



Downtown Bellevue Transportation Demand Management Focus Group Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Purpose

The City of Bellevue, King County Metro and the Bellevue Downtown Association are interested in identifying ways to best achieve goals for reducing drive-alone mode share particularly in peak commute times. For this purpose the City and its partners commissioned Gilmore Research to conduct a set of four focus groups with downtown employers, property managers and commuter parking operators to collect their opinions and information about managing transportation demand. Results of the focus groups will be used to guide the development of messages, programs and products to further the City's transportation demand management (TDM) work.

Methodology

All four focus group sessions were conducted at Fieldwork Seattle in Kirkland, WA and took place on three consecutive days in November, 2012. The first and fourth groups were conducted with downtown Bellevue small employers (those with fewer than 100 employees): seven on November 27th at 7:30 am and nine on November 28th at 6:00 pm. Group 2 was held with nine downtown Bellevue parking operators on November 27th at 6:00 pm. Group 3 took place at 7:30 am on November 29th and consisted of four downtown Bellevue downtown property managers.

Discussion spanned several common topics and some issues specific to each type of participant group. Common areas of discussion included knowledge and awareness of current programs and products as well as attitudes and beliefs that could impact future participation in the programs.

Specific topics for the employer and property management sessions included:

- Awareness of current commute benefit offerings and requirements
- Perceived barriers to providing commute benefits or participating in the consulting sessions available
- Role property managers perceive for themselves in reducing downtown congestion
- Messaging that could resonate with employers and property managers to induce them to take some action to encourage non-drive-alone modes
- Motivators to encourage participation in transportation demand management programs
- Appeal of available products, program options and potential flexible products

Participants in the parking operator session discussed:

- Openness to increased “flexibility” of parking options
- Perceived market for such products
- Preference for more income (from sporadic/ hourly parkers) or more income security (from monthly parkers)
- Barriers / limitations of flexible parking products (garage access control systems, technology, etc.)
- Motivators to encourage offering flexible parking products at least on a trial basis

Each of the three types of discussion guides is included in the Appendix along with a brief demographic profile of the groups and copies of the screening questionnaires used for recruitment.

Key Findings – Small Employers

1. Participants said that a majority of their workers usually drive alone to work. There are several reasons given for driving alone.
 - Parking is provided, in many cases free of charge and in others at a reduced/subsidized rate.
 - Bus service is perceived as inconvenient for employees because there is no direct bus service to many business locations in downtown Bellevue from the areas where employees live.
 - People are hesitant to walk very far or to wait outdoors for a bus due to weather and security issues in some cases.
 - Some of the employees have to use their own single-occupant vehicles to go out frequently during the day to conduct their business.
2. Employers in these focus group sessions are just as likely to subsidize parking for employees’ cars as they are to provide commute benefits (including bus passes, free park days, biking facilities, telecommuting and preferential parking for vanpools and carpools). Employers who offer both commute benefits and subsidized parking generally require employees to choose one or the other.
3. Asked to name motivations for offering commute benefits, employers agreed that they might be useful enticements for recruiting new employees.

- They singled out cost as the major reason for *not* providing benefits. Commute benefits seemed more of an out-of-pocket expense than the parking privileges negotiated with a lease.
 - Besides cost, some employers said they were prohibited because the same benefits have to be offered to all employees across locations and out of state.
4. Awareness of commute benefits was strongest for three products: ORCA Business Passport, Tax Benefits and Preferential Parking for Vanpools and Carpools.
 5. Participants identified *good value for the dollar* as a key feature offered by the Business Passport. Despite this lure, both groups felt the Passport had significant drawbacks including:
 - Initial cost outlay due to the number of passports a company would have to purchase for all employees (especially since many employees may not use the passport except potentially for non-business usage), and
 - An excess of transit options included.
 6. Most people said they liked the ORCA Business Choice product very much and several said they currently offer it to their workers. Positives associated with the Business Choice product include:
 - The ability to track and monitor usage of the card,
 - A low level of administrative work required,
 - Easy motivation to get employees to use transit and
 - No requirement to purchase for all full-time employees.

Probable low usage by committed single-occupant vehicle (SOV) drivers was identified as a drawback to offering Business Choice.

7. Several participants reported having positive experiences with the King County Metro WorkSmart program, which offers free employer assistance for telework and alternate scheduling programs. Those not interested in WorkSmart gave three reasons for their disinterest:
 - They already have telework or flex schedules in place for their qualified employees

- Telework and/or flex scheduling is incompatible with their industry or business model (for example, the business is retail requiring employees to be on-site)
 - They are unable to offer it to all staff in all locations.
8. Business Carsharing was not widely favored because of concerns about cost and cars being unavailable when needed due to being checked out by someone else.
 9. Home-Free Guarantee gathered approval from nearly all participants because they thought it would provide a very beneficial service, especially to employees who work unusual hours and to those who may become stranded in snowy weather. Those who had reservations about the program did so because of the cost to employers and because they felt the benefit would not be sufficiently used to cover the cost. There was some confusion about who would pay and who would reimburse the cost.
 10. Employers favored the Tax Benefits because they require no financial outlay by employers yet return real benefits either to employers or employees or both.
 - Several participants said they use the tax credits
 - Many offer employees the pre-tax deductions for transit passes.
 - Those who do not use the Tax Benefits gave two reasons: they are not willing to accept another administrative task and they don't feel an organizational need to offer them at present, possibly due to low demand.
 11. Employers who do not provide preferential parking for vanpools and carpools said a majority of their employees prefer to drive alone. They also said that vanpools are difficult to organize because their employees live in locations that are scattered from one another.
 12. A few participants said that they currently have secure bike parking in their buildings and one or two have showers available (in conjunction with a fitness center on premises). However, most said they did not think that offering bike amenities like these would be particularly attractive as commute benefits for employees. This is because of the expense and work involved in providing such amenities, if they are not already available, given the small number of seasonal bikers who might take advantage of the services.
 13. Overall interest in having Commute Advantage assist with the implementation of commute benefits was quite strong. People favored the administrative help that Commute Advantage offers. Reasons for disinterest in Commute Advantage were based on lack of need for assistance with commute planning due to small workforces.

14. Of all programs discussed in the groups, participants identified three that they thought would be most beneficial to their organizations: ORCA Business Choice, Tax Benefits and WorkSmart. Although all three were preferred ahead of others, participants generally spent more time in conversation discussing the merits of having WorkSmart help them with telecommute planning.
15. Employers could identify only one reason for eliminating or reducing subsidized parking for their employees: an increase in cost. Asked whether having free park days, half-monthly parking passes and parking cash-out days might be useful to induce employees to adopt non-drive-alone modes of transportation, employers answered that none of these options would likely work.
16. Participants agreed that email communications would be the most effective way to communicate information about commute benefits programs and products.

Key Findings - Property Manager Group

17. Property managers identified two key factors that influence choice of commute mode: whether or not parking is subsidized and whether or not employees are allowed to telecommute.
18. TransManage was named as the primary “middleman” responsible for providing commute benefits information to downtown Bellevue building tenants for their employees.
19. None of the participants said that they manage commute benefits for their tenants. In fact, three of the four were resolute in the opinion that TransManage should be responsible for administering these benefits. The fourth participant has a book to track commute benefits used by the building’s tenants.
20. Only one participant of the four said he was aware of the ORCA Business Passport, and that was through his contacts with TransManage. Although most in the group said they liked the deep discounts and flexibility offered by the Passport, none thought their management would be interested in offering it to their buildings’ tenants because they agreed that this is what TransManage does. Participants overall showed no interest in offering the Passport as an incentive to attract new tenants.
21. All four members of the group said they had some tenants who used Business Carsharing, but only for organizational needs. None said they knew of any tenants who use Business Carsharing for employee needs. One of the managers said that she would be willing to discuss offering Business Carsharing with her building owner, if she was asked to do so by a tenant.

22. Participants agreed that there is low overall awareness of the Home-Free Guarantee benefit despite the fact that they say they have circulated information about it through collaboration with TransManage. No one in the group showed any interest in managing Home-Free Guarantee as part of a lease package offered to clients.
23. Half the property managers said they currently have vanpool parking for tenants who request it and half do not. The group gave two reasons for not offering preferential vanpool/carpool parking independently:
 - There is no benefit gained by building owners because they make money selling parking spaces, and
 - There is a significant amount of administrative work involved in providing preferential parking.
24. All participants said they offer some bike amenities in each of the properties that they manage. However, the extent of the amenities that they described varies considerably. The range is from minimal bike parking in non-secure locations to shower facilities provided by an agreement made between employers and fitness centers located in the building. None of the property managers said they currently offer clean-up facilities independently to bikers.
25. Property managers are interested in participating in the Commute Advantage program if they do not have to administer any of the commute benefits programs. They feel strongly that either tenants or TransManage should have the responsibility for managing commute benefits.
26. Overall impressions of Commute Benefits Mini-Grants were positive because the program requires no management of ongoing services and because property owners are likely to accept it. It seemed best if tied to implementation of a particular program.
27. Free park days and Home-Free Guarantee were considered the best programs to motivate less drive-alone transportation.
28. Property managers who work with parking vendors agreed that their operators would likely be inflexible if asked to implement parking options like a half-monthly parking rate. Reasons include software limitations, administrative headaches and organizational roadblocks.
29. Participants agreed on email as the best way to communicate news about commute benefits programs and products.

Key Findings – Parking Facilities Operators

30. None of the parking facilities operators offers any commute benefits to building tenants independently, although some said they honor free park days and give reduced carpool rates at tenants' request. The primary reason for not extending these benefits is because parking operators are expected to make as much parking revenue as possible for building owners.
31. Building parking spaces are allotted on a formula based on the amount of available square footage in conjunction with location of the building in downtown Bellevue.
32. Participants were unable to name any motivations for changing the way parking plans are currently offered because their *job is to push single-occupancy-vehicle parking*. One person said that if carpools were encouraged more by tenants, parking facilities operators would have to accommodate the arrangement.
33. The group seemed resistant to the idea of having a parking consultant help with implementation of parking changes. They said that they felt sufficiently knowledgeable about the operation of parking facilities, and they also said that they were locked into a business model that would allow little flexibility in parking plans that offered options such as half-time parking.
34. A majority of participants were not in favor of having free park days for non-monthly (transient) parkers because they said it is difficult to track.
35. Parking operators dismissed the idea of offering half-monthly parking (at half the cost of full monthly parking) for several reasons.
 - They said they had system limitations for monitoring use of the pass.
 - They were unable to alter the revenue structure for paying on a monthly basis.
 - They also discussed the physical conflict that could occur if parking spaces made available for pre-paid monthly parkers were taken by half-monthly parkers, because one could not predict which days the half-monthly parkers would use.
36. The option of offering a discounted daily rate to parkers who normally do not drive alone was discredited as being unfavorable because *it can eat up revenue*. One participant said he thought it might be workable if building tenants would manage it.
37. Parking operators could think of only one reason for offering flexible parking plans to building managers: if that would bring in new tenants or to keep current tenants. They could not envision any benefit that might accrue to parking operators because

they thought none of the flexible parking options would provide any increase in parking revenue.

38. Barriers to offering flexible parking options include downtown workers' desire to drive their own vehicles, lack of direct public transportation to service all locations of downtown Bellevue and employers' willingness to offer free parking to employees.
39. Asked how the City, the Bellevue Downtown Association or Metro might best help implement the programs, participants said they could make up the revenue they believe will be lost by offering flexible parking products. They also said that this consortium should understand completely how much technology will be needed to implement any of the programs.
40. Participants agreed that email would be the best way to communicate news about commute benefits programs and products.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Overall, Employers and Property Managers seemed to be aware of many of the Commute Benefit Programs and Products presented, but understanding of the details of many of the offerings seemed incomplete, except for those with which the employer had experience.

Recommendation: A more complete definition of each product should be available on a website or through material communicated by the consortium.

