

The Small Business Transit Subsidy

WSDOT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION DIVISION, KING COUNTY METRO,
COMMUNITY TRANSIT AND PIERCE TRANSIT





CONTENTS

Executive summary _____ 3

Introduction _____ 4

Employer highlights _____ 5

Performance highlights _____ 8

Incentive and marketing _____ 9

Outreach _____ 11

Outcomes _____ 18

Lessons learned
and potential improvements _____ 22

Acronyms and abbreviations _____ 24

Websites featured _____ 24

More Information _____ 24

THE SMALL BUSINESS TRANSIT SUBSIDY

Executive summary

In 2018, the Legislature provided WSDOT with \$1 million for a new ORCA pass incentive program (promoted as the Small Business Transit Subsidy) in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties. The program offered a 50 percent rebate on the cost of ORCA transit subsidies for smaller employers that had never before offered transit subsidies to their employees.

From November 2018-May 2019, 121 employers signed up for the program and distributed ORCA cards to 1,469 employees.

The program has shown promising behavior change results among participating employees:

- Nearly 80 percent increased their transit use.
- Nearly 75 percent reduced their driving.

Employers and employees are also overwhelmingly satisfied with the Small Business Transit Subsidy:

- Nearly all (97 percent) employers indicated their likeliness to continue with the ORCA products subsidized by the program.
- Over 90 percent of employees indicated that they were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with their subsidized ORCA cards.

In the 2019 legislative session, the Small Business Transit Subsidy received an additional two years of funding. With the additional time and funding, the program team is integrating recommendations from partners and participating employers, including:

- Coordinating with local marketing firms to develop tailored marketing plans for specific geographic areas and demographic groups.
- Identifying key transit routes and focusing on businesses along those routes.

In 2018, the Legislature provided WSDOT with \$1 million for a new ORCA pass incentive program in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties ([ESSB 6106, Section 220\(7\)\(b\)](#)).

The program, promoted as the Small Business Transit Subsidy, offered a 50 percent rebate on the cost of ORCA transit subsidies for smaller employers that had never before offered transit subsidies to their employees.

Introduction

King County Metro administered the Small Business Transit Subsidy in partnership with Community Transit and Pierce Transit. The transit agencies set the following goals for the program:

Sign up 100 small businesses and nonprofits.

Encourage employees who received an ORCA card through the program to use the card and shift from drive-alone to transit trips.

Encourage participating employers to continue providing ORCA transit subsidies after the program ended.

To achieve these goals, King County Metro implemented a marketing and outreach campaign using a team of trained business advisors who worked with local transit agencies and outreach partners.

Business advisors engaged directly with employers in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties. Advisors understood the complexities of the Small Business Transit Subsidy, and developed and maintained relationships with employers.

Once advisors had identified interested employers, participating transit agencies signed up and provided rebates to employers in their contract.

The program also relied on outreach partners, who used online and social media ads, as well as direct outreach to employers, to foster employer interest in the program. A full list of outreach partners is available under [Outreach through partners](#).

Additionally, the program used a central landing page at orcasmallbiz.com.

Employers and employees were overwhelmingly satisfied with the Small Business Transit Subsidy. Almost all (97 percent) employers indicated their likeliness to continue with the ORCA for Business products (Business Choice and Business Passport) subsidized by the Small Business Transit Subsidy. Over 90 percent of employees indicated that they were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with their subsidized ORCA cards.

The program also showed promising behavior change results, with an 8 percent increase in transit use and a 9 percent decrease in drive-alone commute trips. Almost 80 percent of ORCA card recipients increased their transit use and over 70 percent reduced their driving.

In the 2019 legislative session, the program received an additional two years of funding.

EMPLOYER FEEDBACK:

“My employees like to know they always have the option to take the light rail. As a small business, being able to provide [ORCA passes] as part of their benefits package is a huge bonus. It is a way we can compete or offer something similar to some of the larger companies in town.”

