

Commute Connections Annual Update – 2018

Overview

About Commute Connections

The Commute Connections program helps City of Austin employees understand their sustainable commute options and take action to reduce their drive-alone work trips, especially during peak travel times. The ultimate goal is to minimize the impact these commutes have on traffic congestion and air quality in our region. The City strives to continually improve its commuter programming by offering and encouraging employees to take a sustainable commute to work by using active transportation, rideshare, or transit.

Highlights

The following list captures the main accomplishments of the Commute Connections program in 2018.

- Commute Connections launched Commute Consulting, an outreach campaign to departments that may be moving locations and seeking assistance with new commutes, and to individual employees interested in exploring commute options besides driving alone. This program also provides best practice information to other employers nationwide.
- Named Best Workplaces for Commuters for the first time.
- Program saw an increase in the total number of B-cycle annual memberships requested, number of transit passes distributed, and MetroRideShare vanpool participation in 2018 compared to 2017.

Awards

- The City's Smart Commute Rewards program received the National Award in Commuting Options – Carpool by the Association of Commuter Transportation (pictured below left).
- The City of Austin received the Transportation Demand Management Excellence Award for Large Government at the 2018 Association for Commuter Transportation Forum (pictured below right). This award recognizes a government's efforts to support sustainable transportation options through policies, programs, and actions.



Tracking Program Performance

American Community Survey Data Collection

The American Community Survey (ACS) data is collected annually by the United States Census Bureau. We use the 5-year estimates from the ACS data to track the commuting habits of Austin residents overall (shown below) and compare this to the City employee mode split from the Listening to the Workforce Survey.

Primary Commute Type	Percentage
Drive Alone	73.8%
Bike	1.3%
Walk	2.3%
Transit	3.9%
Carpool	9.5%
Telework	7.9%
Other	1.3%

Information above taken from the 2017 ACS Data 5-year estimates.

Listening to the Workforce Survey Data Collection

The City of Austin conducts an annual survey of its employees, called the Listening to the Workforce (LTW) Survey. In coordination with Human Resources Department, three specific commuting questions were added to the survey. We use these three questions to track our overall performance as a program, and also as an employer, that aims to decrease the use of single-occupancy vehicles (SOV) for commuting. The Listening to the Workforce 2017 Mode Split data is the baseline for which we will measure our progress towards increasing the share of City of Austin employees commuting by non-SOV modes, a target identified in the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (adopted in April 2019). The other questions from the survey provide insight on how many employees are interested in changing their commute behavior and where they are at with that behavior change (question 84 below), and also how many employees are aware of or use our program as a resource (question 85 below).

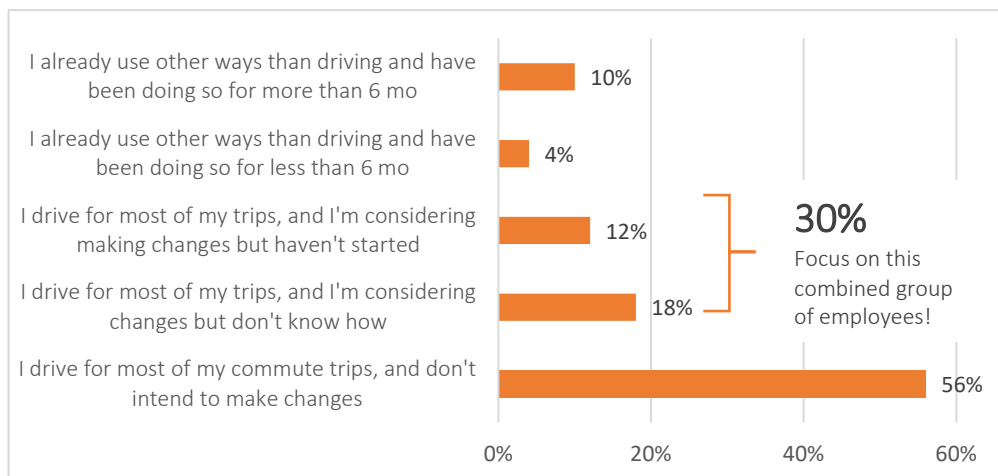
Mode Split

By comparing the ACS data with the LTW data, we can compare how City employees are doing versus Austin as a whole. While Austin's drive alone rate from the ACS was 73.8% in 2017, City of Austin employees came in higher with a drive alone rate of 84% in 2017 and 85% in 2018.

