

# Cash for Commuters

## Survey Key Findings



### Overview

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation, sponsors the evaluation of Atlanta Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs. TDM programs are designed to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality. The Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE) conducts periodic surveys of regional programs, including the Cash for Commuters (CFC) incentive program, to evaluate program effectiveness.

CFC is aimed at changing the behavior of drive alone commuters by providing an incentive to try an alternative commute mode (carpool, transit, telework, bike, or walk) to travel to work. For a period of three months, participants log the modes they use to commute and receive \$3 for each day they use an alternative commute mode. Participants who registered in CFC through 2008 were eligible to receive up to \$180. Beginning in 2009, the maximum award was reduced to \$100.

CTE has conducted several evaluations of the CFC program since its inception in October 2002. Participants in the first wave of the CFC program (which ran from October 2002-March 2003) were surveyed three times: 3-6 months after completing the program, 9-12 months after completing the program, and 18-21 months after program completion. Participants in the second wave of the program (which ran from May 2003 – October 2003) were surveyed once, 3-6 months after participation. This survey was conducted to compare the immediate post-program retention for the wave 2 participants to the retention observed for wave 1 participants. CFC continued to run from May – December in 2004 and 2005; beginning in 2006, it became a year-round program.

In 2009, CTE conducted the survey described in this report to measure commuter mode changes and influences to mode changes among participants in the CFC program from two program years—2007 and 2008. CFC participants from 2007 were surveyed 18-24 months after program completion and 2008 CFC participants were surveyed 3-6 months after program completion. The 2007 CFC program year sample of 237 represents a margin of error of  $\pm 5\%$  at a confidence level of 95%. The 2008 CFC program year sample of 400 represents a margin of error of  $\pm 4.5\%$  at a confidence level of 95%. The key findings from the 2009 Cash for Commuters program survey are presented below.

### Cash for Commuters Participant Profile

**Gender** - The composition of the survey respondents for 2007 and 2008 CFC program years was 36% male and 64% female.

**Age** - Most CFC participants from both program years were between the ages of 25-54. In 2008, almost one-fifth (16%) of the participants were 55-64.

**Ethnic Background** - Two-thirds of respondents from both the 2007 and 2008 CFC program years were of Caucasian ethnicity. Almost one-fourth of participants in 2007 (22%) and 2008 (23%) were of African American ethnicity.

**Employer Type** - Two-thirds of 2007 CFC program participants (65%) were employed in private industry. The 2008 program attracted a

slightly higher share of private industry employees; three-fourths of 2008 survey participants (75%) worked for private industry firms.

**Average Annual Household Income** - Nearly two-thirds of survey participants in 2007 (66%) and 2008 (65%) reported an average household income of \$60,000 or more. This income level distribution is very similar to that found in the 2006 Regional Commuter Survey. In that survey, 63% of commuters reported an average annual household income of \$60,000 or more.

**Overall Profile** - The overall commuter profile for the 2007 and 2008 participants was similar to profiles of participants in previous CFC surveys and showed no significant changes.

### Influence of Gas Prices on 2008 Participants

*The price of gas soared to record highs in 2008, greatly affecting the Atlanta region and its commuter programs. In addition to the general nationwide spike in gas prices, the region was affected by higher gas prices and a local gas shortage following damage to oil pipelines by Hurricane Ike in September 2008. These events prompted record enrollment and participation in the CFC program. Respondents from 2008 were specifically asked about the influence of gas prices on their commute behavior before, during, and after the CFC program.*

**Importance of Gas Prices for 2008 Participants** - When 2008 CFC program participants were specifically asked the importance of gas prices in their decision to start using an alternative mode 95% stated it was somewhat or very important. Of these participants, 20% reported they would not have been likely to start an alternative commute mode if gas prices had not increased. When 2008 CFC respondents were asked what factors led them to start using a commute alternative, 46% stated the price of gas was a factor. This was much higher than the percentage of 2007 CFC respondents that cited gas prices as a reason (17%) when the price of gas was much lower. On average, 2008 CFC program participants stated they were paying approximately \$3.49 a gallon when they decided to enroll in the program.

**Current Commute Behavior of 2008 Participants** - The current commute behavior of the 46% of respondents who stated the price of gas was a factor that led to using an alternative mode is very different than those not influenced by gas prices. Among 2008 CFC participants who cited gas prices as a reason to start alternative modes, 38% had stopped these modes at the time of the survey, compared to only 25% who did not mention gas prices as a factor.

