

# Understanding Asian Commuters in Southern California: Implications for Rideshare Marketing

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Asian Americans are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population, more than doubling in the past decade from 3.7 million in 1980 to 7.9 million in 1990. Findings on the travel behavior and commuting concerns of the Asian-American commuter are based on an analysis of *State of the Commute* surveys conducted by Commuter Transportation Services, Inc. (CTS) in 1991, 1992, and 1993. Supporting data are taken from the 1980 and 1990 Censuses. CTS has also reviewed marketing literature for techniques that have proved effective in reaching the Asian-American market in other industries. It should be noted that within the Asian community, there is a wide range of ethnic groups that are diverse in many characteristics: language, religion, culture, and value system. Some general inferences made, therefore, may not apply to all Asian ethnic groups. Results show that Asian commuters have a higher drive-alone rate and a lower carpool rate than other ethnic groups. However, Asians are the most likely to indicate that they would be interested in trying carpooling or vanpooling. Marketing literature indicates that Asians concentrate in suburban strongholds and identify with their native language; marketing campaigns that are in Asian languages and that promote a sense of community have been effective. It is concluded that Asian commuters are likely to choose an alternative to driving alone if given more information on their commute options. CTS can increase the rideshare rate of Asian commuters by investing in marketing programs targeted at this group. The marketing campaigns should include home-end corridor programs and promotional material in Asian languages.

Although Asian Americans make up only 3 percent of the U.S. population, they have been the fastest-growing ethnic group, more than doubling in the past decade from 3.7 million in 1980 to 7.9 million in 1990. In the Los Angeles-Anaheim-Riverside Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA)—Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties—Asian Americans have increased by 54 percent, from 600,000 in 1980 to 1.3 million in 1990, now representing 9.2 percent of the population (Figure 1).

Asian-American market research has been limited to studies of small sample sizes and has been lacking in an understanding of Asian values. Companies are not willing to invest in the high cost of researching a market that is complex because of its diversity in language and dialect. As a result, there is currently little marketing information about the Asian community.

Commuter Transportation Services, Inc. (CTS), a private, non-profit corporation dedicated to helping commuters find alternatives to driving alone, has developed this paper to determine the extent to which rideshare marketing efforts have reached this race group

and how to improve or develop more effective rideshare marketing programs.

More specifically, this paper has been prepared to answer the following three questions:

1. Who is the Asian commuter market, and what are the characteristics and profile of its members?
2. What is the travel behavior of Asian Americans? How do they travel to work? What are their commuting concerns?
3. How do we market to Asian Americans? What messages and media do we use?

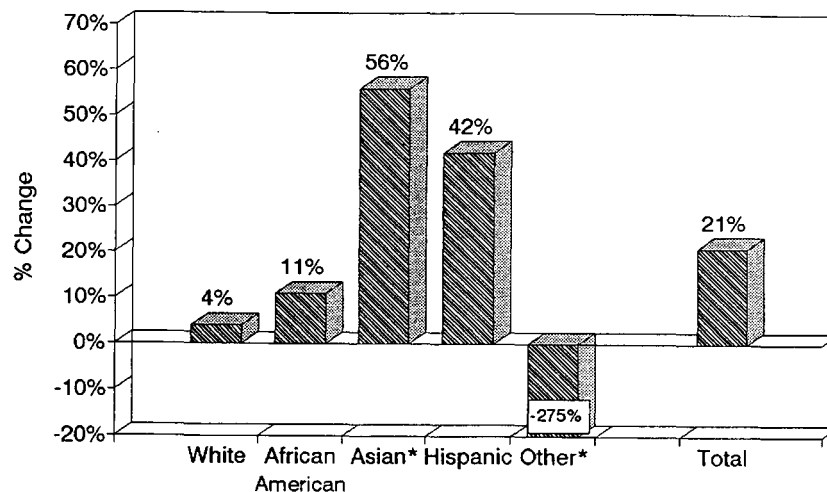
## DATA SOURCES

Findings in this paper are taken from the 1991, 1992, and 1993 *State of the Commute* surveys conducted by CTS and the 1980 and 1990 Censuses. In addition, the marketing literature has been reviewed to provide insight on the most effective marketing strategies in other industries.

