RideSmart Placement

Survey Key Findings

Overview

The RideSmart Placement Survey is part of a broad evaluation effort led by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration, to evaluate the effectiveness of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs that receive Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) funds. The Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE) conducts periodic surveys of regional TDM programs, including the RideSmart program (previously known as 1-87-RIDEFIND), on GDOT's behalf.

The RideSmart program is managed by the TDM Division of the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). As part of the RideSmart program, ARC operates and maintains a rideshare database that serves to match commuters that live or work in the Atlanta region with potential carpool or vanpool partners. The program also includes a Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) service that provides commuters using alternative transportation options with a ride home or to their car if an unscheduled or unexpected event occurs. As part of the RideSmart program, ARC manages subcontracts for the Atlanta region's Employer Service Organizations (ESOs) that promote commute options in designated service areas. The ESOs provide marketing and outreach to support RideSmart program services. ARC provides general assistance and distributes transit related information to commuters as well.

The 2009 RideSmart assessment is the fourth of its kind. CTE completed the initial baseline survey for RideSmart in October 2002. A second survey was conducted in the fall of 2004. CTE completed the third survey in 2006. This report presents unique findings for the 2009 survey as well as comparisons between the current status of the program and results of the three previous years' surveys where applicable.

The commuters surveyed in this analysis were registered in the RideSmart database and either received information on ridesharing, such as a list of people they could contact as potential carpool partners, or information about the GRH program. Commuters may also be included in the database as a result of registering for the Commuter Rewards Incentive Program.

CTE conducted the 2009 RideSmart survey between June and August of 2009 and surveyed commuters entering the database between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2008. As of June 2009, there were 19,382 active registrants in the RideSmart database. The 2009 RideSmart phone survey sample included 1,005 program participants who entered the database in 2008 representing a margin of error of +/- 3% at a confidence level of 95%.

RideSmart Participant Profile

Gender - As in past analyses, there were more female (68%) than male (32%) participants in the 2009 evaluation.

Age - The majority of 2009 RideSmart participants (75%) were between the ages of 35 and 64. Nearly one-quarter of participants were under 35 (24%). This proportion is similar to previous evaluation results.

Ethnic Background - Just more than half of 2009 program participants were Caucasian (54%) while just more than one-third (36%) of participants were African-American. This proportion is similar to previous evaluation results.

Employer Type - The majority of 2009 participants worked for private industry employers (66%). The remaining program participants were distributed fairly evenly over federal government (11%), state or local government (13%), or non-profit (11%) employers. The 2009 results reveal a decreasing trend for participants employed at private companies when compared to the previous three evaluations.

Correspondingly, the results show a steady increase in participants employed at federal, state, and local employers since 2004.

Average Annual Household Income - Nearly two-thirds of participants (64%) reported a household income greater than $60,000 per year, while 1% of 2009 respondents reported a household income less than $20,000 per year. These results are similar to previous survey results.

Current Commute Travel Patterns

Respondents were asked what types of transportation they used at the time of the survey to travel to and from work and how many days they used each of these modes in a typical week. The evaluation team used this data to determine the percentage of commute trips made in a typical week by each mode. Figure 1 shows the current commute mode split for 2009 program participants.

At the time of the 2009 survey, nearly two-thirds (62%) of the weekly commute trips were made by driving alone. This is a significant increase from the 2006 percentage of drive alone trips (48%). However, it is similar to the proportion of 2004 drive alone trips (66%) as shown in Figure 2. In a similar pattern, the combined carpool/vanpool use rate in 2009 (22%) differs from the 2006 rate (27%) but is comparable to the 2004 rate (21%). Additionally, the rate of transit use in 2009 (11%) is much lower than in 2006 (21%) but more comparable to the 2004 transit use rate (9%).

The low drive alone rate and high carpool/vanpool and transit use rates in 2006 were likely a result of the large influx of commuters who were already using an alternative mode into the RideSmart database during the 2006 evaluation period. This influx occurred when ARC began importing The Clean Air Campaign's (CAC) Commuter Rewards database information into the RideSmart database. Both of these databases are comprised of commuters who are interested in ridesharing in the region. The Commuter Rewards database includes commuters who are or have participated in the regional alternative mode incentive program. Thus, a high percentage of Commuter Rewards database registrants already use an alternative commute mode. When the Commuter Rewards program began sharing information with the RideSmart database, many of the Commuter Rewards incentive program participants were automatically registered in the RideSmart database in 2006 as active for matching even if they were not seeking a rideshare partner. In fact many of these newly added registrants were only interested in the GRH program. Because many of the commuters included in the Commuter Rewards database were already using a commute mode when they were added to the RideSmart database, the proportion of 2006 drive alone users was artificially low. ARC and CAC have refined their datasharing processes since 2006 so that registrants only interested in GRH or not seeking other assistance from RideSmart are not included as active for matching.

