

TravelChoice – Alameda

Executive Summary

TravelChoice, an innovative program to reduce driving and congestion while promoting healthy physical activity, was conducted in the city of Alameda from April 3 to July 1, 2006 and in Oakland's Fruitvale neighborhood from July 3rd to August 10th, 2006. The program was sponsored by the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency, AC Transit, BART, and the Alameda County Public Health Department and coordinated by TransForm (formerly TALC, the Transportation and Land Use Coalition). The program was funded through the sponsoring agencies, the Air District's Transportation Fund for Clean Air, and the City of Alameda.

TravelChoice connects interested residents with information and incentives to add more walking, bicycle riding, public transit, and carpooling into their daily routines. Outreach in Alameda was conducted by phone and door-to-door over a period of 8 weeks. The program reached more than 4,800 households, including one-on-one discussions with 3,100 of those households. In Fruitvale, over 6 weeks, we reached out to over 3,000 households, including discussions with 2500 of them.

Nelson/Nygaard was hired to conduct project effectiveness surveys using a one-day travel diary. The surveys show that the TravelChoice program surpassed its initial goals in reducing auto trips and increasing transit ridership in Alameda. Drive-alone trips were reduced 14% in the Alameda program. This reduction was primarily due to a 34% increase in transit usage and a 5% increase in carpooling. Despite a multi-pronged effort, an inadequate number of survey responses in the Fruitvale district resulted in inconclusive data.

Introduction

Since 1997, TransForm has been a regional champion for a world-class public transportation systems and pedestrian and bicycle safety and infrastructure improvements. TransForm's more than 100 member and affiliate groups want to make bicycling and walking so safe and convenient, and the health benefits of these activities so widely understood, that the share of trips made by these two modes doubles from 11% to 22% by 2020 in the Bay Area. TransForm also wants to double the ridership on the Bay Area's bus and light rail systems over the next 25 years.

As a result, TransForm made a strategic decision in 2005 to increase our programmatic work educating and encouraging people take transit and to use walking and biking as a means of transportation. After researching programs throughout the country, *TravelChoice* rose to the top as an exceptional way to engage a wide range of people in choosing alternatives to driving, plus decrease congestion, increase physical activity, improve air quality, save

families money, increase fare box revenues for transit agencies, and enhance safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Developing the program

In pursuit of these goals, TransForm spent countless hours researching the myriad methods of promoting non-single occupancy vehicle (SOV) usage. Despite a variety of methodologies, approaches that used a one-to-one educational approach that focused on educating people about all transportation choices available to them consistently was top-rated in success. Programs we investigated included TravelSmart in Australia, Europe and Portland, TravelBlending (Australia and Europe), TravelWise UK, as well as others.

TravelChoice is unique among transportation behavior change programs because it targets all trips made within a household rather than isolating a single trip type (such as commute or school trips). This allows participating households to self-select the particular trips they are interested in changing.

TravelChoice also succeeds because it encourages the use of all environmentally friendly transportation modes rather than one particular mode. Participating households indicate their interest and personally guide the process to receive the information that interests them. Participants receive only the information that they have requested.

Finally, TravelChoice overcomes the hurdles that many mass-marketing campaigns encounter due to the need for people to seek out further information to start using a new travel mode. TravelChoice does this by tailoring the information presented to households and offering individualized bus schedules, local bike classes, and specially created local maps. Personalized trip plans were also created for people who requested them. By offering information that is easily understood and speaks directly to the needs of the household, TravelChoice increases the likelihood of a change in travel behavior.

Building Key Partnerships

Key to creating a successful program was creating a partnership with the major agencies with a stake in the outcome of the project. TransForm worked from the early stages of this project, before funding was sought, to create a project partners committee that included the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency, BART, AC Transit and the Alameda County Public Health Department. These partners were directly involved in helping to create the messaging and design of the overall project, as well as helping with the creation of specific materials for their respective agency.

