COMMUTESMART ANNUAL REPORT

OCTOBER 2016 – SEPTEMBER 2017

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This report was prepared as a cooperative effort of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB), as staff to the MPO, by the requirement of Title 42 USC 7401 et seq., Clean Air Act and 40 CFR Parts 51 and 93, Air Quality Conformity Rules and Regulations. The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the official views or policy of the USDOT.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCENTIVE PROGRAMS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GetGreen</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CommuterClub</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Ride Home</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanpool</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUTREACH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach Coordinators</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media &amp; Website</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising &amp; Public Relations</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

People like options. When it comes to getting to work, options that provide rewards are even better. The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, with funding from the U.S. and Alabama Departments of Transportation, created CommuteSmart in 1999 to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality by promoting options.

CommuteSmart makes changing commuting habits less intimidating. Through various incentives and services, the program helps ease transitions from driving alone to cleaner commutes. Furthermore, the program collaborates with employers to benefit employees, address issues such as parking shortages and business relocations, and support sustainability initiatives.

CommuteSmart engages participants through employers and the media to increase awareness of program offerings and highlight the benefits of alternative commutes. Through these efforts, 2,124 new commuters were added in fiscal year 2017, bringing total database registrations to 24,955. Overall, new and returning participants reported 13,224,336 in vehicle miles reduced last year. Alternative commutes, including carpooling, transit, bicycling, walking, and working from home, accounted for 9,340,270 of these vehicle miles reduced, while vanpoolers contributed 3,884,066 reduced vehicle miles.

Lower vehicle miles traveled translates into fewer vehicle emissions, less traffic, and cost savings for commuters. In fiscal year 2017, CommuteSmart participants saved an estimated $5,632,636 in total commuting costs. Approximately $742,559 of these savings were achieved by eliminating 375,027 gallons of fuel.

The following pages provide details of the CommuteSmart incentive programs and activities that took place in fiscal year 2017. Please let us know how we can better serve you moving forward in the coming years. Together, we can reduce traffic, improve air quality, and strengthen the community.
FIGURE 1
Vanpool & Alternative Commute Vehicle Miles Reduced
Annual Comparisons
FIGURE 2
Commuter Savings
Fuel and Cost Totals

375,027
Fuel Savings (Gal.)

$742,559
Fuel Savings ($)

$5,632,636
Est. Cost Savings ($)
INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

GETGREEN

CommuteSmart offers the GetGreen program to encourage individuals to try an alternative commute option. Under this program, new participants logging a minimum of 20 alternative commutes in the first 90 days earn $1 per day, up to $70. Any commuter living or working in the CommuteSmart program area, which includes Jefferson, Shelby, South Blount and West St. Clair County, is eligible for GetGreen incentives.

In FY 2017, CommuteSmart outreach events, social media, advertising and employer engagement yielded 866 GetGreen enrollees. These participants logged approximately 646,867 vehicle miles reduced last year, or an average of 747 miles reduced per participant. The GetGreen program cost $29,403 or 5 cents per vehicle mile reduced.

FIGURE 3
New GetGreen Members

By Month
COMMUTERCLUB

After the initial 90-day GetGreen period, commuters are automatically enrolled in CommuterClub to encourage the continued use of alternative commutes. This program provides $25 gift card rewards for commuters that log at least 20 alternative commutes each quarter. Participants choose one of 7 gift card options including Chevron/Texaco, Publix, BJCTA Transit Pass, Cahaba Cycles, CVS, The Summit, and Express Oil Change. Employees of the University of Alabama at Birmingham may also choose the option of having $25 added to their Blazer Bucks account, a declining balance account linked to each employee and student’s identification card.

There were 762 new commuters registered in CommuterClub in 2017. The CommuterClub program cost $161,870 in fiscal year 2017 and resulted in the elimination of 8,693,403 vehicle miles from the region’s roadways. As such, the program cost approximately 2 cents per vehicle mile reduced.

FIGURE 4
New CommuterClub Members
By Month

![Graph showing new CommuterClub members by month in 2017]
EMERGENCY RIDE HOME

For individuals interested in switching from driving alone to taking an alternative commute, the security of a private vehicle for emergency situations is often one of the most significant hurdles to making a change. CommuteSmart helps remove this obstacle by providing an Emergency Ride Home (ERH) program. Participants actively logging their commutes are eligible for up to 5 emergency rides home each year for qualified events such as illness, family emergency, or unscheduled overtime. In these instances, active participants contact CommuteSmart to arrange transportation back to the origin of their commute at no cost to the participant.