## Commute Behavior

**Alternative Mode Status** – A very significant question CTE is trying to answer through these surveys is the extent to which participants continued using alternative modes after they completed the 90-day CFC period. 2008 program participants completed the CFC program 3-6 months before the survey. At this near-term post program time, 69% continued using alternative modes. A small share decreased their frequency of use, but still used alternative modes at least one day per week. This near term retention rate was similar to those found in the survey of 2002 and 2003 participants in the wave 1 (71% retention) and the wave 2 surveys (74% retention).

The 2007 program participants completed the CFC program 18-24 months before the survey. At this longer-term post program time, nearly three-fourths (74%) of participants in the 2007 program year continued using an alternative mode after completing the CFC program. This percentage was a substantially higher long-term retention than that measured in the survey conducted in 2004, 18-21 months after wave 1 participants completed the CFC program. That survey found that 57% of participants were still using alternative modes.

Table 1 shows the continued use of alternative modes after completion of the CFC program for the three surveys of wave 1 participants, the two surveys of wave 2 participants and the 2007 and 2008 program year participants.

**Table 1: Short and Long-Term Alternative Mode Status**

Alternative Mode Status	CFC Wave 1			CFC Wave 2	2007 CFC Program Year	2008 CFC Program Year
	3-6 Months After Program Completion (n=302)	9-12 Months After Program Completion (n=300)	18-21 Months After Program Completion (n=308)	3-6 Months After Program Completion (n=300)	18-24 Months After Program Completion (n=237)	3-6 Months After Program Completion (n=400)
Continued Use of Alternative Mode	71%	64%	57%	74%	74%	69%
Stopped Use of Alternative Mode	29%	36%	43%	26%	26%	31%

Participants were asked to specify if they had increased, continued, decreased or stopped using alternative modes since completing the CFC program. Table 2 shows the current alternative mode status percentages for participants from the 2007 and 2008 CFC program years.

Table 3 shows the average number of alternative mode commute days for 2007 and 2008 CFC participants as well as the results from the surveys of wave 1 and wave 2 participants.

**Table 2: Current Alternative Mode Status**

Alternative Mode Status	2007 Program Year (18-24 Months) (n=237)	2008 Program Year (3-6 Months) (n=400)
Increased	6%	4%
No Change	44%	42%
Decreased	24%	23%
Stopped	26%	31%

**Table 3: Average Alternative Mode Days Per Week**

Time Period	CFC Wave 1			CFC Wave 2	2007 CFC Program Year	2008 CFC Program Year
	3-6 Months After Program Completion	9-12 Months After Program Completion	18-21 Months After Program Completion	3-6 Months After Program Completion	18-24 Months After Program Completion	3-6 Months After Program Completion
Current Average Alternative Mode Days	3.12	2.46	2.35	3.08	2.94	2.68

**Mode Split** - The continued use of commute alternatives translated into fewer drive alone commute trips for CFC participants. All respondents were asked what types of transportation they were using to travel to work and how many days they used these modes in a typical week for three time periods: before participating in CFC, during CFC, and after completing the CFC program. This information was used to determine the typical week mode split for drive alone and alternative mode trips for each of the three time periods.

The 2007 program participants as a whole made 83% of their weekly commute trips by driving alone before they enrolled in the CFC program. While participating in the program, only 8% of these weekly trips were drive alone. Eighteen to twenty-four months after the completion of the CFC program, drive alone trips had risen, but still accounted for only 37% of weekly trips made by the 2007 respondents. The 2007 program participants displayed a percentage reduction of 55% in overall drive alone trips 18-24 months after completing the CFC program.

The 2008 program participants drove alone for 87% of their weekly trips before enrolling in the CFC program. While participating in the program, 2008 participants made 12% of weekly trips by driving alone. Three to six months after completing the program, they made 42% of weekly commute trips by driving alone, about half of the pre-enrollment percentage. The 2008 program participants showed a percentage reduction of 55% in drive alone trips 3-6 months after completing the CFC program.