In both project areas, local bicycle, pedestrian, transportation and community groups were invited to give input and help create location specific materials that included bike routes (beyond just marked lanes), and pedestrian walkways, local trip generators (shops, churches, etc.) that were included on our local area maps. Community meetings were held in both cities in order to collect broad input from a broad spectrum of residents.

Location Choice

Choosing appropriate locations for this Bay Area pilot project was extremely important. The

project partner committee created four criteria to select locations that would allow for an efficient and effective project. These criteria were:

- Transit Choice: Chosen neighborhoods must have existing, highly-usable transit choices.
- Existing Ridership Capacity: Existing transit must have capacity for new riders. Partners believed that it was important to initially focus on areas where new riders were not being encouraged to board bus or BART vehicles that were already crowded, which could create an uncomfortable riding experience for new riders.
- Economic Diversity between the chosen sites: Focusing on two areas gave us the ability to test the effectiveness of this project in different socio-economic communities.
- High walkability and bikability: Like the ridership capacity criteria, it was determined that the ability to comfortably walk and bike as a part of everyday travel was essential. Because TravelChoice educates and encourages residents about all available modes, it was important in this first project that there was a realistic expectation that each mode offered a viable option.

Two neighborhoods were identified as meeting the criteria which also shared some of the same transit options, allowing the project to create efficiencies by producing some outreach materials usable in both areas. These areas were the North Shore/East End neighborhoods in Alameda and the Fruitvale neighborhood in Oakland.

North Shore/East End, Alameda, CA

The North Shore/East End of Alameda is a very walkable and bikable community with flat terrain and a well laid out biking network. Centering around the Park Street Business District, the area offers solid transit options--15-minute bus connections to Fruitvale BART, trunk line service to Downtown Oakland and Berkeley, and an easy bicycle commute of less than a mile to the Fruitvale BART station. The bike station at Fruitvale BART offers Alamedans a perfect opportunity to bike to BART and leave their bike in a safe and secure facility. Alameda's ferry service from both Harbor Bay and Alameda's West end offers a further transportation option for travelers. Built around transit lines, and with limited egress/ingress options, Alamedans have an above average transit ridership (for both the Bay Area and the nation). With the recently revitalized historic Park Street Business District drawing more local residents, Alamedans have many options for using non-automotive travel for their daily errands and shopping.

Census data for North Shore/East End Alameda:

- 29% households w/ children under 18
- 45% homeownership
- 67% employment of people over 16
- 26% commute by transit/bike/walk
- Median household income \$55,593
- 35% people of color

- 1.6 vehicles per household

Language breakdown

- Confident English Speakers – 86%
- Tagalog – 3%
- Spanish – 3%
- Chinese – 3%
- Other – 5%

Fruitvale, Oakland, CA

The vibrant Fruitvale neighborhood lies in the heart of an ethnically and culturally diverse community which is anchored by a BART station and has excellent transit service running along 14th Street/International Blvd (local and limited service), Foothill Blvd and cross-town connections to BART and shopping areas. The flat terrain facilities make walking or biking to transit and shopping easy. The Fruitvale bike station offers residents the additional convenience of secure valet bike parking at BART. The abundance of shopping and services allows transit, biking and walking to be used as a part of everyday errands and shopping. Transit and walking are used frequently in the area (approx. 30% of all commutes).

Census data for Fruitvale, Oakland:

- 56% households w children under 18
- 28% homeownership
- 54% employment
- 30% commute by transit/bike/walk
- Median household income \$32,881
- 71% people of color
- 1.3 vehicles per household

Language breakdown

- Confident English Speakers – 53%
- Spanish – 35%
- Chinese – 3%
- Tagalog – 3%
- Other – 6%

With a low car-ownership rate and low-income population, Fruitvale had a lower occurrence of “choice-riders.” Nearly half the population do not consider themselves confident English speakers. The project partners, however, agreed that it was important to choose this neighborhood in order to gauge the effectiveness of the TravelChoice model in a setting that had not been as well studied in other regions and countries.

