



Working Together for

VITAL COMMUNITIES

Vital Communities' Smart Commute Program: King Arthur Flour, Norwich VT

Project Goal

To reduce commuter vehicle fuel use by developing programs that are tailored to each worksite and its commuter population.

Brief Description

The Smart Commute Program is a workplace trip reduction program that consults major employers on opportunities to get employees carpooling, biking, walking, telecommuting, and using public transit.

Like many businesses located in rural town centers, Upper Valley businesses have employees who commute incredibly long distances. These commutes are primarily done by employees driving themselves in a personal car without any other occupants.

The goal of the Smart Commute program is to work with businesses to develop strategies that will incentivize employees to change their commuting habits.

The Smart Commute program is based on a systematic Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM) process. This process identifies and uncovers barriers, and then designs ways to motivate new or alternative behaviors. The CBSM process is developed through a multi-step strategy incorporated within the Smart Commute Program. The steps involved are: administering a survey that tracks changes in driver behavior and preferences over time, crafting a Sustainable Commuting Plan, providing consulting time with each employer to discuss the plan and specific strategies for reducing single occupant driver time, and creating a promotional campaign that focuses on gaining commitments from employees to try new ways of getting to work.

King Arthur Flour (KAF), located in the rural community of Norwich VT, embraced the Smart Commute program and its incentive-based approach. KAF worked very closely with Vital Communities to develop a strategic approach to improve the driving habits of its employees. Based on the results from CBSM framework, the specific strategies tailored for KAF were: the creation of a commuter benefit program that included a \$3/day carpool incentive, preferential

carpool parking, an improved bus shelter, an electric vehicle charging station, and an employee bike-share program (employees can check out bikes for short-term use).

The program was developed and implemented through a mixture of funding sources and agencies, including an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG), Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), the High Meadows Fund, and support from employers. Agencies involved in the implantation of the program were Vital Communities with support from the Upper Valley Trails Alliance, Resource Systems Group, and Nomad Communications.



King Arthur Flour electric vehicle charging station

Lessons to Share

The King Arthur Flour Smart Commute Program has been a resounding success. It proved that commuter fuel use reduction programs can achieve significant energy savings in rural areas and small towns.

Many aspects of the program for KAF have proven to be highly effective. One of the most effective aspects of the Smart Commute Program is developing strategies only after thorough initial research on existing conditions of the business have been done. This research must include barriers to commuting options, and then determining what incentives and programs will appeal to employees based on these barriers. Marketing these strategies must reflect the target community.

“If someone does not find environmental messages appealing, don’t offer him a “green” commute benefit.” Aaron Brown, Transportation Project Manager with Vital Communities

In the case of KAF, the incentive of \$3 a day for carpooling, combined with preferential parking for carpool users, proved successful. Within one years’ time, carpooling as a primary travel choice increased almost 23%, while transit and biking/walking increased by 2-3% respectively.

One of the key challenges involved with developing the Smart Commute Program is to not overwhelm the employer being consulted. When analyzing the results of surveys and the sustainable commuting plan, it may seem easy to provide many, many strategies for the business to use. It is important to limit these strategies to the top 3-5 choices that will be highly effective. When too many strategies are discussed, employees may find themselves overwhelmed, and the effectiveness of the program will be diminished.

Another challenge associated with the program is achieving high increases in biking and walking as a primary mode of transportation. This is challenging because of the engrained housing patterns of many rural communities. This was especially true for KAF. Average commute distances are extremely high in New Hampshire and Vermont, with many employees commuting over 30 miles per day. Most people are not willing to bike or walk that far for their commute. These findings show that transportation programs are intimately tied with land use policy.

The success of the Smart Commute Program for businesses has proven to be so successful that Vital Communities developed a program directed toward the town level. This will involve a very similar process as the business program, but will have the benefit of potentially reaching a much broader audience.

For More Information

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Community Served: Upper Valley Region