



2009 Commuter Challenge Survey Report

Introduction

The Commuter Challenge is a month-long competition in May between Ann Arbor Area organizations that encourages individuals to use sustainable transportation to get to work. Organizations compete against one another and log sustainable commutes online on the getDowntown website (www.getdowntown.org). Sustainable commutes include busing, biking, walking, carpooling, moped/motorcycling and telecommuting. Every participant that does at least one sustainable commute receives an Ice Cream Coupon to the Washtenaw Dairy. Organizations win the Challenge if they have the highest number of Commuter Challenge participants in their size category. Organizations win prizes such as a pizza party, chocolate treats, movie tickets and more. The getDowntown Program has been conducting the Commuter Challenge since 2005. Since the getDowntown Program is focused on serving downtown Ann Arbor employees and employers, most of the marketing and promotions efforts for the Challenge center around downtown Ann Arbor. However, the Commuter Challenge is open to all employers outside of downtown as well as the University of Michigan. As a result, Commuter Challenge participants work at employers both inside and outside of downtown Ann Arbor as well as at the University of Michigan.

In addition to the online Challenge, the getDowntown Program organized events throughout the month of May including Bike to Work Day, fitness walks, an Awards Ceremony and more. This year, every week during the Commuter Challenge focused on a particular mode of transportation including walking, biking, busing, carpooling and Zipcar. The getDowntown Program also recruited Ambassadors to help promote the Commuter Challenge at their worksites and throughout the community. To learn more about the Commuter Challenge, please visit <http://www.getdowntown.org/programs/commuter> or check out our blog at <http://blog.getdowntown.org/tag/curb-your-car-month/>.

About the getDowntown Program

The getDowntown program (www.getdowntown.org) was established in 1999 to reduce traffic congestion and parking stress in downtown Ann Arbor by promoting transportation options for downtown employees. The getDowntown program promotes transit, bicycling, walking, telecommuting, carpools and vanpools and Zipcars and encourages downtown employees to choose an alternative to single-passenger auto commuting. Partners in getDowntown include the Ann Arbor Area Chamber of Commerce, Ann Arbor Transit Authority, the Downtown Development Authority, and the City of Ann Arbor. Learn more about the getDowntown Program at www.getdowntown.org/about.

Commuter Challenge Participation

Before delving into the Commuter Challenge Follow-Up Survey results, we would like to give you an idea of the participation levels of the Commuter Challenge for the last two years.

Number of organizations participating in the Commuter Challenge

- 2008: 117
- 2009: 139

Number of people participating in the Commuter Challenge (logged at least 1 sustainable commute)

- 2008: 1,482
- 2009: 1,806

Commuter Challenge Survey Results

At the end of the Commuter Challenge (around the first week in June), the getDowntown Program emailed a follow-up survey to all Commuter Challenge participants. The survey is intended to collect feedback from participants about the Challenge and also to gauge the success of the Challenge. The following report outlines the results of the 2009 Commuter Challenge Follow-Up Survey and compares these results to the 2008 Follow-Up Survey (where applicable). Notes are given to provide any additional insight about survey results.

Commuter Challenge Survey Respondents

Year	2008	2009
# of Respondents	324	685
% of all Commuter Challenge Participants	22%	38%

Participants by Location (2009)

Location	Downtown Ann Arbor (Downtown)	Affiliated with the University of Michigan (UM)	Not Downtown Not UM (Not DT Not UM)	Other
Percentage of respondents	48%	28%	22%	2%

Notes: It is not surprising that many of the Survey respondents are from downtown Ann Arbor since that is where the Commuter Challenge is most heavily marketed because the getDowntown focuses on the downtown.

How do you get to work on most days? (2009)

Answer Options	All	Downtown	UM	Not DT Not UM
Drive alone	41.2%	40.2%	23.4%	55.0%
Walk	22.2%	28.5%	29.0%	7.3%
Bus	21.8%	23.5%	38.6%	6.3%
Bike	21.3%	19.8%	24.1%	20.4%
Park at a Park and Ride and take the bus	2.4%	1.2%	7.6%	0.5%
Carpool or Vanpool	18.5%	18.9%	17.9%	19.4%
Moped or Motorcycle	1.5%	0.6%	2.1%	2.1%
Telecommute	1.9%	1.2%	0.7%	3.7%
Other (please specify)	2.4%	2.2%	2.8%	1.0%

Notes: Since the overall commuting statistics for Ann Arbor and downtown Ann Arbor put the drive-alone rate at about 58-60% of all employees, the demographics of Survey respondents are definitely weighted towards people who are using a sustainable commute, which is not surprising. Also interesting is that most of the respondents from the University of Michigan are not driving alone. Is this because most people at UM are not driving alone or because the Challenge participants at the UM were mostly people who already used a sustainable commute? It is also not surprising to see that people who work outside of downtown had the highest drive alone rate, since sustainable commuting options are more limited outside of downtown.