Project Funding

Major project funding for TravelChoice was provided by the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District’s Transportation Fund for Clean Air. Funding in-kind services and materials were received from all project

partners, as well as the City of Alameda, City of Oakland and the San Francisco Bay Area Water Transit Authority.

Pre-project Surveying

Nelson | Nygaard Consulting was hired to implement an independent project effectiveness evaluation in both Alameda and Fruitvale. The methodology involved creating a simple, single-day travel diary for up to four people in a household. This travel diary was sent to households in the project area, and responding households were divided into a control group and an outreach group. The control group was removed from our database, and was not contacted during the TravelChoice Project

Alameda

In Alameda, a total of 3,625 “Before” surveys were sent to households. Nelson|Nygaard made follow-up calls to over 70% of the Alameda households in order to achieve a response rate with an acceptable confidence rate. Responses were returned from 579 people.

Fruitvale

In Fruitvale, a total of 3,470 “Before” surveys were sent to households. Again, Nelson|Nygaard made follow-up calls, in English and Spanish, to over 70% of the Fruitvale households reminding people to send back the survey. Less than 100 surveys were returned. The sample was too small to give a statistically significant sample. Bi-lingual canvassers were hired to work at the Cinco de Mayo festival canvassing local residents with the travel diary. Unfortunately, this outreach took place in the same time period as the 2006 pro-immigration marches and concerns. Since the outreach workers had to ask for name, address and phone number, the response rate was extremely low. In-neighborhood canvassing was conducted through June, with canvassers going door-to-door, completing travel diaries to get an even larger number of responses.

By the end of June, Nelson|Nygaard had received “Before” surveys from 555 households.

Pre-Project Set up

Two months before TravelChoice was launched, community meetings were held in both Fruitvale and Alameda to raise awareness of the coming program with key stakeholder groups, and to gather local information about transportation choices and hurdles. This information helped guide the creation of materials.

Three weeks before outreach began, posters announcing the project, were put up in the area in high-visibility locations. These locations included stores, coffee shops, community groups, libraries and city agencies, etc. Press releases were sent to local papers announcing the upcoming project. The week before outreach began, TravelChoice received front page coverage in the Alameda Journal.

Before outreach began, letters from high-profile officials in Alameda (City Manager Debra Kurita) and Fruitvale (City Administrator Deborah Edgerly) were sent to residents in the project area to announce the program and let residents know they would be contacted.

Material Creation

The materials are key to the success of TravelChoice. Because so much transit information is created for a broad market, it often contains too much information, creating confusion among new users. In order to present project-specific, detailed transportation information that spoke directly to participants, TravelChoice created or procured 137 different informational pieces and incentives.

Innovative pieces included wallet-sized schedules, about the size of a credit card, for each AC Transit route that provides service within the project area. These schedules provided information for the 3 closest stops to the house and included typical travel times to key destinations.

Unique Fruitvale BART station guides were created, highlighting transit connections at the Fruitvale BART station, as well as bike parking, and BART schedules. The Fruitvale Bike Station also had it's own stand alone brochure that explained the benefits of the valet parking service.

Project specific biking maps were created that highlighted on-road bike routes, as well as low-traffic streets that would serve nervous riders. Walking routes and key shopping opportunities were also highlighted in order to help encourage shopping on-foot.

Information Requests by Mode/Type (percent of households requesting information)

	Alameda	Fruitvale
Bicycle	78%	69%
AC Transit	73%	78%
Walking	73%	73%
BART	61%	71%
Alameda Ferries	61%	--
General Transportation Info	44%	47%
Local Area Map	31%	32%
Rideshare / Carpool	21%	25%
Personalized Trip Plan	19%	11%
Paratransit	17%	19%

Materials were made available in English and Spanish, as were Fruitvale request sheets. Timetables were not produced in Spanish.

Outreach

Beginning in April, outreach personnel began telephone outreach in Alameda. Residents were offered incentives from local businesses to take time on the phone discussing their current transportation usage as well as identify trips that they would be willing to consider changing. At the end of the conversation, each household was offered the opportunity to

request information in order to help them make the changes that they identified interest in making. Households that were already using transportation modes that are environmentally friendly were sent incentives to reinforce their behaviors, these included single ride transit passes and discounts at local bike shops.