- The depth of the discount for the Business Passport seemed known only to one or two employers, whereas others seemed to imagine a much higher cost outlay depending on the number of employees they had. A specific number may entice more employers to consider it as an alternative to subsidized parking.
- Home-Free Guarantee was a familiar concept to many, but few appeared to know how it worked: who would pay, when it was approved, who would reimburse the cost. Those items need to be spelled out.
- Clarity about how the WorkSmart program assistance can assist in formalizing the process and making it easier for employers to manage.
- For Business Carsharing, information about who would own/maintain the vehicle and whether it would need to be scheduled in advance or be available for emergencies would be helpful.
- Commute Advantage was perceived by some as a positive by the half of employers aware of it, but a more intense promotion among those not aware

would let them see how alternate modes could be enticing, especially the assistance in planning efficient employee commute-transit routes.

- Explanation of the full range of carpool/vanpool options including those that might include other companies in the building or nearby may encourage more interest in that mode. Most employers assumed it would be only their employees.
2. The primary barriers to non-drive-alone modes of commuting were consistent across all segments of participants: Bellevue employees' preference for the freedom of single occupancy vehicles and the subsidized or free parking that employers offer to keep employees happy.

Recommendation: Mount a campaign that will unite the downtown community behind a decrease in use of single occupancy vehicles.

- Encourage employers to cut parking subsidies or limit parking availability.
 - Promote the positives of transit commuting such as time to read, better health benefits with more walking and less stress in traffic.
 - Assure the friendliness of bus waiting areas and walking paths as are already in place in downtown Bellevue.
3. There does not seem to be a community commitment to address the traffic congestion in downtown Bellevue yet. Building management and parking operators are more motivated by revenue generating measures than green issues. LEED certification stars are the exception in that they motivate a few of the buildings.

Recommendation: Distribute information about the future negative impact of an increased number of vehicles in the downtown Bellevue area or the positive effects of a walk-able city.

4. Most respondents in all groups seemed equally understanding of the popularity of SOV commuting among downtown Bellevue workers and mindful of how entrenched that commute mode is in the community.

Recommendation: Continue efforts to enroll employers and property managers in the TransManage or Bellevue Downtown Association programs so that they become more educated about how to transform attitudes of their employees or tenants regarding the benefits of alternate modes of commuting.

- Continue to make the benefits easier for employers and property managers to understand--and employees/tenants to access—through Commute Advantage consulting.

- Take advantage of interest in the WorkSmart program to demonstrate how employers can work more efficiently and satisfy employee desire to work remotely some of the time, in industries where that is appropriate.
5. Although employers seem willing to extend most commute benefits to employees who normally drive alone, those who now offer subsidized parking are unwilling to eliminate or reduce the subsidy because they believe it is a primary factor in maintaining workers.

Recommendation: Look for ways to make this reduction a downtown Bellevue community wide movement, so that one company is not as concerned about losing employees to others that have free, paid or subsidized parking.

6. The idea of a Mini-Grant was most positively received by property managers as a way to introduce or implement some of the commute benefits.

Recommendation: Tie the grant to the following suggested ways of encouraging commute modes other than SOV:

- Offer property managers and parking operators a way to upgrade their parking technology either with new equipment or enhanced software that will accommodate the flexible parking options discussed in the focus groups.
 - Make bicycling to work more attractive by encouraging employers or property managers to add or enhance bike amenities such as secure cages, showers or towels.
7. Parking operators prefer to stick with model they perceive as “tried and true” to garner as much pre-paid and monthly parking as possible and fill in with transient parking as needed or as available. Those needs do differ by whether there are large retail tenants or not.

Recommendation: Ease into the parking consulting option with the recognition that parking operators see themselves as experts.

- Prepare some solid cost comparisons to show how flexible parking can enhance revenue overall.
- Present the mini-grant idea for parking operators who are willing to install upgraded equipment and software to work with smart cards that would be programmed for flexible parking benefits by employers or one of the transit agencies involved in offering ORCA programs.

- Consider ways to overcome concerns about the likelihood of having available spaces—not double-booked—if all of the flex-customers show up at the same time.
- Focus on the flexible parking products that can be accommodated most easily by the operators and building management without loss of revenue.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Each group began with disclosure of the name of the research sponsor and the purpose for the group. In each session the moderator also asked participants to discuss a few basic aspects of their jobs. For example, employers were asked to give their companies' names, types of businesses and number of employees currently working in downtown Bellevue. Property managers specified the number of buildings that they oversee downtown. Commuter parking operators were asked to discuss the types of buildings or parking facilities they manage, including the number of parking facilities or locations in downtown Bellevue. A brief summary of this preliminary information can be found in the demographic profile presented in the Appendix.

Small Employer Groups

Most employers in both groups said that the majority of their workers usually drive alone to and from work. Although several participants in each session reported having a group of workers who commute by bus, some carpoolers and occasional bikers, the majority of employers reported that single occupancy vehicles were the most frequent mode of transportation for their employees.

Everybody in our office drives.

Of all our employees, I'd say 70% or 80% drive alone. We have free parking in our building in abundance, so why not?

With 45 employees we have 6 or 7 bussers. In the summer a few bike in. Most people need to have their cars if off-site meetings pop up during the day. The majority drive alone.

We have some who bus, a few who drive to Park-and-Rides and then bus and several full-time drivers.

Influential Factors in Choice of Commute Mode

Employers attributed the high proportion of SOV commuters in their companies to several factors:

- Perceived inconvenience of bus service and the lack of direct bus service to downtown Bellevue from a number of outlying areas
- Need for a car during the day to go to offsite meetings, to make sales calls, and to take customers to other locations

- Hesitancy to expose themselves to weather conditions or risk of walking/standing alone on city streets or in remote Park-and-Ride locations
- Aversion to walking among some employees

The following quotations from employers illustrate these factors:

A lot of people don't want to walk so far to get to the bus – there's weather, security. You're tired after work...some people just don't want to do that.

It's just easy to take your own car. You don't have the inconvenience of having to wait for a bus. For us it's not having a direct service, I know that for me it's just not convenient. I have a bus stop right by my house, but from there I have to go down to the Redmond Transit Center, and you're spending an hour as opposed to drive-alone – 20 minutes.

Not having direct service into downtown Bellevue is the main hindrance. It's faster to go to downtown Seattle than to downtown Bellevue. The bus routes are so limited.

The factor that appears to influence drive-alone behavior—though not mentioned as directly—was the large-scale availability of free or subsidized parking. Employers either have free parking that comes with their lease contract or they offer it to employees as a perk to entice and retain the employees they would like to have. In some cases, the employer offers a set amount with the option of using it either for monthly paid/subsidized parking or a monthly transit pass.

Commute Benefits Offerings

Many participants said that their companies offer commute benefits to employees and some offer them pre-tax. Specific benefits that they named include subsidized bus passes (several said bus passes are fully subsidized), free park days, preferential parking for vanpools and carpools, bike amenities (secure parking and some showers) and telecommuting.

Just as many however, said that they also provide subsidized employee parking for their cars. Employers who offer both commute benefits and subsidized parking for SOVs generally require employees to choose one or the other.

You can either have a building parking pass, or you can have an ORCA card.

We have everything, buses, vanpools, bikes and we do subsidize – the bus, and vanpools too. We increase the subsidy periodically. We give \$75/month for any type of commute pass or for parking, and we do their deduction (\$125) prior to taxes.

We offer vanpool parking, preferential parking for carpools. We also have flex spending that's pre-tax and it can be used to buy gas, for busing, parking. We don't require receipts – these are commute expenses. We also have staff with flex hours.

Participants whose companies do not offer commute benefits were asked to suggest motivations for doing so. When one employer mentioned that the benefits might be useful as enticements to recruit new employees, others agreed:

I think it would help bring in potential employees who live in Seattle. Those who take the bus seem to prefer it.

Yeah, I think these might help my recruiting capabilities with some employees.

Barriers to offering commute benefits were primarily cost-related. Besides cost concerns, some participants mentioned that they had “free” parking negotiated as part of their lease agreements, and said that employees preferred taking advantage of having free parking. One or two also said that they were prohibited from offering commute benefits because their offices are subsidiary locations of companies not headquartered here. They said such benefits would be barred because of out-of-state tax barriers and because company policies are structured to offer work benefits on a similar basis across all office locations. One other barrier alluded to with some of the benefits is the administrative time necessary to document the use of benefits by employees.

Awareness and Perceptions of Programs and Products

Table 1 displays the number of participants in employer groups aware of each program or product. It shows that overall awareness was greatest for three things: ORCA Business Passport, Tax Benefits and Preferential Parking for Vanpools and Carpools.

Table 1 Number of Participants Aware of Programs and Products – Employer Groups			
	Total	Group 1	Group 2
	(16 Participants)	(7 Participants)	(9 Participants)
Business Passport	11	6	5
Business Choice	9	6	3
WorkSmart	7	3	4
Business Carsharing	7	4	3
Home-Free Guarantee	9	5	4
Tax Benefits	10	4	6
Preferential Parking Spaces for Vanpools & Carpools	10	4	6
Bike Amenities	9	3	6
Commute Advantage	8	4	4

ORCA Business Passport

More than two-thirds of all participants (11 of 16) said they knew about the ORCA Business Passport after reading the description of the program below:

Business Passport is a deeply discounted comprehensive annual transportation pass program for employers with 5 to 499 employees. It includes unlimited rides on all King County Metro, Sound Transit (including LINK Light Rail), Community, Kitsap, Pierce and Everett transit services;

100% vanpool and VanShare subsidy; and home-free guarantee (free taxi ride in case of emergency). Employers must purchase Passport for all full-time benefited employees, and can cost-share with employees up to 50%.

Though most agreed that the Passport seemed to offer very good value for the dollar, nearly everyone felt that it was just not cost effective for their organizations because it has to be purchased for all full-time employees. Among all participants, just two people had experience using the Passport for employee commute benefits, but only one still offered it.

It sounds very expensive; you have to buy it for everybody – I'd have to buy a lot of them. It would be thousands of dollars a month. It would be very hard to sell this in the budget.

The biggest drawback is that you have to buy it for all full-time employees. What if you buy it for 60 people and only 10 use it?

Beside the cost, employers said that many of their full-time workers would not use the Business Passport for the work commute because they prefer driving their own cars and because some have their SOV parking fully subsidized. Some said they thought the number of transit options offered through the program seemed excessive and needless, and one person who previously offered the Passport mentioned that some of her workers used it for weekend transportation and not for work purposes.

I just know our employees would prefer to drive their own cars. If we subsidized this 100% we would still have a lot of employees that would use their own cars.

There's no real benefit for us on the other end. Staff doesn't have to pay for parking, we own the parking,

In reality, how many of your employees are going to be using other transit than just what they use to get to work?

We figured out that only a few employees were actually taking the bus to work, and other people were just using it, the Passport, on weekends.

Asked to name advantages that might be gained from offering this product to their organizations, participants singled out the scale value that might be gained if the organization is large enough -*if you worked in a really big company – like 500 people – it might work.*

One barrier observed but not mentioned was that respondents reading the description had no idea what the discount would be. One user thought that it might cost about \$294 per annual ORCA card per person, thinking that to be a high price, although the actual downtown area-wide Passport price at the time of the focus groups was \$467 (\$361 for the first year). This level of investment may be perceived as more advantageous if the company already subsidizes employee parking or transit costs.

ORCA Business Choice

Awareness of the ORCA Business Choice was fairly widespread, with 9 of 16 employees acknowledging some familiarity with the product. There were twice as many participants in the first Employer Group aware of Business Choice than in the second group (6 v. 3).

Business Choice allows employers to load a dollar amount or any Puget Pass onto their employees' ORCA cards at retail pricing on a monthly basis. Business Choice gives the employer the flexibility to subsidize as much or as little of their employees' transportation costs as they want, for as few or as many of their employees as they want.