“Everyone was overjoyed to get a bus pass. It’s much more convenient than having to reload an ORCA pass - and having free transportation makes a HUGE difference to folks who are making a little over minimum wage. They loved it and we were happy to be able to offer it to them.”

Employer highlights

Below is a selection of small businesses and nonprofits from around Puget Sound using the Small Business Transit Subsidy to help their employees shift from drive-alone to transit trips.

Playfish Media, South Seattle

Playfish Media is a video production company based in Seattle that specializes in nonprofit, corporate, commercial and documentary media.

With the closure of the Alaskan Way Viaduct in January 2019, Playfish Media knew they had to look at providing alternative transportation options for their employees. Congestion and general “Seattle Squeeze” were going to make it difficult to access the office in South Seattle. They signed up for the Small Business Transit Subsidy a couple days after the viaduct closure and could not be happier with the decision to incorporate ORCA Passport into their employees’ commute options.

With an enormous amount of construction occurring around their office, Playfish Media noted that having the ORCA passes as a flexible commute option helped to mitigate the negative effects of construction. Although Playfish Media indicated they would have signed up for ORCA Passport regardless, the Small Business Transit Subsidy inspired them to cover all employees instead of, perhaps, looking at a smaller program overall.

Playfish Media chose ORCA Passport for their five employees and received a Small Business Transit Subsidy rebate of \$1,104.60.

EMPLOYER FEEDBACK:

“Being a small business in the tech industry, it is hard to compete with the tech giants of our community in terms of pay. We are always on the lookout on ways to provide value to employees beyond compensation. [The Small Business Transit Subsidy] filled in a much-needed gap in our benefits package as we were offering 0 transportation benefits. When we launched this program at the beginning of 2019, staff members actually cheered that this was happening. Their reaction showed just how much of a big deal it was to not have to subsidize their commute and they would now be able to keep that money in their pocket.”

“[Subsidized ORCA passes are] the 2nd highest factor employees cite when asked why they like working here.”

Degrees of Change, Tacoma

Degrees of Change is a nonprofit that helps young people access higher education through pre-college training and visits; financial assistance; and connecting high school and college students to paid internships. Degrees of Change also partners with local companies and organizations to help them create positions for student interns.

Degrees of Change was motivated to participate in the Small Business Transit Subsidy because of the cost-savings associated with the subsidy. Degrees of Change employees currently receive parking stipends, but some employees commute via transit from Seattle and SeaTac to the worksite in Tacoma. Offering ORCA passes better aligned with these employees' commutes. Purchasing their individual transit passes was a much higher cost than the full-access passes offered by ORCA Passport, after applying the 50 percent rebate from the Small Business Transit Subsidy.

Shifting to the Small Business Transit Subsidy produced a high level of benefit for Degrees of Change. The nonprofit has a focus of being socially responsible towards their employees and improving their quality of life. Degrees of Change also hoped that some employees who previously took advantage of parking stipend would shift towards using transit to commute to work.

Degrees of Change chose ORCA Passport for their 14 benefits-eligible employees and received a Small Business Transit Subsidy rebate of \$1,450.

EMPLOYER FEEDBACK:

“Employees have been very excited about 100% subsidy of [ORCA passes]. A few have even given up their parking in South Lake Union as a result.”

“We are definitely planning on [continuing with] the ORCA Business Program because we have received such positive feedback and it aids in employee retention.”

Boundless, Downtown Seattle

Boundless, is small Seattle tech startup that has become a one-stop shop for immigrants entering the U.S.

After learning about the Small Business Transit Subsidy at a Seattle Chamber of Commerce event, Boundless' owner and founder, Xiao Wang, contacted Commute Seattle to learn more about Small Business Transit Subsidy. With a staff of mostly transit commuters, Wang knew the integration of an ORCA for Business product would be a hit with his team.

“The announcement of this program received the loudest applause I had ever heard at a staff meeting!” said Wang.

Boundless chose ORCA Passport for their 18 employees and received a Small Business Transit Subsidy rebate of \$6,285.24.

EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK:

“Receiving an employer-subsidized ORCA transit pass makes driving to work even less economical than taking public transportation, and has made my commute more flexible by allowing me to utilize the Seattle Streetcar for the “last leg” of my commute.”

“The subsidized ORCA card has been an outstanding addition. I no longer feel like there is some hidden cost associated with working downtown. Please keep this up!”

“This is an AMAZING program. I had mostly taken transit for work purposes anyway, but I now take it not for work in my personal life much more because of the pass.”

Performance highlights

Performance summary

The following table contains a summary of performance measures for the Small Business Transit Subsidy, highlighting some of the benefits of the program.

Subsidy spent	Number of participating employers	Number of participating employees
\$392,120.48 ¹	121	1,469

Performance by county

The following table shows performance measures for each county participating in the Small Business Transit Subsidy that had data available at the time of this report.

	Subsidy spent	Number of participating employers	Number of participating employees
Snohomish County	\$270.00	1	1
King County	\$388,434.65	116	1,435
Pierce County	\$3,415.83	4	33

¹ As of May 28, 2019

Incentive and marketing

Incentive structure

King County Metro marketed the Small Business Transit Subsidy to employers with fewer than 100 employees. Through the program, employers could try an ORCA for Business product (Business Choice and Business Passport) at a lower cost through June 2019.

For businesses who chose to subsidize their employees' transit passes through ORCA for Business, the Small Business Transit Subsidy provided a 50 percent rebate on employer contribution, up to \$10,000.

Eligibility for the program was as follows:

- Businesses or nonprofits with fewer than 100 employees.
- Located in King, Pierce or Snohomish County.
- Had never offered transit benefits to employees in the past.
- Signed a participation agreement, completed a pre-survey and agreed to complete a post-program survey for employers and employees.

ORCA for Business products

Employers who participated in the Small Business Transit Subsidy were given the options of two ORCA for Business products, Business Choice and Business Passport.

Business Choice is a month-to-month product that allows employers to select which employees receive an ORCA card and the dollar value loaded on the card. Employees can choose to add additional funds to their ORCA cards.

Business Passport is an annual program that provides unlimited-trip ORCA passes to all benefits-eligible employees. It also includes vanpool and vanship options, as well as King County Metro's Emergency Ride Home.

Of the employers who signed up for the Small Business Transit Subsidy, around three-quarters opted for the Business Passport, with the remainder opting for Business Choice.

Marketing campaigns

Small Business Transit Subsidy campaign

King County Metro implemented a digital marketing campaign in targeted areas to promote awareness of the Small Business Transit Subsidy, with the goal of signing up 100 small businesses and nonprofits.

In addition to a landing page for the project, King County Metro deployed web banners and ads in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties targeted at specific zip codes and individual worksites.



The marketing campaign produced 887,120 impressions² and 2,500 clicks (0.28 percent click-through-rate³).

The top 10 cities with the highest number of impressions and clicks were:

1. Seattle
2. Tacoma
3. Everett
4. Federal Way
5. Bothell
6. Bellevue
7. Lynnwood
8. Lakewood
9. Renton
10. Kent

² Impressions are when an ad appears on a user's screen.

³ Click-through-rate is the number of clicks that an ad receives divided by the number of times the ad is shown.

Commute Seattle campaign

A month before the Legislature approved the Small Business Transit Subsidy, Commute Seattle had in-market a brand awareness campaign that unified ORCA Choice and Passport products under a single brand, ORCA for Business. Since their campaign included, radio, digital, social media and print, Commute Seattle generated leads in and out of King County. While King County Metro focused on the Small Business Transit Subsidy planning process and rebate distribution, Commute Seattle hinted at the Small Business Transit Subsidy in their employer

consultations and kept a running list of the employers that had expressed interest.

Once the Small Business Transit Subsidy was approved by the Legislature, Commute Seattle worked with downtown Seattle employers that had expressed interest in ORCA for Business products and qualified for the rebate to sign up for the program. Additionally, since Commute Seattle's campaign had also generated leads that were located outside of Seattle, Commute Seattle provided King Count Metro with an initial list of companies that had expressed interest in ORCA for Business products.





