

# Evaluation of Second-Year Effectiveness of Guaranteed Ride Home Service at Warner Center Transportation Management Organization

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The concept of offering a "Guaranteed Ride Home" (GRH) to employees in case of emergencies to maintain and encourage ridesharing and transit use has grown in popularity among transportation management associations and single employers during the past few years, especially in Southern California. The Warner Center Transportation Management Organization was one of the first organizations to design and offer such a service to its entire membership as early as 1989. To date, there has been little information on the impact of GRH services in maintaining and recruiting solo drivers for alternative forms of transportation such as carpooling, vanpooling, buspooling, and public transit. Data are provided through the evaluation of Warner Center's second year of offering a comprehensive GRH Service to its 45 member companies, which employ over 33,000. The study identifies 600 employees who began carpooling, vanpooling, or riding a bus during the past year and indicated that the GRH service most influenced their decision to do so. In addition, 50 percent of those surveyed said that the GRH service was important in their decision to rideshare or take transit. Furthermore, a majority of management believe that the service is a vital part of their overall rideshare incentive package. Overall costs, usage, and responsiveness of the service are also identified. The conclusion reached is that this service costs very little, was used very little, but was abused very little. However, it successfully removed an important roadblock to ridesharing and transit use by converting a significant number of solo drivers.

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Warner Center Transportation Management Organization (TMO) has offered a comprehensive Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) service to its 7,500 ridesharers and transit riders since June 1989. The service provides employees with a free ride home in a taxi or rental car in the event of emergencies during the work shift.

The Warner Center is 1,100-acre mixed-use development in the West San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles, with an employee population of approximately 40,000. The Warner Center TMO consists of 45 corporate members and 4 building owners and represents approximately 90 percent of the total Warner Center labor force. The TMO was formed in 1989 to maintain an adequate level of mobility in the Warner Center area by providing commuters with an attractive choice of transportation options. The Warner Center TMO offers a number of ridesharing incentives, including the GRH pro-

gram, and has established an extensive carpool network, vanpool program, and private express lines.

During the past 2 years, the TMO has closely monitored the GRH service. An outside consulting firm, Transportation Management Services, was used to evaluate results from the first year of GRH service and reported that program objectives were being met and that there was very little abuse of the service. TMO staff conducted the second-year evaluation, and discovered that although the service had continued to be very effective in recruiting ridesharers and has had very little abuse, it has been utilized infrequently.

## GENERAL FINDINGS

To help evaluate the effectiveness of GRH, the TMO reviewed a variety of surveys and detailed records and made the following findings:

1. Over 600 employees who began carpooling, vanpooling, or riding a bus during 1990 identified GRH as the service that most influenced their decision to do so.

In order to quantify the number of employees ridesharing because of the GRH service, the TMO designed a standard attitudinal questionnaire and asked all company members to distribute it to their employees, with the goal of gathering center-wide data about the GRH program from all members. Commuter Transportation Services compiled the attitudinal survey responses and issued a report revealing that GRH was maintaining and recruiting many ridesharers and transit riders among TMO members.

2. Of the employees surveyed, 59 percent said that GRH was important in their decision to carpool, vanpool, or ride a bus. This significant finding reveals that over half of the employees surveyed considered GRH important when deciding whether to rideshare or take transit.

3. Member Employee Transportation Coordinators (ETCs) were also surveyed, and the majority believe that GRH is a vital part of their overall rideshare incentive packages. This finding confirms that members see GRH as an important TMO service.

4. The proportion of employees who are aware of GRH is 56 percent. Although it is good that over half of the employees know about GRH, it is disturbing that almost half do not. This suggests that continuous marketing campaigns are needed to communicate the availability of GRH.

## FINDINGS REVEALED FROM PARTICIPANTS

In addition to finding out employees' attitudes about GRH, the TMO also tracked each GRH participant's experience and opinions. The TMO utilized two forms to help monitor this service: a voucher form and a follow-up confirmation report.

### Voucher Form Responses

The voucher form is used for two reasons: to verify that the employee is eligible to use this service and as a coupon to pay for the actual ride. The TMO compiled statistics from those who used the voucher forms and identified whether the rider used a taxi or rental car. Taxis were used if rides were within 20 mi, and rental cars if rides were over 20 mi. It is important to note that the statistics reflect the respondents who answered the question. Some participants did not answer each question and, as a result, are not reflected in the data.

The following information was derived from these vouchers.

### Transportation Mode

The statistics below show that most rides were taken by vanpoolers. The reason for this could be that the TMO operated a large fleet of 73 vanpools, carrying over 1,000 riders each day. Another reason for the high use of the GRH service among vanpoolers could be that they are continually reminded of the service and tend to vanpool full time because they pay a monthly rate. Participants who carpool tend to commute shorter distances than vanpoolers, and less often.