Most participants liked the flexibility of the product concept very much and several said they currently offered it to their workers. They said they could see several pluses associated with the product including no requirement to purchase for all full-time employees, having the ability to track and monitor people's use of the card, a low level of administrative work involved and a good motivation to get employees to use transit.

You don't have to buy it for everyone; I like it. We would probably subsidize the whole thing. We now pay for parking, and I think the company would offer both of these.

I like it because I can track and monitor people's use of the card; I can load it and learn how much they're using it. The amount of work involved isn't that bad.

We load the same amount on the cards, and if it adds up – like to \$300 on a card – well then we get a refund and that's really nice for us. If people aren't using it then we know we'll eventually get it back.

I think this is idea; a good benefit for those employees who take the bus, and a good motivator for others to use transit.

I'm sure it would make a difference if I had to pay for parking – I'd use this.

Those who mentioned drawbacks to the product usually linked those to probable low usage in their organizations because of a committed SOV driver group.

I don't think it would fit for us at all. We prefer to drive and we don't have to pay for parking.

We couldn't offer this as an option versus parking (subsidized 100%) because many of the workers have to be off-site part of the day. They need to park.

WorkSmart

Almost half of all participants (7 of 16) said they were aware of the WorkSmart program.

WorkSmart is free consultation service for employers to develop and implement a telework or flexible schedule program for their employees. Program provides technical assistance to develop program policies, train managers and employees and ensure technology meets business needs.

Several participants said they had been contacted about the WorkSmart program and one or two said they saw advertising about it. A few had had meetings with program representatives and at least two participants were currently taking advantage of services provided by WorkSmart.

We've used the service, and for us, they formalized it. Our system was pretty loosely organized before that. This was good for us culturally.

For us one of the best things about working with them was having them set up the parameters to maintain control.

Of those not interested in receiving services offered by WorkSmart nearly all gave one of three explanations for their disinterest: 1) they already have flex schedules in place for their qualified employees, 2) flex scheduling is incompatible with their industry or business model (for example, their business is retail) or 3) they are unable to offer it to all staff in all locations.

Business Carsharing

About half (7 of 16) of the employers present said they were aware of Business Carsharing as described below.

Business Carsharing offers employees access to a Carsharing program or fleet vehicle to use for daytime transportation needs (i.e. appointments, meetings).

Response to Business Carsharing was mixed. Though most participants seemed to like the concept of having Business Carsharing for employees who may have home emergencies or weather-related problems with the commute home, overall they seemed resistant to the idea because of cost concerns and because of problems they voiced about past sharing of vehicles with others.

We had this but found it wasn't cost effective.

Our employees would not have a problem using them, but it would be a hard sell to management.

The hours were limited by the rental agency – you couldn't depend on having a car available. You had to plan this yourself. You had to plan ahead and it just wasn't workable.

We had a Flex Car at our Seattle location but you had to sign up online, and anybody else had access to it.

Much discussion about the program focused on the conflict of having company-owned cars dedicated for business purposes, used instead for employee purposes.

We have two business cars, but we need to have these available for business purposes, not employee use.

We have a company owned vehicle on site and we also have one in the Seattle store, but they're for business use - shuttling people to the airport and dropping off mail.

The main barrier seemed to be the **shared** use of the car because it may not be available when it was needed for an urgent use that was unforeseen. They thought this was more likely to be an issue if there was a car in the building that served as a back-up for several companies.

Home-Free Guarantee

Nine out of 16 participants said they knew about the Home-Free Guarantee program after reading the description below:

Home-Free Guarantee provides an emergency taxi ride home for your employees who take alternative modes of transportation to work. If an unexpected situation arises, transit, bike or rideshare commuters will not be stranded.

Home-Free Guarantee gathered approval from nearly all participants because they thought it would provide a very beneficial service, especially to employees who work unusual hours and to those who may become stranded in snowy weather. Those who had reservations about the program wondered about the cost to employers.

This would be great, especially in the winter-time, especially for the bus riders. If it starts to snow, everybody who drives is out of there.

Does it cost the employers money?

I think it comes free with the Passport option, otherwise I think the employer has to pay for it.

At least two people reported having experience with Home-Free Guarantee as part of the ORCA Business Passport. Both thought the program was worthwhile, although one said she was inconvenienced by having to grant approval for an employee's ride home from work very late, long after close of business hours. Discussion of Home-Free Guarantee's role in Business Passport sparked some conversation about whether it might be added on to the ORCA card, and whether it might be used by employees who bike to work.

Disinterested participants said they either felt the benefit would not be sufficiently used to cover the cost, or that they, as a company, would make the necessary arrangements:

We take care of our own. If someone needs a ride, we'll give it to them.

Lack of understanding of how this benefit works or is administered also contributed to disinterest.

Tax Benefits

Most participants (10 of 16) said they knew about Tax Benefits when the description below was presented to them.

Tax Benefits allow employers to receive federal and state tax benefits for offering commute benefits programs.

- *Washington State Tax Credit - Employers who provide commute trip reduction incentives to their employees are eligible for a credit against their business and occupation (B&O) or public utility tax (PUT) liability.*
- *IRS commuter benefits - Federal law allows employers to reduce the cost of commuting for their employees via public transportation including: bus, ferry, rail and vanpool by:*

- *Providing employees with a tax-exempt benefit of up to \$125 per employee per month for a transit pass (2012 tax year)*
- *Allowing employees to use pre-tax income to purchase transit passes*
- *Allowing employers and employees to split the cost of the transit pass using employer tax-free subsidies for a portion and employee pre-tax income for the remainder*

Those who take advantage of the tax incentives were generally pleased with the fact that participation requires no financial outlay by employers yet it offers real return in benefits provided to employees.

The nice thing about this is that it's not taking anything out of the employer's pocket. It benefits both the employer and the employees.

We participate in all three under the IRS benefit; it helps both the company and the employee.

The paperwork involved in applying for tax benefits and in the administration of payroll deductions was described both favorably and unfavorably.

We've done this – the paperwork is really easy. We used the Washington State Tax Credit and got a credit.

Our payroll people have to be flexible and they are and that's great.

I've had some problems with payroll people, and it's turned out to be more of a headache than a benefit.

The hard part is applying for it. Have an HR person do it for you.

Several said they were not interested in offering tax-free benefits because are not willing to accept another administrative task and because they didn't feel an organizational need to do so at present.

The employee pre-tax deduction is just another administrative task that we're not willing to do right now.

We just don't have need for this right now.

It's sketchy how much the benefit would be worth.

Preferential Carpool/Vanpool Parking Spaces

A total of 10 participants said they were aware of preferential parking spaces available for workers who carpool or vanpool as the concept is described:

Preferential Carpool/Vanpool Parking Spaces designates preferred parking spaces (i.e. close to the elevator/door) that can only be used by employees that carpool or vanpool.

A majority of employers said that having these spaces would be of little benefit to their employees, primarily because most either drive alone or reside in areas that are not common to others, making carpools hard to organize. Additionally, a few pointed out that although preferential parking spaces are provided in their buildings, they are seldom used.

One employer had a positive attitude toward this benefit and used it herself because she often had much to load and unload:

In our building there is a significant difference in the cost for carpooling (spaces). Also, for me it's a great benefit because I often have to carry loads of stuff into the office, so having a space close to the door is a real advantage.

One company in a storefront space said there would be no room for such spaces because they share the lot with other businesses.

Bike Amenities

Over half of the employers (9 of 16) were aware of the option of offering some amenities to employees who bike to work. There were twice as many participants in the second Employer Group aware of having building Bike Amenities available for workers than in the first group (6 v. 3).

Bike Amenities provides employees with access to covered and secure bicycle parking, showers, lockers or towel service so that they feel more comfortable riding their bike to and from work.

Most participants seemed uninterested when they were asked whether they thought having Bike Amenities would be a valuable commute benefit to offer workers. Several mentioned that the expense and the work involved in providing bike facilities did not seem warranted if there was no financial assistance given to employers to do it. Some participants wondered whether there was *program offered somewhere, or whether companies do this just out of the goodness of their hearts.*

I don't know of any programs where the city or state gives a kickback to the employer for providing it.

Refurbishing a business for showers is really expensive. I've never seen a program that covers it. You just suck up the cost of the build-out; it has to be gender specific and then you have to look at the building requirements – permits, and so forth and it gets out of the question.

The small and seasonal number of workers who might take advantage of the benefit also contributed to the overall disinterest in providing Bike Amenities.

A few participants said that they currently have secured bike parking in their buildings and one or two have showers available (used in conjunction with a fitness center on premises). However, the general viewpoint seemed to be that these facilities were underused.

Commute Advantage

Four participants in each session (8 of 16) said they were aware of Commute Advantage as explained in the concept they read:

Commute Advantage is an employer commute assistance program for downtown Bellevue. Includes informational workshops and free consultation service for employers to develop and implement employee commute benefits at their worksite. Program includes cost/benefits analysis, evaluation of program needs and facilities and implementation assistance and promotion.

Overall interest in having Commute Advantage help with the implementation of commute benefits was quite strong. People generally seemed to favor the administrative help that Commute Advantage offers.

For me – transportation coordinator – our company is large enough that it is required to have transportation plans. Commute Advantage would be a big help, less time consuming, they could help with reports and trainings and be very involved. It would be nice to have help with that.

Commute Advantage would take care of getting the bus passes for small companies. They would coordinate travel, determine individual routes for people to use transit. They could figure out how to get workers from point A to point B.

They could supply the manpower and resources. Determining bus routes for employees is more than I can manage; I don't want to administrate this. I'm understaffed. Our employees already have more than enough to do than worry about travel plans.

Reasons for disinterest in Commute Advantage seemed to be rooted in apathy and lack of need for help with commute planning because of a very small workforce.

We've had something like this, but no one was very interested.

There has to be something compelling to get people interested; on the Eastside we're not set up for this.

I can see the benefit, but right now we're just down to our core group of people – in the summer it would be better for us when we have more employees.

We have such a limited number of people and they have to go off site during the day and so I don't think it has much use...I don't see how this would help us.

Most Beneficial Programs to Organizations

Of all programs discussed in the groups, participants identified three that they thought would be most beneficial to their organizations: ORCA Business Choice, Tax Benefits and WorkSmart. Although all three were preferred ahead of others, participants generally spent more time in conversation about the merits of having WorkSmart help with planning for telecommuting than others.

WorkSmart telecommuting is the winner; it's a big benefit for the employees and it benefits us too.

WorkSmart – I think if someone came to us and laid it out for us, it would be more viable.

WorkSmart – if I could sell that to my company it would definitely make for some happier employees.

The ORCA Business Choice option was preferred over the Passport program because it gave the employer more flexibility in what was offered to employees. Not having to buy a pass for the large portion of employees unlikely to use it seemed an advantage, at least without conducting a thorough cost comparison.

Employers liked the tax benefits because they benefited both the employer and the employee with very little monetary investment on their part, most of which was administrative labor.

Parking Subsidies and Flexibility

The groups differed in their perceptions of how approachable their parking facilities operators might be to discuss implementation of commute benefits such as preferential parking spaces for carpools and vanpools and locked spaces for bikes. While most participants in the first session said they thought their facilities operators would be easy to approach with the issue, several participants in the second group said they thought it would be difficult.

For us this would be impossible; we have always had to heavily negotiate with the building for everything.

Most downtown high rises, the parking is separate from the building management, and so I wouldn't know who to contact – the dynamic is totally different. They don't do a good job in my building for promoting carpooling. And you really don't benefit from cultivating that relationship with parking. I wish that the building management would do a better job of developing a relationship with parking and bringing us into it.

I think we must be in the same building. It is so difficult to get new employees resolved with parking problems – I don't know who to contact.

