

Change the Usage Pattern - Examples

The way that travelers use the transportation network can be modified to accommodate more demand and reduce congestion. Using the telephone or internet for certain trips, traveling in off-peak hours and using public transportation and carpools are examples. Projects that use tolls or pricing incentives can be tailored to meet transportation needs and also address social and economic equity concerns.

Any of these changes will affect the way that travelers, employers and shippers conduct their lives and business; these may not be inconsequential effects. The key will be to provide better conditions and more travel options primarily for work commutes, but there are also opportunities to change trips for shopping, school, health care and a variety of other activities.

Although comprising slightly less than 20 percent of all vehicular trips in the average urban area, commute trips generally cluster around the most congested peak periods and are from the same origin to the same destination at the same time of day (10). These factors make commute trips by carpooling, vanpooling, public transit, bicycling and walking more likely. Furthermore, alternative work arrangements—including flexible work hours, compressed work weeks and teleworking—provide another means of shifting trips out of the peak periods. This “triple divergence”—moving away from congested roads—is described in much more detail by Anthony Downs in his book, “Still Stuck in Traffic” (35).

The goal of all of these programs is to move trips to uncongested times, routes or modes so that there is less congestion during peak hours and so that more trips can be handled on the current system. Carrying more trips can be thought of in the same way as increasing production in a manufacturing plant. If the current buses, cars and trains can carry more people to the places they want to go, there are benefits to society and the economy.

The role of phones, computers and the internet cannot be overlooked as the future role of commute options are examined. New technologies are being used along with changes in business practices to encourage employers to allow jobs to be done from home or remote locations—and these might allow workers to avoid their commute a few days each month, or travel to their jobsites after a few hours of work at home in the morning.

Atlanta’s “Cash for Commuters” program is one example of the newer, more aggressive commute option programs. Built around a Clean Air Campaign, the program involved payment of cash incentives to driver-only commuters who switched to another mode. Participants earned up to \$60 per month (for three months) by choosing and using an eligible alternative mode of transportation. During the program, participants used alternative modes an average of more than four days each week compared to less than one day per week before. A year and one-half after the program, participants still used a commute alternative an average of 2.4 days per week. Overall, program participants decreased their single-occupant commute modes from 84 percent to 53 percent. This type of change has benefits in less vehicle travel and fewer parking spaces needed and participants have reported lower frustration levels and better on-time arrival. Decreasing each commuter’s peak-period personal vehicle trips by one per week could have substantial congestion benefits, if employers and employees choose these options (36).