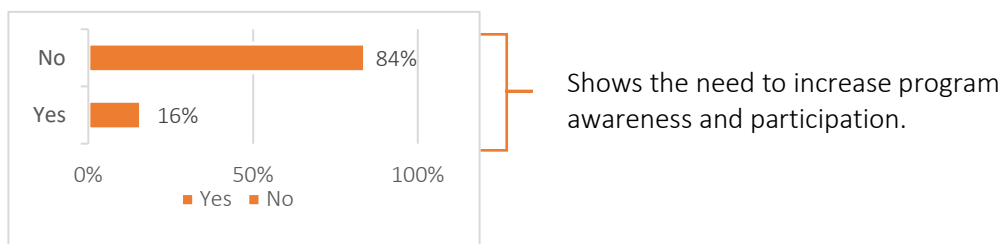
Primary Commute Type	2018		2017
Drive Alone During Peak	55%	85% Drive Alone	55%
Drive Alone Outside of Peak	30%		29%
Active Transportation	2%	9% Sustainable Modes	3%
Transit	3%		4%
Rideshare	4%		5%
Telework	3%		N/A
Alternative Work Schedule (Flex/Compressed)	3%		5%

Information above taken from the 2018 Listening to the Workforce Survey.

Question 84: Select the statement that best applies to you:



Question 85: In the past 12 months, I have participated in COA Commute Connections.



Bike-share Benefit Program

In 2016 The City of Austin teamed up with Austin B-cycle to help City of Austin employees get around town, or maybe even just from one building to another using a free annual B-cycle membership (valued at \$86.60)!

- The Bike-share Benefit program distributed a total of 221 memberships to City employees in 2018, compared to a total of 202 memberships distributed in 2017.

MetroRideShare Program

City of Austin employees are eligible to participate in the regional vanpool program through partnership with Capital Metro's MetroRideShare program and Commute with Enterprise. Employees can take advantage of the vanpool services at a discounted cost through a City subsidy (employees are eligible to receive \$70.00/month as a subsidy).

- The vanpool program had 155 City employees participate in 2018, similar to the total participants in 2017, which was 154 active vanpoolers.



Photo submitted by Kevin C. of his vanpool group. (Capture Your Commute selfie contest March 2018).

Employee Transit Pass Program

City of Austin employees are eligible to receive free annual transit passes for all Capital Metro bus, train, and MetroAccess services (monthly passes start at \$40).

- In 2018, 3,254 total transit passes were distributed. This is an increase from 2017, which saw 2,930 transit passes distributed.

