Photos courtesy of *The Clean Air Campaign*.

2010 Atlanta Region Vanpool Rider Survey

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 reliance on single-occupant vehicles for travel and thereby reduce congestion and improve air quality. TDM actions facilitate and encourage use of non-drive alone "shared ride" travel options such as carpooling, vanpooling, and public transit. TDM strategies also encourage and support use of non-motorized transportation options, such as biking or walking. TDM actions such as telework, compressed work weeks, and alternative work schedules enable commuters to avoid a trip entirely or shift the time the trip is made to a less congested time of day.

Vanpools are an important option in the suite of TDM programs available to Atlanta-region commuters. Vanpools typically serve individuals with longer commute distances. Providing an alternative to these commuters offers the potential for significant reductions in vehicle travel, both in terms of trips and miles.

The Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE) conducts periodic assessments of regional programs, including a survey of vanpool riders in the Atlanta region. This report presents highlights from the 2010 Atlanta Region Vanpool Rider Survey conducted in July 2010.

CTE will also prepare the 2010 Atlanta Region Vanpool Rider Survey Technical Report that will include more detailed data analysis, where applicable, as well as conclusions and recommendations based on the survey findings.

The 2010 Atlanta Region Vanpool Rider Survey received completed questionnaires from 1,175 respondents from a possible 3,703 riders, for a response rate of 32%. This 1,175 sample represents a margin of error of +/-2.4% at a confidence level of 95%. CTE conducted two previous vanpool rider surveys in the region, in 2002 and 2006. When appropriate, comparisons to the previous survey findings are presented.

Survey Highlights

Commute Behavior

- Respondents reported an ***average one-way commute distance of 35.9 miles***.
- More than half (56%) of respondents reported meeting their vanpool in a retail parking lot.
- Three-quarters (74%) of vanpool riders said they would drive alone if vanpooling was no longer an option, followed by one-third who would carpool and 12% who would ride an express bus (*will add to more than 100%; multiple responses allowed*).

Important Factors to Commuters' Decision to Join a Vanpool and Role of Financial Incentives

- Financial savings and reducing wear and tear on personal vehicles were the factors that were most important to respondents' decisions to join a vanpool.
- Sixty percent of vanpoolers reported receiving some type of financial assistance for at least part of their vanpool expenses and 27% did not know if they received any financial assistance.
- The average monthly cost to vanpool reported by vanpoolers who indicated they paid a monthly fare was about $100/month.
- More than half (56%) of respondents noted that their vanpool fare had increased since December 2008. The fare increases had varying impacts on vanpools and vanpool riders. Forty-three percent said the fare change did not affect them or their vanpool, followed by 39% who reported their vanpool lost riders.

Satisfaction with Assistance Received Forming, Joining, or Operating Vanpools

- When asked about organizations that may have provided assistance forming, joining, or operating vanpools, 58% of respondents said they had received assistance from their employer, followed by 57% who received assistance from VPSI, and 40% who said they received assistance from The Clean Air Campaign. Other organizations providing assistance noted by respondents included the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) (23%), Enterprise (19%), Douglas County Rideshare (15%), and Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) (6%) (*will add to more than 100%; multiple responses allowed*).
- Respondents who received assistance were generally satisfied with the assistance. Employers, VPSI, Douglas County Rideshare, and The Clean Air Campaign all received mean scores for satisfaction of 4 or higher on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant "not satisfied" and 5 meant "very satisfied." Other organizations providing assistance received mean scores slightly below 4, including Enterprise, GRTA, and TMAs.

Commute Behavior

Mode Split – Survey respondents made nearly nine in ten (87%) weekly commute trips by vanpool. Driving alone accounted for most of their other commute trips, with six percent of weekly commute trips made by this mode. These percentages are similar to the findings of the 2002 survey when 85% of weekly commute trips were made by vanpool, followed by nine percent driving alone. The vanpool mode split was slightly higher in the 2006 survey. Respondents made 94% of weekly commute trips by vanpool and three percent of weekly commute trips drivving alone.

Distance and Time from Home to Work* – Respondents to the 2010 Atlanta Region Vanpool Rider Survey reported an average one-way commute distance of 35.9 miles. This was comparable to the distances reported in the 2006 and 2002 surveys.

On average, vanpoolers reported their trip from home to work takes 50 minutes. This was similar to the trip times reported in 2006 and in 2002.

Vanpool Meeting Location – Almost all (91%) vanpoolers reported driving alone from home to a central meeting location to meet their vanpool. A small percentage (5%) of riders reported carpooling to the meeting location and another three percent reported they were dropped off at the location. Respondents reported traveling an average of 7.5 miles to their meeting location, which was similar to travel distances report in the surveys in 2006 and 2002.

The 2010 survey was the first to ask vanpoolers where they meet their vanpool or where they pick up riders. More than half (56%) of respondents reported meeting in a retail parking lot. Less than one-quarter (24%) reported meeting at one of the region's park and ride lots and 16% said they met their vanpool in a church parking lot.