Motivations to Decrease Parking Subsidies

Among employers who subsidize employee parking, none could give any reason – other than cost – that would motivate them to eliminate the parking subsidy, and thereby encourage alternative modes of transportation to and from work.

Asked whether or not their employees would accept a decrease in or elimination of parking subsidies, some said they thought they might if the transportation infrastructure in downtown Bellevue was more developed – otherwise, no. Others suggested that employees' reaction to elimination of the parking subsidy would be dependent on the industry and the economy and therefore, the availability of other jobs.

It depends on the economy, the industry you're in. Right now I have my pick of the litter (education), and I think faculty wouldn't leave if the subsidies were removed. If I had a problem finding faculty, then I might look at these as incentives.

They would not accept this, especially the professionals. They would not be happy because of their lifestyles.

It is interesting that at the end of the second session one participant casually mentioned in his parting comments: *I wouldn't work at a place that didn't pay for parking.*

In each session the moderator asked participants whether having free park days, half-monthly parking passes and parking cash-out days might be useful to induce employees to adopt non-drive-alone modes of commuting. None of these, however, was considered viable.

With regard to free park days, a few participants talked about having “visitor parking passes” available for business purposes, but said that those passes are not for employees' personal use. A single participant addressed the question with an understanding of what was asked, and explained that having monthly free park days was not a cost effective option for her business:

If we want to have this available for employees then we have to either pay the daily rate which is \$25 or \$30 or the hourly rate; or we have to buy a monthly pass and have dedicated free parking days – then it's first come first service; it's just not cost effective.

Participants also identified barriers associated with offering half-monthly parking passes. They most often discussed the resistance they envisioned from parking facilities operators and they also talked about cost conflicts with having ORCA cards currently subsidized for employees.

This would be cost prohibitive; if a company had to pay for both an ORCA card and half-monthly parking, that would be too much.

I know that our ORCA users love having the free parking days; but I don't think this would be much of an incentive to those who don't use ORCA cards.

Because of the way our building system is, you'd either get the first half of the month or the second half, but you couldn't pick and choose.

If the parking authority would treat this like a debit card, then that would be doable. But I think that's an operational problem for the parking managers.

Our parking facility can't even tell me how much each of the validated tickets that we give clients cost each month.

I don't think the parking operators could do this. There's no benefit for them. If you pay for a monthly pass and you don't use it some of the time, they don't give you a credit.

Communications

Asked to name the most effective way to communicate to businesses about the commute benefits programs and products, participants all agreed on email. Although one or two people said they might browse through newsletters, no one wished to be contacted by phone about commute benefits. One participant said she would like to have programs and product information consolidated.

The agencies need to be more organized and talk to each other; I mean each of the agencies seems to have its own program, and I get confused about the choices – Rideshare; Bellevue Downtown Association and Wheel Options – each has its own incentives. I need to learn about it first before I pass it on to others. I need to have centralized information.

Property Manager Group

The Property Manager focus group, conducted with four participants, began with a discussion about usage of commute modes.

Estimated percentages of different commute modes used by building tenants varied considerably. Participants guessed that employees who work in large-sized companies (like Microsoft and PSE) are likely to use more non-drive-alone modes of transportation than employees who work in small-sized companies. This is because larger companies have the resources available to offer more non-drive-alone options.

The Microsoft shuttle is used a lot for commuters (at the Bravern). The shuttle accesses the Park & Rides and brings them in. I think that many of the retailers take the bus. I think there are some who bike, and Microsoft has its own bike lock area. A few carpool.

PSE is my majority tenant and they have 4 vanpool spaces. I see a lot of drop-offs but I have no way to tell how many bus, because the transit center is so close-by.

One participant said that he thought the drive-alone option was most common because he is very frequently asked to give information about availability and pricing for SOV parking in the properties that he manages.

Influential Factors in Choice of Commute Mode

Facilities operators identified two primary factors that influence choice of commute mode:

- whether or not parking is subsidized and
- whether or not employees are allowed to telecommute.

One facilities operator said that his building encourages non-drive-alone options by having free park days for those who use alternate modes of transportation.

I think that paying for parking is the biggest factor in what people choose. Our larger employers will pay for parking. We try to give them incentives [to use alternate modes] by having free park days.

We have one tenant that rented all this space and now because they have the capability, they push employees out to telecommute. They're a tech company. It's the exception that people come to work. I have another big tenant that has structured parking and they assign who gets the space.

The TransManage name surfaced immediately in the conversation when participants were asked whether they were aware of commute benefits offered by tenants to their employees.

Our big ones are into the TransManage program. I know they have 2 to 3 free park days a month and guaranteed ride home. I don't see anything else internal. It doesn't seem that it's grown (commute benefits) that much in the 5 years I've been there.

TransManage offers something. Employees sign up on website, and I think there are maybe 30 people who use it. Usually they (TransManage) will have a table in the lobby once a quarter.

Most property managers did not want to be expected to administer commute benefits for any of their tenants. In fact, three of the four were quick to react to the topic when it was introduced for discussion.

We have the TransManage program in the building – they were trying to offload the management on to the landlord and we pushed back. We will do what we can to support it, to promote it, but not administrate it. It's up to TransManage to manage it.

One property manager indicated having a book that lists the transportation benefits of all of the tenants.

Awareness and Perceptions of Programs and Products

Table 2 displays the number of property managers who said they knew about each program or product. Everyone said that they were aware of all programs except for the ORCA Business Passport.

Table 2 Number of Property Managers Aware of Programs and Products	
	Total
	(4 Participants)
Business Passport	1
Business Carsharing	4
Home-Free Guarantee	4
Preferential Parking Spaces for Vanpools & Carpools	4
Bike Amenities	4

ORCA Business Passport

Only one participant acknowledged awareness of the ORCA Business Passport, and that person credited the TransManage program with circulating information about the Business Passport to building tenants.

Most said they liked the deep discounts offered by Passport and the flexibility of its transportation options. At least two speculated that it might be something that they themselves could use as employers or employees. However, no one thought Passport might be a commute benefit that their organizations would be interested in offering to building tenants because they agreed that *this is what TransManage does* and because they did not think the expense would be recoverable:

In our world there are recoverable expenses and non-recoverable. This would probably be not recoverable.

Asked whether they thought the Passport might be used as an incentive to attract new tenants, one or two said they thought it would be worth a second look, particularly for *younger* tenants and for tenants who are interested in working in buildings whose managers participate in the LEED certification program.

From a PR perspective, we're interested in LEED credits, so this would be great.

Although one other person said he liked the idea of using the ORCA Business Passport as a tool to entice new tenants, he was skeptical about how much value it would have as a major incentive, given the pool of available clients:

My managers would like to have every tool available to try to get new tenants, and this sounds real good. But unless you have a real sophisticated tenant like a Microsoft, then at the end of the day the only thing that's going to close the deal is if they really like your space or they like your deal.

From a community-oriented perspective, one property manager expressed this attitude:

You want to be a good landlord in Bellevue and part of this is to get people in and out of the downtown area easily, and this would be good for that.

Business Carsharing

All four participants said they had some tenants who use some form of carsharing for business purposes, but none said they knew of any tenants who use Business Carsharing for employees, unless they do so as part of the TransManage program.

Asked whether it may be beneficial for building managers to offer Business Carsharing to tenants, one of the four gave a conditional *yes*.

We would not mind having a car like this for the garage. If even one tenant had asked if we had a Zipcar, then that would be enough for me to talk to the owner about it, but that hasn't happened.

A property manager from a building that houses part of Microsoft thought the following might be an example of car sharing:

Microsoft has a shuttle program; we have a space set aside in the farage for their bus to do pickups... Also they have a little car. Are these the ones that take employees to appointments?

Home-Free Guarantee

Participants all agreed that at some time in the past they had provided information about Home-Free Guarantee to tenants, usually as part of their collaboration with TransManage, but no one knew of any employees in their buildings who used it. It was agreed by all participants that there is overall low awareness of the program among employees who work in their buildings.

No one seemed particularly interested in managing Home-Free Guarantee as part of a lease package offered to clients.

We're just obligated to have the information available to the employees in the building – not to promote it.

Preferential Vanpool/Carpool Spaces

Participants were about evenly split between those who have vanpool parking spaces at tenants' request and those who do not.

At the tenant's request, we have some vanpools and it doesn't come out of the tenant's allotment. We treat it like a handicapped spot. We have four of these and they're used.

No one in the group said that he or she offers preferential parking for vanpools and carpools independently because *there's no benefit to us. We make money selling parking.* Some would offer a vanpool space if the tenant requested it. Another reason for not providing preferential parking is because it is perceived as requiring a significant amount of administrative work.

Nobody wants to organize this. It's very labor intensive.

Bike Amenities

All participants said they offer some bike amenities in each of the properties that they manage. However, the extent of the amenities that they described varied considerably.

Everyone said they provide bike parking, and some offer secure spaces. Others set aside bike parking in non-secure locations. Of those who offer non-secure bike parking, one has it located near the parking attendant and the other does not (because she has no parking attendant in the garage; it is all automated). In one building, the primary tenant (Microsoft) leases bike parking cage space from the building and maintains the secure space so that it is only accessible by card key of the bike owners.

Microsoft offers secure bike parking for their employees. We have the space, but they put up the fencing. We have other bike parking for riders that is not secured, but it's located right by the parking attendant.

Two participants said that they have shower services available for bikers at building fitness centers, but do not have these facilities provided by building management. Instead, the shower amenity is arranged between the two tenants. During discussion one person said that his business may ultimately provide the clean-up facilities independently.

All of my buildings have this and employees can have access by using their card. We have lockers and showers, but no towel service right now. We may carve out the lockers and showers and make it available to bikers and roll it back in as a recoverable expense.

Commute Advantage

Property managers were asked whether they would be interested in participating in the Commute Advantage program to develop and implement commute benefits for their buildings.

Results found that although participants were receptive to the idea of having Commute Advantage, they were resistant if participation required any effort on their part to administer or manage the program. Most of the group felt strongly that implementation and administration of commute benefits programs should be handled by either tenants or by TransManage.

If they're doing the cost benefit analysis for you that would be worthwhile, but don't expect me to do it. I'm willing to work with them, but I don't have a lot of time.

If they want to come and help me figure out which existing program will work, that's a tough sell; I don't want to get into the administration of these programs and the owners aren't going to buy it either.

I would be interested in this, but what's the bang for the buck from TransManage? What am I getting for TransManage? Is this something that TransManage reinvents itself?

It's getting the tenants to do this. Not us.

Although one participant said she uses Commute Advantage and voiced support for it, she added that she thought it was expensive.

We use Commute Advantage at the Summit, and PSE is the kind of tenant that likes to have that information. It's been good fit for our company, but it's costly.

Commute Benefits Mini-Grants

The group was asked to give their impressions of another proposed program offering, the Commute Benefits Mini-Grant, described as follows:

The opportunity to apply for a grant that would provide a set financial contribution (i.e. \$1,000-\$5,000) to allow your building to implement a commute benefits program; conduct a campaign to encourage use of non-drive-alone commute modes by building workers; or purchase a capital improvement that benefits building workers who choose non-drive-alone commute modes.

Overall impressions were positive, because the program requires no management of ongoing services and because it seems to be something that property owners might be willing to accept.

This is better motivator because you get money for doing it. You can sell it to the owner more easily as an enticement for tenants.

One property manager imagined that it might be useful to purchase parking software that would allow more flexibility and tracking of usage.

Most Advantageous Programs to Encourage Alternate Modes of Transportation

Two participants said that free park days and the Home-Free Guarantee would be the best motivators to encourage less drive alone transportation. The others tended to focus

conversation on what building owners might think of the programs. All agreed that the biggest hurdle in convincing building owners would be *having true value for money spent*.

If somebody wants the parking space, we'll sell it.

Asked if there might be any advantage to freeing up parking for other uses, participants offered no insight, focusing instead on the marketability of Bellevue building parking. Asked about barriers to offering the programs in their buildings, participants mentioned *cost*, also having to do business with commercial property brokers.

