

Smart Trips Austin

Feb. 27, 2023

Tools of Change Illustrated

- ▶ Building Motivation, Engagement and Habits Over Time
- ▶ Financial Incentives
- ▶ Home Visits
- ▶ Mass Media
- ▶ Norm Appeals
- ▶ Overcoming Specific Barriers
- ▶ Prompts
- ▶ Vivid, Personalized, Credible, Empowering, Communications

Initiated by

- ▶ City of Austin

Partners

- ▶ Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO)

Location

- ▶ Austin, Texas, USA

For Widespread Use

- ▶ No

Results

- ▶ Participation rate: 5-10% of households contacted
- ▶ 5-10% reduction in drive-alone trips among participants (about 41,000 vehicle trips per year)
- ▶ 5-10% increase in active and shared trips

Introduction

Smart Trips Austin encourages residents of Austin Texas, USA to take multi-modal transportation options (walk, bike, ride transit, and share rides) more often, rather than drive alone. The program focuses on personal interactions — educating individuals on their options and overcoming barriers to multi-modal travel. Smart Trips reinforces this new information through community-based programs such as learn-to-ride classes, transit instruction, and group walking activities. Initially, the program targeted residential neighbourhoods of Austin Texas; each year a different area was targeted. In 2020 the program expanded to city-wide and began to segment using a Stages of Change approach. In 2021, it started targeting residents who had recently moved to or around Austin. Smart Trips Austin averaged a participation rate of 5-10% of households contacted, a 5-10% reduction in drive-alone trips among participants (about 41,000 vehicle trips per year), and a

corresponding 5-10% increase in active and shared trips.

Background

Note: To minimize site maintenance costs, all case studies on this site are written in the past tense, even if they are ongoing as is the case with this program.

Well before the Smart Trips Program, Austin had already introduced innovative approaches to encourage the use of sustainable transportation options. For example, in 2013 it launched MetroBike, which became one of the most successful bike sharing programs in the USA.

Getting Informed

The Smart Trips Program was first piloted in 2015 with a grant from the American Planning Association (APA).

Targeting the Audience

The program initially, targeted residential neighbourhoods of Austin Texas; each year a different area was targeted. In 2020 it moved to a city-wide approach and began to segment using a Stages of Change approach. In 2021, it started targeting residents who had recently moved to or around Austin.

Setting Objectives

Smart Trips Austin had three program goals:

- (1) Manage congestion by encouraging residents to explore the city in new ways,
- (2) Reduce single-occupant vehicle trips by five percent, and
- (3) Increase active transportation trips by five percent.

Delivering the Program

Based on success of the pilot, in 2017 the City of Austin and Capital Metro entered a financial and planning partnership to run the program. The City approved a contract for a two-year period, with an option to extend for an additional 3 years with Council authorization. In addition, the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) contributed \$216,000.

The Program focused on personal interactions to communicate transportation options and overcome key barriers to multi-modal travel. For example, its multi-modal transportation incentive toolkits were delivered in person. (*Home Visits; Overcoming Specific Barriers; Vivid, Personalized, Credible, Empowering, Communications*)

These were supplemented with community-based events such as group bike rides, transit

adventures, and Mayor and Council Members group walking activities. (*Norm Appeals*)

In 2018, Austin became one of 25 cities across the USA supported by the Bloomberg American Cities Climate Challenge to accelerate climate action, using a holistic approach that focuses on clean buildings and transportation. Money from this award was used in 2020 to hold Transportation in Equity workshops with local community organizations. This led to the formation of the Bike Equity Alliance, which provided free bikes, safety gear, and training to residents earning below 50% of Austin's Median Family Income. (*Financial Incentives; Norm Appeals; Overcoming Specific Barriers; Vivid, Personalized, Credible, Empowering, Communications*)

In 2019, Austin City Council unanimously adopted a Strategic Mobility Plan that included a commitment that within 20 years, half of Austinites would get to work without driving alone in a car. At that point, 74% of car trips were drive-alone and the goal was 50%.

In keeping with this commitment, Austin also engaged its own staff to use alternative modes of travel more often. Its Smart Commute Rewards program for city staff began offering employees time off for logging sustainable commutes, and the drive alone rate of participants soon fell from 53% to 41%. In 2019, the City also piloted an electric bike fleet for staff, which has since expanded. (*Work Programs that Influence the Home*)

The 2020 COVID pandemic brought a sharp rise in interest and use of telework and a corresponding decrease in the use of other transportation modes. At that time, the program moved to a city-wide neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood approach. Promotions and incentives enticed participants to request a custom guide, then connect virtually with an expert for one-on-one support. When requesting the guide, participants answered a question that helped sort them by stage of change. Resources were

focused on those at the Contemplation, Preparation and Action stages. The stage of change also informed what information was provided and how. Participants could also join live Facebook sessions for tips on staying active and connected, and to access virtual resources like maps and videos. (*Mass Media; Vivid, Personalized, Credible, Empowering, Communications*)

Development review moved towards a "TDM-first" approach. During the analysis and review of development applications, applicants were asked to incorporate TDM strategies to reduce the anticipated increase in drive-alone trips. Trip reduction targets depended on the area of town (city center, urban, and suburban.) The more TDM strategies implemented in a project, the greater the credit received towards required transportation mitigations.

Recognizing cycling as an important choice for the first and last portion of trips, Austin has also invested in providing and promoting access to bicycles. The city's "Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority" (CapMetro) rebranded the City's B-Cycle bicycle rental service as MetroBike and began integrating it into transit hubs and their upgrades. Payments were integrated into its CapMetro App that was already being used for trip planning and trips by bus.

In 2021, the Program began utilizing a CAMPO grant to reach residents who had recently moved to or around Austin. It also piloted a community ambassador program to increase the depth and breadth of community outreach while also fostering deeper, locally-focused relationships with neighborhoods and communities.

In 2022, Smart Trips Austin became part of Get There ATX, which also targeted the Austin's employees, employers and visitors, as well as residents.

Barrier	How it was addressed
Lack of awareness of transportation options and infrastructure improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand-delivered customized resource toolkits • Personalized support and transportation information through e-newsletters and social media • Increased the capacity of community partners to communicate the benefits of transportation options
Inertia to change habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive bike rides, group walks, and transit adventures • Increased the capacity of community partners to host transportation events

Measuring Achievements

Mode share, mode shift, and mode frequency were all measured before and after implementation to evaluate program effectiveness. In addition to reported changes in transportation behavior, changes in confidence and awareness are also collected.

Mode share was based on data from the American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Results

Smart Trips Austin averaged a participation rate of 5-10% of households contacted, a 5-10% reduction in drive-alone trips among participants (about 41,000 vehicle trips per year), and a corresponding 5-10% increase in active and shared trips.

Assuming sustained behavior change, the program spent \$1.50 per vehicle trip taken off the road over a five year period, with a one-time cost of approximately \$22 per target area household.

Notes

See also:

<https://smartripsaustin.org/>

<https://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=346962>

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/1af8a2821738434b9e9db8f8e5e3366e>

<https://austintx.new.swagit.com/videos/118706>

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For step-by step instructions in using each of the tools noted above, to review our FULL collection of over 200 full-length social marketing case studies, or to suggest a new case study, go to www.toolsofchange.com

This case study is also available on line at <http://www.toolsofchange.com/en/case-studies/detail/754>

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