Makeup of Vanpool – Respondents reported an average of 8.6 commuters riding in each vanpool. This was slightly less than the average ridership reported in 2006 (9.6 riders) and 2002 (9.5 riders).

Length of Time Vanpooling – When asked about the length of time commuting to work in a vanpool, respondents indicated an average of 45 months. This average was higher than the average length of time reported in 2006 (34 months), but similar to the 2002 average of 44 months.

Commute Mode if Vanpooling Was No Longer an Option – Three-quarters (74%) of vanpool riders said they would drive alone if vanpooling was no longer an option available to them. One-third said they would carpool and 12% said they would ride an express bus (*will add to more than 100%; multiple responses allowed*). The percentage of respondents who indicated they would drive alone was essentially the same as the percentage reported in 2006, but higher than 2002, when 57% of respondents reported they would drive alone.

**** The 2010 Atlanta Vanpool Rider Survey Technical Report will include a comparison of the trip distance and travel time to findings from the 2010 Regional Commuter Survey.***

Mode Changes

Nearly eight in ten (79%) respondents said they primarily drove alone before they started vanpooling. About 15% of respondents reported carpooling as their previous primary mode. One in twenty (5%) used transit. The share of respondents who shifted from driving alone was similar to the result from the 2006 survey and higher than the 63% who reported previously driving alone in the 2002 survey.

Factors that Were Important to Commuters' Decision to Join a Vanpool

Respondents were given a list of 12 factors and were asked to rate how important each had been to their decision to vanpool. They rated each factor on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant the factor was "not at all important" and 5 meant the factor was "very important."

Financial savings and reducing wear and tear on personal vehicles were the factors that were most important to respondents' decisions to join a vanpool. Almost all respondents stated gas savings, saving money, or reducing wear and tear on personal vehicles had been important or very important to their decision to vanpool.

Financial Factors Received High Ratings – Three factors, all related to monetary savings, topped the list of factors that were important to respondents' decision to begin vanpooling. Almost all respondents (97%) said "gas savings" was important or very important to their decision and 88% said it was very important and rated it a 5. The same percentage (97%) of respondents reported that "saving money" was an important or very important factor, with 88% saying it was very important and rating it a 5. A third cost-saving factor, "reducing wear and tear on a personal vehicle," was rated as important or very important by 96% of the respondents. The overall mean score for each of these three factors was 4.8.

A fourth financial factor, "reducing the cost to insure a personal vehicle," was rated as important or very important to 66% of respondents. The factor received an overall 3.9 mean score.

Reduce Commute Stress, Environmental Concerns, and GRH Were Also Important Factors to Many Respondents – Three quarters (74%) of respondents stated "reducing commute stress" was important or very important to their decision to start vanpooling. The factor received an overall 4.1 mean score.

Six in ten (62%) respondents gave importance ratings of 4 or 5 to environmental concerns. The factor received an overall 3.8 mean score. Six in ten (60%) respondents also said the availability of the Guaranteed Ride Home program was important or very important to their decision to start vanpooling. This factor received an overall 3.7 mean score.

Time Saving and Use of HOV Lanes – Slightly less than half (47%) of respondents rated "saving time" as important or very important to their decision. The overall mean score for this factor was 3.2.

Four in ten (39%) respondents stated use of HOV lanes, which could save time in the commute, was important or very important to their decision to start vanpooling. The factor received an overall 2.9 mean score.

Use of Personal Time and Companionship – Four in ten (42%) respondents said having "time to sleep or read during commute" was an important or very important factor. The factor received an overall 3.1 mean score.

A similar share (41%) of respondents said "enjoy riding/traveling with others" was important or very important. The overall mean score for this factor was also 3.1.

Only 20% of respondents reported that having "time to work during commute" was important or very important to their decision to vanpool. The factor received an overall 2.2 mean score.

Use of Other Services

When asked if they had received any of four types of services that could help with their travel to work, half of the respondents noted they had not received any of the four services. One-third (33%) reported receiving Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH). One in eight (13%) said they received help finding a carpool or vanpool partner or participated (12%) in Cash for Commuters, the regional incentive program. Four percent noted they had received transit schedule or route information.

Satisfaction with Assistance

Respondents were asked about organizations that may have provided assistance forming, joining, or operating their vanpool. Vanpoolers receiving assistance from an organization were asked their level of satisfaction with the assistance. Respondents rated their level of satisfaction on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant "not satisfied" and 5 meant "very satisfied." *(Respondents could indicate they received assistance from more than one organization.)*

Employer – Six in ten (58%) respondents indicated they received assistance from their employer. Nearly all (86%) of these respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance received from their employer and 71% said they were very satisfied. Employers received the highest overall mean score of 4.4.

VPSI – About six in ten (57%) respondents said they received assistance from VPSI. These respondents also were quite satisfied with the assistance; 85% gave a rating of 4 or 5 for assistance received from VPSI. VPSI tied for the highest overall mean score at 4.4.

