TRANSFORM YOUR TRIP

...and regain the time to DO MORE.
Finding a way to move Individualized Marketing from neighborhoods to business districts.

Project Conducted by
MOVABILITY AUSTIN
INTRODUCTION

Austin, Texas is facing serious transportation challenges. A large portion of our workforce travels to downtown Austin at the same time, and most of them drive alone. With downtown Austin as the largest economic generator in the region and a reason Austin continues to appear on important Top 10 lists nationally, we all have a significant interest in finding ways to get more downtown employees using commuting alternatives.

Movability Austin worked with the City of Austin, Capital Metro, The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, and the Downtown Austin Alliance to conduct a pilot that tested how individualized marketing, highly successful around the U.S., could be deployed to change travel behaviors for downtown employees and encourage them to use more travel options. A core strategy of individualized marketing is to ask people to re-evaluate their travel, and give those who are interested or curious the ability and support to change their behavior.

We found no specific examples of individualized marketing, which is most often called Smart Trips in the U.S., focusing on business districts. Since these programs begin by sending a survey to every household in a defined area, our first design challenge was identifying a new way to reach individual commuters efficiently. The other challenge was changing trends and implementation practices that were proving useful in other applications. These two design challenges meant we could not merely reproduce current Smart Trips surveys, messaging, and outreach methodology. Thus we also worked with a marketing firm to seek new messaging and communication tools, as well as integrating and testing the effectiveness of a technique called Motivational Interviewing for identifying interest in commute options.

PROJECT SCOPE

The project’s first step was to conduct research with employers and employees to identify redesign approaches and messaging themes likely to work for these specific audiences.

Research suggested that the most effective way to reach commuters would be through their employers, and that “time” was the most compelling value shared by both employers and their employees, rather than the traditional focus on pain points of traffic-related hassles.

Therefore, our marketing firm focused on developing creative content that redirects attention from travel time to what can be done with that time. Outreach methodology began with email campaigns to company decision makers and earned media coverage. Over time we also initiated targeted social media and a greater reliance on direct contact with commuters via street-level activations and company events.

- **Initial broadcast expectations** - direct communications with 300 businesses via email campaigns targeting decision makers asking them to send their employees an offer: “allow us to help you become happier with your commute.” We also experimented with direct in-person contacts to companies and enlisting partners (Austin Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Austin Alliance) who already have employer relationships to increase responses to our email appeals.

- **Initial commuter expectations** - businesses would communicate our offer to commuters and we would get at least 1,000 people seeking to schedule commute chats.

- **Initial awareness expectations** - people do not think about their commute until it is too late for them to act differently. We also sought to leverage social media and press coverage to bolster awareness and build some recognition of this project for businesses and employees. When initial assumptions showed inconsistent results, an example of course correction was deploying activations with a “commute cart” and travel advisors talking directly to employees, at employer-hosted events and on the street.
PROJECT RESULTS

Employers turned out to be very difficult to engage via the marketing approaches we tried; however, once we did speak directly with commuters, the commute chats (using Motivational Interviewing techniques) proved highly efficient, engaging high volumes of people and getting a high percentage of them agreeing to transform their trips.

We think results from the pilot confirm the power of face-to-face engagement for both employers and employees. It takes time to understand the businesses’ or employees’ motivations and circumstances, and tailor a mobility solution to that. In our findings, this is an outcome worth building upon. We cannot be certain of the specific impacts of our messaging and communications approaches, but this pilot did find traditional news outlet coverage helpful in complementing in-person communications.

Engaging Employers

Our initial outreach method of emailing the company decision-makers and appealing to their presumed interest in cost-savings, lower stress for employees, and an interest in being part of the solution did not result in action on the part of employers. Open rates on the emails were low. When employers did open emails, they did not respond despite fairly robust communications that involved no cost and low time commitment. They simply weren’t compelled to share materials with their workforce.

