NASHVILLE TDM CHARRETTE

ADDRESSING THE REGION'S MOBILITY CHALLENGES

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Association for Commuter Transportation

The Association for Commuter Transportation is the leading advocate for the Transportation Demand Management (TDM) industry and premier association for TDM professionals and organizations.

ACT strives to get the most out of our transportation system by empowering the people, places, and organizations working to advance TDM to improve the quality of life of commuters, enhance the livability of communities, and support economic growth.

www.actweb.org

Center for TDM

The Center for TDM is a charitable organization focused on research and the dissemination of information aimed at educating public and private stakeholders to advance the adoption of transportation demand management to improve our nation’s mobility.

www.centerfortdm.org
Executive Summary

In conjunction with its annual Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Forum, the Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT) in collaboration with its non-profit Center for TDM, held a half-day charrette to identify TDM solutions to address Nashville’s regional transportation challenges, which had gained national exposure after the defeat of the local transportation referendum that would have provided over $5 billion in new funding for a new light rail system, public transit improvements, and other transportation enhancements.

During the charrette, representatives from public and private organizations across the Nashville region joined TDM professionals from around the country to address the questions below to examine the potential for TDM to play a leading strategy for the region in the near term.

- The biggest barriers to implementing a comprehensive TDM strategy in the region is…
- In 3-5 years, mobility in Nashville should look like…
- How does a community implement a robust TDM program when transit service may be lacking?
- How should a community address the challenge of free and incentivized parking?
- Stronger collaboration between public sector and private sector can be developed by…
- Actions the region should take immediately to expand transportation options and encourage mode shift should include?
- What is the role of regulation in advancing TDM?

Upon compiling and analyzing the feedback from participants, ACT developed a list of TDM recommendations intended to give the region’s stakeholders and decision makers potential strategies for further study or implementation. Recommendations focused on the concepts of:

- Strengthening a coordinated structure for TDM that brings together public and private stakeholders;
- Investing in and building significant public awareness of a recognizable brand supported by marketing and outreach activities;
- Better utilization of funding resources like Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program funds to support TDM strategies; and
- Adoption of new TDM supportive policies.
Introduction

The Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT), in conjunction with its annual Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Forum held in Nashville, November 13-14, 2018, conducted a half-day charrette to identify potential TDM solutions to address the region’s growing transportation challenges. Participants in the event included representatives and stakeholders from local governments, transit agencies, universities, major employers, businesses, civic organizations, and commuters. In addition to these individuals, participants included TDM professionals from across the country who were invited to share their knowledge and experience in areas of TDM planning, programming, and implementation.

With the TDM Forum being held just months after the defeat of the region’s Transit Referendum, ACT saw an opportunity for our members and community of TDM professionals to give back and lend its expertise to Nashville to identify near term TDM solutions to address the region’s congestion and mobility challenges.

TDM means the use of strategies to inform and encourage travelers to maximize the efficiency of a transportation system leading to improved mobility, reduced congestion, and lower vehicle emissions. These strategies often rely on supporting programs and policies aimed at shifting behavior and creating an environment supportive of public/private collaboration to address mobility issues.

TDM strategies may include the use of planning, programs, policy, marketing, communications, incentives, pricing, and technology to shift travel modes, routes used, departure times, number of trips being made, and even the location and design of work spaces or public facilities. These strategies are often at lower costs and require less development time to implement compared to costly infrastructure projects, but when fully committed to, can create significant benefits in mode-shift.

Through this charrette, participants spent time identifying some of the major challenges facing the region, and how various sectors are working to address these challenges today to meet the broad goals for the region. Further discussions focused on identifying potential solutions for the region. Through this report, we aim to summarize the discussions and provide general recommendations for stakeholder and local decision makers to use as an additional resource for implementing, enforcing, and/or advancing existing TDM solutions.
The biggest barriers to implementing a comprehensive TDM strategy in the Nashville region

1. Education and lack of basic information about TDM was the most identified barrier to adopting a comprehensive TDM strategy for the Nashville region. An improvement in marketing is a key opportunity to promote a clear unified message about what TDM is and how it can benefit the community. This messaging campaign should consist of:
   - a baseline understanding of TDM and its purpose;
   - employer / employee benefits; and
   - addressing misconceptions about convenience and public transit.