Brokers bring tenants and brokers love their cars.

Besides considering programs that might encourage alternate modes of transportation among tenants participants were probed to name the program that they thought would be most beneficial for their own businesses. Two mentioned Business Carsharing, and a third said the Commute Benefits Mini-Grant.

Current ownership would probably like the mini-grant program hand in hand with a specific program or programs. They would want to tie these together.

All participants agreed that the ORCA Business Passport would likely have the biggest impact on reducing traffic in downtown Bellevue.

Parking Subsidies and Flexibility

Three out of four property managers said that they work with separate parking facilities operators. Of those who work with parking vendors, all three agreed that their operators would likely be inflexible if asked to implement proposed parking options such as a half-monthly parking rate. Reasons include software limitations, administrative headaches and organizational roadblocks.

I can't figure out how to make a 1/2 monthly rate work. What half-day is that person going to use that space?

If half monthly spaces are sold, what do you do when the garage is full? Our vacancy rate is so low that we can't do this.

At buildings with ample parking space, where parking operators are not concerned about low vacancy rates, there may be some flexibility about varied parking. For example, the property manager of the Bravern said that their parking vendor offers a part-monthly pass.

We offer this to the retail employees. For part-timers, those that work only one or two days a week, they can purchase a monthly pass, discounted to \$7 per day, maybe \$12, and they use it like a debit card.

Communications

At the conclusion of the group building managers were asked to name the most effective way to communicate to members of their community about the commute benefits programs and products. Everyone agreed on email, and one participant commented, *don't ever call me.*

Parking Operators Group

To determine their perceptions of non-drive-alone usage by downtown Bellevue workers, the moderator asked participants to name a percentage of workers that they thought might commute to work by a mode other than driving alone.

Most everyone said that they thought a majority of workers drive alone, but several mentioned that they see an increase in usage of alternate modes of commuting, depending on the season (more biking) and the economy (more carpools and bus usage when the economy slows).

It depends on other garages and surface lots, but I'd say 80% are individual parkers in a single car.

On a day to day basis it's mostly people driving themselves.

In summertime we see more bicycles in the cage. This time of year, there may be none or one.

Right next to the garage I manage is the Bellevue Transit Center and I do see a lot of people coming and going from there. I notice changes in the economy where poorer people will be taking the bus, not driving as much.

In summer, I notice more available parking spaces, and in economic slow times.

Involvement in Commute Benefits Offerings

When asked whether they are involved in any of the commute benefits offered by building tenants or whether they offer these benefits themselves, participants mentioned that they honor free parking days and give reduced carpool rates for building tenants. However, no one said they offer any of the benefits themselves, and no one could think of any reason for doing so independently because, as parking operators, their primary business purpose is to make as much parking revenue as possible for building owners.

There are no incentives, because we are expected to get high parking revenues.

If we were to reach out and do that (offer commute benefits), it would be to create revenue where we're struggling, and to entice people to come in.

If the management wants to have these benefits for tenants, then that's how it would work, but it doesn't mean much to us as parking operators.

Although several said they offer facilities for bikers in their garages everyone agreed that providing bike amenities is the responsibility of building tenants, not parking operators.

One participant mentioned that his company does get higher parking rates for carpool spaces. However, he said that tenants negotiate those carpool rates in the lease arrangements that they make with building managers. Parking operators are not involved in setting the rates.

It's the property manager's job to fill the buildings. It's our job to fill the garage. So carpools can hurt us in terms of revenue.

To determine the types of parking that provide the best generators of revenue for owners, parking operators were asked whether more money is made on short-term hourly or daily parking or on monthly parking. Participants said that revenue is dependent on a number of interactive factors including type of building and level of vacancy.

If you have transients coming in to see clients, you'll have a lot (of hourly or validated) there.

A lot of revenue comes in the way of validations – these are presold.

It depends on your tenant base - if people are working there, they come in the morning and leave at the end of the day. In that case you're going to see a lot more monthly parking revenue.

We're all trying to build as much revenue for the property owner as we can; if we lose leases then we don't see those monthly parkers and we try to augment it with revenue from transients.

All seemed to prefer the secure revenue with monthly parking passes and the ease of parking operation as one explained:

It's nice with monthly because you don't have to deal with tickets. No cashiers needed; no ticket jams; no technical difficulties.

Current Parking Operation

The moderator asked the group to discuss how their organizations determine the allotment of parking spaces in the garages that they operate. In response, most said that they base this on a combination of square footage and location. Other factors that they consider are tenant base and type of garage. Overall discussion revealed that there was no single answer to the question.

It's based on the square footage and on the locations. It used to be 3 cars per 1000 square feet when everyone had parking available.

It's property by property – it varies so much, sometimes it depends on the tenant base, but not always.

It's a matter of the type of tenant: retail vs. office. Do you have a company with 500 employees or do you have a company with 50 employees? That's the difference.

Is it an older garage that's really tight or is it bigger and easier to get around? Some people will park blocks away to get into a better garage – more protective for the car.

Participants were unable to name any motivations for changing the way parking plans are offered because as one person said *our job is to kind of push (SOV) parking*. One participant said that if tenant encouraged more carpools, then parking facilities operators would have to accommodate that arrangement.

It depends on the tenants. When we may want to bring in carpooling is when we have to close off the garage to daily parking because we're full. That would be the only incentive to us.

The group seemed resistant to the idea of having a parking consultant help them to implement parking changes. They said that they felt sufficiently knowledgeable about the business and also implied that they were locked into a business model that would allow little flexibility in parking plans such as the option of offering half-time parking.

I think everyone here knows more about this – is more of an expert than anyone else.

I know that some parkers, they would love to have something like monthly parking, but only get charged for their usage. Operationally, this just isn't possible. Our job is to sell space and we're selling it ahead of time.

Our job is to pre-sell as much parking as we can. The money is there. I know we have equipment that can do half-time parking, but that's hard to set up. If the system was capable of doing it, of taking a payment, applying it to a card, programming the card for the payment—and it's just not done as a debit on a prepaid card—that's still not a way to make money.

Flexible Parking Options

Parking operators discussed several options for increasing non-drive-alone modes of transportation in their parking facilities, including free park days, half-monthly parking passes and discounted daily ticket books.

Free Park Days

All nine participants said they were aware of free park days, during which drivers who regularly use alternatives to the drive alone mode are allowed to have a certain number of free parking days per month. Asked what they thought about the option, a majority said they were not in favor of having this for non-monthly (transient) parking because it is difficult to track. The in/out privilege was said to be particularly difficult to monitor.

The in and out privilege is operationally very hard to track for transients. For those who pay monthly it's allowed.

With the TransManage program at our facility they can do the in and out, but they have to mark it down and we have to know about it ahead of time. We have to check their ID and the parker does not like this. It takes more time and it requires an attendant at the gate.

If you're going to offer this and you have several hundred participants and only a limited number of passes, it's going to be a huge problem. People are going to say they lost it (the pass), and then you have to check their name against a list.

One person said that his company offers free park days at one location but does not advertise it because it is so difficult to track.

Half-Monthly Parking Pass

None of the nine participants gave any positive comments when they were asked about permitting half-monthly parking at half the cost of full monthly parking. They said they had system limitations for monitoring use of the pass and said they were unable to alter the revenue structure for paying on a monthly basis. They also discussed the physical restrictions imposed by having a set number of parking spaces available for pre-paid monthly parkers.

There are system limitations on doing something like this – some systems will automatically cut a card off when usage is hit, but typically this is so cost prohibitive it's just not done.

Our machines can set a card to expire but a person has to program that. It can't be done automatically, it requires a person to do it.

The revenue structure doesn't change if someone pays for a monthly pass versus paying a daily rate. It just changes how the customer pays.

A half-monthly pass also takes away your spots – you can't tell when the half month customer will be there. What if everybody came at the same time - half-monthly and full month parkers? I wouldn't have enough parking spots. It's so much harder to manage. I would have to find another facility for those

half-monthly parkers. There's a level of oversell, but it's not as simple as selling two half-monthly passes and one full-monthly pass.

Discounted Daily Ticket Book

The option of offering a discounted daily rate to parkers who normally do not drive alone was discredited as being an out-of-date practice that is no longer used because *it can eat up revenue*. One participant however, seemed to think it might be doable if *the companies, the tenants could manage it*, and that this could be handled through pre-purchased validations

Benefits of Offering Flexible Parking Options

Parking operators could think of only one reason for offering flexible parking plans to building managers: to bring in new tenants or to keep current tenants. They could not envision any benefit that might be gained by parking operators by offering these options because they thought none of them would provide any increase in revenue per square footage of garage.

Participants were also unable to voice any meaningful benefits that they thought might accrue to tenants. The moderator probed the discussion to determine whether offering flexible parking options might promote green images for their own companies. Participants seemed to think not, although one person said that he thought *it might matter to building management if they are trying to get LEED-certified*. In that case he said, *offering online ticket validation instead of ticket validation at the gate might help*.

Asked to discuss the impacts that might be felt if all parking operators implemented some of these programs, one person thought that *traffic would be reduced*. However, another person said he thought *traffic might increase because people would utilize discounted parking*. Another participant said *increasing gas prices has a bigger effect on reducing traffic*.

Barriers to Offering Flexible Parking Options

Participants discussed employees' ongoing desire to drive their own vehicles, a lack of public transportation available in downtown Bellevue and employers' willingness to offer free parking to employees as barriers to offering flexible parking options.

People want to park here and they want to park in the buildings that they work in because the buildings are so isolated.

Downtown Bellevue transportation is really hard compared to Seattle because more walking is required. There are more buses in the downtown area of Seattle than in Bellevue.

The big tenants offer free parking as the norm. You're not going to get any buy-in from them to try alternatives - there's no reason to.

The group agreed that having *better technology* would make it easier for them to implement flexible parking options, although they thought that the administrative time in auditing the programs would still be significant.

Asked how the consortium of organizations (City of Bellevue, Bellevue Downtown Association and Metro) might be able to help them implement any of the programs, participants said *they would have to make up the revenue lost* in the implementation, or pay for new technology or extra staffing needed. They also said that the consortium would have to be able to completely understand the depth of involvement required by technology in the process of implementation.

Communications

Participants agreed that email would be the best way to communicate news about programs and products offered by Transportation Demand Management.

In parting comments one participant said that he thought the programs could only be accepted if the parking public desired them:

If the market shifted, if there was a big push to change by parkers, then we would adjust. If customers aren't pushing for it, there's no pressure to do it. There's no reason to accept these programs.

APPENDIX

Demographic Profile

A total of 29 participants attended the 4 focus group sessions. The two groups of employers consisted of 7 males and 9 females. Three females and 1 male attended the focus group of property managers. Of the parking facilities operators, 7 were male and 2 were female.

Employers: employers said they worked for companies drawn from a wide-range of industries including retail, hospitality, recreation, education, financial services, banking services and others. Companies ranged in size from as few as 5 employees to as many as 75.

Property Managers: Property managers said they work for organizations responsible for overseeing the Bravern, Symetra, 1 Bellevue Center, 110 Atrium, Columbia West and the Summit buildings.

Parking Facilities Operators: Parking operators said they managed the operations of many garages in downtown Bellevue including the 110 Atrium, One Bellevue Center, Symetra, Galleria, Key Center, the Summit building, Skyline Tower, the US Bank Plaza and Civica Office Commons.

Discussion Guides

Discussion Guide

Downtown Bellevue Small Employer Groups Nov. 27 – 7:30am and Nov. 28 – 6:00pm

Introduction

(Moderator introduces self, unbiased third party, and then explain)

Purpose of the Focus Group: (1 minute)

As you may already know, this discussion is sponsored by the City of Bellevue, King County Metro and the Bellevue Downtown Association. We are here today to hear your perceptions of how employee commuting affects businesses in downtown Bellevue. We also will ask you for your feedback about how you view various transportation alternatives and programs that might impact your employees. Before we get started, let me give you a few guidelines, then we'll introduce ourselves and then we'll start the discussion.

