



2019 CASE STUDY

Exit 27: Reboot Your Commute

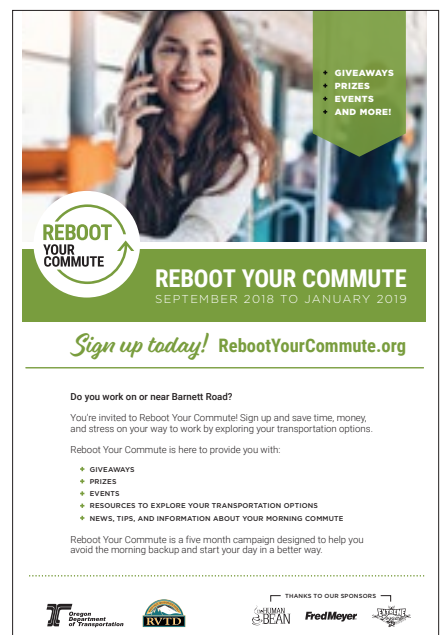


Introduction

The **Reboot Your Commute** campaign was designed to address safety and vehicle flow issues on I-5 in Medford, Oregon. Specifically, the campaign aimed to change the behavior of commuters traveling on weekdays to East Barnett Road. On many weekday mornings, excess traffic demand at the I-5 southbound Exit 27, headed to East Barnett Road, caused backups of vehicles the entire length of the off-ramp and into the freeway travel lane. Responding to the 2014 Oregon Transportation Options Plan (OTOP), rather than add travel lanes for vehicle capacity (a costly solution), the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) instead piloted a new approach in partnership with the Rogue Valley Transportation District (RVTD) to provide outreach, education, and encouragement about the suite of transportation options (TO) already available in the area.

Above right: Cover of Reboot Your Commute program map brochure.

Below right: Reboot Your Commute program poster.



Approach

The project team partnered with three major employers and one school in the rapidly growing East Barnett Road area: Rogue Regional Medical Center, the Medical Eye Center, Rogue Valley Manor, and St. Mary's School. Analysis showed that the peak of the Exit 27 backup was largely due to employees commuting to work between 7:45 and 8 am. Initial interviews with employers identified administrative staff as the primary target for outreach, as their work schedules generally correlated with the peak commute hour. Interviews also indicated that there was a large supply of free parking in the area, little knowledge of carpooling or vanpooling among employees, and a lack of awareness of RVTD service levels, which combined to reinforce a workplace culture where driving alone to work is an accepted norm. For the project team, this was an opportunity to promote transportation options, including RVTD's recent service enhancements and the City of Medford's recent bicycle path investments.



From September 2018 – January 2019, the team worked with designated program liaisons at each partner employer to reach administrative staff. Key program strategies included:

- » Providing ready-to-use resources to employer program liaisons to help them reach their colleagues (e.g. newsletter content, posters, and event flyers)
- » Hosting outreach events (e.g. benefit fairs, lunch-time outreach, and food truck events)
- » Launching an encouragement program website at **RebootYourCommute.org**, which included transportation options information, personalized trip-planning, and opt-in resources for anyone who lived or worked in the area (i.e. free transit passes, a bi-weekly e-newsletter, monthly prizes, and prizes for sharing a personal TO story).
- » Integrating the **Reboot Your Commute** campaign into regional outreach for ODOT's annual Get There Challenge and RVTD's social media posts.

Communications from the campaign included two core message types:

- » Education-focused messages which emphasized "avoiding the morning back-up" (e.g. "Did you know traffic on I-5 southbound at Exit 27 backs up onto the freeway from 7:45 – 8:00 am nearly every morning? Arrive to work early or try an alternate route to lower your stress and avoid the hassle.")
- » Encouragement-focused messages that emphasized "starting your day in a better way" (e.g. "Save time and money while adding some fun and activity to your commute by biking, carpooling, or taking transit.")

The program reached an estimated 19,000 people via digital communications (including monthly employer emails to over 8,000 people, and bi-weekly program emails to 163 participants), 36,000 people via print communications (including 300 print materials in the project area and 35,800 via the statewide ODOT Moving Ahead publication), and 700 people at program events.