The average carpool size in 2009 was 2.4 occupants and the average vanpool included 9.3 people. Nearly two-thirds (60%) of the respondents traveled more than 20 miles to work, one-way. The average one-way commute distance for survey participants was 26.3 miles. This commute distance is greater than the one-way commute distance found in the 2007 Regional Commuter Survey (19.7 miles), which represented a random sample of the entire Atlanta region. The longer commute distance reported in the 2009 RideSmart evaluation is consistent with results of other rideshare placement surveys; it is common for commuters who enroll in commute programs to have longer commutes than does the average commuter.

Figure 1:
Current Commute Mode Split
Percent of Weekly Trips by Mode
(n=1,005)

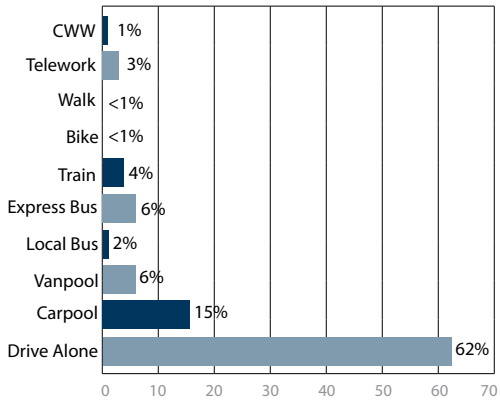
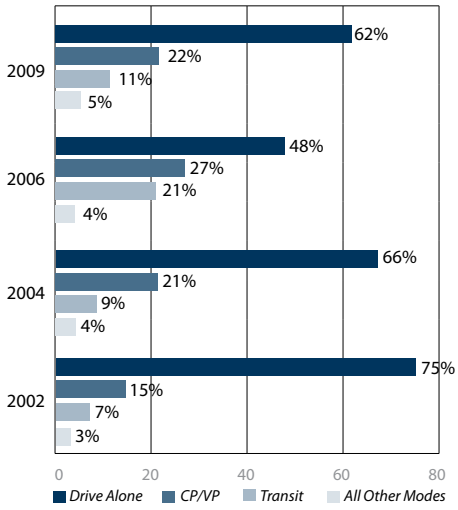


Figure 2:
Mode Split Comparison Across Survey Years



Commute Changes

A primary objective of the survey is to identify the extent and types of commute changes made by applicants who received assistance from RideSmart during the 2009 evaluation period. These commute changes, classified as *new placements*, include both continued and temporary shifts to new commute alternatives as well as increased use of commute alternatives participants were previously using. The survey also collects data on *retained placements* defined as applicants who did not make any changes, but maintained use of alternative modes they began using prior to the evaluation period.

Table 1 summarizes the commute changes made by 2009, 2006, and 2004 survey respondents. Of the 1,005 respondents surveyed in 2009, 23% joined, created, or tried a new carpool. This rate is significantly greater than the proportion of 2006 participants who made this change (11%), but not as great an increase when compared to 2004 participants who joined or created a carpool (14%). More than one in ten (13%) 2009 participants made a change to transit, biking, or walking. This is an increase from the percentage of 2006 registrants who changed to these non-motorized modes (8%). Also, a greater percentage of 2009 registrants made a teleworking change (8%) than in 2006 (4%).

These results support the hypothesis mentioned above that the low drive alone rate in 2006 is related to the large influx of Commuter Rewards registrants already using a commute alternative at the time they entered the RideSmart database. While the use rate of non-drive alone modes is lower in 2009 than in 2006, the number of people who began using new alternative modes in 2009 is much greater than in 2006.

More than one-fifth (22%) of database registrants who made a new commute change *continued* the change throughout the evaluation period, while 21% said the change was *only temporary*. These two percentages, 22% and 21%, represent the overall 2009 new placement rate, 42%. This rate is significantly higher than the overall new placement rate in the 2006 evaluation (26%). Table 2 shows the placement rates for the 2009 evaluation as well as all three previous survey years.