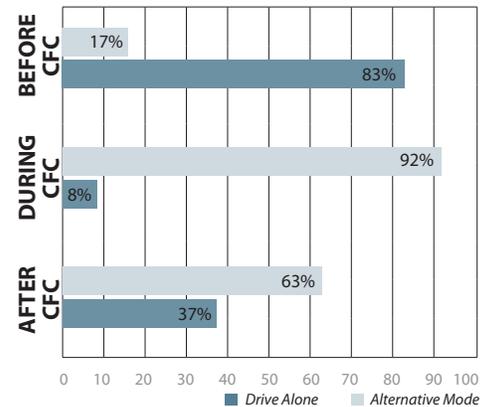
**Distance from Home to Work** - Respondents from the 2007 CFC program year reported an average one-way commute distance of 23 miles. The 2008 CFC survey participants reported an average one-way commute distance of 24 miles. Again, these results mirrored the distances reported in the wave 1 and wave 2 surveys. The average commute distances for those surveys were 24 miles for wave 1 and 25 miles for wave 2.

**Factors that Led to Start Using Alternative Modes** - Participants were asked what factors led them to start using an alternative mode. They could respond with multiple answers. Two in ten (20%) of the 2007 CFC participants said availability of the \$3 per day CFC incentive was a factor. Nearly three in ten (28%) reported a general reason, to "save money" and about a quarter (23%) said a friend, family member, or coworker wanted to carpool. Gas prices and convenience were cited by 17% and 16% of 2007 CFC respondents, respectively, as factors in starting to use alternative modes.

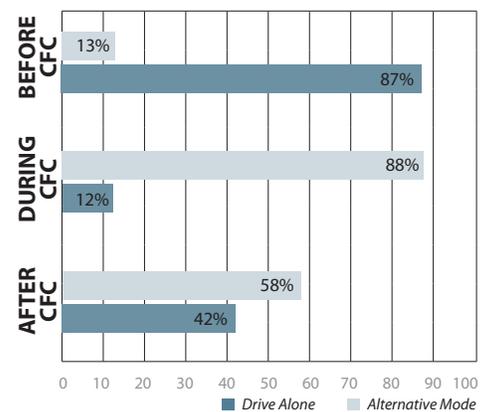
Gas prices were a much more important motivation for 2008 CFC participants. Nearly half (46%) of 2008 CFC respondents stated the price of gas as a factor that led them to start using alternative commute modes. Other motivations named were similar to those selected by 2007 CFC participants; 21% wanted to save money, 20% cited the availability of the \$3 a day incentive, and 18% said convenience was a factor that led to starting to use alternative modes.

Table 4 shows a more complete list of the factors reported for the 2007 and 2008 CFC program years.

**Figure 1:**  
**2007 Program Year Mode Split**  
Percent of Weekly Commute Trips



**Figure 2:**  
**2008 Program Year Mode Split**  
Percent of Weekly Commute Trips



**Table 4:**  
**Factors that Led to the Start of Using Alternative Modes**

Factors that Led to the Start of Using Alternative Modes	2007 Program Year (18-24 Months) (n = 237)	2008 Program Year (3-6 Months) (n = 400)
Gas prices	17%	46%
Save money	28%	21%
Friend, family member, co-worker wanted to carpool	23%	16%
\$3 incentive	20%	20%
Convenience	16%	18%
Less stressful than driving	9%	3%
Reduce congestion/ Help environment	8%	6%
Save time	5%	3%

**Primary Reasons for Commute Changes** - The survey interview compared the frequency of alternative mode use during and after CFC and then asked respondents about the reasons for any changes in frequency. Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7 show the primary reasons participants stopped, decreased, and maintained/increased their use of an alternative mode 3-6 months and 18-24 months after completing the CFC program.

The loss of a carpool partner and a change in the respondents' work schedule or work location were the top two reasons in both 2007 and 2008 CFC program years for stopping or decreasing alternative mode use. The finding that a personal change, rather than dissatisfaction with alternative modes as the primary reasons to stop or reduce alternative mode use, is very consistent with those from many other TDM program evaluations.

More than six in ten respondents who maintained or increased their alternative mode use cited saving money as the top benefit for both the 2007 and 2008 CFC program years.