Douglas County Rideshare – Fifteen percent of respondents indicated they received assistance from Douglas County Rideshare. Satisfaction ratings for this provider also were very high; 85% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied. Douglas County Rideshare had an overall mean score at 4.3.

The Clean Air Campaign – Forty percent of respondents had received assistance from The Clean Air Campaign. About three-quarters (76%) rated their satisfaction as a 4 or 5. The overall mean score for The Clean Air Campaign was 4.2.

Enterprise – Two in ten (19%) respondents received assistance from Enterprise. Six in ten (62%) were satisfied or very satisfied with this assistance. Enterprise had an overall mean score at 3.8.

Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) – Slightly less than one-quarter (23%) of respondents noted they received assistance from GRTA. Most (60%) of these respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance. The overall mean score for GRTA was 3.7.

Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) – Only six percent of respondents said they received assistance from one of the region's TMAs. About six in ten (59%) respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the assistance received from their TMA. TMAs had an overall mean score of 3.7.

Reasons Not Satisfied with Assistance

Thirteen percent of respondents provided an explanation for why they were not satisfied with the assistance they received. Fifteen percent of these respondents' explanations noted dissatisfaction with the lack of assistance and/or communication and 10% specifically mentioned the decrease in the subsidy provided by GRTA. Another 47% of these respondents' explanations noted specific issues related to assistance received from their employer (25%) or a vendor (22%). (*Explanations included comments from respondents rating satisfaction as a 3, 4, or 5, as well as those rating satisfaction as a 1 or 2*).

Financial Assistance and Vanpool Fares

Commuters Receiving Financial Assistance – The majority of vanpoolers (60%) reported they received some type of financial assistance for at least a part of their vanpool expenses. Thirteen percent said they did not receive financial assistance and the remaining 27% did not know if they received any financial assistance. These were approximately the same percentages as were observed in the 2006 survey.

When vanpoolers who received assistance were asked who provided the assistance, about one-half of the respondents (52%) stated assistance was from their employer. Fifteen percent said GRTA provided the assistance, seven percent noted assistance from a TMA or The Clean Air Campaign, and five percent mentioned assistance from one of the three vendors. More than a quarter (28%) did not know who provided the assistance (*will add to more than 100%; multiple responses allowed*).

The percentage of respondents who received financial assistance was similar to the percentage reported in the 2006 survey. However, the 2010 survey found an increase in the employer-provided assistance and a decrease in the percentage of respondents noting assistance from a TMA or The Clean Air Campaign. In 2006, 42% of respondents noted receipt of assistance from their employer and 27% mentioned assistance from a TMA or The Clean Air Campaign (compared to 52% and seven percent, respectively, in 2010). There also was a significant increase in the number of respondents stating they did not know who provided the assistance between 2010 (28%) and 2006 (3%).

Importance of Financial Assistance in Decision to Vanpool – More than eight in ten (81%) vanpoolers who received financial assistance did not vanpool prior to receiving financial assistance. This is similar to the findings of the 2006 survey, but higher than the percentage reported in 2002. When asked to rate the importance of financial assistance in their decision to start or continue vanpooling, 78% rated the importance as a 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was "not at all important" and 5 was "very important."

Average Monthly Cost to Vanpool – For the first time in the Vanpool Rider Survey, respondents were asked how much they pay monthly to vanpool. The average monthly cost to vanpool reported by vanpoolers who indicated they paid a monthly fare was about $100/month.

Effects of Increases in Vanpool Costs* – More than half (56%) of respondents noted that their vanpool fare had increased since December 2008. Of these vanpoolers, 51% said the fare increased in 2009, 15% said the fare increased in 2010, and 35% reported an increase in fare in both years.

The fare increases had varying impacts on vanpools and vanpool riders. Forty-three percent said the fare change did not affect them or their vanpools. Four in ten (39%) reported their vanpool lost riders and 23% said they considered dropping out of their vanpool. About one in ten (11%) respondents reported their vanpool changed vendors and eight percent said their original van disbanded and they joined another vanpool.

Participation in Regional Incentive Programs - Most vanpoolers (89%) were aware of the regional incentive program Commuter Rewards. 22% of respondents said they knew of the New Rider Referral Program, in which they could receive a $50 reward for referring a friend or co-worker to start vanpooling. This percentage was similar to that reported in the 2006 survey.

Of respondents who were aware of Commuter Rewards, 38% reported they currently participate in the program and 21% said they participated in the program in the past. The remaining 41% said they never participated in Commuter Rewards.

More than one-third (35%) of vanpoolers who participated in Commuter Rewards reported that they log their commutes every day. Two in ten (18%) said they log their commutes a few times a week and 37% logged their commutes weekly. About 10% of respondent logged their commutes less than once per week.

**** There was a considerable decline in the number of vanpools operating in the region beginning in November 2008. This survey was of current vanpool riders as there was no way to reach riders no longer vanpooling.***