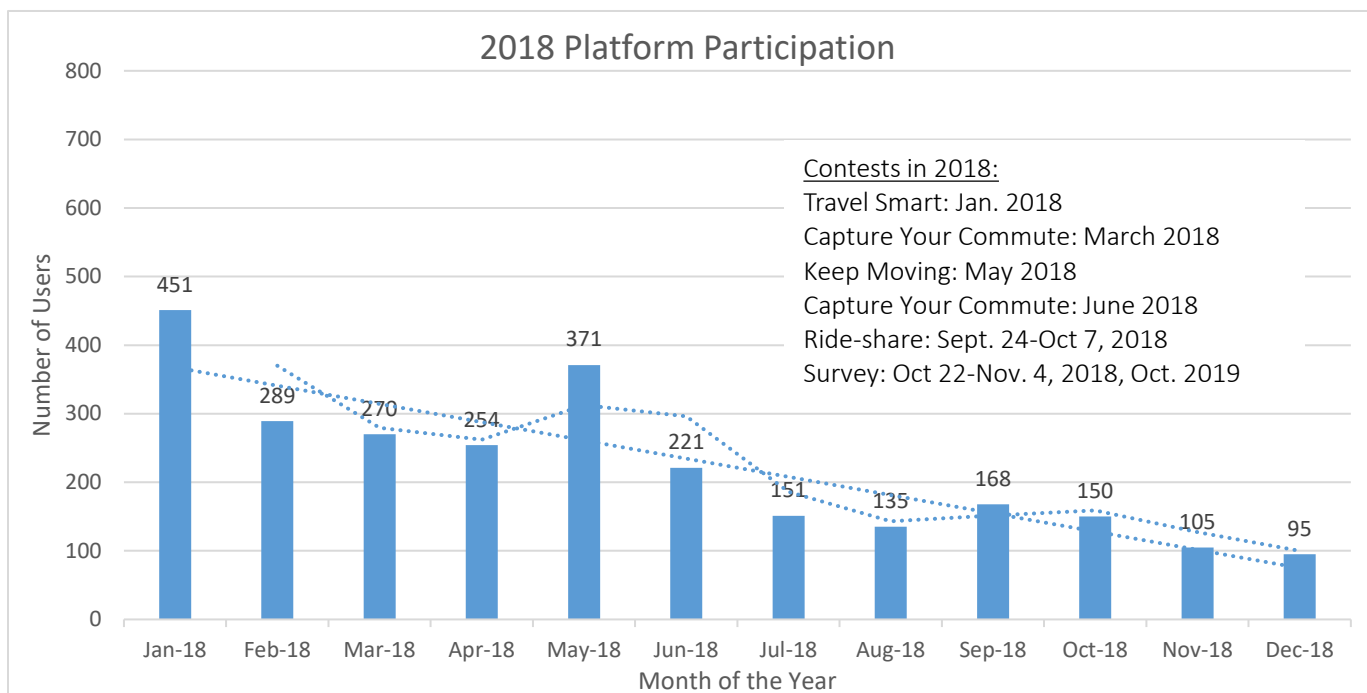
Smart Commute Rewards Program

The Smart Commute Rewards program is the incentive arm of the City's Commute Connections program. Smart Commute Rewards offers City of Austin employees various incentives to adopt a commuting habit that incorporates sustainable transportation, even just one day a week.

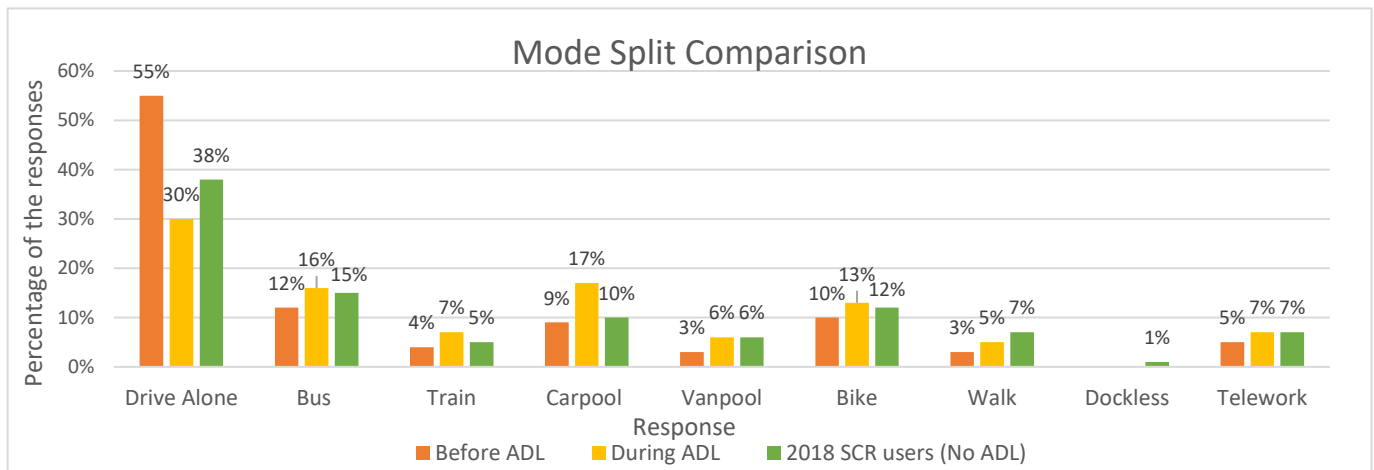
The chart below shows the SmartCommuteAustin.com monthly participation in 2018. The participation has continued to decline since the end of the 2017 Administrative Leave Reward pilot ([read about the ADL pilot at AustinTexas.gov/SmartCommute](https://austintexas.gov/SmartCommute)). Without the leave reward, we have seen a steep decline in overall participation; however some months we see a small spike in users. These spikes are likely caused by the two-week contests held in those months. See the chart for the list of contests, when they were held, and how that corresponds with participation on the platform.