While the *continued* placement rates of the 2009 and 2006 surveys are similar (22% and 19% respectively), the *temporary* placement rate in 2009 (21%) is significantly higher than the 2006 *temporary* placement rate (7%). The CTE evaluation team attributes this large increase in the *temporary* placement rate to high gas prices in 2008 in combination with the effects of the recent recession. These external financial factors led more people to seek out programs and alternative mode options in order to save money. However, when financial pressures decreased (or people adjusted to the new financial climate), many of these temporary placements did not continue with their alternative mode use.

Nearly one-sixth (16%) of registrants were using a commute alternative before the 2009 evaluation period began and did not make any travel changes during the evaluation period. This retained placement rate is significantly lower than the retained placement rate in 2006 (33%) but similar to the 2002 and 2004 retained placement rates. This pattern also supports the above hypothesis that the 2006 registrant pool contained a large proportion of commuters already utilizing an alternative mode when they entered the database, leading the drive alone rate to be lower than in 2004 and 2009.

Table 1:
Commute Changes Across Survey Years

Types of Commute Changes	2009 Percentage of Respondents *(n = 1,005)*	2006 Percentage of Respondents *(n = 1,600)*	2004 Percentage of Respondents *(n = 1,002)*
Joined or created a new carpool/tried carpooling	23%	11%	14%
Added another person to existing carpool	<1%	1%	1%
Total carpool	**23%**	**12%**	**15%**
Joined or created a new vanpool/tried vanpooling	4%	5%	3%
Added another person to existing vanpool	2%	2%	1%
Total vanpool	**6%**	**7%**	**4%**
Started or tried using transit, bike, or walk	13%	8%	8%
Started teleworking or increased number of days	8%	4%	5%
Total transit/non-motorized modes	**21%**	**12%**	**13%**
Increased number of days using an alternative	1%	2%	1%

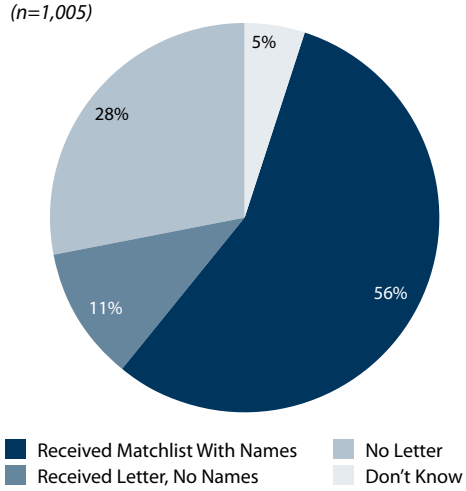
Table 2:
Continued, Temporary, and New Placements for All Years

Placement Categories	2009 *(n = 1,005)*	2006 *(n = 1,600)*	2004 *(n = 1,002)*	2002 *(n = 1,000)*
Continued new placements	22%	19%	17%	17%
Temporary new placements	21%	7%	10%	13%
Retained placements	16%	33%	19%	18%

Use of Ridematch Information

The majority of respondents (90%) remembered requesting information from RideSmart, their local ESO, or from their employer. As shown in Figure 3, more than half (56%) of 2009 participants remembered receiving a matchlist with one or more people they could contact to arrange carpooling or vanpooling. An additional 11% of respondents said they received a letter but that the letter did not provide any names. This is a significant decrease from the percentage that received a letter without names in 2006, (20%). In the 2009 evaluation, 28% of participants did not receive a matchlist or letter and 5% did not remember receiving one. Because only 90% of respondents recall requesting information, it is possible that about one-third of the 28% of participants that did not receive information in fact did not request the information. However, this would still indicate that 18% of participants who requested information did not receive a matchlist or letter. The evaluation team believes that a significant portion of sent matchlists and letters are blocked by recipients' spam filters. This technological situation contributes to the portion of respondents who did not receive a matchlist or letter.

