

## **SCHOOLPOOL...an A+ for Effort to Students who Carpool!**

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Contra Costa County, located in the San Francisco Bay Area of northern California, has two unique and successful school-based commute alternative programs. The first is a countywide school carpool ridematching service, and the second is a comprehensive commute alternative program at the local community college. Both address the challenges of getting students to campus in this age of high single-occupancy automobile use, and limited transit service.

Most school districts in Contra Costa, California do not provide school bus service for the general student population. School congestion and difficulties associated with getting children to and from school is a problem throughout the County, as it is all over the country. The SchoolPool carpool ridematching program was developed five years ago, in cooperation with jurisdictions throughout the County to respond to this problem. It promotes carpooling for children in all public and private schools in the County (kindergarten through high school). There are two agencies which administer SchoolPool under the unified identity of the Contra Costa Commute Alternative Network (CCCAN). This program is offered free of charge to participants, with the cooperation of the Contra Costa Transportation Authority, which provides a small portion of its half-cent sales tax revenues to support the program, in addition to Bay Area Air Quality Management District Transportation Fund for Clean Air monies.

CCCAN, in cooperation with school districts and principals, distributes ridematch brochures via school registration packets at the beginning of each school year. Since some school districts are on year-round schedules, this means that some brochures are distributed as early as April, while others are not sent until August. Newsletter articles are written for PTA newsletters to promote the program, and staff works closely with all of the school districts to ensure that their endorsement of the program is understood by school principals and staff. Several private schools also participate and have a higher rate of participation due to the larger geographic area from which they draw students, and the longer travel distances. Parents who submit ridematch requests receive a list, within five days, of other parents interested in carpooling, as well as a SchoolPool pen and magnet with the SchoolPool phone number, for future reference. The ridematch list includes the name, street, cross street, and phone number of other participants. No specific street addresses are included. There is also a disclaimer at the bottom of each page, with a paragraph indicating that it is the responsibility of each parent to certify the driving record and character of other carpool participants. Over a period of six weeks, each participant receives an average of three updated ridematch lists, as more parents enroll and are added to the lists. If a parent has students attending more than one school, ridematch lists for each of the schools are sent to the parents. This increases the number of potential carpool partners.

A follow-up survey is sent to all participating parents about three months into the school year, to determine the effectiveness of the program and the rate of participation. It is estimated that approximately 30% continue to carpool the following year after establishing carpool partners. If parents have been unable to find anyone with whom to carpool, free transit tickets are offered as an alternative to encourage yet another option for getting their students to school. This additional incentive has proven very successful.

This program continues to expand each year, with the addition of a school needs-assessment survey which was distributed to determine any infrastructure improvements which might be needed to increase the safe access to the schools, as well as to increase the use of alternative modes. Some of these improvements include adding bike racks, bike lane striping in front of schools, better traffic signaling, and other improvements. With the continued cooperation of the local jurisdictions, schools, school districts, parents and students, SchoolPool has become an established and effective program by promoting alternative transportation access to schools.

The results of the 1998/99 program were as follows:

- Annual program cost was \$65,000
- Cost effectiveness was \$14,750/per ton of emissions reduced\*
- 155 schools participated
- 160,500 ridematch lists distributed/1631 ridematch requests processed
- 1204 participants (non-siblings in carpools)
- 5.5 average one-way miles
- 180 days of effectiveness
- 3612 vehicle trips reduced per day
- 3,575,880 vehicle miles reduced by this project
- (1204 x 3 trip segments\*\* x 5.5 one-way miles x 180 days =3,575,880 miles reduced.)

\* As determined by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District

\*\* The reduced trips produced almost two round trips per day per non-sibling-student. Unlike regular carpools, parents generally drive back-and-forth to school both in the morning and afternoon, resulting in two round trips. Since some trip linking may have occurred dropping students off on the way to or from work, only 3 one-way trip segments were credited.

### **Getting to College...Good Grades are the Easy Part!**

Finding transportation alternatives to driving alone has been the hardest part of getting to campus at a local community college in Contra Costa County, California. This is a commuter school with an enrollment of 23,000 students! In the fall of 1999, CCCAN began a two year comprehensive commute alternative program in cooperation with the community college district and the local jurisdiction. Due to an extensive expansion program at the campus to accommodate an additional 5,000+ students, several of the existing parking lots are being usurped to provide new buildings and facilities. As a result, an already impossible parking problem has become even greater. CCCAN has developed a comprehensive program to encourage the use of commute alternatives to campus.

With the help of the associated student services who provided mailing labels for the project, a travel behavior survey was conducted of all students, faculty and staff to determine existing campus access as well as viable alternative options for campus commuters. A drawing which included a laptop computer and other small prizes, was offered to encourage the return of the surveys. A total of 5,000 surveys, an impressive 25%, were returned. With this information, several components of the program were developed.

The strategies implemented include: installing additional bike racks; providing free bike locker rentals and maps; establishment of a carpool ridematching service, including \$40 gas scrip to those who would form or join a carpool; \$40 in bus tickets to try transit; installation of a real-time transportation information kiosk in the student union; and a stipend for professors to develop up to thirty on-line distance learning courses. By the time the spring semester had begun, the only components of the plan not yet in place were the installation of the bike racks (to be installed by

summer 2000), and the development of the final 15 on-line courses, (with the remainder due by fall 2000). The response to this program has been excellent. Hundreds of ridematch lists and incentive forms have been received. Students who purchase bus passes receive an additional \$40 bus pass when they turn in their used passes. Discussions have begun with the college district to form a carpool-only lot to maximize existing parking capacity. Marketing the various incentive programs is done by way of transportation fairs each semester on campus, and additional articles in the campus newspaper and in the registration of classes brochure. In general, there is high visibility for the program, and an overall enthusiasm for the various options which have been developed. This project will be complete by summer 2001, with the expectation that most, if not all, of the original concepts will be continued indefinitely. With a comprehensive program such as this, hopefully good grades will be all that is needed to get to this campus in the future!