Ground Rules/Disclosures: (1 minute)

Some viewers are viewing behind the mirror.

Video/audio taping, for my purposes and for any members of the team who couldn't be here today

We usually use first names. We'd like you to be open in sharing your opinions and ask that you keep what opinions you hear here to yourself. Of course, you are welcome to share whatever information you receive about programs offered by the sponsors.

Can only hear one at a time; speak up at same level as I am

No wrong answers, want your candid opinions and suggestions

We don't identify individuals when we quote ideas, but present the information in a combined form.

Respondent Introductions: (5 minutes)

First name?

What type of business do you represent? Headquarters or branch office?

How many employees do you have working in downtown Bellevue?

Employee Transportation Perceptions/Offerings (20 minutes)

How do your employees usually get to work? What percentage of your employees drive alone? Carpool? Take public transportation? Bike or Walk? Telecommute? Have Flexible Hours?

What are the factors that influence how your employees commute to and from work?

For purposes of this discussion, we're defining "commute benefits" as providing a subsidy or making it easier for your employees to ride the bus, carpool, vanpool, telecommute, walk, or bike to work. Examples include bus pass or vanpool subsidies, allowing flexible schedules, preferential parking for carpools and vanpools, bike parking, and assistance with finding carpool or vanpool partners. Do you currently offer any employee commute benefits? If so, what are they? [PROMPT IF NECESSARY]

What motivated you to offer that benefit?

How is it working for you? For your employees?

FOR TRANSIT BENEFITS: Do you require employees to choose between being able to park or receiving a transit subsidy? Why?

FOR THOSE NOT OFFERING ANY PROGRAMS OR PROGRAMS NOT MENTIONED:

What would the motivation be for you to offer employees a commute benefit? Are there barriers to you being able to offer commute benefits to your employees?

Programs/Products (45 minutes)

Now, we are going to look at a number of benefits programs and products available through City of Bellevue, King County Metro and the Bellevue Downtown Association that employers might offer and we would like to know whether you were aware of each and what your perceptions of each are.

HAND OUT LIST TO RESPONDENTS. HAVE THEM READ EACH IN ORDER AS WE DISCUSS.

***Commute Advantage** – Employer commute assistance program for downtown Bellevue. Includes informational workshops and free consultation service for employers to develop and implement employee commute benefits at their worksite. Program includes cost/benefits analysis, evaluation of program needs and facilities and implementation assistance and promotion.

***ORCA Business Passport** – Business Passport is a deeply discounted comprehensive annual transportation pass program for employers with 5 to 499 employees. It includes

unlimited rides on all King County Metro, Sound Transit (including LINK Light Rail), Community, Kitsap, Pierce and Everett transit services; 100% vanpool and VanShare subsidy; and home-free guarantee (free taxi ride in case of emergency). Employers must purchase Passport for all full-time benefited employees, and can cost-share with employees up to 50%.

***ORCA Business Choice** – Business Choice allows employers to load a dollar amount or any PugetPass onto their employees' ORCA cards at retail pricing on a monthly basis. Business choice gives the employer the flexibility to subsidize as much or as little of their employees' transportation costs as they want, for as few or as many of their employees as they want.

***WorkSmart** – Free consultation service for employers to develop and implement a telework or flexible schedule program for their employees. Program provides technical assistance to develop program policies, train managers and employees and ensure technology meets business needs.

***Business Carsharing** – Offer employees access to a carsharing program or fleet vehicle to use for daytime transportation needs (i.e. appointments, meetings).

Home-Free Guarantee – Provide an emergency taxi ride home for your employees who take alternative modes of transportation to work. If an unexpected situation arises, transit, bike or rideshare commuters will not be stranded.

Tax Benefits – Employers can receive federal and state tax benefits for offering commute benefits programs.

- **Washington State Tax Credit** - Employers who provide commute trip reduction incentives to their employees are eligible for a credit against their business and occupation (B&O) or public utility tax (PUT) liability.
- **IRS commuter benefits** - Federal law allows employers to reduce the cost of commuting for their employees via public transportation including: bus, ferry, rail and vanpool by:
 - Providing employees with a tax-exempt benefit of up to \$125 per employee per month for a transit pass (2012 tax year)
 - Allowing employees to use pre-tax income to purchase transit passes
 - Allowing employers and employees to split the cost of the transit pass using employer tax-free subsidies for a portion and employee pre-tax income for the remainder

Preferential Carpool/Vanpool Parking Spaces – Designate preferred parking spaces (i.e. close to the elevator/door) that can only be used by employees that carpool or vanpool.

Bike Amenities – Provide employees with access to covered and secure bicycle parking, showers, lockers or towel service so that they feel more comfortable riding their bike to and from work.

*Asterisks indicate key, significant programs/products

FOR EACH PROGRAM, ASK:

ALL PROGRAMS: Are/were you aware of this program? (Show of hands for each program) What did you hear about it?

KEY PROGRAMS: What benefit would/does it have for employees? Advantage for you/the employer?

IF NOT MENTIONED, EXPLORE:

- Saving money or saving time?
- Being energy conscious or environmentally proactive?
- Promoting a green image of the company?
- Providing an employee benefit?

What barriers are there, or might there be, to your offering this option for your employees?

WHEN PARKING Management & Bike Amenity OPTIONS ARE DISCUSSED, ASK: Are you able to approach your property manager or parking operator about what parking and bike amenities are offered at your building (e.g., priority parking for carpools/vanpools, parking lease options, showers/lockers)? Have you? Do you feel you can influence these decisions as a tenant?

Parking Subsidies and Flexibility (?? minutes)

Do you subsidize parking for your employees, or provide it for free?

If so, why?

What might motivate you to decrease or eliminate this subsidy? IF NECESSARY, PROMPT:

- Saving money
- Knowing that your employees would accept this change, especially if you were to provide benefits for commuting by alternative transportation mode
- Greater flexibility in your lease arrangement with your property manager to facilitate this change
- Free consulting assistance with a parking expert to implement this change

One circumstance that can help employees use a non-drive-alone commute mode is partial access to parking for occasional need to have their car, such as doctor's appointments, without having to pay full monthly parking fees. Examples for addressing this include:

- Free Park Days for non-drive-alone commuters as discussed above
- Availability of a half-month employee parking pass at half the cost of full monthly parking
- Parking cash-out for days not using the parking facility.

What might motivate you to offer these types of options? IF NECESSARY, PROMPT:

- Knowing that there is a need, or that employees would value these options
- Greater flexibility in your lease arrangement with your property manager to facilitate this change
- Free consulting assistance with a parking expert to implement these changes

What are or might be barriers? IF NECESSARY, PROMPT:

- Inability to work with property manager to make these changes

What are some of the barriers specific to offering options for employees' occasional parking needs? IF NOT MENTIONED, PROBE THE POSSIBILITIES BELOW:

- Long-term lease – no changes allowed in number of parking spaces.
- Cost/availability of parking spaces.
- Property managers' needs (ex: carpool/vanpool riders registered before space assignment).
- Other?

Summary (15 minutes)

Which of these programs (all discussed) do you think would be the *most beneficial* to your organization? Why?

Which program/option that you would be interested in would be the most difficult to implement? What could the City, TransManage or Metro do to make it easier for you?

To sum up, what value do these programs and products have overall?

What is the most effective way to communicate with you about commute benefits programs and products? IF NOT MENTIONED, PROBE THE POSSIBILITIES BELOW:

- Email
- Monthly Newsletter
- Direct mail
- Memo from property manager

Is there anything else you would like to add?

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR TIME AND THOUGHTS.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR PARTICIPATION.

Discussion Guide

Downtown Bellevue Property Manager Group

Nov. 29 – 7:30am

Introduction

(Moderator introduces self, unbiased third party, and then explain)

Purpose of the Focus Group: (1 minute)

As you may already know, this discussion is sponsored by the City of Bellevue, King County Metro and the Bellevue Downtown Association. We are here today to hear your perceptions of how your building tenants and their employees' commuting habits affect your building and the businesses in downtown Bellevue. We also will ask you for your feedback about how you view various transportation options and programs that might impact your tenants. Before we get started, let me give you a few guidelines, then we'll introduce ourselves and then we'll start the discussion.

Ground Rules/Disclosures: (1 minute)

Some viewers are viewing behind the mirror.

Video/audio taping, for my purposes and for any members of the team who couldn't be here today.

We usually use first names. We'd like you to be open in sharing your opinions and ask that you keep what opinions you hear here to yourself. Of course, you are welcome to share whatever information you receive about programs offered by the sponsors.

Can only hear one at a time; speak up at same level as I am

No wrong answers, want your candid opinions and suggestions

We don't identify individuals when we quote ideas, but present the information in a combined form.

Respondent Introductions: (5 minutes)

First name?

How many buildings does your firm manage in downtown Bellevue?

Property Manager Perceptions/Offerings (20 minutes)

Do you have any observations about what percentage of your tenants' employees drive alone? Carpool? Take public transportation? Bike or Walk? Telecommute? Have Flexible Hours?

What are the factors that you feel influence how your tenants' employees commute to and from work? Do you feel that policies at your building influence how your tenants commute?

For purposes of this discussion, we're defining "commute benefits" as providing a subsidy or making it more advantageous for people to ride the bus, carpool, vanpool, walk, or bike to work

Are you aware of whether the tenants in your buildings offer commute benefits to their employees? If so, what do they offer?

Do you manage any transportation benefits for tenants of your building(s)? IF SO, ASK: Which ones do you manage?

What motivated you to offer that benefit?

How is it working for you? For your tenants and their employees?

Programs/Products (45 minutes)

Now, we are going to look at a number of benefits programs and products that property managers might offer or market to their tenants. We would like to know whether you were aware of each and what your perceptions of each are.

HAND OUT LIST TO RESPONDENTS. HAVE THEM READ EACH IN ORDER AS WE DISCUSS.

***ORCA Business Passport** – Business Passport is a deeply discounted comprehensive annual transportation pass program in which employers or property managers can purchase passes for employees. It includes unlimited rides on all King County Metro, Sound Transit (including LINK Light Rail), Community, Kitsap, Pierce and Everett transit services and 100% vanpool and VanShare subsidy. Purchasers must purchase Passport for all full-time benefited employees, and can cost-share with employees up to 50%. Potential roles for property managers include the following: provide the Passport for all building workers; work with King County Metro to help sell the Passport to tenants; or offer a rebate/discount on purchase by tenants.

***Business Carsharing** – Offer tenants/building employees access to a carsharing program (Zipcar) or fleet vehicle to use for daytime transportation needs (i.e. appointments, meetings) or place a vehicle from a carsharing program on the property.

Home-Free Guarantee – Provide an emergency taxi ride home for your building employees who take alternative modes of transportation to work. If an unexpected situation arises, transit, bike or rideshare commuters will not be stranded.

***Preferential Carpool/Vanpool Parking Spaces** – Designate preferred parking spaces (i.e. close to the elevator/door) that can only be used by building employees that carpool or vanpool.

***Bike Amenities** – Provide building employees with access to covered and secure bicycle parking, showers, lockers or towel service so that they feel more comfortable riding their bike to and from work.

*Asterisks indicate key, significant programs/products

FOR EACH PROGRAM, ASK:

ALL PROGRAMS: Are/were you aware of this program? (Show of hands for each program) What have you heard about it?

KEY PROGRAMS: What benefit would/does it have for building management? Advantage for your tenants and their employees? Would you be willing to facilitate communication with your tenants about these programs?