The *State of the Commute* surveys provide travel behavior data and some demographic information. Data for the studies were collected via telephone interviews among commuters who are 18 years or older, work full-time outside their homes, and reside in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties. For the 3 years combined, a total of 7,671 commuters were surveyed, of which 7 percent were Asian (543 respondents). Responses are weighted by the number of respondents in each race group for that given year. This ensures that the race groups with larger sample sizes for a given year are not overrepresented. Data are also weighted by county populations based on the 1990 Census figures to ensure that less populated counties carry a weight in proportion to their share of the regional population.

Although 1990 Census data may be more reliable than the *State of the Commute* survey results, the Census data do not provide summary totals for the selected variables by race. The Public Use Microdata Sample data of the 1990 Census can provide this information, but the *State of the Commute* goes into more detail regarding commuting behavior and attitudes.

This paper summarizes characteristics of the Asian market. The Asian group identified encompasses a wide range of ethnic groups, (i.e., Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, and Pacific Islanders). It should be noted that these groups are diverse in many characteristics—language, religion, culture, and value system—and some general inferences may not apply to all groups.



\*1980 figures include Other Asians and Pacific Islanders in Other category.

FIGURE 1 1980-1990 percentage change (1).

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

### Size of Ethnic Groups

According to the 1990 Census, 1.3 million Asian Americans reside in the Los Angeles metropolitan area (Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties); Asian Americans make up 9 percent of the region's population of 14.5 million. The largest Asian ethnic group in this region is Chinese, followed by Filipinos (Figure 2).

### Age

According to respondents in the *State of the Commute* study, Asian commuters residing in the Los Angeles basin are younger than non-Hispanic whites and African Americans. Seventy-seven percent of Asian respondents are under 40 years old; only 59 percent of non-Hispanic whites are under 40. The youngest race group is Hispanics, 87 percent of whom are under 40 years old.

### Income

The annual household income for Asian commuters in the Los Angeles CMSA is higher than that of African Americans and Hispanics but lower than that of the non-Hispanic whites. Thirty-one percent of Asian commuters have household incomes of \$65,000 and up, whereas only 20 percent of African Americans and 9 percent of Hispanics commuters have household incomes of \$65,000 and up. Non-Hispanic whites have the highest household incomes; 36 percent have household incomes of \$65,000 and up.

### Occupation and Work Site Size

Asian and non-Hispanic white commuters have similar breakdowns in occupation fields. The occupation most often reported is professional, followed by sales and service.

Most non-Hispanic whites, Hispanics, and Asian Americans (65, 70, and 62 percent, respectively) indicate that they work at sites with under 100 employees. Half of African Americans indicate that they work at work sites with under 100 employees.

### Length of Time at Work/Home Location

Asian commuters report the shortest length of time at their current work location, 47 months (4 years), and non-Hispanic whites report the longest, 65 months (5½ years). African Americans and Hispanics report similar lengths of time at their work locations, 54 and 53 months, respectively.

Asian commuters also report the shortest length of time living at their current home location, 70 months (5.8 years), whereas non-Hispanic whites report the longest length of time, 88 months (7.3 years). African Americans and Hispanics have an average length of time at their home locations that is slightly longer than Asians, 72 and 76 months respectively.

### Number and Availability of Vehicles

According to the *State of the Commute* data, all Asian-American commuters interviewed have a vehicle in their households, whereas 4 percent of Hispanic households do not have a car and 3 percent of African-American commuters do not have a car in their households.

In addition, 90 percent of Asian commuters always have a car available to commute to work, compared with only 79 percent of Hispanics and 85 percent of African Americans. Of all groups, non-Hispanic whites are most likely to always have a car available for commuting (94 percent).