Business advisor Will Pearson (left) and a potential customer at bStrong Bellevue.



Business advisor Laura Svancarek at Federal Way Transit Center with Small Business Transit Subsidy marketing materials.

Outreach

Approach

King County Metro used business advisors and outreach partners to contact employers in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties about the Small Business Transit Subsidy through a variety of channels, including:

- In-person outreach.
- Direct email and phone call.
- Referrals and sign ups through partner organizations.
- Spots on local newsletters and news channels.
- In-person events.
- Marketing campaigns.

Promotional materials for the program included:

- A flyer outlining the subsidy and eligibility requirements.
- Program descriptions for partner newsletters.
- Presentation slides for events.
- A landing page.
- Web ads and banners.

King County Metro performed an initial analysis to identify target employers for advisors to prioritize in-person outreach. The analysis focused on employers with fewer than 100 employees within half a mile of high-quality transit. King County Metro evaluated the employers by industry type for their likeliness to use transit to commute to work.

Business advisor outreach

King County Metro hired a team of three business advisors to cover the Puget Sound region and reach out to target employers. King County Metro trained the advisors in motivational interviewing techniques, as well as details of the ORCA Choice and Passport products and the Small Business Transit Subsidy incentive structure.

Outreach through partners

Direction from established partner organizations within King, Pierce and Snohomish counties was a core driver of the Small Business Transit Subsidy.

King County Metro involved these organizations as outreach partners to make recommendations on outreach channels and act as trusted sources of information for employers.

Below is a list of Small Business Transit Subsidy outreach partners:

Multi County	King
WSDOT SCORE Ventures EnviroStars Various Chambers of commerce Various small business associations Procurement technical assistance centers	King County Metro Commute Seattle City of Tukwila Seattle Southside Chamber Hopelink Port of Seattle Port Jobs City of Burien Discover Burien City of Issaquah City of Federal Way City of SeaTac City of Kent City of Renton Bellevue Downtown Association City of Redmond City of Kirkland Bothell Kenmore Chamber of Commerce One Redmond Greater Redmond Transportation Management Association Redmond Town Center Kirkland Alliance of Neighbourhoods Bellevue Chamber of Commerce Greater Issaquah Chamber of Commerce Kirkland Chamber of Commerce Snoqualmie Chamber of Commerce Woodinville Chamber of Commerce Sammamish Chamber of Commerce Central Area Chamber of Commerce City of Shoreline Renton- The Landing Property Management Association The Impact HUB
Pierce	
Pierce Transit Downtown on the Go Tacoma Housing Authority Safe Street 6th Avenue Business District Cross District Association Old Town Business District City of Tacoma Tacoma-Pierce Chamber of Commerce Puyallup-Sumner Chamber of Commerce Lakewood Chamber of Commerce	
Snohomish	
Community Transit Everett Transit Snohomish County Committee for Improved Transportation Snohomish County Economic Development Alliance City Of Monroe Snohomish Chamber of Commerce Mill Creek Chamber of Commerce Mill Creek Townhouse Association	

Outreach partner highlights

King County Metro engaged nearly 60 partners to support and get the word out about the Small Business Transit Subsidy. Below are some examples of the program's outreach partners.

Transit agency partners

King County Metro, Pierce Transit and Community Transit held coordinating roles for the Small Business Transit Subsidy in each respective county.

When employers committed to the program with the business advisor team, they were connected with a transit agency representative to complete the sign up. The transit agencies provided a number of contacts and connections with other partner organizations. They also provided key context on their services and their regions.

Commute Seattle

Commute Seattle leveraged its existing relationships in the business community to conduct online and in-person outreach to small businesses throughout Seattle.

Commute Seattle attended networking and business resource events to promote the Small Business Transit Subsidy on a regular basis, earning free exposure through relationships with local chambers of commerce, business associations and industry groups. These groups, both citywide and neighborhood-focused, shared Commute Seattle's information about the Small Business Transit Subsidy online to their members through newsletters and targeted email campaigns, generating new business leads.