   Starting with a simple universal message that clearly identifies the problems and provides solutions the community supports - which can be tailored to different audiences - will make the spread of information more efficient and effective. Understanding the opportunities and benefits TDM can provide is critical to getting people to change their behaviors.

   Education and promotion can also provide opportunities to make connections where there were none previously. Attendees identified the disconnect between private businesses and public agencies as another major barrier. It was acknowledged that the Chamber and others have been working to address this disconnect but continuing efforts to form new connections between like-minded organizations could bring new information about the region to light, for example, how county density and proximity to rural/urban areas can affect the success of certain TDM strategies.

2. Outdated and nonexistent infrastructure in the area was another identified barrier to implementing a TDM strategy. As the region continues to work towards more viable transit initiatives, attendees looked at other trip reducing strategies such as instating a parking maximum rather than a minimum on new building projects to limit how much space is dedicated to single occupancy vehicles. The lack of sidewalks, bike lanes, and dedicated bus infrastructure like priority lanes are also major barriers to implementing TDM strategies. Nashville’s “hub and spoke” bus system makes trips inefficient, requiring a rider to travel downtown to change lines rather than just traveling from neighborhood to neighborhood.

3. Institutional culture is the third major barrier attendees identified. “Status quo” habits and policies make behavior change very difficult, but education and messaging could help to change that. Car culture is so ingrained in the Nashville region because of the idea that driving a personal car is the quickest and most convenient way to get around and the amount of parking availability only serves to reinforce that. The lack of incentives to take alternative options also stems from the fact that people may not be aware of the options that are available.
In 3-5 years, mobility in Nashville should look like

1. Many of the responses to this prompt focused on the desire to develop a regional multimodal system that provides options that are equal and interchangeable in one seamless and easy-to-navigate system. This involves investments in safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in addition to more robust mass transit systems. This gives travelers the opportunity to choose a mode that best aligns with their unique commuting needs. Implementing a single payment system that is easily accessible in one app will make the transition between transit systems easier for multimodal commuters.

2. Attendees also highlighted information and messaging as another major component in the improvement of Nashville’s transportation system. The recent initiatives at Vanderbilt University and the recent launch of the Nashville Connector have helped create awareness of TDM and the social benefits it provides. The promotion of success stories like this along with events like the Commuter Challenge should play a major role in the marketing strategy and elected officials should be vocal about the goals of TDM and positive results should be reported and celebrated. Education on Nashville's multimodal transportation system should include clear statements of what services and incentives are available to employers and commuters.

3. The third major component of Nashville’s future in transportation is institutional support. State programs and efforts should be better promoted, employers should be encouraged to participate in TDM programs, and public agencies and private businesses should form partnerships on TDM and commuter benefits projects. This top-down support will make them prominent in the public eye and move beyond the “status quo” mentality. Broad institutional support will also provide structure to program planning and development; hold public agencies accountable for the success of projects; provide community members a place to give feedback; and support transparency on the status of projects.

Attendees envisioned the future of mobility in Nashville to be a connected, multimodal and seamless system with widespread support and promotion from businesses and elected officials.
Implementing a robust TDM program when transit service may be lacking

Focusing on TDM strategies that require less infrastructure investment like teleworking, carpooling, and vanpooling allows for initial progress without major changes to existing transit service or undertaking major infrastructure projects. Additionally, promoting biking and walking as other means of travel provides commuters with a healthier option, takes single-occupancy vehicles off the road and they do not require major changes to existing infrastructure. This would provide a network of multimodal options while capital and infrastructure intensive options like buses and rail are improved over time.