## TRAVEL BEHAVIOR

### Travel Mode

For their primary mode of transportation (3 or more days a week), 86 percent of Asians drive alone to work. This drive-alone rate is

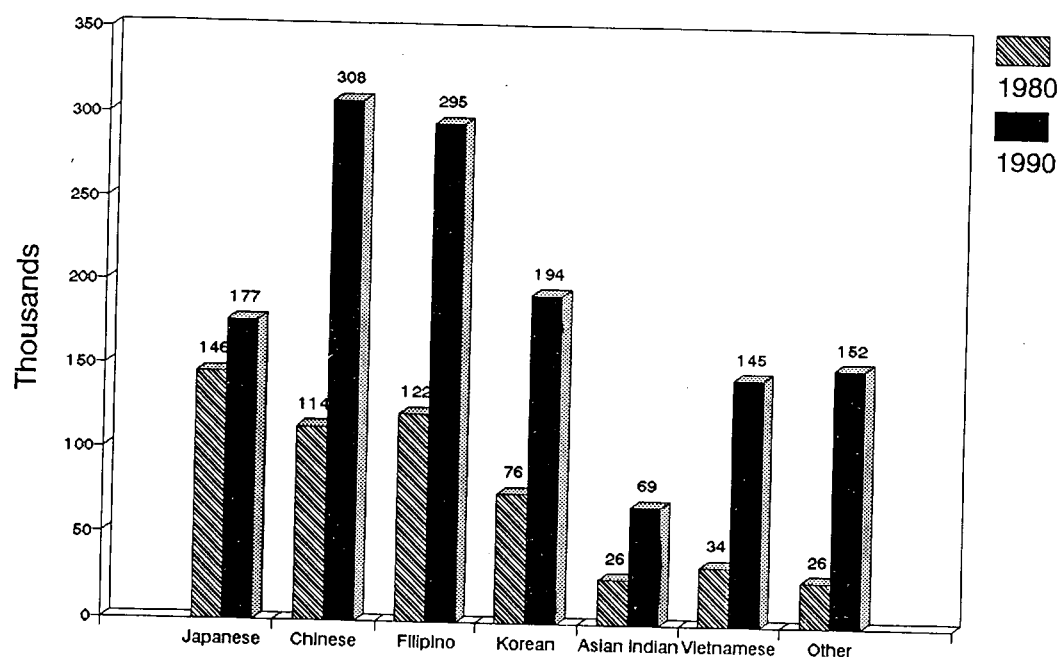


FIGURE 2 Population growth by Asian groups (I).

the highest of the race groups; 2 percentage points higher than non-Hispanic whites, 13 points higher than African Americans, and 21 points higher than Hispanics (Figure 3). The Asian carpool and transit rates are the lowest of all race groups, 11 and 1 percent, respectively (Figure 4).

Averaged over the past 3 years, only 22 percent of Asian commuters rideshare full-time (3 or more days a week) compared with 29 percent of non-Hispanic white commuters, 36 percent of African-American commuters, and 42 percent of Hispanic commuters. However, a larger share of Asian commuters rideshare part-time (1 or 2 days a week): 10 percent of Asians rideshare part-time but only 6 percent of non-Hispanic whites, African Americans, and Hispanics.

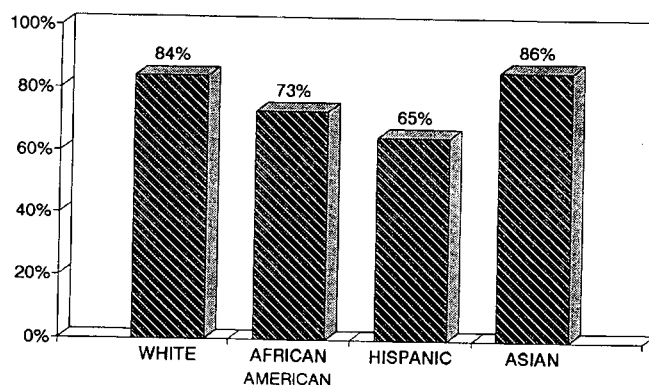


FIGURE 3 Drive-alone rate by race (2).