Commute Seattle's ORCA sales have been significantly higher than previous years since the Small Business Transit Subsidy became available. In the first quarter of 2019, Commute Seattle exceeded its annual goal in both total pass sales and new ORCA contracts. Commute Seattle has reached new annual highs in both sales metrics and continues to exceed monthly averages from past years. This significant uptick can be directly correlated to the Small Business Transit Subsidy.

Cities

Business advisors reached out to numerous cities directly or were introduced to officials by partners. While the level of interest and engagement in the Small Business Transit Subsidy varied between cities, advisors reported that connection through partners was much more effective than cold calls or emails.

A couple of cities were enthusiastic and supportive of the program and went above and beyond to get the word out about the program to employers in their area. For example, the City of Tukwila already promoted transportation demand management in the city and areas throughout South King County, and was able to tap into an extensive network of contacts to assist the advisors.

Chambers of commerce

Business advisors saw varying levels of success and interest in outreach to chambers of commerce. Chamber interest in the Small Business Transit Subsidy ranged between those who were immediately interested to others that advisors were never able to reach.

Overall, advisors found that the time invested in building trusted relationships with chambers can assist with reaching employers. Because of this, more assessment is needed to understand how chambers could be leveraged to generate interest with programs like the Small Business Transit Subsidy.



Business advisor Will Pearson presenting the Small Business Transit Subsidy at South King County Employer Resources Lunch and Learn.

Partner marketing

Several partners helped to promote the Small Business Transit Subsidy through their regular communication channels. To the right are two examples.

Ventures

Ventures, a nonprofit that focuses on providing resources for low-income entrepreneurs, included the Small Business Transit Subsidy in their April 2019 newsletter.



ORCA Special Small Business and Non-profit Subsidy through June 2019

Small businesses and organizations, with 1 to 100 employees can try [ORCA for Small Business](#) transit subsidy through June 2019. When an organization subsidizes its employees' transit passes for the first time, WSDOT provides a 50% subsidy of the employers' contribution amount up to \$10,000.

A great opportunity for small businesses to provide a competitive benefit to their employees. [Visit their website](#) or email their Business Advisor team at ORCASmallBiz@steergroup.com to find out more.

Tacoma Report

Tacoma Report, a contemporary news program that delves into the happenings of Tacoma's community and highlights the services and programs offered by the City of Tacoma and its partners, featured Small Business Transit Subsidy business advisor Laura Svancarek on the program March 2-15, 2019.

The Small Business Transit Subsidy as featured in the Ventures April 2019 newsletter.



Business Advisor Laura Svancarek featured on Tacoma Report.

Events

Events attended by the business advisor team included:

Date	Event	Partner/Host
December 8, 2018	ORCA / Transit for All	City of Kirkland
December 10, 2018	Canyon Park Stakeholder Workshop	Community Transit
January 22, 2019	Snohomish County Committee for Improved Transportation Meeting	Snohomish County Committee for Improved Transportation
January 31, 2019	James Center North Business Meeting	Tacoma Housing Authority
February 12, 2019	6th Ave Business District Gen Membership Meeting	6th Ave Business District
February 12, 2019	Access to Work & School Forum	Hopelink
February 13, 2019	Tenant Environmental Forum	Port of Seattle/ Port Jobs
February 22, 2019	Friday Forum	Downtown: On the Go!
February 28, 2019	Lynnwood Chamber Meeting	Lynnwood Chamber
March 5, 2019	Chamber Networking	Mukilteo Chamber
March 6, 2019	Small Business Round Table	Tacoma-Pierce Chamber
March 7, 2019	Wake Up!	Puyallup Chamber of Commerce
March 7, 2019	Government to business connection event	Alliance NW
March 12, 2019	Gen Membership Meeting	6th Ave Business District
March 12, 2019	2019 Business Showcase	Bellevue Chamber of Commerce
March 13, 2019	Quarterly Networking Luncheon	Shoreline Chamber
March 14, 2019	Transit Talks- Transit Talk:10 Years of Link Light Rail. 10 Years of Connecting Community	Sound Transit/ Beacon Hill
March 14, 2019	Downtown: On the Go! Board Meeting	Downtown: On the Go!
March 20, 2019	Breakfast Meeting	Edmonds Chamber
March 20, 2019	Tenant Environmental Forum	Port of Seattle/ Port Jobs
March 21, 2019	Chamber Breakfast	Mukilteo Chamber
March 22, 2019	Friday Forum	Downtown: On the Go!
March 24, 2019	Swift Green Line Launch Event	Community Transit
March 28, 2019	Kirkland Network Group Meeting	City of Kirkland
April 10, 2019	Cross District Association Meeting	Tacoma Neighbourhood Business Districts
May 8, 2019	South King County Lunch and Learn	City of Tukwila