How did you hear about the Commuter Challenge? Select all that apply.

Answer Options	2008 All	2009 All	2009 Downtown	2009 UM	2009 Not DT Not UM
I participated last year so I already knew about it	n/a	46.2%	48.3%	33.8%	51.3%
A co-worker	70.8%	51.4%	51.4%	60.7%	46.1%
A Commuter Challenge Ambassador	16.3%	16.4%	18.0%	15.9%	15.2%
An email from the getDowntown Program	20.3%	18.8%	25.4%	13.8%	12.6%
A postcard about the Commuter Challenge	2.0%	1.9%	2.8%	0.7%	1.6%
The getDowntown website, blog, Facebook Group or Twitter feed.	7.1%	2.1%	2.8%	2.1%	1.0%
The Ann Arbor Chamber of Commerce's Morning Edition	n/a	0.9%	1.5%	0.7%	0.0%
A print ad in a publication such as the Ann Arbor Business Review, Ann Arbor Observer, etc.	3.1%	1.5%	2.2%	0.7%	1.0%
An article in the Business Review or Ann Arbor News	n/a	0.6%	0.9%	0.0%	0.5%
Other (please specify)	11.0%	6.2%	5.0%	4.8%	8.9%

Notes: Clearly the best way to reach people about the Challenge is through co-workers. There are also a lot of people who participate in the Challenge who have participated in the past. The getDowntown Program would like to find more ways to engage new people in participating in the Challenge.

What motivated you to participate in the Commuter Challenge? (select all that apply) (2009)

Answer Options	ALL	Downtown Ann Arbor	UM	Not DT Not UM
I participated last year	41.3%	42.1%	33.8%	44.5%
The possibility of winning a prize	26.5%	30.7%	25.5%	19.9%
The free ice cream coupon	21.2%	24.1%	18.6%	16.8%
My co-worker asked me to do it	32.1%	30.7%	42.8%	25.7%
Sounded like fun	39.7%	39.0%	40.7%	39.3%
Wanted to try getting to work using sustainable transportation	39.7%	42.1%	31.7%	40.8%
Other (please specify)	17.8%	16.4%	17.2%	19.4%

Notes: It's interesting to see that people were motivated by many different factors and that many people were motivated to participate because they wanted to try getting to work using sustainable transportation. Also interesting to see that more downtown workers were motivated by wanting to try sustainable transportation than in other locations.

Before the Commuter Challenge, how often did you use sustainable transportation (e.g. walking, biking, busing, carpooling/vanpooling, telecommuting, motorcycle/moped, etc) to get to work?

Answer Options	2008	2009 All	2009 Downtown	2009 UM	2009 Not DT Not UM
Never	8.5%	5.5%	5.3%	2.8%	8.4%
Rarely (fewer than 1 time a month)	15.3%	11.7%	13.6%	7.6%	11.0%
Sometimes (1 to 5 times a month)	18.3%	14.5%	14.9%	4.8%	20.4%
Occasionally (once a week)	7.1%	8.0%	8.4%	4.1%	10.5%
Often (more than one time a week)	50.8%	48.7%	47.7%	65.5%	39.3%
Other (please specify)	8%	11.6%	10.2%	15.2%	10.5%

Notes: Most of the "other" responses for this question were "Every Day".

Did the Commuter Challenge change your commuting behavior in any way?

Answer Options	2008	2009 All	2009 UM	2009 Downtown	2009 Not DT Not UM	2009 Never or rarely use sustainable transportation
Yes	52.8%	50.1%	38.6%	52.9%	53.4%	68.3%
No	47.2%	49.9%	61.4%	47.1%	46.6%	31.7%

Notes: Compared to 2008, less people overall said the Commuter Challenge changed their commuting behavior in 2009. However, some of this is because some of the respondents had their behavior changed in 2008 so it was still changed in 2009 and not changed by the 2009 Commuter Challenge. However, it is also interesting to note how many more downtown respondents said the Commuter Challenge changed their commuting behavior compared to all respondents and UM respondents. Another interesting statistic is that a much larger percentage of people who never or rarely used sustainable transportation before the Challenge had their behavior changed by the Challenge.