### Commuting Time and Distance

The average commuting distance for Asians is 15.1 mi, shorter than the commuting distance for non-Hispanic whites (16.7 mi) and African Americans (16.1 mi) but slightly longer than the commuting distance of Hispanics (14.7 mi) (Figure 5).

Although the average distance traveled by Asians is shorter than the distance traveled by the other groups (except for Hispanics), the average self-reported travel time to work, 31 min, is comparable to that of the other race groups (Figure 6).

### Arrival and Leave Time

Asian commuters, on average, arrive and leave approximately 30 min later than commuters from other race groups. Hispanic commuters arrive and leave the earliest. On average, non-Hispanic white commuters work longer days than commuters of the other race groups, 12 min longer per day.

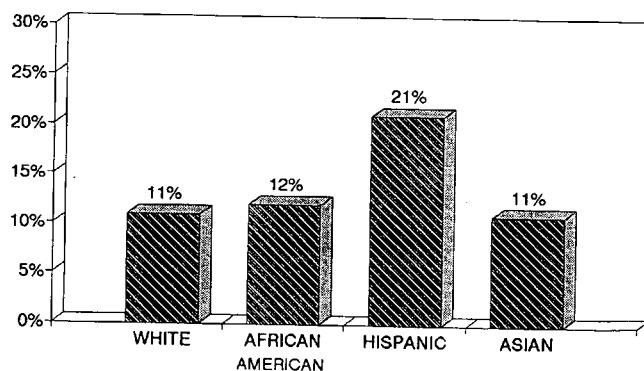


FIGURE 4 Carpool rate by race (2).

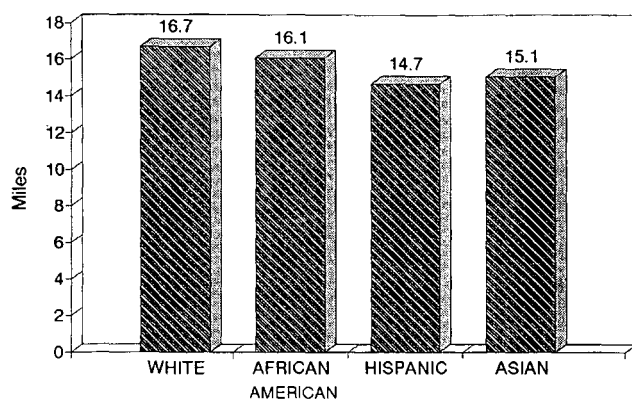


FIGURE 5 Distance to work (2).

### Carpooling Characteristics

#### Carpool Size

The average carpool size for Asian Americans (2.56) is smaller than that for African Americans (2.98) and Hispanics (2.89) but larger than that for non-Hispanic whites (2.50).

#### Number of Months in a Carpool

Asian-American commuters stay in a carpool longer than do the other race groups, an average of 32 months (2.7 years), 3 months longer than non-Hispanic whites, 5 months longer than African Americans, and 8 months longer than Hispanics (Figure 7).

#### Carpool Partners

Household members are the most common partners for Asians who carpool. Thirty-seven percent of Asians who indicated that they carpool said that they carpooled with a household member. The most common carpool companion for non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics is also a household member. However, a co-worker is the most common carpool partner for African Americans.

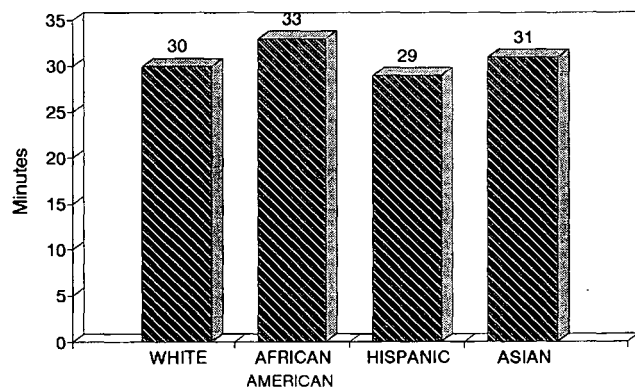


FIGURE 6 Travel time to work (2).