Event highlights

Swift Green Line launch

On March 24, 2019 at the McCollum Park and Ride, Community Transit launched the new Swift Green Line. This new line aims to have busses running between the Canyon Park and Ride and the Seaway Transit Center every 10-20 minutes.

Around 500 people attended the launch event. Small Business Transit Subsidy business advisors spoke with around 20 people about the program and handed out brochures.

In conversations with attendees, advisors found that most people were interested in finding out more about the program. Advisors were also able to identify factors that push people to drive to work in Snohomish County. These include transit trips taking

a long time, especially during rush hour, as well as the availability of free parking near their employers.

6th Avenue Business District Meetings

The 6th Avenue Business District in Tacoma is highly transit-connected, with Pierce Transit Route 1 running every 15 minutes to Tacoma Community College, downtown and south to Spanaway. Route 1 starts earlier and runs later than many of Pierce Transit's other routes, and is by far the agency's most productive route.

The 6th Avenue Business District has a general membership meeting every month, with owners of approximately 10-12 businesses present at each meeting. On February 12, 2019, Small Business Transit Subsidy business advisors attended a 6th Avenue Business District Meeting to discuss and sign up qualifying employers to the program.



Business Advisor Will Pearson at the March 24, 2019 Swift Green Line launch.



Employers speak with program representatives at South King County Employer Resources Lunch and Learn.

For advisors, the 6th Avenue Business District meeting was a good opportunity to receive collective feedback on the program. Many employers identified barriers due to size (some businesses had less than five employees and were not ORCA Passport eligible) or employees with shifts outside of normal Pierce Transit schedules (many of the employers were restaurants and bars, with employees starting either very early in the morning or ending very late at night).

Ultimately, one employer signed up with advisors following the meeting. With the difficulty generating signups for the program in Pierce County, the ability to generate conversations with employers who stood to gain from the program due to transit proximity was crucial to understanding why sign ups in this region were slower than others.

South King County Lunch and Learn

The Small Business Transit Subsidy team partnered with other transportation demand management programs from King County Metro, Sound Transit, City of Tukwila, City of Renton and Commute Seattle for an event providing commute support for employers in South King County. The lunch and learn aimed to inform employers about different transportation options, identified programs they may be able to take advantage of to support their employees' commutes, and promoted new and future transportation services in the region.

The event kicked off with different program representatives briefly introducing their programs. After introductions, employers circulated and spoke with representatives in greater depth about how the programs could meet their business needs.

Outcomes

Outreach outcomes

Outreach metrics	King County	Pierce County	Snohomish County
Employers signed up	116	4	1
Employees receiving ORCA cards	1,435	33	1
Employers receiving a flyer	617	177	247
Number of events attended	9	9	7
Number of partners coordinated with	32	10	10
Number of impressions through marketing campaigns	497,110	243,285	145,960

ORCA Card usage

ORCA cards distributed through the Small Business Transit Subsidy were evaluated for usage. The following table shows how employees who received an ORCA card through the program used the card on different services. Please note, this table reflects ORCA Passport participant usage only (around 75 percent of the employers who signed up for the program).

Overall, Small Business Transit Subsidy ORCA Passport cardholders have made over 76,000 trips since the ORCA card distribution began in November 2018.