Increasing the safety for individuals looking to bike and walk should be prioritized, and the region should encourage the private sector to enhance end-of-trip amenities supporting these modes, like shower and locker facilities at places of work making the options more attractive for commuters, especially those with limited access to the current transit system.

Marketing strategies for these efforts should focus on the positives: incentives, health and safety, success stories, and consumer satisfaction. Education campaigns about available alternatives and area-specific benefits of mode-shifts improves awareness and could influence behavior change. The region needs to address the underutilization of outreach to residents and businesses, with regards to the variety of commuting options that are available, how they work, and the benefits of their adoption. Telecommuting was specifically identified as a possible solution, but misconceptions about it may be holding it back from greater use and acceptability. The spread of information in a clear and comprehensible way can garner support for a robust TDM program that communities may have never realized they needed.

Other factors included:

- Institutional support – especially when introducing new, wide-sweeping programs or policies;
- Including elected officials and businesses when introducing comprehensive TDM initiatives;
- Identifying maximum funding with existing funds as one way local governments can implement new TDM programs;
- Getting support from the state and persuading CEOs of businesses to invest in TDM projects ensures that there is a three-way relationship between the community, public, and private sectors;
- Multiple and diverse stakeholders allow for a more effective TDM program that has input from all stakeholders.

Incremental progress is a good approach when implementing a TDM strategy where transit service is lacking. Starting with alternative modes that don’t require large infrastructural changes or funding will result in progress, while the marketing and partnerships are formed in the background to target larger transit system projects like bus and rail expansion.
Addressing the challenges of free and incentivized parking

Limiting and revising the parking benefits employers can offer will reduce an employee’s incentive to drive alone on their daily commute. Instead of a parking minimum on building developments, a set maximum would reduce the number of available parking at new sites without needing to remove or repurpose that space in the future. Switching from yearly parking passes to daily passes and raising the price of parking so that it is competitive with alternative transit benefits will make parking a conscious daily choice rather than a decision made only once a year. Attendees also identified free or reduced-price parking for carpools and vanpools as an option to face this challenge.

Citizens, property owners, developers, and employers will not embrace limiting parking benefits or revising the parking policies unless alternative and comparable options and benefits are provided. Creating parity between parking, walking, biking, and transit will make each option and benefit equal and easier for employees to choose the mode that is best for them without worrying about the differences between benefits. Providing a free community bus or offering benefits to those who take public transportation or carpool also encourages the use of alternative modes of commuting. The important part is to equally encourage all alternatives, so people can choose what is best and most convenient for themselves while shifting away from driving alone.

Providing accurate and clear information about the benefits is another key part in encouraging people to move from one mode to another, especially if one mode is under-utilized by their colleagues. Clear and accessible information is important to make commuters aware of the alternatives available to them while ensuring there is a wide range of options that make commuting easier and enjoyable.

Provide employees/residents with information about alternatives and cost comparisons; and do research to promote the benefits of reduced parking and provide success stories. For example, the recent success of Vanderbilt University’s campus land-use management plan creates a positive message and can change the narrative of parking and land use.

Gather information to learn commuter origination points and which alternative modes are available in those regions; gather specific information via outreach surveys to find out what people want and need.
Developing stronger collaboration between the public and private sector

Participants expressed a need for robust collaboration between the public and private sectors to address the region’s transportation challenges. The collaboration should be multifaceted involving all levels of government, large and small employers, and the media.

The collaboration should involve a clear and motivated messaging campaign to inform the public and spark a discussion; seek partnerships through local chambers of commerce to establish regular meetings and form agreements; and set out with goals that benefit stakeholders mutually.

Forming a campaign that builds off the momentum from the referendum to gain supporters and highlight next steps. The need for a public discussion will help establish partnerships between the public and private sectors with TDM framed as a benefit to businesses. Journalists can help with building collaboration by engaging with supporters and promoting transparency and accountability. Recognizing the successes of the past and focusing on one or two key messages for the future make for a more streamlined and understandable campaign.