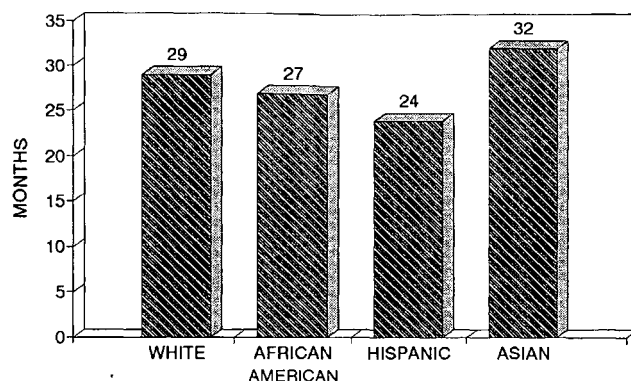


FIGURE 7 Number of months in carpool (2).

Unlike the other race groups, Asians indicate friends and neighbors as the second most common type of carpool partner, 25 percent. For all other race groups, the two most common carpool partner types are household members and co-workers.

The high propensity for Asian commuters to carpool with household members and friends and neighbors can explain the longer life expectancy of their carpools. Carpool arrangements with family and friends tend to be more convenient and permanent. Similarly, carpool arrangements with someone from a matchlist would more likely be short-lived because individuals are less committed. Hispanics are the most likely to carpool with someone from a matchlist, 15 percent, and their carpools have the shortest life expectancy.

### Commuter Attitudes

#### Satisfaction with Commute

When asked to rate their current commute to work from 1 to 9 (1 being least satisfactory), the average rate for Asian respondents is 6.2. Although the average rate for Asian respondents is comparable to that of the other race groups, Asian commuters are less likely to rate their commute a 9. Only 14 percent of Asian commuters rate their commute a 9 compared with 17 percent for non-Hispanic white commuters, 18 percent of Hispanic commuters, and 20 percent of African-American commuters.

#### Factors in Selecting Mode

When asked what they consider in choosing a travel mode, the most common response for Asians is convenience and flexibility (29 percent) followed by travel time to work (20 percent). These two factors are also the most common for the other race groups. However, although 18 percent of Hispanics and 16 percent of African-American commuters indicate "no other way," only 10 percent of Asian commuters report this factor.

#### Consider Ridesharing on Trial Basis

When asked whether they would consider carpooling on a trial basis once or twice a week, 25 percent of Asian respondents say

that they would definitely try it. This percentage is the highest for the four ethnic groups; only 16 percent of non-Hispanic white commuters say that they would definitely try carpooling, 20 percent of Hispanic commuters, and 22 percent of African-American commuters.

Asian-American commuters also respond more favorably to vanpooling. Twenty-four percent of Asians who commute 20 mi or more one way say they would definitely consider vanpooling; this compares with only 11 percent of African Americans, 14 percent of Hispanics, and 18 percent of non-Hispanic whites (Figure 8).

However, when asked if they would consider riding the bus to work, Asians respond similarly to the other race groups. Only 7 percent of Asian commuters indicate that they would definitely try riding the bus, 6 percent of non-Hispanic whites, and 9 percent of both African Americans and Hispanics.

Recognition of Commuter Computer

Of the four race groups, Asians rank second to last in having heard of the "Commuter Computer" or the RIDE-number. Non-Hispanic whites rank first, African Americans second, and Hispanics last.

As expected, Asian commuters are the least likely to have contacted Commuter Computer (7 percent), compared with 11 percent for non-Hispanic whites and 9 percent for African Americans and Hispanics.

MARKETING AND ADVERTISING STRATEGIES

General marketing literature on the Asian market was reviewed to learn more about strategies that can be applied to the development and design of an effective rideshare marketing program.