In addition to the online Commuter Challenge, the getDowntown Program provided many other events throughout the month of May such as a Transit Movie Night, Bike to Work Day, Downtown Fitness Walks and more. Did you know about these events? (2009)

Answer Options	All	Downtown	UM	Not DT Not UM
Yes	62.3%	66.0%	57.0%	59.9%
No	37.7%	34.0%	43.0%	40.1%

Notes: People seem to know about the Commuter Challenge events, with more downtown respondents knowing about the events that other respondents.

Did you attend any of the Commuter Challenge events?

Answer Options	All	Downtown	UM	Not DT Not UM
Yes	16.6%	21.8%	13.6%	10.7%
No	83.4%	78.2%	86.4%	89.3%

Notes: Even though people knew about the events, most didn't attend them.

Why didn't you attend a Commuter Challenge event?

Answer Options	All	Downtown	UM	Not DT Not UM
Didn't know there were events	0.9%	0.6%	0.0%	2.0%
Too busy	53.4%	57.8%	55.7%	48.0%
Not at a time I could attend	46.9%	43.5%	50.0%	50.0%
Not interested in any of the events	15.8%	19.3%	15.7%	11.0%
Other (please specify)	15.8%	12.4%	17.1%	19.0%

Notes: These responses represent a challenge for the getDowntown Program in terms of figuring out the best events for the Commuter Challenge that will work for most individuals.

Open-ended Responses Themes: Downtown Workers

The getDowntown Program asked a number of open-ended questions as part of the Commuter Challenge Follow-Up Survey. Here is a summary of some of the themes from the open-ended responses of respondents who indicated that they work in downtown Ann Arbor. We choose to highlight the themes of downtown workers since these are the workers served primarily by the getDowntown Program.

General Themes of Downtown Workers: Why didn't the Commuter Challenge change your commuting behavior?

Already doing it
Live so close that sustainable commuting just makes sense
Lack of options from where I live
Bus service not convenient enough
Takes too long using sustainable options
Other reasons such as childcare, scheduling, need to run errands, etc.

Notes: The comments above are quite common and show how importance convenience and time are for people when it comes to their commute.

2009 General Themes of Downtown Workers: How did the Commuter Challenge Change your commuting behavior?

Put a spotlight on sustainable commuting/increased awareness which made people more inclined to try a sustainable commute
Tried sustainable transportation that they would not normally try. Either usually do one type of sustainable commute (like busing or biking) and tried something else or tried a sustainable commute because of the Challenge
Made more of an effort this month to try a sustainable commute, even if it was not as easy as driving.
Helps people find carpooling partners and get their bikes out of the garage
Provided that final nudge to actually get someone to try something they'd been waiting to do.
Gets people to realize the benefits of sustainable commuting
Found that using sustainable transportation is not as hard as it seems
Gave structure to trying sustainable transportation with a goal and prizes etc, which motivated people to participate
Increased the sustainable commuting of people who already did it.
Made people more aware of their options
Made some people think about sustainable commuting during other times than just to and from work
Many people said the Commuter Challenge 2008 actually changed their behavior, not this one, but they are clearly keeping it up since they gave this response to this survey a year later

Notes: Many of the comments above clearly show that the Commuter Challenge is working. The Challenge does seem to provide that extra incentive to get people to try sustainable commuting and to get those who are already doing a sustainable commute to try something new.

2009 General Themes of Downtown Workers: What do you think would motivate you to continue to use sustainable transportation in the coming months?

Higher gas prices
Express buses, later bus schedules, live tracking of buses, faster connection to Park and Ride Lots, more frequent buses
Better bike paths at various locations
Reminders and activities throughout the year
Nice Weather (lots of people said this)
Make it a longer, ongoing competition
Prizes
Better maintained sidewalks
Secure places to park bikes both downtown and outside of downtown
Want to keep the commuting log year 'round
Train/express bus (especially from Northeast side of town (Plymouth,etc))

Notes: Many of these comments represent factors beyond the control of the getDowntown Program. There were also many comments related to infrastructure issues.