Even as CommuteSmart participation remains high, ERH utilization remains relatively low. In FY 2017, CommuteSmart participants received 53 ERHs at a total cost of $2,648.45. The average cost per ERH was $49.97 this fiscal year. Requests for ERH were requested from CommuteSmart at a rate of only 7 per every 100,000 trips reduced.

**FIGURE 5**

Emergency Ride Home Totals

*By Month*
VANPOOL

Rideshare by Enterprise currently manages the vanpool program for CommuteSmart. The benefits of vanpool commuting for individuals and employers include less stressful commutes, increased morale, lower levels of tardiness and absenteeism, reduced parking demand, and increased commuter cost savings. To help incentivize more vanpools, the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham provides a $400 subsidy for 7 to 9-passenger vans and a $450 subsidy for 12 and 15-passenger vans.

The Enterprise staff worked with CommuteSmart outreach coordinators at special events and supported marketing campaigns with local businesses, civic groups and communities to promote vanpooling and its benefits. As a result of these efforts and the subsidy, vanpool participants:

- Maintained an average of 32 operating vanpools each month, resulting in 46,486 cars off the highway in 2017;
- Lowered carbon dioxide emissions by 1,495 tons and carbon monoxide emissions by 58.06 tons;
- Reduced 154,130 gallons of fuel used for a total savings of $320,273 in fuel costs; and
- Took 71,347 fewer passenger trips, which reduced vehicle miles travelled by 3,884,066.
FIGURE 6
Total Active Vanpools
By Month
FIGURE 7
Carbon Dioxide Reduction (tons)
By Month
FIGURE 8
Vanpool Fuel Savings
By Month
OUTREACH

CommuteSmart outreach includes developing partner relationships; providing promotional items and information pamphlets; engaging individuals in person and online; and building awareness through traditional advertising and public relations campaigns. Outreach coordinators work with employer and community partners to create customized programs to increase the number of employees and residents utilizing alternative commutes.

OUTREACH COORDINATORS

The main focus of direct outreach is engaging commuters through their employers. CommuteSmart provides marketing tools such as presentations, special events, giveaways, monthly email blasts, and cluster analysis mapping. Furthermore, CommuteSmart offers other no-cost services. For instance, CommuteSmart is working with HealthSouth in advance of their headquarters relocation in an effort to reduce turnover related to the move. Furthermore, the program is working with the University of Montevallo through their Environmental Studies program to conduct a commuter survey that can be incorporated into planning processes.
CommuteSmart also offers tangible items such as bike racks, providing 7 bike racks to local partners last year. In May of 2017, CommuteSmart partnered with community bicycle vendors and coffee shops to host an annual Bike to Work Day event in conjunction with National Bike to Work Day. The coffee shops served as “energizer stations” where bicycle commuters could stop to receive a free coffee and Bike to Work branded t-shirts and reflective bands. This initiative proved to be the most successful social media campaign of 2017.

CommuteSmart welcomed Autotec, PRA Group, Shipt, University of Montevallo, and YWCA Central Alabama as new partners this year. These partners connect CommuteSmart to an additional 2,430 employees, students, and residents.
MEETINGS 173

CLIENT CONTACT (PHONE/EMAILS) 6,056

NEW PARTNERS 5

PARTNER EVENTS 120

PRESENTATIONS 139

RIDESHARE APPLICATIONS COLLECTED 1,252

BLAST EMAILS 1,520
SOCIAL MEDIA & WEBSITE

CommuteSmart utilizes our website and social media outlets to engage in a genuine and useful manner with current and potential customers. Both provide great vehicles to raise website traffic, create brand awareness, improve customer service and capture new business opportunities.

CommuteSmart currently focuses its social media efforts on Facebook and Twitter. In 2017, CommuteSmart increased the number of Facebook Page “Likes” to 1,005 and reached approximately 33,223 people through this platform. On Twitter, CommuteSmart now has 795 followers and garnered over 54,799 impressions.