The Chamber of Commerce should coordinate stakeholders and help set goals for TDM programs. The public sector should conduct research and development to clearly identify the economic benefits to employers when TDM is practiced. Businesses need to see how the goals laid out can benefit their company and employees. Creating a "TDM Champions" rating system will create competition between employers to offer the best benefits while bringing attention to the campaign.

In Nashville, only 4 out of 13 colleges and universities participate in transit pass programs; so, getting all schools to commit to providing free bus passes will push the public message further and may persuade other businesses and agencies to get involved. Promotion and assistance with establishing transit programs that incorporate the qualified transportation fringe benefit could encourage employers to offer alternative commute options.

Unbundling parking from an annual-pay to a daily-pay system will be a starting point for most employers. This will make driving a daily transactional choice and, when alternatives are available, will be a less attractive commuting option. Vanpooling was also presented as a good alternative for corporations.

Seeking possible partnerships and presenting tailored messaging to businesses will help to foster better collaboration when offering alternative commuting options. Promoting these partnerships and the resulting programs will elevate participants as a “TDM Champion” and create a public dialogue which can build momentum and influence further changes.
Immediate actions to expand transportation options and encourage mode shift

The region should continue to conduct research to identify gaps in transit availability, underperforming routes, average commuting distances, and what benefits and alternatives are already offered by employers. Use the data to develop an informational and behavior change campaign as well as a task force to evaluate options for filling identified gaps. Develop new incentives for employers offering transit benefits that shift employees away from parking/driving alone. Prioritize parking for vanpools and carpools in lots and ensure that parking is priced appropriately. Top-down support from large regional stakeholders like mayors, CEOs and universities will help establish a foundation of public support.

Research and identify areas of need and what services already exist and work well to establish where and what planners should focus on. Survey employers to understand current programs and benefits and determine which ones are most used (and why). Gather commute data from residents via survey or through the MPO’s and ask what they would like to see added to their community. This will also help to identify which areas are underserved and what options are desired in their community. Alongside research, an informational campaign should be devised to educate the community on what benefits may be offered by their employers, what alternative modes are available in the area, and how walking, biking, carpooling, and vanpooling are viable options to driving alone and may even be more cost-effective. These campaigns should be personalized and localized and should build on success stories of the past to reinforce commitment to the goals ahead.

Increasing or initiating incentives for employers to offer commuter benefits may get more employers to offer benefits. A change in policy to support transit development districts will increase visibility of projects and result in better transit services. Building infrastructure and shifting underperforming bus routes will improve coverage and commuter satisfaction. Improving transit coverage to residents 25+ miles outside of the city will connect more people to the city and increase mobility between urban and rural areas.

Top-down support for this initiative will make the process easier, quicker, and accountable. Vanderbilt University is a major hallmark in the region with public visibility and support; build on the university’s recent efforts to develop a comprehensive TDM plan by highlighting this story. Outreach through the Nashville Connector to business leaders will engage the private sector, create ownership of the plan and can create competition between companies to support the regional changes.
Charrette attendees had mixed viewpoints on the role of regulation in advancing TDM within the region, seeing the potential for both negative and positive outcomes in advancing efforts. Loosening existing regulation to allow for more TDM and multimodal options to exist make regulation seem less of an obstacle to advancing TDM. On the other hand, regulation can require large employers to have a comprehensive TDM plan with metrics, which would promote TDM for businesses and provide more information on the transit services and commuter behaviors in the region.

Regulation can build community trust but needs proper enforcement in order to be successful—particularly the enforcement of HOV lanes and TDM mitigation measures that may be placed on new developments or employers. It also gives people a single-point of accountability and can standardize the TDM programs that are implemented. Eliminating the parking minimum requirement and shifting to a parking maximum is one way to shift the way regulation promotes or prevents the advancement of TDM.

