

# Urban Partnership Communications Plan

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## CONTACTS

Tolling:	Janet Matkin	<a href="mailto:matkinj@wsdot.wa.gov">matkinj@wsdot.wa.gov</a> or 206.716.1150
Transit:	Carol Cooper	<a href="mailto:carol.cooper@kingcounty.gov">carol.cooper@kingcounty.gov</a> or 206.684.6766
Technology:	Patty Michaud	<a href="mailto:michaup@wsdot.wa.gov">michaup@wsdot.wa.gov</a> or 206.716.1133
TDM:	Benjamin Brackett	<a href="mailto:bbrackett@psrc.org">bbrackett@psrc.org</a> or 206.971.3280

## URBAN PARTNERSHIP OVERVIEW

In 2007, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) awarded more than \$154.5 million to the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), King County Metro (KCM) and the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) to manage congestion on the SR 520 corridor in the Seattle area through the combined application of tolling, transit, technology and transportation demand management (the Four Ts).

Known as the Urban Partnership (UPA), the project includes variable tolling on SR 520; active traffic management technology on SR 520, I-90 and I-5; real-time traveler information signs on SR 520, SR 522 and I-405; enhanced bus service along SR 520 and on SR 522; and continuation of trip reduction programs. Federal funds provided compliment significant local investments.

As outlined in the Phase 3 Scope of Work for the Lake Washington Congestion Management Project, the agencies agreed to provide FHWA information about project communications, public education and outreach. This plan is intended to fulfill that commitment by outlining the overall communication plan for congestion management on SR 520 in the Seattle area and summarizing supplementary information about communication activities associated with each of the Four Ts.

## COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

The communications approach for the Urban Partnership is based around the high-level organization presented here. This plan builds upon the existing efforts and plans already in place for each of the 4Ts. This approach focuses on the long-term, and will allow us to carry communications and outreach efforts forward in each area after the UPA has come to an end.

### OBJECTIVES

- Increase public awareness and understanding of our multifaceted approach to congestion management.
- Meet the goals outlined in the Urban Partnership Agreement and the deliverables agreed to in the Phase III Scope of Work.

### STRATEGIES

- Incorporate information about at least two of the Four Ts in communications for each project. Examples:
  - Tolling communications that mentions carpooling and riding the bus.
  - Technology communications that mention benefits to both cars and buses.
- Consider factors that will motivate specific audiences and tailor messaging accordingly. Examples:
  - Encourage discretionary travelers to shift the time of their trips to avoid the highest toll rates.
  - Pitch enhanced transit service to everyday commuters who could build the bus into their daily routine and avoid tolls.
  - Provide information about how to start a telework program to organizations that employ staff who do work that could be done from a remote worksite.
  - Market carpools and vanpools to commuters who live in areas where transit service is inconvenient or unavailable.
- Use plain language and clear explanations rather than relying upon technical terms or terms of art. Examples:
  - Choose terms such as carpooling, vanpooling, riding the bus and working from home instead of phrases like transportation alternatives, trip reduction or ridesharing.
  - Refer to the Customer Service Center instead of the back-office system and account policies instead of business rules.
- Take advantage of and create project milestones to sustain earned media coverage.
- Focus on congestion management and a clear call to action.
  - Avoid the phrase urban partnership and references to the agreement or program. The outcome is more important than the agreement.
  - Be transparent. Mention the agencies that support the congestion management effort without over-promoting them.
  - Do not create a specific brand for Urban Partnership.

## KEY AUDIENCES

- Corridor commuters (drivers and transit riders)
- Corridor employers
- Affected low-income and minority populations
- Corridor discretionary drivers (recreation, errands, etc.)
- General public
- Policy makers

## KEY MESSAGE

To effectively manage congestion and enhance safety, we are using a combination of tolling, transit, technology, carpools, vanpools, telework, bicycles and more.

## TACTICS

### Policy Makers

- Monthly report to project stakeholders and policy makers about project progress and performance.
- Maintain the program webpage at [www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/LkWaMgt](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/LkWaMgt).
- Provide communications and outreach collateral samples to project stakeholders and the national evaluation committee.
- Provide a calendar of project milestones that will lend themselves to earned media coverage.
- Recognize the federal financial contribution.
- Outreach and presentations to legislators and other government stakeholders.