The following statistics were compiled in response to the question about mode used to get to work:

Mode	No. of Rides		
	Rental Car	Taxi	Total
Carpool	17	34	51
Vanpool	48	39	87
Bus	8	5	13
Other (bike, walk)	0	0	0
Total	73	78	151

### Type of Emergency

Interestingly, although the TMO had assumed that child-related emergencies would occur most often, employee illness and overtime were the most frequent reasons for using the service. Family illness is that involving a spouse or other relative (other than children). However, the TMO will continue to target this service at working parents because of their fear of being unavailable to attend to their children's needs.

Responses to the question about type of emergency are as follows:

Emergency	No. of Rides		
	Rental Car	Taxi	Total
Employee illness	16	27	43
Child need	8	14	22
Family illness	15	3	18
Overtime	18	13	31
Carpool driver ill	2	9	11
Car/van breakdown	2	4	6
Employee terminated	0	1	1
Death in family	3	5	8
Total	64	76	140

### Distance

It is clear that employees living far from the work site tend to rideshare and are most likely to take advantage of the GRH service. The average rental-car use distance is 55 mi: taxi use, 26 mi; and total average, 41 mi. The employee may use 150 mi free in a rental car, and this is considered adequate on the basis of normal demand.

Interestingly, taxis were supposed to be used for those traveling under 20 mi, but it was discovered that most taxi trips were over this limit. The TMO suggests many reasons for this occurrence. First, ridesharers tend to commute longer distances to work, thus needing a rental car for the over-20-mile trip. However, it was discovered that many are unable to rent a car. Some were under the age of 21, which prohibited them from renting a car, some worked later shifts when the rental agency was closed, and others were either physically or mentally unable to drive a car. ETCs have the flexibility to decide which vendor to use for a particular circumstance. They are only required to document their reasons for utilizing another vendor. Although it is true that the long taxi rides were much more expensive than a rental car would have been, the occurrences were infrequent.

### Location of Emergency

About 60 of 150 rides, or roughly half, need to stop someplace before going home and the majority rode home in a taxi. The most common destination was a parking lot to pick up their car. Another common destination was the doctor's office. This reinforces TMO's marketing effort to let employees know that, if necessary, they will be taken to another emergency destination before they are taken home.

Responses to the request to identify emergency locations other than home at which riders needed to stop are as follows:

Location	No. of Rides		
	Rental Car	Taxi	Total
Van stop	2	25	27
Doctor's office	3	8	11
Hospital	6	3	9
School	2	2	4
Other	2	7	9
Total	15	45	60

Some similar programs in Los Angeles choose to call their programs "Guaranteed Return Trip," because they believe that home is not the only destination desired. The Warner Center TMO, however, retained "home" in its name because all participants ultimately needed a ride home after attending to their emergencies at other locations.

### Follow-Up Confirmation Report Responses

The TMO requires all participants to complete a confirmation report within 30 days after the ride so that the TMO can verify their eligibility and for satisfaction with the service. The report asks for specific information, including the names and phone numbers of their carpoolers, and reconfirms the type of emergency. The report also asks questions about response time; importance of GRH service in decision to carpool, vanpool,

or use transit; and comparison of experience with service and expectations.

At the end of the follow-up confirmation report, the TMO allowed participants to write any positive or negative comments. The majority of the comments were positive. Here is a sampling:

"Very pleased with service." "This is a good program. Thank you." "Very satisfied with the service." "Took too long (40 minutes)." "Great Service." "Good service." "Pleased with service." "Employees at rental agency were very courteous." "After having used this service in time of need—and no hassles—makes vanpooling a real pleasure and dependable." "Keep up program. It's very good." "I am very satisfied with service."

### Response Time

The largest percentage, 38, were picked up within 10 min and 34 percent were picked up within 20 min. This justifies the claim that employees do not have to wait long for their rides. The TMO had believed that 20 min was a reasonable wait. Research into longer wait times revealed that the vendor was confused about the pickup location. This usually occurred at the larger employer complexes with many entrances. The rental-car agency provided a shuttle service to pick up and return employees to their work site, but taxis appeared to respond more quickly than the shuttle.

Answers to the question about response time are as follows:

Response Time (min)	No. of Rides		
	Rental Car	Taxi	Total
0–10	8	30	38
10–20	22	12	34
20–30	14	5	19
30–40	5	1	6
40+	2	2	4

### Importance

These data confirm that employees are either staying in their ridesharing and bus-riding arrangements or starting them because the GRH service is available.

Responses to the question about effect of GRH service on decision to use carpools, vanpools, or transit are as follows:

Response	No. of Rides		
	Rental	Taxi	Total
Very important	59	71	130
Somewhat important	7	8	15
Not important	0	0	0
	66	79	145

### Comparison of Experience with Expectations

The following data were collected in response to the question "How has your experience with this service compared with expectations?"