Engaging Commuters

In fact, it was not until we decided to do street-level activations with a lemonade stand-type cart in high traffic areas that we found an effective way to get people to stop and talk, and to make pledges. A big hurdle was that company contacts were not sufficiently motivated to open the gates on this idea; but a light bulb moment for this pilot was that employees are willing to respond if you can catch them when they have a moment available. In that moment, you need to be prepared to quickly engage, learn, and tailor information to their interests and circumstances.

Movability Austin has engaged thousands of employees using traditional TDM techniques, including prizes and rewards, and even gamification techniques. We see direct engagement of employees using this commute chat approach as an effective way scale up to reach more employees, more efficiently.

Engaging Media

Similarly, we received significant coverage from traditional news outlets, but less attention from business specific outlets. Social media proved less fruitful in both telling the story of what we were offering and clicks to web, visits, or sign-ups.
LESSONS LEARNED

Gaining Direct Access to Employees

Rather than expecting companies to send a message to employees, we found better success in seeking options to connect directly with employees.

Motivational Interviewing (aka Commute Chats) Continues to Shine

Motivational Interviewing continues to prove itself as a productive part of a Smart Trips fulfillment and the behavior change effort. The Commute Chat results speak for themselves, but the significantly higher success rates from in-person contacts with both employers and employees also provide interesting anecdotal evidence.

Giving Efforts Time to Mature

With 10-12 months of activities, there would be greater opportunity to build momentum and awareness, and less impact of external negative factors (i.e. weather and summer vacations).

Getting People to Report is Still the Hardest Part

The Travel Advisors got great information face-to-face, but once communication depended on email or phone for follow-up information, reporting dropped significantly. In-person activation throughout project can help.

Cautionary Note Regarding Traditional Public Relations

While any marketing firm can make PR sound necessary and indispensable during planning, this project spent 18% of its marketing budget on PR without any tangible results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Austin should begin building and implementing a traditional Smart Trips program.

2. Long-term, we still need experimentation with how to convert Smart Trips to employment centers.
PROJECT FINANCES

The “Do more: Transform Your Trip” pilot was funded by a STPMM grant from our regional planning organization (CAMPO Texas), with Capital Metro as the fund recipient. Capital Metro contributed the financial management, procurement support, project management, and marketing advice at no cost. The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Austin Alliance provided communications, research, and staff support.

Total cost of DO MORE: Transform Your Trip

$146,500

TOTAL DEDICATED STAFF HOURS*

2,176

PROJECT BUDGET

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<tr>
<td>Federal Funds</td>
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<td>Local Share</td>
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54% one-time set up costs (marketing materials, website, program design, training, etc.)

46% regular operations (8 months of program admin, management, coordination, and commuter engagement)

*Hours include Movability Admin and project management, project coordination, and travel advisors, but excludes Marketing/Communication contractor hours.
PROJECT SUMMARY

We were most effective in reaching our audience with direct employee engagement in two ways. At employer-hosted events, travel advisors would set up inside an office and their presence was advertised in advance. On the street, travel advisors popped up on busy downtown streets during the lunch hour to intercept passerby and engage them in conversation about their travel habits. Our Travel Advisors spoke with over 1,300 downtown employees during the duration of the Transform your Trip pilot.

AT EMPLOYER-HOSTED EVENTS

Setting up at company offices or fairs placed us directly in front of our downtown commuter audience and had a high intercept rate. This also required having a relationship with the right person at the company.

1,065 passerby* during 12 events

213 employees chatting up travel advisers

50% employees gave contact info

51% pledged** to try something new
ON THE STREET

For street activations, we would place our “commute cart” near office buildings that housed mass employee numbers.

23,420 passerby* (46 days)

1,171 employees chatting up travel advisers

28% employees gave contact info

26% pledged** to try something new

INTEREST BY MODE

25% transit 17% rideshare 10% bike 1% flex/telework

* Employer events had approx. 1 in 5 intercept rate. Street activations had approx. 1 in 20 intercept rate.
** See appendix for full explanation of how the project had insufficient data to determine pledge follow-through