		Boardings
Bus	King County Metro	51,563
	Community Transit	3,351
	Pierce Transit	884
	Kitsap Transit	562
		Boardings
Rail	Sound Transit Commuter Rail	14,258
	Sound Transit Light Rail	2,766
	King County Metro Streetcar	1,039
		Boardings
Ferry/water taxi	King County Marine Division Water Taxi	985
	Kitsap Transit Ferryboat	462
		Boardings
On-demand	King County Metro	613
	Hopelink	71
	Via	35

Employer and employee survey outcomes

Employers that participated in the Small Business Transit Subsidy were required to fill out a survey during the sign-up process and complete a follow-up survey in May 2019⁴. Employers were also required to distribute similar surveys to participating employees and obtain 50 percent response rate.

Over 70 percent of employers and over 55 percent of participating employees completed their follow-up survey.

The surveys aimed to capture any behavior change that resulted because of the program and to measure satisfaction among those who participated. The surveys are also an important tool for giving a voice to those who directly benefitted from the program.



⁴ Only those who signed up prior to April 1, 2019 were required to complete the May follow-up survey. Employers who signed up after April 1 will be surveyed in November 2019.

EMPLOYER FEEDBACK:

“As a small business, being able to provide this as part of their benefits package is a huge bonus. It is a way we can compete or offer something similar to some of the larger companies in town.”

“It increased employee satisfaction, was a huge help during the squeeze and snow storms, and it’s something we promote during hiring as well.”

“Without the subsidy we would not have participated in Orca cards. With this subsidy we were able to pass the savings straight to employees by offering 100% employer coverage.”

Employer survey

Employers were surveyed in the following areas:

- Transportation information provided at the worksite.
- Transportation infrastructure around the worksite.
- Transportation amenities at the worksite.
- Product and subsidy level.
- Value of subsidy to employer and employees.
- Continuation of the ORCA for Business product.

Over 80 percent of employers ranked the Small Business Transit Subsidy as highly important in their decision to sign up for an ORCA for Business product. After sign up, almost three-quarters of employers fully subsidized their employees’ ORCA passes.

Nearly all employers (97 percent) indicated they would continue with their ORCA for Business product.

The highest rated reasons for continuing with the product were:

- It provided competitive benefit and boosted morale.
- It directly benefitted employees and improved their quality of life.
- It encouraged transit use, is environmentally friendly and produced cost savings for employees.

Additionally, close to a quarter of employers started providing information to employees about their ORCA for Business product after its introduction, and over 10 percent of employers began promoting non drive-alone trips to their worksite.

EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK:

“It’s saving me around \$300 per month, which I used to buy myself a bike! So now I get to ride the bus AND bike to work! It’s environmentally friendly, avoids traffic, and allows more exercise. I love it!”

“This is a great employee benefit and is now a key factor in how I assess employer benefit packages.”

“The subsidized ORCA card is vital to my ability to work.”

Employee survey

Employees were surveyed in the following areas:

- Mode used to get to work.
- Transit provider.
- Reduction in drive-alone trips.
- Increase in transit use.
- Satisfaction with subsidized ORCA card.

Employee post-survey results showed a significant increase in employee transit use (up from 59 to 67 percent), while driving alone was cut nearly in half (down from 19 to 10 percent).

Based on analysis, the increase in transit use came from previously drive-alone trips, rather than riders converting from other modes (i.e., biking, carpooling, walking).

Nearly 75 percent of employees surveyed indicated that they had reduced their driving and nearly 80 indicated that they increased their transit use since receiving their ORCA card. On average, employees noted that they used their ORCA cards six times per week for commuting and two times per week for leisure. This added benefit of using the ORCA cards for trips outside of work makes it possible for the program to reduce congestion at all times of the day and week, comprehensively changing transportation behavior.

Over 90 percent of employees reported that they were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with their ORCA card. No employees reported dissatisfaction with their ORCA card.