The CommuteSmart website provides updated content and videos, testimonials, and interactive tools to inform and encourage program participation. Traffic to the website is generated from various sources with 51% coming from individuals typing in www.commutesmart.org or bookmarking the site in their browser. Over the year, the website received 69,909 total visitors with 22,755 visiting for the first time.
FIGURE 9
Website Statistics
www.commuteshort.org

RETURNING VISITORS 67.5%

1ST TIME VISITORS 32.5%
FIGURE 10
Traffic Sources Overview
www.commutesmart.org

REFERRING SITES, 13.0%
SOCIAL, 0.4%
ORGANIC TRAFFIC, 35.6%
DIRECT TRAFFIC, 51.0%
ADVERTISING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

Traditional public relations and advertising are effective at reaching mass audiences and building brand awareness. Thus, CommuteSmart utilizes its outreach campaign to drive participation in the program while also educating the general public about air quality issues and the consequences of individual choices such as travel behavior and transportation preferences. In 2017, media strategies included creating a new advertisement for radio and television, along with ads on print, digital media, and use of on-site events. Various promotional items, information pamphlets, and social media reinforced the program brand and provided additional education for interested parties. Furthermore, CommuteSmart alerted the public of air quality alert days using media notifications, ALDOT message boards, special advertisements on AL.com, and multiple radio websites.

To improve monitoring of ad effectiveness, radio and television messaging urged consumers to visit the CommuteSmart website. The radio campaign kicked off in May broadcasting on 11 stations.

JOIN COMMUTESMART FOR

2017 BIKE TO WORK DAY

May 19, 2017
7:00 - 9:00 a.m.

Head to www.b2wbham.com to see if there is an energizer station in your area!

Use the Hashtag #b2wbham to be featured on CommuteSmart's Twitter or Facebook!
across the program service area through June. CommuteSmart deliberately focused on running radio advertisements in the morning and afternoons when the audience was in the midst of their commutes. iHeart Media delivered a strong campaign and provided additional exposure through added value spots and presence on their websites. The radio campaign also included buys through Summit Media, which included a diverse audience such as 98.7 KISS, 106.9 The Eagle, 97.3 PLAY, and Birmingham Mountain Radio.

WBRC-TV aired a series of bike safety promotions throughout “Bike to Work Week” in May. In addition, CommuteSmart was featured on multiple live news segments that aired during Good Day Alabama to promote “Bike to Work Day.” The 2017 television campaign launched with 5 weeks on local stations beginning in the last week of June. For radio and television, CommuteSmart sponsored traffic reports, while also being included as a sponsor for the “Taste of Five Points” event at Vulcan Park and Arc Stories at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

For print, CommuteSmart featured a full page ad in B-Metro magazine. This publication included copy highlighting commuter testimonials explaining why they chose their alternative commute. CommuteSmart was also featured in BHM BIZ magazine, which targets local businesses. For this ad, the CEO of SPOC Automation provided a testimonial of how the program has helped his business.

Public Relations efforts included radio and television interviews with the CommuteSmart staff, which aired 8 times across 3 television stations and 2 radio stations. This added value alone provided approximately 140,000 impressions. CommuteSmart also received a cover story for the organization-wide online newsletter, UAB Reporter.
TELEVISION

A total of 5 television stations, along with multiple cable networks, were purchased in the market for the flight which aired June 27, 2017 to August 28, 2017. The television campaign included $46,155 in expenditures with the total amount of added value television stations provided to CommuteSmart values at $43,555. The total of the campaign, including expenditures and added value, was $89,710.

FIGURE 11
Television Campaign
Cost and Added Value Comparison
CommuteSmart purchased spots from a total of 11 radio stations airing beginning on May 8, 2017 and running through June 11, 2017. Along with the $23,843 in paid spots CommuteSmart received $50,890 in added value. Altogether the radio campaign was valued at $74,733.

**FIGURE 12**
Radio Campaign
*Cost and Added Value Comparison*
PRINT / INTERNET/ SPONSORSHIPS

CommuteSmart’s campaign with B-Metro and BHM BIZ magazines ran in that last quarter of FY2017. CommuteSmart purchased $5,700 worth of advertising and received $2,000 worth of added value. Total print, digital, and sponsorships was valued at $7,700 combining the purchased and added value.