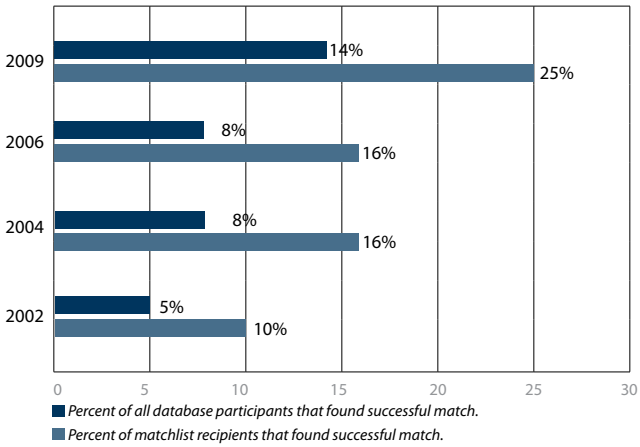
Figure 3:
Matchlist Received From RideSmart
(n=1,005)



Of the 2009 respondents who received a matchlist with names, 40% tried to call one or more people on the list. This call rate is significantly higher than in previous surveys when between one-quarter and one-third of respondents tried to contact people on their matchlist. Additionally, the rate of making contact with someone interested in ridesharing (76%) is significantly higher in 2009 than in all previous surveys.

Considering both of these actions, 25% of people who received a matchlist in 2009 sought and found a commuter interested in ridesharing (14% of the total database applicants). This rate of successful matching is significantly higher than in all three previous evaluation years as shown in Figure 4. In 2006 and 2004, only 16% of matchlist recipients found a commuter interested in ridesharing (8% of total database applicants) and only 10% of 2002 matchlist recipients (5% of total applicants) successfully found a commuter interested in ridesharing.

Figure 4:
Rate of Successful Rideshare Matching



The CTE evaluation team believes the high successful matching rate in 2009 is a result of a combination of three primary factors:

- First, the 2008 recessionary climate put pressure on commuters to proactively seek out cost saving modes with a greater personal investment than in previous evaluation years. Thus, a greater proportion of 2008 applicants contacted people on their list and those they reached were also more serious about finding a commute partner.
- Second, the greater potential for matching within the database information itself has led to higher successful match rates in 2009. The smaller rate of applicants who received letters with no match names in 2009 (10.7%) than in 2006 (20.0%) is evidence of this greater match potential.
- Finally, ARC and the ESOs have improved their methods for identifying and placing people with a genuine interest in ridesharing in the database since the inception of the program.

The top reasons cited for not contacting people on their matchlist are consistent for all four evaluation years. Respondents cited incompatible work hours/schedules, finding other rideshare arrangements, deciding not to carpool, and addresses that were not close enough to their home or work.

Influence of Information and Assistance on Commute Changes

Respondents were asked if there were any general influences that motivated them to make a commute change as well as if there were any specific services or information they received from a TDM partner that motivated them to change. The top general influences that respondents cited are shown in Table 3.

The general influence question gathered open-ended responses without any prompting by surveyors in both 2009 and 2006 surveys. In 2006 saving money was the top influence cited for making a commute change cited by 55% of respondents. In 2009 saving money specifically on gas was the top influence

cited by 53% of respondents and general saving money was also cited by 20% of respondents. Saving money explicitly on gas was not cited by any 2006 respondents. Respondents' inclusion of gas savings as an influence in 2009 and not in 2006 supports the survey team's belief that registrants were acutely aware of the effect high gas prices were having on their commute costs and were seeking commute alternatives proactively because of it.

Table 4 shows TDM partners' service related influences on respondents' decisions to use a commute alternative in 2009, 2006, and 2004. In 2009, availability of a cash incentive was cited by four in ten respondents as having influence on their decision to change commute mode. While a cash incentive was also the top reason given in 2006, a greater proportion of 2009 respondents (40%) cited this influence than in 2006 (33%). The proportion of respondents who cited receipt of a matchlist as an influence on their mode change was less in 2009 (13%) than in 2006 (17%). It is interesting to note that the influence of receipt of GRH assistance on respondents' decision to use commute alternatives decreased greatly from 14% in 2006 to 2% in 2009. This decrease agrees with ARC's programmatic changes between 2006 and 2009 to decrease the promotion of GRH.

Table 3:
General Influences on Respondents' Decision to Use a Commute Alternative

Influence	2009 Percentage *(n= 487)*	2006 Percentage *(n=485)*
Save money on gas	53%	N/A
Save money	20%	55%
Reduce congestion/pollution	13%	10%
Tired of driving	11%	17%

The 2009 rates of service related influence on registrants' commute changes differ between continued and temporary alternative mode users [*Note that the sample numbers for the related questions were relatively low (continued users, n=96; temporary users, n=100)]*. The largest difference is the role of cash incentives as an influence to change modes. Of the 100 temporary users that identified an influence for their commute change, 49% cited cash incentives as that influence. Only 29% of the 96 continued users cited cash incentives as an influence in their decision.