Results

Self-Reported Travel Behavior

Thirty-three of the 163 program participants responded to a post-program survey. Responses indicated that participants were more likely to be aware of congestion (and how to avoid it) than non-participants. Although self-reported travel during peak times increased among participants, one-third reported trying a new way to get to work (most of whom said they were “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to continue using new modes). Drive-alone trips among participants decreased by 7%, replaced by carpool, transit, and telework trips. Over half of participants agreed that they changed their commute to find a less stressful option.

Traffic Pattern Changes

No significant change in the Exit 27 backup was observed by the project team, survey respondents, or employer interviewees. However, the program may have contributed in decreased southbound traffic turning right and left off the exit (i.e. towards the employers in the project area). Considering growth in the target area, it is conceivable that conditions could have worsened without the program.

Transit Counts

Ridership on Route 24 (which serves the project area) increased by 70% from summer 2017 to fall 2018. Although ridership was 44% higher during the program than it was during the same time period the previous year, overall ridership dipped 5% compared to the months immediately preceding the program. The overall transit ridership impact was unclear, but it is important to note that RVTD’s ridership remained high compared to the previous year.

Employer Relationships

The program helped build positive and ongoing relationships between the major employers in the project area and RVTD, paving the way for a longer-term collaboration to reduce drive-alone travel. Since the end of the program Asante, the target area’s largest employer, assigned an employee with Employee Transportation Coordinator duties to help increase awareness of transportation options among employees.

Photo from November 2018 Food Truck Edition Event



Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Motivating Participation

Sign-up survey respondents reported that they were motivated to participate in order to get more information about travel options (e.g. safer walking/biking routes), decrease their stress, and receive sign-up incentives (e.g. RVTD transit pass). The project team also received positive feedback about the area map and magnetic safety lights.

Successful Communication & Outreach Strategies

Gaining support from key decision-makers at employers was very important for communication and coordination. Most participants heard about the program from their employer e-newsletter. Short, direct content promoting sign-ups worked well. In-person outreach at employer-organized events was more successful than digital outreach (75% of sign-ups happened at outreach events).

Below: Reboot Your Commute sign-up form for in-person outreach

REBOOT YOUR COMMUTE Sign me up to **reboot my commute!**

FIRST NAME _____ LAST NAME _____

EMAIL _____

EMPLOYER NAME _____ DEPARTMENT _____

Please provide your mailing address to be eligible to win and receive one of our monthly prizes! We will not share or use your address for any additional purpose.

STREET _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

In the past month, what time have you typically commuted to work in the morning?
START TIME: _____ ARRIVAL TIME: _____

In the past month, which of the following transportation options did you use to get to work? (select all that apply)

DRIVE ALONE CARPOOL* BUS
 BICYCLE WALK N/A (worked from home or teleworked)
 OTHER (PLEASE DESCRIBE) _____

*Carpool = more than one person of driving age in the car. Count as "driving alone" if driving with kids only

What is your level of agreement to the following statements:

Traffic flows smoothly through I-5 southbound Exit 27 on my morning commute
 STRONGLY DISAGREE DISAGREE NEUTRAL AGREE STRONGLY AGREE

I'm frustrated by traffic conditions on I-5 southbound Exit 27 on my morning commute
 STRONGLY DISAGREE DISAGREE NEUTRAL AGREE STRONGLY AGREE

Program Weaknesses

Reboot Your Commute may have had greater success if:

1. The project timing didn't conflict with the winter holidays
2. The program had a stronger suite of sign-on materials and higher value incentives for participating and sharing stories
3. There were incentives for employer involvement, clear goals and responsibilities
4. There was broader community support from high-profile community leadership, such as Chamber of Commerce, City Council, County Commissioners, or local media personalities

Ideas for the Future

The program team identified several other potential strategies that could be fruitful for future congestion mitigation outreach, including:

1. Creating competitions between employers to raise the profile of the program
2. Involving a greater number of small to mid-size employers in the targeted area
3. Promoting the new statewide carpool matching and trip planning tool, Get There Oregon, which had not yet launched during the Exit 27 project
4. Using geo-targeted social media communications and outdoor displays along relevant corridors
5. Having frequently scheduled events and outreach opportunities for employees, and increasing outreach to schools, where applicable
6. Establishing context-sensitive goals and associated evaluation metrics to determine the success of the program



get there