### General Public, Commuters and Employers

- Sample language that can be incorporated into various communications, including:
  - Press releases.
  - Public education e-mails.
  - Employer outreach materials.
  - Transit, carpool, vanpool, telework/compressed work week and bicycling marketing materials.
  - Tolling marketing materials.
  - Smarter Highways marketing materials.
- Create a project milestone calendar to help agencies coordinate and to identify opportunities to create a more sustained outreach effort.
- Maintain a UPA project folio, to be updated semi-annually, for public distribution.
- Incorporate congestion management messaging into existing outreach campaigns, including employer-based commute trip reduction campaigns.

## **TOLLING**

### **Project Overview**

Tolling will begin on the SR 520 bridge in spring 2011 using all-electronic technology. The tolls are expected to improve traffic flow, particularly during peak hours. The revenue generated will be used to replace the aging SR 520 floating bridge and to upgrade the highway corridor from I-405 to I-5. Corridor construction will affect traffic starting in 2011.

Passes (transponders) will be marketed under the existing *Good To Go!* brand. While the state currently uses tolls on the SR 167 HOT lanes and the SR 16/Tacoma Narrows Bridge and charges fares on ferries, tolls on the SR 520 corridor will affect the largest number of travelers in state history. A comprehensive public education and marketing campaign is under way.

For a comprehensive look at the entire outreach and communications effort for tolling, see appendix **A**.

### **Communications Objectives**

- Articulate the features of the tolling program and how tolling, transit, technology, and carpools, vanpools, telework and bicycles all work together to manage congestion and enhance safety.
- Promote the use of prepaid *Good To Go!* passes as the method of payment for those using the SR 520 bridge with any frequency.
- Educate the public about how to use electronic tolling.

### **Outreach and Communications Summary**

The campaign will include:

- Community outreach through grass roots organizations, a speaker's bureau, employer networks, fairs and festivals, and local governments and agencies.
- Social media that includes website, blogs, twitter, and videos.
- Media relations and promotional events.
- Outreach targeted to low-income and minority populations, including information translated into six languages (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese.)
- Customer service centers: walk-up centers in Seattle's University District, Gig Harbor, downtown Bellevue and one online center, as well as mobile customer service centers at key locations with significant public exposure.
- Paid advertising on radio, newspaper, billboards, transit boards, Web sites and television.
- Materials including brochures, information sheets, presentation slides, welcome kits, postcards, letters, displays, giveaway promotional items, point of purchase displays, etc.
- Highway signs that alert non-account holders on how to use the toll facility.

## **TRANSIT**

### **Project Overview**

King County Metro (KCM) will add 90 additional one-way daily weekday trips in the SR 520 corridor. In addition, KCM will purchase new buses and improve park-and-ride facilities. Other plans include new passenger amenities such as real-time next bus arrival information. KCM will add up to 5,000 annual bus service hours on SR 522 to absorb the expected increased demand for transit service on the parallel corridor on the north side of Lake Washington.

Tolling on SR 520 is expected to increase transit demand by 15-35 percent as people look for feasible alternatives to driving. In particular, those with lower incomes are expected to seek out transit as an alternative to paying vehicle tolls. All transit riders will benefit from more frequent, faster and reliable service across SR 520.

New peak period service improvements will include routes between downtown Redmond and the University District; commuter service enhancements from the Houghton park-and-ride to First Hill, and between Woodinville and downtown Seattle; all-day service enhancements extending peak period and midday frequency between Bellevue and the University District, as well as Kirkland to downtown Seattle. For more information, see appendix **D**.

### **Communications Objectives**

- Articulate the benefits of faster, more frequent transit service and how tolling, transit, technology, and carpools, vanpools, telework and bicycles all work together to manage congestion and enhance safety.
- Build ridership on new and existing transit service.
- Help customers adjust to changes in the service, including off-board fare payment.