Of the 21% of total registrants who said they started carpooling or vanpooling, 19% said their new carpool or vanpool partners were named on their matchlist. This percentage was comparable to 2006 and 2004 findings.

Table 4:
Influence of Commute Information and Assistance on Respondents' Decision to Use a Commute Alternative

Information and Assistance	2009 Percentage *(n = 196)*	2006 Percentage *(n = 194)*	2004 Percentage *(n = 162)*
Cash Incentive **	40%	33%	10%
Matchlist	13%	17%	11%
Vanpool Assistance	10%	16%	9%
Transit Pass Discount	9%	5%	9%
Transit Schedule	6%	4%	2%
Rideshare Ads	5%	4%	2%
Employer Info	4%	4%	32%
GRH	2%	14%	5%

*** Cash incentive includes the following responses: Cash for Commuters, Commuter Prizes, Carpool Rewards, and other cash incentives.*

Role of Follow-Up Contact on Commute Changes

In 2006, the CTE evaluation team started including in-depth questions regarding any follow-up assistance commuters may have received following receipt of their match letter or other assistance. The 2009 survey also included these questions. Respondents were asked if they had received a follow-up call, email, or other type of contact offering additional commute assistance. Respondents who said yes were asked additional questions about how and when they received the contact as well as the type and usefulness of the additional assistance.

After receiving intial commute information, about one-quarter (22%) of 2009 survey respondents said an ESO made follow-up contact with them to offer additional assistance as shown in Figure 4. This is similar to the percentage of 2006 respondents who recalled receipt of follow-up (24%). About two-thirds of respondents (63%) said they had not received any follow-up contact and 15% said they did not remember.

The 2009 evaluation reveals that the use of email for follow-up contact has increased significantly since the 2006 evaluation. Of the 22% of people who received follow-up in 2009, 89% received the contact via email. This is a greater proportion than those who received follow-up via email in 2006 (56%). Correspondingly, the use of mailed letters and telephone calls has decreased in comparison with the 2006 analysis. This shift in method of follow-up corresponds to the increasing rate of email addresses included with database applications.

About one in five participants that recalled receiving follow-up (19%) recalled receiving follow-up within one week of receipt of their matchlist. About one-quarter (26%) said they received follow-up one to two weeks after receiving a matchlist, 9% recalled follow-up occurring three to four weeks after, and 19% recalled follow-up occurring more than four weeks after.

Survey respondents were asked to recall what types of assistance was offered during follow-up. Table 5 shows the top types of assistance received during follow-up contact by 2009 respondents.

In 2009, a greater percentage of respondents (26%) noted they were offered assistance with contacting potential carpool/vanpool partners than was observed in 2006 (17%). Conversely a significantly smaller percentage of 2009 respondents (7%) recalled being offered assistance with GRH, compared to 2006 (18%). This decrease is in line with the programatic changes that occurred between 2006 and 2009 that involved ARC's decreased promotion of GRH. In 2009, a greater percentage of respondents could not recall what type of assistance was offered to them (39% in 2009 vs. 28% in 2006).

Nearly three quarters (73%) of 2009 respondents believed that the additional assistance offered during the follow-up contact was helpful. The top three reasons given in 2009 for why the assistance was helpful were that it helped them to know more about options available to them (32%), it answered questions they had (12%), or helped them find a carpool partner (10%).

Figure 4:
Receipt of Follow-up Assistance
(n=762)

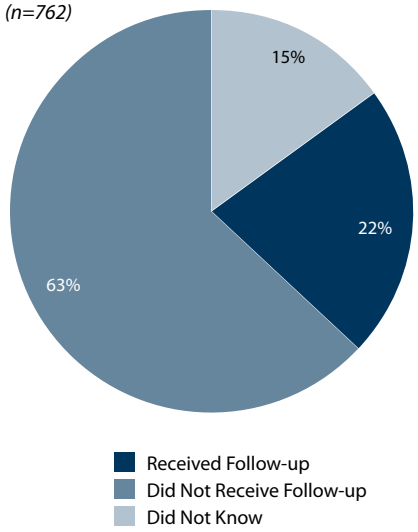


Table 5:
Follow-up Assistance Offered

Assistance Offered During Follow-up Contact	2009 *(n = 175)*	2006 *(n = 348)*
Offered to contact potential carpool/ vanpool partners	26%	17%
Told me about transit service I could use	9%	7%
Told me about financial incentives	9%	9%
Told me about GRH	7%	18%
Don't know	39%	28%

