These reports say "Here is the problem, and here is a solution, not *the only* solution."

TABLE 3 VIEWER DATA FOR TRAFFIC SERIES FROM ARBITRON AND NIELSEN RATINGS REPORTS FOR FEBRUARY 1988, MAY 1988, FEBRUARY 1989, AND MAY 1989

Date	Item	Arbitron Shares		Nielsen Shares	
		WSOC	Competitor	WSOC	Competitor
4-27-88	year before	39	35	31	41
2-01-89	winter	39	36	35	38
4-26-89	traffic series	32 (-7)	39 (+4)	36 (+5)	35 (-6)
5-20-88	year before	38	35	38	42
2-15-88	winter	36	41	31	41
5-50-88	teen job series	47 (+9)	31 (-4)	36 (-2)	45 (+3)

3
weeks
later

In each of these cases, the government agency involved recognized a need of its constituency, recognized the value of free television time in a slot with high tune-in (to "purchase" a series like this would cost \$80,000), worked with the television station to package its material in a way that did not compromise journalism principles, and helped the public. Recognition of these factors by the government agency is a key to making these programs work.

Ten years ago, if these items had been aired at all, they would have been found in the graveyard of early Sunday morning public affairs programming. But with local television news seeking a new role—one that makes it more than a news provider—it must locate material that helps improve people's lives.

This has always been a goal of journalism, but the methods have changed. Bettering society no longer means just pointing out its ills. It means taking an active role in finding solutions, even to the point of acting as a middleman between government agencies and a public that finds them increasingly difficult to understand and use. Whenever this method of reporting is successful, the public remembers the television station and the government agency in a positive light.

There are no firm plans at this point to follow up this paper. However, the data base remains intact, and if WSOC-TV and UNCC decide to follow up, it can be done in a direct manner. The names and telephone numbers of those contacted in the original survey were received for a possible follow-up. Areas for additional research include:

1. Did "Bumper to Bumper Blues" change your outlook on travel behavior in the Charlotte region?
2. Would you be interested in a personal travel plan (carpool, vanpool, park-and-ride) prepared by a government agency to make your travel a bit easier?
3. Do you recognize that travel habits combined with growing population and obsolete highway systems create the present traffic congestion problem?

In short, follow-up is possible. However, the media need a "hook"—an incident that can lead to a series of reports that might provide a ratings advantage in addition to the service.

If a government official wants to establish constructive dialog with the media, what actions should the government official take? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Decide what is to be accomplished.
2. Develop potential story lines—what items would the media be most interested in? How can these items be told and sold as stories? What makes them interesting?
3. Plan. Meet with the media informally, off the record, to discuss ideas.
4. Compromise. Get the interest level up. Decide how the media can help. Be prepared to discard items of less importance.

5. Implement. Work with the media to develop stories or issues. Work out an agreeable schedule.

6. Help the media put stories together. Answer questions, do interviews, provide sources. But don't write the story or push it in ways you want it to go.

7. Follow up. Continue to offer assistance over time. Establish a long-term rapport. Build mutual trust.

As with most situations, an open, honest approach, geared to cooperation rather than confrontation, will encourage a spirit of friendliness that will yield dividends for both parties.

This concept can be repeated anywhere. It is transferable if the government agency, university, and media outlet are able to seize an issue and, through a pool of resources, orchestrate attention and possible change. In recent months, WSOC-TV has embarked on similar ventures with the local medical society, agencies dealing with abused children, agencies and businesses seeking teenage employees, and agencies who agreed to provide free phone counseling for drug abusers.

The need for simplicity is emphasized. To pack many ideas into a short series means that many thoughts have to be shortened, some eliminated. Good journalism requires this. The traffic expert, for example, needs to recognize that complex problem descriptions and solutions will be greatly distilled for airing. But the benefits gained—reaching a wide audience, helping many citizens, and fostering understanding—outweigh the costs. The traffic analyst who is willing to compromise—and that is not always easy—may find that the media can be an ally in improving transportation for the community.

The media need not be viewed as an enemy. The media's role as helper is increasing as competition from other sectors encourages traditional TV news to expand its functions. The media are also community citizens and themselves depend on services such as transportation, so they too have a stake in transportation solutions. Series such as that described clarify the complexity of the problems and the difficulty of implementing solutions. This does not mean that the media have sold out. Carrying forward the public agenda is still a valid goal and will continue to be so.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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