**Table 5:**  
**Primary Reasons for Stopping Use of an Alternative Mode**

Reasons for Stopping	2007 Program Year (18-24 Months) (n = 53)	2008 Program Year (3-6 Months) (n = 99)
Lost carpool partner	38%	38%
Schedule or work location change	32%	25%
Too inconvenient	25%	19%
Gas prices went down	0%	13%

**Table 6:**  
**Primary Reasons for Decreasing Use of an Alternative Mode**

Reasons for Decreasing	2007 Program Year (18-24 Months) (n = 56)	2008 Program Year (3-6 Months) (n = 93)
Schedule or work location change	34%	22%
Lost carpool partner	27%	17%
Other commitments before/after work	13%	11%
Too inconvenient	9%	11%
Gas prices went down	0%	11%

**Table 7:**  
**Primary Reasons for Maintaining or Increasing Use of an Alternative Mode**

Reasons for Maintaining or Increasing	2007 Program Year (18-24 Months) (n = 119)	2008 Program Year (3-6 Months) (n = 184)
Saving money	61%	66%
More convenient	30%	19%
Enjoy alternative mode	14%	23%
More environmentally aware	13%	11%

## Other Incentive Programs

Cash for Commuters is one of three programs that make up Commuter Rewards. Each of these components, Cash for Commuters, Carpool Rewards, and Commuter Prizes, are separate programs with their own set of rules, procedures, and participants. Carpool Rewards and Commuter Prizes offer incentives for commuters who use alternative modes to continue and increase use of these modes.

The 2009 CFC survey was the first to question previous CFC participants on their awareness and participation in the other two programs of Commuter Rewards. Carpool Rewards and Commuter Prizes began in 2005 and were not available to participants in the earlier years of Cash for Commuters.

**Awareness** - 2007 and 2008 CFC participants were asked about their awareness of Carpool Rewards and Commuter Prizes. Of the 2007 participants, 88% were familiar with the other programs under the Commuter Rewards umbrella, while 86% of 2008 participants were familiar with these programs.

Word of mouth and referrals were the most common way participants learned about these programs, followed by the Internet and The Clean Air Campaign for both years.

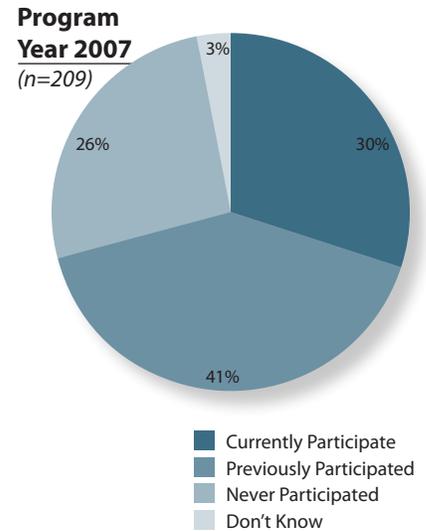
**Table 8:**  
**How Commuters Learned About Commuter Rewards Programs**

How Commuters Learned About Programs	2007 Program Year (18-24 Months) (n = 209)	2008 Program Year (3-6 Months) (n = 344)
Word of mouth/referral	21%	30%
Internet	20%	21%
The Clean Air Campaign	19%	18%

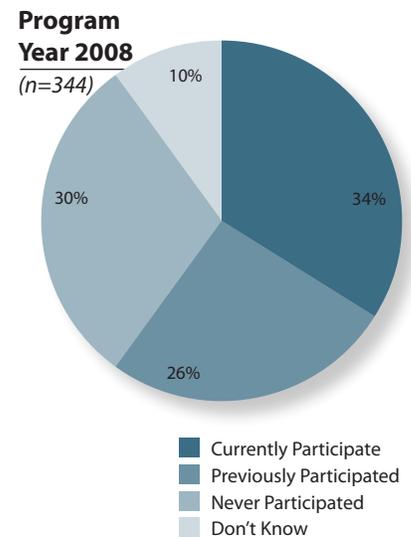
**Participation** - 2007 and 2008 CFC program participants aware of these programs were asked if they were currently participating in or had previously participated in Carpool Rewards and Commuter Prizes. Of the 2007 CFC respondents, 30% currently participate in Commuter Prizes and/or Carpool Rewards, while 41% previously participated and 26% never participated in Commuter Prizes and/or Carpool Rewards. In the 2008 CFC program year, 34% of respondents currently participate, 26% previously participated, and 30% never participated in Commuter Prizes and/or Carpool Rewards.

**Current Commute and Commuter Prizes/Carpool Rewards** - The 2007 CFC program participants currently participating in Commuter Prizes and/or Carpool Rewards use an alternative mode an average of 4.4 days each week. The average number of days 2008 CFC participants currently participating in Commuter Prizes and/or Commuter Rewards use an alternative mode is 4 days a week.

**Figure 3:**  
**Participation in Commuter Prizes /Carpool Rewards**



**Figure 4:**  
**Participation in Commuter Prizes /Carpool Rewards**



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