Satisfaction with the Information or Assistance Provided

In the 2009 evaluation, 24% of respondents recalled receiving information or assistance from RideSmart [*Includes references to 1-87-RIDEFIND and Commute Connections*]. This was about half the rate of respondents that recalled assistance from 1-87-RIDEFIND in 2006 (48%) [*RideSmart was known as 1-87-RIDEFIND in 2006*] . Respondents in the 2009 survey reported quite high levels of satisfaction with the assistance; nearly six in ten (58%) respondents who received RideSmart assistance were very satisfied with the information of assistance provided and 33% were somewhat satisfied.

Nearly one-quarter (23%) of 2009 respondents recalled receiving information from The Clean Air Campaign, an increase from the 13% of respondents who recalled receiving assistance from this organization in 2006. Of the 2009 applicants who recalled assistance from The Clean Air Campaign, nearly two-thirds (65%) were very satisfied with the information or assistance provided and 32% were somewhat satisfied.

The change in organizational recall, with decreased mention of RideSmart and increased citing of Clean Air Campaign, is likely attributable to several factors. In the 2006 survey, more respondents noted receiving a matchlist or information/assistance regarding GRH. Commuters receive their matchlists directly from RideSmart. RideSmart also distributed GRH participation cards to registered commuters. The card used in 2006 contained the 1-87-RIDEFIND logo and information about the program. In 2006, the database had a larger share of registrants who registered with 1-87-RIDEFIND only for GRH than was noted in 2009. RideSmart staff potentially contacted these commuters as part of database validation efforts.

There is also the potential for commuters to be unaware about who provided assistance, because there are many sources for the commute programs and services available in the region. It is quite possible for a commuter to have actual contact with one organization, but receive service from another. For example, a commuter who wants a ridematch can contact RideSmart directly or access RideSmart's website via link on websites sponsored by CAC and by other framework partners. The TDM community recognizes that a commuter may not be able to make the distinction. The 2009 survey findings did show an increase in the number of commuters who did not know or did not remember what organization had provided the assistance

or information. In 2009, 26% of respondents indicated they did not know or could not remember the organization that provided the assistance or information compared to 14% in the 2006 survey.

Finally, there may be increased recall of The Clean Air Campaign as the source of assistance and information because the TDM community has focused efforts on making CAC the gateway into programs and services. Regional messaging directs commuters to CAC's website or toll-free number. From this point, commuters are directed to programs and services of interest, which may not be managed by CAC. In 2006, two radio spots ran during survey administration that either referenced 1-87-RIDEFIND directly or mentioned the region's ridematching database. These media efforts could have resulted in greater recognition of the 1-87-RIDEFIND program in 2006. As noted above, the commuter may not make the distinction and consequently identify CAC as the source from the initial contact.

Nearly one in five (19%) of the 2009 respondents recalled receiving information from their employer. This slightly lower than the rate of 2006 respondents who recalled assistance from their employer (21%). When asked about their satisfaction with their employer's assistance, 72% were very satisfied and 24% were somewhat satisfied. Another 13% of respondents recalled receipt of assistance from a TMA. This rate is similar to the 14% of 2006 respondents who recalled receipt of assistance from a TMA. Of those who received this assistance, 67% were very satisfied and 25% were somewhat satisfied. Only 2% of respondents recalled assistance from GRTA. More than one-quarter (26%) did not recall the source of the assistance.

Respondents in the 2009 evaluation were pleased with the assistance they received because it was timely, useful, and personalized. For services provided by their employer, respondents were also particularly pleased with the incentives offered as well as the receipt of new commute ideas. When asked what could improve the level of services provided, respondents cited providing more names on matchlists and names with better matches. Particularly related to assistance from RideSmart, The Clean Air Campaign and the TMAs, respondents suggested additional follow-up assistance as a way to improve services. These responses are similar to those given in the 2006 evaluation.