Urban Concentration

Most Asians live in metropolitan areas where housing costs are high. Within these metropolitan areas, the urban concentration of Asians are suburban strongholds such as Monterey Park and Daly City. New Asian immigrants first move to affordable urban neighborhoods where they save money and later move out to wealthier communities, which usually means longer commutes.

Because Asians tend to be concentrated in selected suburban communities, marketing campaigns can be geographically focused on these Asian-dominated neighborhoods.

Accessibility

Accessibility is a valued quality for the Japanese; convenient transportation is one of the most important factors in selecting a home location. For example, in Japan, houses are advertised by their distance to the train station.

State of the Commute findings support these values as true for Asians living in Southern California. Survey results show that Asians tend to have short commutes. Short commutes mean that living close to work may play an important role in the selection of a home or work location.

Technical Orientation

Because Asian Americans are younger and more educated, they tend to be more comfortable with technology: having technical occupations and owning home computers, sophisticated car alarms, and other electronic equipment. As the transportation field advances, Asians may be an appropriate market for technically oriented programs: touch-screen ridematching booths, debit card systems, intelligent vehicle-highway systems.

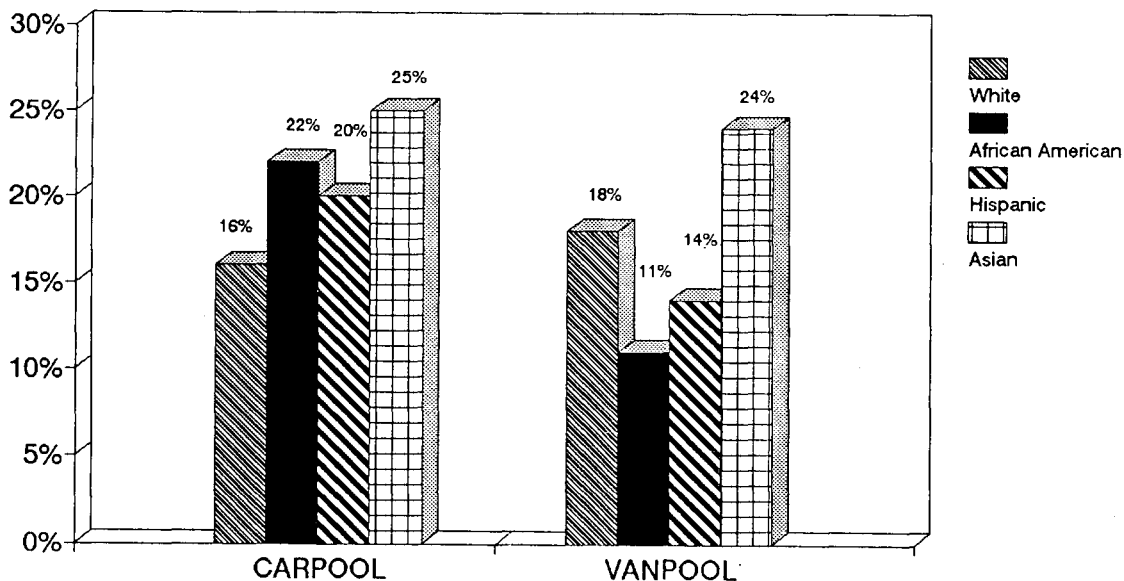


FIGURE 8 Consider carpooling or vanpooling (2).

## Language

Language plays an important role in doing business with the Asian-American community. For example, even second- and third-generation Asian Americans use San Francisco's *Asian Yellow Pages* as a way to "maintain their community." In fact, approximately 5,500 businesses advertise in the *Asian Yellow Pages*, which earned more than \$5 million in 1989.

One proven method of reaching the Asian market is to use their native tongue. Television advertising may not be as cost-effective as the newspaper. In fact, the newspaper is currently the most widely used media for targeting the Asian market.

