

How to Write a Transportation Action Plan Vermont Transportation Efficiency Network

After you read our guide to surveys and give one to your target audience, it's time to present the data and recommend next steps. This guide gives advice on how to interpret surveys, write an action plan, set goals, and measure success. This information is written to help transportation professionals and advocates work with different partners to form new transportation projects. The term "partners" refers to workplaces, schools, and other target communities. However, this guide can be useful for individuals starting programs on their own (ex: an HR professional launching a commuting program at the workplace).

Six Tips for Transportation Action Plans

1. Recommend up to five actions to implement.

It's possible to look at survey results and identify dozens of possible projects a workplace, school, or community could develop. Recommending too many projects may intimidate or confuse program partners.

2. Recommend projects that vary in cost and in time – from free, immediate actions to more ambitious, long-term proposals.

When you begin work with an organization for the first time, remember that your partner likely has not budgeted for new transportation programs. Always recommend free, immediate actions, such as promoting Go! Vermont or local bus service through e-mail. Then identify projects that your partner might pursue over the course of several years. Longer projects might include starting and subsidizing vanpools or new bus routes.

3. Provide a short project description and survey results overview at the beginning.

It's useful to provide context for your project. A partner could change jobs and hand off the project to someone new. Or a community might want to look back at their work years later for historical data. Start with some basic, essential survey data, but not too much. Good data include how people got to work the day before the survey, how often people use various options, and an estimate of the amount of fuel used by people who drive alone. Put full results at the end.

4. Identify barriers that affect your audience and projects that people actually want.

While you might be enthusiastic about a particular project, recommend actions that appeal to your audience and address their barriers.

5. Provide as much stock language as possible.

Your recommendations will probably include promoting existing services. Provide as much language for e-mails, newsletters, etc. for your partner to make it easy to market transportation services.

6. Avoid industry jargon.

Ex: Use a term like "drive alone" instead of "single-occupancy vehicle."

The Process of Writing Your Plan

The first step is to interpret the data you collected in the commuting survey. Your data should include some straightforward information that can be understood as-is: total number of survey respondents, transportation mode share (i.e., percentage of people who drive alone, bike, carpool, etc.), and the average distance travelled. Other data, however, will require you to cross-tabulate information or make an informed recommendation.

Cross-tabulations occur when two data points are compared to one another to find out more information. In a commuting survey, a common cross-tab might be home zip code and interest in a vanpool. Most survey software will allow you to isolate a particular answer choice, such as “Yes – I’m interested in a vanpool,” to responses from another question, such as zip code. If you identify strong interest in a vanpool among individuals who live near one another, you should recommend that your partner further explore vanpools from that area.

Other interpretations will require you to know your audience, the availability of resources, or perhaps even the physical terrain involved. Generally, most audiences probably need at least 20% interest in a particular project idea to make them feasible. The present author heard anecdotally that for every 10 people who express interest in riding a bus, only one will actually ride it. Knowing the financial and physical feasibility of certain projects is important too. Small non-profit organizations, while they might have employees who are interested in transit, are unlikely to have the same ability to start a new bus route as a large hospital or university. Similarly, biking and walking programs are going to work better in communities where it is safe, inviting, and convenient to use those options.

Finally, as you go through the survey results, create lists of the top barriers people face. Identify what already motivates people to bike, walk, etc. Identify new projects that appeal to your audience. You can present these kinds of lists in simple tables in the narrative of your action plan.

Example:

<i>Top Three Reasons People Do Not Carpool at Company X</i>	
I have to pick up/drop off children.	35 respondents
I do not know anyone who can carpool.	33 respondents
I need to travel during the day for work.	22 respondents

It is very difficult to address the top barrier found in our theoretical company. #2, however, has several easy solutions and #3 has some possible solutions. You might recommend that the project partner help people carpool by (1) promoting Go! Vermont’s website, (2) creating an internal carpool matching sheet, and (3), if applicable, promote fleet vehicles or buses as a way to travel for mid-day work needs.

Other example barriers:

- I don't bike because my office is small and there's no place to put it → install bike racks.
- I would walk to school, but my parents won't let me → start a walking school bus.
- I don't understand the bus schedule → promote Google transit.

For additional information on how to use the surveys to get advanced data on fuel use and other topics, please see the Vermont Transportation Efficiency Network document “How to Use Sample Surveys.”

Discuss Projects with Partner and Finalize Plan

It helps to present partners with a draft plan before making recommendations final. This way, you'll be able to vet different ideas, see what budgetary restraints might exist, discuss timing of different projects, and discover whether certain ideas have been tested before.

What Happens After the Plan?

You will continue to assist your partner (or roll out a plan on your own) after the written work is considered final. Future tasks may include organizing community events, talking to groups of students about transportation options, holding a bike repair seminar at a workplace – the list of possibilities is long. Keep in mind too, though, that certain activities are better left to the workplace or community with which you've partnered. Examples might include sending direct e-mails to employees who live in a particular zip code – an HR department is highly unlikely to hand over a list of geocoded e-mails, though it may ask you to provide language for an e-mail.

Events are a fun and engaging way to get people involved in transportation. They may include the annual [Way to Go! commuter challenge](#), a pizza party to match up potential carpoolers, or maybe a walk-to-school day. In Norwich, VT, community organizers even held a bike vs. bus vs. car race in fall 2014!¹

It is important to measure the effectiveness of programs over time. Typically, one should plan to administer one year later the same survey (or very similar) that was given before program implementation. This will allow a comparison of how different programs worked based on shift in transportation mode and use of programs. After a year-one progress check, you can survey again every two or three years to measure long-term change.

Questions, comments? Contact uvtma@vitalcommunities.org.

¹ See James M. Patterson, “Commuter Race,” *Valley News* (Lebanon, NH) October 22, 2014. <http://www.vnews.com/home/14025714-95/commuter-race>.