IF NOT MENTIONED, EXPLORE:

- Freeing up parking for other uses, such as visitors, customers, etc. (allowing for more revenue through short-term parking)
- Less congestion during peak hours coming and going from building
-
- Being energy conscious or environmentally proactive
- Promoting a green image of the building/company (i.e., LEED certification)
- Providing an employee benefit, making the building more attractive to potential tenants and workers

What barriers are there, or might there be, to your offering these options for your tenants and their employees? IF NOT MENTIONED, PROBE THE POSSIBILITIES BELOW:

- Long-term lease – it's difficult, time-consuming, or inefficient to allow changes.
- Tenant must have carpool/vanpool riders registered before space assignment can be authorized.
- Other?

WHEN PARKING MANAGEMENT & BIKE AMENITY OPTIONS ARE DISCUSSED, ASK:

Are you able to work collaboratively with your parking operator about what parking and bike amenities are offered at your building (e.g., priority parking for carpools/vanpools, parking lease options, showers/lockers)? Have you?

Parking Subsidies and Flexibility (10 minutes)

Do you have responsibility for or influence on the parking facility in your building?

IF SO, ASK:

One circumstance that can help tenants and their employees use a non-drive-alone commute mode is partial access to parking for occasional need to have their car, such as doctor's appointments, without having to pay full monthly parking fees. Examples for addressing this include:

- Free Park Days for non-drive-alone commuters, with in-out privilege
- Availability of a half-month parking pass at half the cost of full monthly parking, with in-out privilege (to allow for mid-day appointment)
-
- A daily commuter parking rate that is approximately 1/20th the monthly rate, so that commuters can make a day-to-day choice whether to drive alone without losing the benefit of the monthly discount rate

What might motivate you to offer these types of options to tenants? IF NECESSARY, PROMPT:

- Increase in parking revenue or garage space
- Knowing that there is a need, or that employees would value these options
- Positive response to your lease arrangement with your tenants if you facilitate these changes
- Free consulting assistance with a parking expert to implement these changes

What are some of the barriers specific to offering flexible parking options? IF NECESSARY, PROMPT:

- Don't have the technology or staff time to implement these changes
- Making the management arrangements with tenants too diverse? Too complicated?

New Program Concepts (10 minutes)

Now we would like to present you with two program concepts that are being considered by the Connect Downtown Partnership to assist property managers to provide the types of benefits we just discussed. We would like to know whether you would be interested in participating in these types of programs.

***Commute Advantage** – Commute assistance program for downtown Bellevue property managers. Includes informational workshops and free consultation service for property managers to develop and implement commute benefits at their building. Program includes cost/benefits analysis, evaluation of program needs and facilities and implementation assistance and promotion.

***Commute Benefits Mini-Grant**– Opportunity to apply for a grant that would provide a set financial contribution (i.e. \$1,000-\$5,000) to allow your building to implement a commute benefits program; conduct a campaign to encourage use of non-drive-alone commute modes by building workers; or purchase a capital improvement that benefits building workers who choose non-drive-alone commute modes.

What would motivate you to participate in these programs? Are there any barriers to you participating in these programs? How would it benefit you or your tenants?

Summary (10 minutes)

Which of these programs (all discussed) do you think would be the *most beneficial* to your organization? Why?

Which program/option that you would be interested in would be the most difficult to implement?

In summary, what would the impact be on Downtown Bellevue if all the buildings implemented some of these programs?

What is the most effective way to communicate with you about commute benefits programs and products? IF NOT MENTIONED, PROBE THE POSSIBILITIES BELOW:

- Email
- Monthly Newsletter
- Direct mail

Is there anything else you would like to add?

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR TIME AND THOUGHTS.
WE APPRECIATE YOUR PARTICIPATION.

Discussion Guide

Downtown Bellevue Parking Operator Group Nov. 27 – 6:00pm

Introduction

(Moderator introduces self, unbiased third party, and then explain)

Purpose of the Focus Group: (1 minute)

As you may already know, this discussion is sponsored by the City of Bellevue, King County Metro and the Bellevue Downtown Association. We are here today to hear your perceptions of how the building tenants and their employee commuting habits affect your parking facility and the businesses in downtown Bellevue. We also will ask you for your feedback about how you view various transportation options and parking arrangements that might impact the tenants in your building. Before we get started, let me give you a few guidelines, then we'll introduce ourselves and then we'll start the discussion.

Ground Rules/Disclosures: (1 minute)

Some viewers are viewing behind the mirror.

Video/audio taping, for my purposes and for any members of the team who couldn't be here today.

We usually use first names. We'd like you to be open in sharing your opinions and ask that you keep what opinions you hear here to yourself. Of course, you are welcome to share whatever information you receive about programs offered by the sponsors.

Can only hear one at a time; speak up at same level as I am

No wrong answers, want your candid opinions and suggestions

We don't identify individuals when we quote ideas, but present the information in a combined form.

Respondent Introductions: (5 minutes)

First name?

What type of building or parking facility management firm do you represent?

How many parking locations/facilities does your firm manage in downtown Bellevue?

Parking Operator Perceptions/Options Offered (15 minutes)

Awareness of usage of non-drive-alone modes by downtown Bellevue workers

Do you have any observations on what percentage of downtown Bellevue workers commute to work by a mode other than driving alone?

For purposes of this discussion, we're defining "commute benefits" as making it easier or more advantageous for people to ride the bus, carpool, vanpool, walk, or bike to work. Are you involved in any commute benefits for tenants of your building(s) or parking facilities? IF SO, ASK: Which ones? (IF Free Park Days mentioned, explain that it will be discussed later.)

What motivated you to offer that product/program?

How is it working for you? For your buildings' tenants and their employees?

Do you offer the following Options/Amenities to assist non-drive-alone commuters?

- Preferential Carpool/Vanpool Parking Spaces – Designate preferred parking spaces (i.e. close to the elevator/door) that can only be used by tenants that carpool or vanpool.
- Bike Amenities – Provide tenants with access to covered and secure bicycle parking, showers, lockers or towel service so that they feel more comfortable riding their bike to and from work.

What benefit would/does it have for the building management or parking operator? Advantage for building tenants?

IF NOT MENTIONED, EXPLORE:

- Saving money or saving time?
- Being energy conscious or environmentally proactive?
- Promoting a green image of your company?

What might motivate you to offer these types of options to building tenants? IF NECESSARY, PROMPT:

- Knowing that there is a need, or that tenants of the building would value these options
- Increase in overall revenue with greater usage?
- More flexibility in how parking spots are allocated?

What are some of the barriers specific to offering these types of options to building tenants? IF NOT MENTIONED, PROBE THE POSSIBILITIES BELOW:

- Lack of market demand
- Not enough revenue security
- Don't have the technology/equipment to keep track
- It's difficult, time-consuming, or inefficient to make changes.
- Tenant must have carpool/vanpool riders registered before space assignment can be authorized.

- Other?

Current Parking Operation Mode (15 minutes)

Who has responsibility for the allotment of parking spaces in the parking facility you operate (or in your building)?

Thinking about the parking options offered in your facility/building, how are spaces allotted?

- What percentage of the parking is monthly and what percentage is hourly? How is the hourly rate vs. the monthly?

What are the reasons for the current product structure? Is it due to demand? Or is it the need for a secure level of revenue (with monthly parkers relatively predictable?)

What might motivate you to change the way you offer parking plans/fees?

IF NECESSARY, PROMPT:

- Increase in parking revenue or flexibility of parking spaces
- Knowing that your tenants want to change to a more flexible system
- Free consulting assistance with a parking expert to implement this change

Flexible Parking Options (20 minutes)

One way to encourage tenants and their employees to choose a non-drive-alone commute mode is for them to have partial access to parking for occasional times when they need to have their car, such as doctor's appointments, without having to pay full monthly parking fees. Examples for addressing this include:

Free Park Days for non-drive-alone commuters (already offered at some facilities) –

Allowing those drivers who normally don't drive alone to have a certain number of free parking days per month, preferably with in/out privileges (for mid-day appointments).

Half-Month Parking Pass – Offer a parking pass to use up to half the number of days for the month at half the cost of full monthly parking

Discounted Daily Ticket Book – Offer a discounted daily rate to parkers who normally take the bus, vanpool, bike or walk.

What benefit would/does it have for the building management or parking operator?

Advantage for building tenants?

IF NOT MENTIONED, EXPLORE:

- Saving money or saving time?
- Being energy conscious or environmentally proactive?

- Promoting a green image of your company?

What might motivate you to offer these types of flexible options to tenants? IF NECESSARY, PROMPT:

- Knowing that there is a need, or that tenants of the building would value these options
- Increase in overall revenue with greater utilization of parking?
- More flexibility in how parking spots are allocated (i.e. by the property manager)?

What are some of the barriers specific to offering parking options that would appeal to sporadic daily parkers who usually use a non-drive-alone mode but have occasional need to park? IF NOT MENTIONED, PROBE THE POSSIBILITIES BELOW:

- Lack of market demand
- Not enough revenue security
- Don't have the technology/equipment to keep track
- It's difficult, time-consuming, or inefficient to make changes.
- Other?

Summary (10 minutes)

Which of these programs (all discussed) do you think would be the most beneficial to your organization? Why?

What messaging and information might encourage you to consider offering more flexible parking products, such as half-month parking passes and/or daily-rate parking with in-and-out privileges?

Which program/option that you would be interested in would be the most difficult to implement? What could the City, Bellevue Downtown Association or Metro do to make it easier for you?

In summary, what would the impact be on downtown Bellevue if all the parking operators implemented some of these programs?

What is the most effective way to communicate with you about these programs and products? IF NOT MENTIONED, PROBE THE POSSIBILITIES BELOW:

- Email
- Monthly Newsletter
- Direct mail

Is there anything else you would like to add?

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR TIME AND THOUGHTS.
WE APPRECIATE YOUR PARTICIPATION.

Focus Group Summary for Feb 6, 2013 Parking Meeting

Facilitated by King County Metro

Summary prepared by City of Bellevue, 5 February 2013

Purpose of Project

To project will inform future downtown Bellevue transportation demand management (TDM) work by gathering qualitative information from employers with fewer than 100 employees; property owners or managers; and commute parking providers to help design programs and products that best achieve the City's goals for reducing drive-alone mode share, particularly in peak-hour travel times.

Parking-Related Areas of Research

Parking Operators/Property Managers:

- Awareness of usage of non-drive-alone modes by downtown Bellevue workers
- Reasons for current product structure (impressions of demand, income security, etc.)
- Barriers to providing products that would appeal to sporadic daily parkers who usually use a non-drive-alone mode but have occasional need to park (lack of perceived market or income security, technology/equipment, etc.)
- What messaging, information or other support might encourage these audiences to consider offering more flexible parking products, such as half-month parking passes and/or daily-rate parking with in-and-out privileges

Employers (Fewer than 100 Employees):

- Whether employers subsidize their employees' parking, and why they do this
- What would motivate employers to reduce their parking subsidies?
- Impressions of the degree to which employees value and utilize various transportation subsidies, including transit and parking
- What messaging or program/product would encourage employers to think about offering other transportation subsidies besides parking, including flexible parking

Implementation

- Consultant: Gilmore Research Group
- Dates conducted: November 27-29, 2012
- Composition & attendance (attendees = decision makers)
 - Employers – First Group: 7
 - Parking Operators: 9
 - Property Managers: 9
 - Employers - Second Group: 4

Key Parking-Related Findings

I. Parking Operators

A. Commuter attitudes/behaviors in Bellevue are seen as leaning toward driving alone, in particular in comparison with downtown Seattle.