**FIGURE 13**

Print & Internet Campaign

*Cost and Added Value Comparison*

![Pie chart showing the comparison of purchased and added value. The chart indicates that 70% of the cost was purchased and 30% was added value.](chart.png)
GOLD PARTNERS

ALABAMA POWER
CITY OF MONTEVALLO
FORTIS INSTITUTE
HEALTHSOUTH
PROTECTIVE LIFE

SOUTHERN COMPANY SERVICES
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM
VA MEDICAL CENTER

SILVER PARTNERS

ALABAMA GAS CORPORATION
AMERICAN CAST IRON & PIPE COMPANY (ACIPCO)
AUTOTEC
BAKER DONELSON
CAHABA CYCLES
CHILDREN’S HEALTH SYSTEM
CHILDREN’S SOUTH
CITY OF BIRMINGHAM
DAXKO

JEFFERSON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
PRA GROUP
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM (RPCGB)
ST. VINCENT’S HEALTH SYSTEM
SAMFORD UNIVERSITY
SPOC AUTOMATION
UNIVERSITY OF MONTEVALLO
VIRGINIA COLLEGE
BRONZE PARTNERS

ADVANTAGE RESOURCING
ALABAMA MEDIA GROUP
ALTEC, INC.
AMERICAN FAMILY CARE
AUTOTEC
BALCH & BINGHAM, LLP
BARBER’S/MAYFIELD
BAPTIST HEALTH SYSTEM
BBVA COMPASS BANK
BE&K/KBR
BIRMINGHAM ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS
BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS ALLIANCE
BIRMINGHAM COCA-COLA
BIRMINGHAM JEFFERSON COUNTY TRANSIT AUTHORITY
BIRMINGHAM JEFFERSON CONVENTION CENTER
BIRMINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY
BRADFORD REAL ESTATE GROUP
BRASFIELD & GORRIE
BROOKWOOD MEDICAL CENTER
BROWN MACKIE COLLEGE
BUCK CREEK STAINED GLASS
BUD’S BEST COOKIES
CALLAHAN EYE FOUNDATION AT UAB
CARDOVASCULAR ASSOCIATES OF THE SOUTHEAST
CITY OF HOOVER

CITY WHOLESALE, INC.
COLONIAL PROPERTIES
COOPER GREEN MERCY HOSPITAL
CORPORATE REALTY SERVICES
DANIEL CORPORATION
EYESIGHT FOUNDATION OF ALABAMA
GLENWOOD, INC.
GOLDEN FLAKE
HARRIS TYNES MANAGEMENT (CRESCE NT BUILDING & PARK PLACE)
HMS HOST
INFINITY INSURANCE
INTERMARK GROUP
ITT TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
JEFFERSON COUNTY COMMISSION
JEFFERSON STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
KINDER MORGAN
LAKESHORE FOUNDATION
LAWSON STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
MOLTON, ALLEN & WILLIAMS, LLC
MOTION INDUSTRIES
MTR PROPERTIES
NATHAN & NATHAN, PC
PIGGLY WIGGLY DISTRIBUTION
PRIDE STAFFING
PRINCETON BAPTIST MEDICAL CENTER
REGIONS FINANCIAL CORPORATION
SHELBY BAPTIST MEDICAL CENTER
SHELBY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
SHERATON BIRMINGHAM HOTEL
SHIPT
SIGN FACES
SOUTHERN RESEARCH INSTITUTE
SOUTH SHELBY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
STATE FARM INSURANCE
SUPERIOR MASON CORPORATION

THOMPSON TRACTOR
T-MOBILE
TRINITY MEDICAL CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA HEALTH SERVICES
UNIVERSITY PLACE APARTMENTS
U.S. PIPE AND FOUNDRY
VIVA HEALTH, INC.
VULCAN MATERIALS
WATTS REALTY

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

ALABAMA CLEAN FUELS COALITION
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
ALABAMA ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL
ALABAMA PARTNERS FOR CLEAN AIR
ALABAMA RIVERS ALLIANCE
BICICOOP
BIRMINGHAM BIKE CLUB
BIRMINGHAM BOTANICAL GARDENS
BLACK WARRIOR RIVERKEEPER
CITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP (CAP)
COBBS, ALLEN & HALL
ECO THREE

GATEWAY
HOMEDWOOD ROTARY
HOOVER AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
JEFFERSON COUNTY COMMITTEE FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
POSITIVE MATURITY
SAIN & ASSOCIATES
VALLOCYCLE
THE WRATT FOUNDATION
YMCA OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM
YWCA CENTRAL ALABAMA
ZYP BIKESHARE