Tactical Telesolutions (TTS) was hired to conduct the telephone outreach. TTS has experience working with non-profit groups such as AIDSWalk as well as Fortune 500 corporations. Callers were trained by TravelChoice staff. The TravelChoice methodology is not the same as fundraising and corporate sales because it is important that households are not pressured to request information. Instead, outreach staff should give them the opportunity to opt-in to the program and generate interest. A fine balance must be achieved in order to keep people on the line for a discussion in the midst of their busy days.

Door-to-door outreach began at the end of April, once the phone outreach slowed down as the available phone lists were exhausted. A team of 18 community canvassers was used to cover the evenings and weekend outreach times. The methodology was much the same as on the phone: give people the opportunity to discuss their travel behavior and assist them in requesting information that would help them make that change. Outreach took place on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings and all day on Saturdays and Sundays.

Material Delivery

All of the material request forms collected nightly and via mail were entered into a database which was then used to track requests and generate reports from which each individual packet of information was created. The project area was divided into quadrants. Alameda had four while Fruitvale had 13. Our experience in Alameda taught us to use smaller quadrants and assign all of our outreach personnel to one or two quadrants on a given night which helped to consolidate deliveries in the area.

TravelChoice employed a full-time mailroom position and branded, canvass bags were packed with the personalized information requests received from each household. Once packed, these bags were delivered by bicycling delivery people, often working in tandem with one or two trailers. Face-to-face deliveries were attempted, and if no one was home bags were returned to the office and attempts were made a second time before being left at the front door.

Follow-up and Redelivery

Households received follow-up phone calls from TravelChoice outreach staff following the delivery of their materials. After confirming the receipt of all materials, the outreach staff made themselves available to answer questions, send further information and encourage each household to take the next step and act on the information that they had received. In many cases, people had already tried out alternative travel modes.

When necessary, bags were redelivered, additional information was sent to households, and in some cases, high-value bus or BART tickets were sent out to help encourage households

that were not currently using the transit system but were interested in doing so with reservations.

Post-Project Surveys

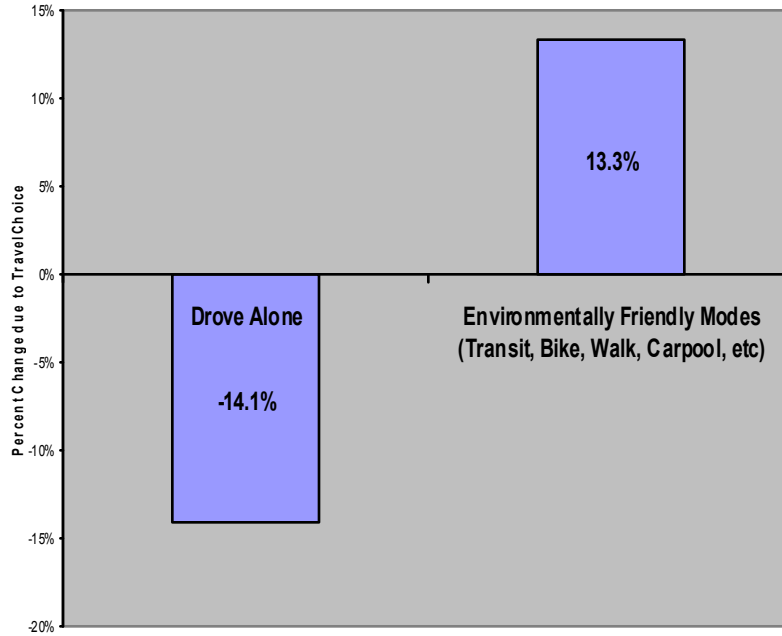
After the TravelChoice outreach had been completed, households in Alameda and Fruitvale who responded to the first survey were sent a second travel diary. This diary was used to measure the actual change in travel behavior. The control group received only the pre- and post-survey work and were not contacted as a part of the TravelChoice outreach. Data from the control group was used to account for external factors affecting travel patterns, such as weather and changing gas prices.