1. *On a day-to-day basis it's mostly people driving themselves.*
2. *Workers want to leave when they want to, run errands. Things aren't as close – in Seattle you can walk right there.*
3. *Changes would have to happen at a corporate level, but they want to offer free parking to attract employees.*
4. *Companies would set up valet parking rather than getting people into a two-person car.*

B. Commuter parking utilization is relatively high, and starting to affect parking allotments to tenants.

1. *It's getting so full in the downtown Bellevue market; the number of people carpooling/vanpooling is going to change. I've noticed an increase in carpool/vanpool in the last month or so.*
2. *There are a lot of facilities I know of in downtown Bellevue that are close to full, full or going to be that way in the near future. (Agreement around table.)*
3. *Parking is assigned to tenants based on square footage in their leases. In the downtown core, it used to be 3 spaces per 1,000 square feet when everyone had parking available. Now it's generally 2 per thousand.*
4. *We were at 3 spaces per thousand, but are now at 2.*
5. *One tenant offers free parking; filled their allotment; and filled another floor. New tenants now get 2 spaces per thousand.*
6. *One tenant was buying parking for all of their employees. We're like, yeah, bring 'em in. But eventually yo'du get to where you'd have to scale back.*
7. *We're pretty full and we have a lot of places that are hitting their allotment, so they're starting to charge their employees for parking and that's what's driving them to carpools and vanpool. We've seen an interest in vanpooling information just in the last month.*

C. Parking operators' goals are to fill the garage and maximize revenue.

1. *Our job is to increase parking revenue. The building manager has to deal with the TMP [building transportation management program requiring certain trip reduction activities].*
2. *It's our job to fill the parking; it's the property manager's job to fill the building.*
3. *There is a level of oversell – we sell more than the actual spaces that we have.*

D. Parking operators view transient parking somewhat negatively, compared to monthly parking, in most cases.

1. *It depends on the building. Monthly's awesome because it's guaranteed. Transient can be great at some locations, but it's nice to have that guaranteed monthly parking. We try to sell as much monthly parking as we can.*
2. *Monthly's easier to manage operational-wise. You don't have to deal with ticket; lots of times you don't even need to have it staffed because they're dealing with a keycard. Monthly is billed entirely separately from the parking equipment.*
3. *They're pulling tickets; tickets can jam; they put \$5 bill in Visa/MasterCard machine.*
4. *Our motivation is to try to pre-sell as much parking as we can so it's done, money in the bank, it's there. If they only wanted to pay half time, there would be more manpower needed; it's labor-intensive.*
5. *Exception, one person: Transient parking can get us in the black.*

E. Parking operators define transient parking rather narrowly (i.e. visitors) and of relatively small impact.

1. *Office parking is weighted toward monthly parking – transient parking is just what tenants need for their customers.*
2. *Transients equal customers; small number of stalls and demand. There is a high demand for monthly.*
3. *Transient versus monthly depends on the tenant mix. Transients are coming to visit tenants.*
4. *Transient is just a small segment.*
5. *One of my garages is hidden and has fewer transient parkers. Transient parking depends on access to thoroughfares.*

F. Parking operators are experts in their field and advise property managers on parking-related issues.

1. (When asked if interested in free consulting services from a parking expert) *I think everyone here is an expert not only on how to manage parking but on how to manage their equipment.*
2. *We keep property managers informed... We keep an eye on new items coming out and let the property manager know. It's their decision whether or not to implement something.*
3. *Property managers trust our judgment as operations managers and the mix of transient versus monthly. This [flexible parking options] wouldn't even be considered.*

G. Parking operators see no benefit to offering or enhancing flexible parking options.

1. *As operators our job is to increase revenue – why would we [implement flexible options]?*
2. *It's like asking McDonalds how to keep obesity down. While you may want obesity to come down, your job is to push your product.*
3. *Our jobs hinge on the revenue we generate. If it's down, we're asked "What are you doing to create more revenue?" by ownership or the parking management company.*
4. *Revenue would be less secure than if we gave it away. What's the benefit for us? We would be losing spaces.*
5. *Giving away opportunities to decrease parking bandwidth in garages is not something we even want to consider.*

OBSERVATION - They see anything that takes from monthly parking as "losing spaces."

6. *Some parkers would like something like monthly but they only pay based on usage. But operational-wise that's just not feasible. Our job is to sell space, and we're selling it ahead of time. They want to buy the opportunity to park in that space, and that's something we just can't do.*
7. *Many systems have the capability for a pre-paid card, but you constantly have to go in to put on, take off value on the card. It's not a way to make money.*
8. *It's easier to offer prepaid monthly parking than pre-sold cards like Starbucks. That's not how you make money. Like with cable – I want NBC & ABC & that's it. Or I'd like to just pay every time I turn it on. It's not like that.*

9. *When there's an economic downturn, there is a focus on revenue, closing loopholes, keeping the baseline [monthly parking] strong.*
10. *To increase revenue, you would take the path of least resistance rather than changing the whole structure (e.g. increase Early Bird rates).*
11. *We would only be motivated to do this if the property manager made us.*
12. *Everything you're suggesting is offered already, but with a different method of sale. These [flexible options you're proposing] wouldn't change anything.*

OBSERVATION: This demonstrates a misunderstanding of the need we're trying to address. They said that employees can already park individually each day and paying at point of sale; but we're saying it's important to be able to conveniently pre-pay and have in & out privileges with less than full monthly parking.

H. On In and Out Privileges (through Free Park Days):

1. *If you let them out you might not see them come back.*
2. *We allow in & out, but don't advertise it more than we have to...it's hard to track; almost impossible if it's a large campus, having to check IDs, etc. Property managers & owners push it to tenants but don't put up a billboard about it. Reducing single-occupant vehicles is a goal in building TMPs, but you have to balance that with revenue for the client.*
3. *Monthly parkers can get full-time in & out privileges because they're paying to park full time.*

I. On Half-Month Parking, specifically:

1. *I don't know how we would track that. The card won't cut off after a half month of use. We would have to manually shut the cards off.*
2. *Some systems will do it. There has been a small uptick in new equipment recently, but it's cost-prohibitive. Some systems are 10-15 years old.*
3. *My machine can be set to expire, but our tenants never request that.*

OBSERVATION: Tenants might want it, but operators don't find this out (see below under Employers).

4. *There isn't a benefit to us. It's transient parking, but they want the convenience of pre-payment.*

5. *If everyone comes at once it's a problem.*

J. On Discounted Daily Ticket Book, specifically:

1. *Sounds like Early Bird. We would not consider this. It would eat revenues.*
2. *Companies could provide this for their employees through validations, which are prepaid to us.*

OBSERVATION: There could be an opportunity to implement this at the employer level.

3. *It goes back to the tenant and their business model. Do they have a lot of flex workers who don't have to come in every day? If they're a Seattle business, can they find a better rate in the Bellevue market, such as six months free, or discounts based on daily ticket use? It goes to the tenant side of the business model, and depends on the tenant mix.*
4. *There is more paperwork for manual transactions. It would add to costs. A huge chunk of what we do is auditing. That costs money, as well as losing money on the other end – it's a double whammy.*

OBSERVATION – they absolutely see no money to be made by increasing short-term parking. They see this as losing space for monthly parking.

K. Customers will cheat the system given the opportunity, in particular with flexible parking options.

1. *Customers could manipulate products such as free park days, ½ monthly – and they do. They lie all the time.*

L. Being seen as “green” is not a motivator for changing parking practices.

1. *It matters to some at the building level who want to be LEED-certified. We parking operators can contribute to that with online validations and energy-efficient lighting. It is balanced on what the tenants want, whether they care about being in a green building.*

OBSERVATION: They don't think of parking products that reduce drive-alone trips as “being green.”

M. Help from the city/partners would be well-received only if financial in nature.

1. *They would need to make up for the revenue loss that would happen.*

2. *They would need to pay for the additional staffing that would be needed.*

II. Property Managers

A. Motivated to be LEED certified (one participant).

1. (When asked about perception of ORCA Passport) *From a PR perspective, we're interested in LEED credits, so this would be great.*

B. Property manager goals related to parking are making money and efficiency.

1. *There's no benefit to us [to offering preferential parking for vanpools and carpools independently]. We make money selling parking.*
2. *Nobody wants to organize this [carpool/vanpool parking at the property manager level]. It's very labor-intensive.*

C. Bike parking is provided, but at varying levels of quality; and bike amenities are generally provided by tenants, not property managers, although one property manager is considering providing it at the building level.

1. *We have the space, but they put up the fencing. We have other bike parking for riders that is not secured, but it's located right by the parking attendant.*
2. *We have lockers and showers, but no towel service right now. We may carve out the lockers and showers and make them available to the building and roll it back as a recoverable expense.*

D. Property managers who work with parking vendors agreed that their operators would likely be inflexible if asked to implement flexible options such as half-month parking.* However, one property manager that operates its own parking does offer a half-monthly pass for part-time retail employees.

*Perceived reasons include software limitations, full capacity and administrative issues.

1. *I can't figure out how to make a half-monthly rate work. What half-day is that person going to use that space?*
2. *If half-monthly spaces are sold, what do you do when the garage is full? Our vacancy rate is so low that we can't do this.*
3. *We offer this to retail employees. Part-timers who work only one or two days a week can purchase a monthly pass, discounted to \$7 per day (maybe \$12) and use it like a debit card.*

III. Employers (Smaller – Fewer than 100 employees)

A. Most participants said that a majority of their workers drive alone to and from work, and implied that this justifies the provision of free parking.*

*Most stated either that they have parking that comes with their lease contract or that they offer it to employees as a perk to entice and retain employees.

1. *Everybody in our office drives.*
2. *Of all our employees, I'd say 70% or 80% drive alone. We have free parking in our building in abundance, so why not?*
3. *With 45 employees we have 6 or 7 bus riders. In the summer a few bike in. Most people need to have their cars if off-site meetings pop up during the day.*
4. *Not having direct bus service into downtown Bellevue is the main hindrance. It's faster to go to downtown Seattle than to downtown Bellevue. The bus routes are so limited.*

B. Employers who offer both commute benefits and subsidized parking for SOVs generally require employees to choose one or the other.

1. *You can either have a building parking pass, or you can have an ORCA card.*
2. *We give \$75/month for any type of commute pass or for parking.*

OBSERVATION: “Either/or” provisions generate the need for flexible parking products.

C. Employers were mixed on the question of whether their parking managers would be easy to work with on provisions for non-drive-alone modes.

1. *In most downtown high-rises, the parking is separate from the building management, and I wouldn't know who to contact. They don't do a good job in my building of promoting carpooling. And you really don't benefit from cultivating that relationship with parking. I wish that the building management would do a better job of developing a relationship with parking and bringing us into it.*

OBSERVATION: There are conflicting goals between employers (who want to increase non-drive-alone) and parking operators (who want to increase revenue).

D. Among employers who subsidize SOV parking, no employers could give any reason, **other than cost**, that would motivate them to decrease/eliminate the parking subsidy.

1. *They would not accept this [elimination of subsidies], especially the professionals. They would not be happy because of their lifestyles.*

2. Some said employees might accept decrease/elimination in parking subsidies if the transportation infrastructure in downtown Bellevue were more developed.
3. Some said it was dependent on the industry, the economy and the availability of other jobs.

OBSERVATION: There might be some opportunity here using the cost savings angle.

E. In each session the moderator asked participants whether having free park days or half-monthly parking passes might be useful to induce employees to commute by non-drive-alone mode. None considered these options to be viable.

1. *If we want to have free park days available for employees then we have to either pay the daily rate which is \$25 or \$30, or the hourly rate; or we have to buy a monthly pass and have dedicated free parking days – then it's first come first served; it's just not cost effective.*

OBSERVATION: They may be missing the opportunity to save on overall parking costs by making it easier for people to use another mode.

2. Participants envisioned resistance from parking facilities operators. *I don't think the parking operators could do this. There's no benefit for them.*
3. *If the parking authority would treat this like a debit card, then that would be doable. But I think that's an operational problem for the parking managers.*

OBSERVATIONS: Some operators say they won't provide flexible products unless tenants want them; but tenants think operators can't provide them.

4. *It would be cost-prohibitive for a company to pay for both an ORCA card and half-monthly parking.*