Response	No. of Rides		
	Rental Cars	Taxi	Total
Exceeded	17	20	37
Satisfied	24	28	52
Fallen short	3	1	4
	44	49	93

These data reveal that the majority using this service believed it to be equal to or better than their expectations. The TMO assumed that participants' expectations were favorable to begin with. High-quality, colorful brochures and posters were distributed to assure employees that GRH is a dependable, professional service.

### USAGE

The statistics in Table 1 give a detailed picture of the use and costs of the GRH service. The average number of rides monthly is 21. A grand total of 245 GRH rides was provided. Only 10 participants used the service more than once. The TMO estimates that a grand total of 7,500 Warner Center commuters currently do not regularly drive alone and are therefore eligible for this service. As a result, only 3 percent of those eligible actually used this service.

### COSTS

The TMO paid a total of \$13,606 for GRH rides. This breaks down to be an average of \$53 per ride. Taxi costs are slightly less than rental-car costs. Although it can be said that each ride is costly, the service is needed very infrequently. Therefore, the TMO improved its public relations with little actual cost.

### LIMITED ABUSE

Abuse of this service, (i.e., not following GRH policies) was extremely low, 3 percent. The TMO believes that this is because most employees would not leave work just because they knew that a free ride was available. In addition, the TMO designed a good monitoring system to limit abuse. The employee must gain prior approval from an authorized company representative and acquire a voucher form before using the service.

TMO employer members are each responsible for administering the GRH service correctly. All members must sign an agreement stating that the employer will reimburse the TMO for any abuse by their employees. The employer may then decide whether or not to have the employee reimburse them. The TMO investigated the few cases of participant abuse. All employers with abuse cases reimbursed the TMO, and it was found that all participants reimbursed their employer when asked.

The abuse was more by employees who used rental cars than those who rode taxis. The opportunity to abuse rental-car use is clear: employees could easily keep the rental car longer than allowed. The rental period is 24 hours. The few participants who rented a car on Friday and didn't return it on Saturday claimed that they had not been told they could not keep the car all weekend, even though this limit policy is clearly stated on the back of the voucher. There were no cases in which ineligible employees who drove alone utilized this service.

The one case of taxi abuse involved a participant who used the GRH service after an on-the-job injury, which is not

TABLE 1 MONTH-TO-MONTH STATISTICS, JUNE 1990 THROUGH MAY 1991

<u>RENTAL CAR USE</u>							
	6/90	7/90	8/90	9/90	10/90	11/90	12/90
# RIDES	18	10	12	14	6	12	10
Average cost	\$ 62	55	62	53	64	54	52
Total cost	\$1,114	549	748	737	385	649	524
Abuse	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
	1/91	2/91	3/91	4/91	5/91	Total/Average	
# RIDES	11	7	11	7	10	128 / 11	
Average cost	\$ 54	62	55	51	57	\$57	
Total cost	\$ 597	437	605	361	666	\$7,372/\$614	
Abuse	0	1	0	1	0	5 / 4%	
<u>TAXI USE</u>							
	6/90	7/90	8/90	9/90	10/90	11/90	12/90
# RIDES	6	6	*	10	8	13	5
Average cost	\$ 42	68	*	87	49	60	43
Total cost	\$ 254	410	*	869	390	784	215
Abuse	0	0	*	0	0	1	0
	1/91	2/91	3/91	4/91	5/91	Total/Average	
# RIDES	13	11	16	11	18	117 / 10	
Average cost	\$ 55	54	48	39	45	\$49	
Total cost	\$ 717	596	765	429	805	\$6,234/\$520	
Abuse	0	0	0	0	0	1 / .9%	
* Numbers from 8/90 are included in 9/90 figures.							
	<u>RENTAL CAR USE</u>		<u>TAXI USE</u>		<u>TOTAL USE</u>		
	Total	Average	Total	Average	Total	Average	
# RIDES	128	11	117	10	245	21	Per Month
Average cost	\$ 54	\$57	\$49	\$49	\$53	\$53	
Total cost	\$7,372	\$614	\$6,234	\$520	\$13,606	\$567	
Abuse	5	4%	1	.9%	6	3%	

allowed. Each employer is responsible for transporting an employee either home or to acquire medical attention if an on-the-job accident occurs. An ETC had incorrectly approved this case.

**SUMMARY**

The Warner Center TMO believes that the statistics compiled provide substantial evidence that participants were very pleased

with the GRH service, and this program has continued to be successful in sustaining and recruiting ridesharers and transit riders. The TMO intends to continue offering this service to its members, with an emphasis on conducting extensive marketing strategies to ensure that a majority of Warner Center employees are well informed of its availability.

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