Alameda

For the post-project survey collection, a process similar to the pre-project survey was used. At the end, Nelson Nygaard received both pre-project and post-project surveys from 359 people.

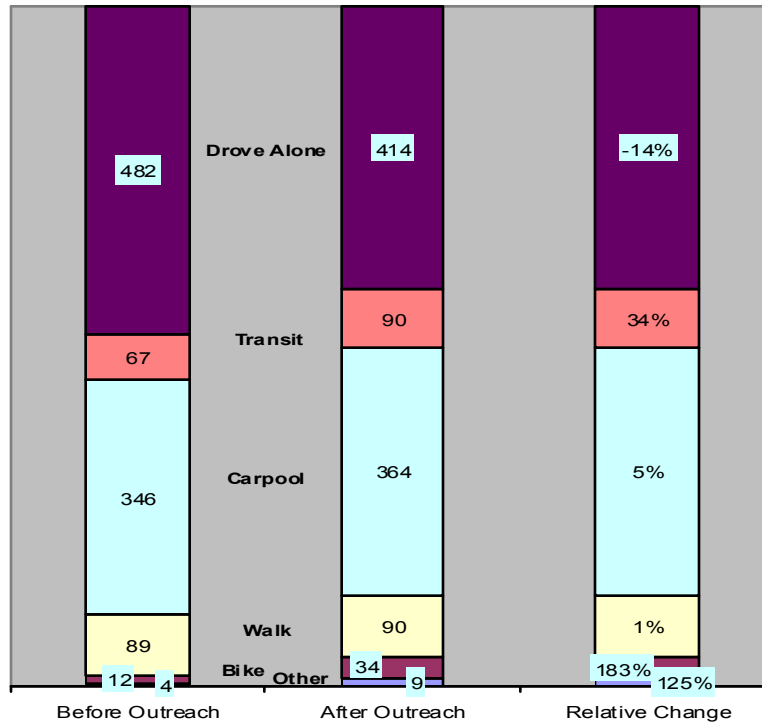
The results of post-project travel surveys, conducted by Nelson Nygaard one month after the outreach was completed, surpassed initial projections when compared with the pre-project travel surveys (also conducted by Nelson Nygaard). Drive-alone trips were reduced more than 14% (found to be statistically valid) due to an increase of more than 13% in the use of non-congesting, environmentally friendly modes (public transit, biking, walking, carpooling, etc.).

TravelChoice – Alameda Behavior Shift



TravelChoice – Number of Trips by Mode

Results standardized to show change per 1000 trips



These results were within the upper range of similar projects conducted in Australia, Europe, and the U.S. Based on longer-term studies in these project areas, it is expected that this attitude and behavior change will remain relatively constant for 3 years.

Fruitvale

Post-project surveys were mailed to all households who returned the pre-project survey, with incentive offers of gift certificates for those returned within 14 days. Nelson|Nygaard made follow-up calls to all households, and encouraged them to fill out the surveys over the phone or return them by mail. In addition, bi-lingual surveyors went door-to-door to obtain more responses. After three months of telephone and in-neighborhood outreach, post-project surveys were received from only 158 households.

The tiny sample size yielded inconclusive data.

This experience raises important issues to consider for future projects. While some of the funding for this particular project was based specifically on reducing car travel, there are additional benefits for communities beyond decreases in automobile trips. Though Fruitvale has a low car-ownership rate, there was a lot of interest in receiving transit, bike and walking information. Based on these requests, we would expect some mode-shift benefit. This significant number of requests for information indicates a latent need for targeted information regarding transportation options.

Further study of survey outreach techniques in low-income and immigrant communities will need to be done before the results of a second TravelChoice project can be appropriately evaluated on its success of encouraging mode-shifts in low-income, low-car ownership, high transit dependency areas.