Researching case studies from other states that have successfully implemented TDM regulation can help identify what may work and why—for example, many cities have passed commuter benefits ordinances. Overall, regulation can be helpful in setting the groundwork for advancing TDM when there is little public knowledge or incentive to pursue TDM strategies. Since too much regulation can serve as a potential barrier, it is important to lay the groundwork and build a public following from commuters, businesses, and local government to avoid creating mandates the community will not support. A more organic following—fueled by education—will be more sustainable and longer lasting to benefit the region in the coming years.
Recommendations

The following list of recommendations are based on input and thoughts gathered from participants in the half-day charrette. These recommendations are intended to give the region’s stakeholders and decision makers ideas and direction and, in many instances, may require additional study and analysis to determine the appropriate approach. Recommendations are not listed in any particular order of potential impact or ability to be implemented.

1. Establish a statewide TDM Advisory Committee that includes representatives from the state, cities, MPOs, transit agencies, TMAs, TDM programs, employers, and other interested stakeholders to provide continuous focus and oversight of TDM planning and programming and ensures collaboration across all entities.

2. Local agencies and stakeholders should collaborate to empower a centralized outreach and education program like the Nashville Connector, aimed at informing the public about commuting options and the benefits of TDM to increase the efficiency of existing infrastructure.

3. Develop and implement a structure for TDM programming that is overseen at the state level and coordinated down to the local level through partnerships with MPOs, cities, and transportation management associations (TMAs).

4. Develop a comprehensive targeted marketing and behavior change program to increase public awareness of options and shift driving alone commuters to other modes.

5. Develop a strategy to prioritize the use of CMAQ funding for TDM initiatives and incentivizing private sector collaboration in the selection of CMAQ funded projects.

6. Look at best practices from other states that implement commute trip reduction ordinances or regulations that require employers to provide TDM programming.

7. Establish policies that aim to improve equity in transportation costs, access and mobility options.

8. Look at developing policies to better manage parking through pricing and availability.
Participants

Mark Abkowitz
Vanderbilt University
Hiba Baroud
Vanderbilt University
Steve Bland
WeGo Public Transit
Dan Callas
TransOptions, Inc.
Thom Cerny
AECOM
Rodney Chester
Gresham Smith
Amanda Clelland
WeGo Public Transit
Miranda Clements
Metro Nashville Planning Department
Justin Cole
WeGo Public Transit
Jessica Dauphin
The Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee
Paul DeMaio
MetroBike, LLC
Lois Demeester
Destination Sales & Marketing Group
Kiki Dohman
Cherriots Trip Choice
Maureen Farrell
GVF
Aaron Fodge
Colorado State University
Lindsey Ganson
MP&F Strategic Communications
Michel Guillet
OneCommute
Erin Halkenschiel
Vanderbilt University
Sohier Hall
Luum
Chase Harper
TMA Group
Angie Henderson
Metropolitan Council Office
Debbie Henry
TMA Group
Rob Henry
GVF
Stanton Higgs
TMA Group
Kelly Hostetler
Luum
Carol Hudler
Cumberland Region Tomorrow
David Kells
Nashville Predators/ Bridgestone Arena
Andrea Leary
NE Transit Planning & Mgt. Corp.
Matthew Meservy
AECOM
Zarema Maxwell
Commute With Enterprise
Connie McGee
Commute With Enterprise
David McMaster
Metropolitan Transportation Authority of Harris County
Melanie Murphy
TDOT
Carolyn Newsome
Intercity Transit
Toks Omishakin
TDOT
Victoria Payne
Nashville Chamber of Commerce
Jessica Rinne
Walk Bike Nashville
Christian Ryan
Urban Green Lab
Ralph Schulz
Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce
Danny Silva
METRO Houston
Beth Snoke
The Ohio State University
Rick Steele
NuRide
David Straus
Association for Commuter Transportation
Mike Thompson
Nashville Civic Design Center
Mary Vavra
Barge Design
Steve Wheeler
OneCommute
Tom Yardley
Stantec
Maria Vollmer
Wilmot, Inc