*Photo submitted by Ginger S. waiting for the MetroRail.
(Capture Your Commute selfie contest June 2018).*



The Smart Commute Rewards program holds an annual survey contest, which asks employees about their travel behavior, and their satisfaction with the Smart Commute Rewards program. This survey helps us to track many important pieces of data. One key piece of data to analyze is how users commuted before the ADL rewards pilot, during the ADL pilot, and one year after the ADL pilot ended. Below is the mode split break down from the survey respondents in 2017 and 2018 that shows this comparison. Note that the drive alone rate went significantly down with the implementation of the ADL pilot, and then increased again after the pilot ended. This chart also shows that the ADL incentive was particularly effective encouraging ridesharing modes, which are two modes that have high usage potential in the Austin region, as many of our employees are travelling from areas that are currently not well suited for active transportation or public transit.



Commute Consulting & Outreach

The Commute Connections program tables at several large City employee events throughout the year, including the Health Expo and the Safety Conference. In addition to these large events, Commute Connections also provides Commute Consulting for individual employees, or for departments experiencing issues like limited parking capacity or moving office locations.

The Commute Consulting branch of our program began in 2018 with a Commuter Fair pilot with the Office of Innovation. They reached out to Commute Connections staff detailing issues they were having with their new move to the Faulk Library building, including parking issues, as well as, commuting issues into the downtown core. The Commute Connections team held a Commuter Fair for the employees at this location, bringing partners from Capital Metro, MetroRideShare, car2go, and others. This event launched the new Commute Connections service, Commute Consulting.

The Austin Transportation Department then partnered with the Commute Connections team during their departmental move. Commute Connections staff conducted a survey of ATD employees, created a “New Move New Commute Checklist”, detailed maps about the commute options at the new office locations, hosted Commute Consulting tabling events, organized potential bike rides to the new location at Barton Oaks Plaza, and sent Did You Know emails about the commuter resources available to employees.



Commute Connections staff tabling at the Faulk Library Commuter Fair.

ARE YOU READY FOR YOUR NEW COMMUTE?

commute CONNECTIONS

Information about the commute options below and more can be found at
AustinTexas.gov/CommuteConnections

<h4>TRANSIT</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Pick up your free transit pass from HR. ✓ Consider downloading the Cap Metro App or the Transit App to explore your route. ✓ Start riding, and be sure to pack headphones or a good book! 	<h4>BICYCLE</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Explore the Austin Bike Map to find routes that are safe and best for you. ✓ Search for a bike buddy with myCommuteSolutions. ✓ Be prepared for your active commute by packing sunscreen, water, and hygiene products!
<h4>RIDESHARE</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Find a carpool buddy with Smart Commute Rewards or myCommuteSolutions. ✓ Contact MetroRideShare to join a vanpool and apply your vanpool subsidy! Call 512-477-7433 (RIDE). ✓ Consider downloading rideshare apps like Metropia or Waze Carpool. 	<h4>MID-DAY TRIPS</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Take the COA Shuttle! ✓ Get your free B-cycle membership for trips downtown between meetings. ✓ Other mid-day trip options can be found on the Commute Connections website.

Example of resource given to moving departments

In 2018, the Commute Connections program:

- interacted with 764 employees total at tabling events;
- shared 23 informational “Did You Know” emails with the mailing list; and
- submitted over 20 articles to the CitySource Newsletter.

Commute Connections staff received several inquiries during 2018 about our award-winning program.

- Inquiries on the Smart Commute Rewards program in 2018 from: Travis County, TX; City of Hillsboro, OR; New York City Department of Transportation; Greater Redmond Washington Transportation Management Authority; City of Raleigh, NC; City of Santa Monica; Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority; Arizona Department of Administration; Walker Consultants Seattle, WA; City of San Antonio, TX; VIA Metropolitan Transit; San Luis Obispo Council of Governments; City of Somerville, MA; and Southern California Edison Energy Company.