## Diversity

### *Different Asian Race Groups*

Asians may be the most difficult race group to target because of the diversity among the different ethnic groups. Researching the differences of each Asian ethnic group may be costly but critical in successfully reaching the Asian communities.

### *First and Second Generations*

In addition to the diversity within the Asian group, there exists a diversity among the generations: between new and assimilated Asian Americans. When marketing to multiple generations, the use of both English and the Asian language can be important in bridging the age gap.

There is also a difference between newly immigrated Asians and second-generation Asians. Newly immigrated Asians face unique problems—language, long workdays, and underemployment (where college-educated persons drive taxis and work in convenience stores)—that segregate them from Asians who have assimilated into the American culture. It may be difficult to reach both groups with the same marketing promotion. For example, new immigrants may prefer longer hours of bus service whereas second-generation Asians may prefer more frequent bus service during peak hours.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this paper show that Asian commuters have many similar demographic characteristics and travel behaviors to the non-Hispanic whites. From these findings, it can be assumed that CTS can reach the Asian community through general marketing campaigns that target the non-Hispanic white population. However, survey results also indicate that CTS has not reached Asian commuters compared with commuters of other ethnic groups; Asians

- Rank second to last in the recognition of Commuter Computer;
- Are the least likely to have contacted CTS in the last year;
- Have the highest drive-alone rate and the lowest carpool rate, although Asian carpoolers report the longest carpool longevity; and

- Are the most likely to indicate that they would definitely try carpooling, and those traveling 20 mi or more are the most likely to indicate that they would definitely try vanpooling, on a trial basis once or twice a week.

Given that Asians are the fastest-growing race group, nationally and regionally, and are more than likely to have access to a vehicle, CTS needs to invest in marketing alternative means of transportation to this race group. In addition, this group is young and educated, meaning that they will be making up a significant proportion of the future work force.

However, CTS needs to take caution in developing marketing campaigns that try to reach all segments of the Asian population. Like other immigrants, Asians have different transportation needs depending on how long they have been living in the United States. First-generation Asians tend to live near the central city and have short commutes, whereas second-generation Asians tend to live in suburbs with longer commutes. In selecting the target audience for rideshare promotions, CTS may find that public transit will be easier to market to first-generation Asians and carpooling or vanpooling will be more appropriate for second-generation Asians.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends the following marketing strategies and programs:

- Home-end corridor programs in Asian enclaves. Because Asians tend to concentrate in suburban strongholds, marketing campaigns can be geographically focused. For example, CTS can conduct a corridor promotion along Atlantic Boulevard in Monterey Park. Atlantic Boulevard is a frequented thoroughfare in the Chinese community because many popular restaurants and retail establishments are located along this major arterial.
- Part-time rideshare promotions. Asian commuters prefer carpooling on a part-time basis, 1 or 2 days a week. Promoting part-time ridesharing can be the first step in reaching these commuters who usually drive alone to work.
- Marketing campaigns in Asian languages. Marketing campaigns should be developed in Asian languages. In addition to reaching those newly immigrated Asians, using Asian language will contribute a sense of community, which is an important Asian value.
- Pilot programs of technically oriented projects. CTS should solicit Asian-dominated communities to participate in demonstration programs that test the viability of using technically advanced equipment to reduce air pollution and congestion or improve mobility.

CTS can introduce two advancing projects involving high-tech equipment—touch-screen kiosks and the congestion pricing debit cards—to the Asian business community. Asian commercial districts may be good candidates for these projects because of their high densities and interest in trying new automated equipment.

- Investigate joint projects with Asian marketing firms. These companies are eager to explore new ventures and can provide helpful information about the Asian market. Specifically, CTS can work with Asian Business Connection—a growing telemarketing company that specializes in marketing to the Asian community—

to promote ridesharing to the Asian commuters. Asian Business Connection has a telemarketing staff that speaks Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese and a data base of a quarter of a million Asian households. With these two valuable resources, CTS can develop a powerful marketing campaign that will reach many Asian commuters.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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