Lessons learned and potential improvements

The Legislature has extended funding for the Small Business Transit Subsidy for an additional two years, allowing King County Metro to learn from this initial year and incorporate new strategies that respond to identified areas for improvements. Several actionable improvements are identified below:

Area	Lessons Learned	Recommendations
Program start time	Delay in program start due to finalizing subsidy structure and distribution process (sign ups were first offered in November 2018).	Further implementation efforts would nearly double the amount of outreach time for the pilot. Quickly incorporate lessons learned into future program to enable quicker mobilization.
Outreach team	Difficulty hiring and retaining business advisors.	Now that a team has been hired that knows the program structure and is committed to the project, take steps to retain this team.
Business Choice product complications	Shorter eligibility window, complications with reimbursement and administrative burden affected small businesses sign-ups for Business Choice.	The ORCA Choice product is not flexible due to its nature, posing some difficulties. Extended funding would allow businesses to receive rebate for longer.
Employee behavior change	While positive behavior change results occurred, employers did not typically offer more transit resources and information with the distribution of ORCA cards (this is an ideal time to provide employees thinking about transit options with information to help them take the next step).	Offering more onboarding support for employers could improve behavior change outcomes.
Partner management	Coordinating a new program with tight deadlines with a large and geographically diverse pool of partners poses challenges.	Clear role delineation among partners with frequent updates and check-ins. Forming county-specific partner-stakeholder groups rather than a centralized group for the program may help focus efforts.
Partner involvement	Varying levels of partner outreach to constituents.	Develop and host partner training on the program, ORCA products and promotion program to employers.
Marketing	During marketing campaigns, there was a higher level of signups.	Develop more localized marketing strategies and campaigns.
Accessing employers	Cold calls, drop-ins and emails were very hit or miss.	Expand efforts to connect to employers through commercial property managers. Target employees with information on the program (positive feedback from employees was a key employer motivator).
Geographic distribution of sign ups	Low rate of signups in Pierce and Snohomish County	Focus even more along higher quality routes and more accessible town center locations.

Actions

- Use the final month of the program to plan for the coming year of outreach.
 - Create a plan with defined and actionable items in order to hit the ground running.
 - Set performance targets and dates to check in on those targets.
-
- Invest in skill development for team members.
 - Identify areas to grow or expand outreach based on relationships the team has formed.
-
- Identify a timeline of check-ins with Choice customers to ensure that they are sticking with the program.
 - Monitor orders to ensure they are continuing to be placed.
 - Develop an infographic or other marketing material to more clearly breakdown the Choice processes.
-
- Design or resource locally used transportation demand management and on boarding materials.
 - Provide employer representatives with a one-on-one meeting (if requested) to review transit resources and come up with a personalized plan on how to promote transit or vanpool/carpool to their employees.
-
- Develop a regular partner check in schedule.
 - Organize partners by geographic area so meetings focus on strategies for their area.
-
- Organize a partner “hack-a-thon” style meeting before the beginning of year two to brainstorm ideas for their area.
 - Ask partners to identify clear actions for themselves and establish timelines.
 - Establish regular check-in protocol.
 - Use participation in planning to foster program ownership.
-
- Coordinate with local marketing firms to develop tailored marketing plans designed to resonate with the different geographic or demographic groups in the area.
 - Before the second year, identify and reach out to firms requesting a proposal for a localized marketing strategy. Key ideas out of the strategies can be applied across the whole region. Contract with local firms to implement their proposals.
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- Devote more staff time to reaching out to commercial property managers. Identify those with wide-reaching networks
 - Identify large employers who contract with many small businesses (i.e., Boeing).
 - Develop marketing material specifically targeting employees.
-
- Identify a couple of key routes and focus on businesses along those routes.



King County



Acronyms and abbreviations

ESSB	Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill
ORCA	One Regional Card for All
WSDOT	Washington State Department of Transportation

Websites featured

ORCA for Business	orcasmallbiz.com
ESSB 6106	leap.leg.wa.gov/leap/budget/lbns/2018Tran6106-S.SL.pdf

More Information

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