Looking Ahead to 2019

Several programs and targets will be introduced in 2019. Reporting on these items listed below will be included in the next annual report.

Mobility Coordinators

Since 2015 Mobility Coordinators have been identified in a majority of departments. In 2019, Commute Connections will plan to offer more opportunities for Mobility Coordinators to receive training and conduct outreach to co-workers. Coordinators will continue to assist with communications about Commute Connections events and resources available to employees, and will also provide our team with information about any commute issues their employees are experiencing.

New Employee Orientation Pilot

The Commute Connections team is piloting a presentation to new employees at the City of Austin’s New Employee Orientation. This is a great opportunity to engage with new employees about their new commutes, and help them with forming a sustainable commute behavior before they develop a habit of driving alone. 8-10% of employees are reached through this training alone, equaling over 1,000 employees a year.

The first presentation occurred in February 2019. We will track total numbers reached and provide an update in the 2019 annual update.

Electric Bike Fleet Pilot Program

Beginning March 2019, The Austin Transportation Department launched an electric bike fleet pilot program for city employees in the Transportation Department located at Barton Oaks Plaza V. The pilot will run for one (1) year, with a hope to permanently implement the program. The electric bike fleet will provide employees a sustainable and active transportation solution for moving around Austin during the work day, and aims to decrease the number of vehicle trips taken during the day

- Total miles traveled in first month: 111 miles.
- Interest in ATD’s Electric Bike Fleet Pilot Program from the Public Works Department, Department of Aviation, and Capital Metro.

We will track pilot program data and provide an update in the 2019 annual update.

Austin Strategic Mobility Plan Indicators:

The Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, adopted by council in April 2019, has a target identified to “increase the share of City of Austin employees commuting by walking, bicycling, sharing rides, or taking transit.” We will continue to track our employee commute mode split to measure how we are performing in regards to this target.

Strategic Direction 2023 Indicators:

The Austin City Council adopted a strategic direction on March 8, 2018, guiding the City of Austin for the next three to five years. Austin Strategic Direction 2023 outlines a shared vision and six priority Strategic Outcomes, one of them being Mobility. The goal of the Mobility outcome is “getting us where we want to go, when we want to get there, safely and cost-effectively.” A specific Mobility outcome created in 2019 relating to the Commute Connections program is “percent split of modes based on commute to work, including off-peak drive-alone trips, by City of Austin employees.” We will continue to track our performance on this outcome in future annual reports.

Pictures and Quotes

- “It's lovely that the city offers incentives for this kind of thing! It makes me proud to work for the city.”
– Austin Public Library employee
- “It gives incentive to start doing what needs to be done. It's the world we live in today, even though we should do it anyway, sometimes we need that push/incentive to get us going.”
– Public Works Department employee
- “It encourages City employees to walk the talk. If we want our citizens to change their behaviors, we need to lead by example.”
– Budget Office employee



Dump the Pump Day 2018! Woke up an hour earlier than usual to try out the MetroBus commute 🙌

Photo submitted by Kane W. of his transit adventure on Dump the Pump Day. (Capture Your Commute selfie contest March 2018).



Photo submitted by Helen G. (Capture Your Commute selfie contest March 2018).

Helen and her coworker matched through the Smart Commute Rewards carpool matching system during one of our contests. In order to be eligible for our contests, typically users must log sustainable commutes during the contest period. Helen was able to be eligible for the contest because she found a carpool match, and this has opened the door for her to continue to carpool now that she has a carpool buddy!

Ravali and Audrey matched through the Smart Commute Rewards carpool matching system. Audrey, an intern at the time, contacted Ravali to carpool with her. They travel 14 miles one-way, alternating driving every week. Although Audrey could not earn rewards as an intern, she was still excited to find a carpool buddy through the system and track her statistics. Ravali says that although the incentives for her as a regular employee are great, she is mostly excited that she found a friend. "There were days when Audrey and I would reach our destination, and not even realize we've travelled that distance."



Photo submitted by Ravali K.



More photos from City of Austin employees collected during the Capture Your Commute contests.