### **Outreach and Communications Summary**

Public outreach for transit improvements and new routes will be combined with the general public outreach and minority/low income outreach efforts for tolling as the transit projects develop. KCM will provide collateral and public education on new routes and route improvements utilizing their existing channels for communicating service changes to the public. KCM will also conduct outreach as they add service and amenities to the SR 520 and SR 522 corridors. The timing of the outreach will align with service changes in October 2010 and February 2011. The campaign will include:

- Bus stop rider alerts, coach posters, facility signs and customer brochures.
- Distribution of timetables on buses, in timetable racks at Metro's two customer service offices, public buildings, and locations including retail partners and large employers.
- Signs and kiosks with schedules at major bus stops. Updated regional maps of Metro's route network posted at major stops and online.
- Special rider alert brochure that includes summaries of changes in schedules and routing.
- Web site and online trip planner updates.
- Press releases and media outreach.

For more information on Metro's standard service change plan, see appendix **C**.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Project Overview**

Beginning in summer 2010, WSDOT will use new tools and technology to reduce collisions and smooth traffic flow on some of the busiest highway routes. More than 300 overhead electronic signs will be installed on I-5, SR 520 and I-90 in the Seattle area. The new overhead electronic signs will automatically alert drivers when a lane is closed ahead and adjust the speed limit to slow traffic before it reaches backed up or blocked traffic. WSDOT will install electronic message signs that display comparative, real-time travel times for alternate routes: one eastbound SR 520; another east of I-405; southbound I-405 north of SR 520; and westbound SR 522 east of I-405. In addition, WSDOT will install a variable-priced, all-electronic toll collection system on the SR 520 bridge.

For more information, see the full Active Traffic Management communications plan in appendix **E**, and the communications schedule in appendix **F**. Sample messaging for technology projects is included in appendix **G**.

### **Communications Objectives**

- Articulate the benefits of the new technologies and how tolling, transit, technology, and carpools, vanpools, telework and bicycles all work together to manage congestion and enhance safety.
- Educate drivers about how to take advantage of the new technologies.
- Minimize traffic impacts when new systems come online.

### **Outreach and Communications Summary**

The campaign will include:

- Social media and educational webisode videos.
- Media relations and promotional events.
- Materials including brochures, information sheets, presentation slides, folios, sign visualizations, etc.
- Highway signs.

## **TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT**

### **Project Overview**

Transportation demand management (TDM) refers to programs that support riding the bus, carpooling, vanpooling, working from home, compressing work weeks, bicycling, walking, combining trips, shopping closer to home. In Washington State, many TDM programs are employer-based and target rush-hour travel. For example, an employer subsidy for transit passes and vanpools, parking fees and policies that support telework and compressed work weeks.

Hundreds of organizations including local agencies, non-profits and employers are currently part of the actively engaged TDM network. TDM efforts are intentionally decentralized and grass-roots oriented, but receive significant support from agencies like King County Metro, Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) and WSDOT. Tolling is expected increase public interest in TDM options. PSRC will work with TDM program managers to help their customers adjust to tolling and new technology, and take advantage of enhanced transit and other demand management opportunities. For more information on the data the TDM effort will examine, as well as a map of TDM jurisdictions and locations, see appendix **I**.

### **Communications Objectives**

- Articulate the benefits of carpooling, vanpooling, riding the bus, teleworking, compressed work weeks, bicycling and walking. Explain how tolling, transit, technology and alternatives to driving alone work together to manage congestion and enhance safety.
- Increase public awareness of transportation options beyond riding the bus. Demonstrate that the public has can choose from a combination of options that work best for them.
- Increase use of efficient commute modes.
- Ensure that the new transit services are utilized.

### **Outreach and Communications Summary**

The campaign will include:

- Outreach and information materials designed to equip grass roots TDM program managers, such as sample messages and customizable outreach materials.
- Speaker's bureau of tolling staff armed with TDM messaging.

Although there is no budget to develop new materials or conduct outreach specifically to promote travel options when tolling occurs, the TDM team will develop sample messages suitable for email alerts and posters for downloads, and incorporate them into ongoing outreach.

Existing outreach efforts include direct communication with specific employers, email alerts to employer networks, and newsletters and other outreach conducted by various Transportation Management Associations and the University of Washington's Transportation Office.

Examples of TDM outreach materials can be found in appendix **H**.