2009 General Themes of Downtown Workers: What did you like most about the Challenge?

Competition
Camaraderie/Group participation
Prizes (Ice Cream Coupons, Sweetwater's Coffee giftcards)
The fact that it raises awareness around sustainable commuting
Stats, logging miles, points
Fun
Easy
Emails
Theme Weeks

Notes: Having the theme weeks this year seemed to be positively received. A lot of the other responses shed light on why the Challenge is so effective. It has a lot of elements that are enticing to people.

2009 General Themes of Downtown Workers: What did you like least about the Challenge?

Nothing (lots said this)
Too short (lots said this)
Too many emails (lots of people said this)
Trying to get others to do it as well
Forgot to log commutes
Need better user interface for website, could be confusing
Didn't win anything
Too complicated
Couldn't make it too events
Miles don't count in the computations
Bad weather/rain

Notes: The difficulty with sending emails during the Challenge (we sent one a week) is that if we don't send a lot of emails, the Challenge could drop off the radar screen for many people. But sending too many emails is also annoying to people. We need to find a middle ground.

2009 General Themes of Downtown Workers: What could be done to improve the Challenge?

Make things clearer
More prizes
More visibility/more publicity
Fine the way it is
Daily analysis of changes in the ranks. Like ongoing sports writing.
Allow people to sign up as individuals as well
Better prizes for people who meet their goal
More community events and kick off meetings?
More events!

Notes: Many of these comments highlight the difficulty of people wanting events but it being hard to have an event that meets the needs of a large portion of employees.

2009 General Themes of Downtown Workers: What did you like best about the events you attended? What could be improved?

For Bike to Work Day: More food, a greeter telling people what was up, fresh fruit, seemed disorganized.
End of day fitness walks?
PA System for all events
Movie showing seemed to be interesting to people, just not at a time they could attend
Need to work on advertising events

2009 General Themes of Downtown Workers: What events would you like to see added to the Commuter Challenge? What events would you like to see throughout the year?

More Bike to Work Events, something in the fall or winter
Make it longer, once a month events
Downtown Fitness Walks were well received

2009 General Themes of Downtown Workers: What would make it easier for you or your co-workers to try walking, biking, busing, or carpooling etc. to work?

More frequent bus service (also to Park and Ride lots), more bus stops by people's homes, more direct bus routes for a faster connection
Incentives, information, etc.
Better bike lanes, safe bike racks
More information and posters where people park their cars.
Easy to use website with carpooling info
15 min buses
Ypsi to Ann Arbor Express Bus
Showers and places to change for cyclists
Longer buses on nights and weekends
More Park and Ride Locations
Later buses, especially from A2 to Ypsi

2009 General Themes of Downtown Workers: Interesting Stuff

Lots of nice comments about the Ann Arbor Bike Choir and Bike to Work Day
Lot's of stories of friendship and community around using sustainable transportation.
It's clear that many see the Challenge as a Team-Building exercise

Conclusions

While the responses to the getDowntown Commuter Challenge Follow-Up Survey only represent a portion of those participating in the Challenge, these responses to highlight what works and what can be improved about the Commuter Challenge. In general, the Commuter Challenge seems to do a good job encouraging people to try sustainable modes of transportation and clearly has lasting effects after the month of May. At the same time, participants in the Challenge do still tend to be people who are already using sustainable transportation. In the future, the getDowntown Program hopes to find more and better ways to engage more people who are new to sustainable transportation with the Commuter Challenge.

From the open-ended comments, it is also evident that many respondents feel that larger infrastructure issues (need for more frequent bus service, better bike paths, etc.) make it harder for them to use sustainable transportation. The getDowntown Program will continue to advocate for better infrastructure on behalf of downtown workers in order to make it easier for them to use sustainable transportation. However, the getDowntown Program also understands that there are some environmental factors mentioned in the survey (such as the weather and gas prices) that are beyond the control of our program.

Many respondents indicated that they'd like to see more information and events throughout the year related to sustainable transportation. The getDowntown Program is working to develop marketing and promotion programs that reach beyond the scope of the Commuter Challenge. It is our hope that we can continue some of the momentum started by the Challenge for the rest of the year by finding the right ways to engage commuters.

While the Commuter Challenge is not the only way to encourage commuters to try sustainable transportation to get to work, it represents an extremely effective tool to accomplish this goal. The getDowntown Program will continue to work to improve the Commuter Challenge and also use the results of the Commuter Challenge Follow-Up Survey to improve the getDowntown Program in general.