

Via2G Microtransit Pilot Evaluation

Project 2002
May 2021

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Driving alone to work has benefits, but also incurs costs for individuals, their employers, and society as a whole. Incentivizing commuters to shift from driving alone to shared or pooled transportation options may yield potential benefits to:

- **society** with decreased congestion and emissions;
- **commuters** by saving fuel and parking costs, allowing for multi-tasking during commuting, and reducing pressures to own a car; and
- **employers** by reducing demands for costly parking infrastructure, and potentially kindling relationships between commuters sharing a ride.

One mode of pooled transportation is microtransit, which provides a flexible shared van service. Limited evaluation of employer-sponsored on-demand microtransit programs, however, curbs our understanding of the outcomes, successes, and/or challenges of such programs.

In fall 2019, Google partnered with Via to launch

an on-demand microtransit called Via2G. The pilot provided employees with free travel to/from two of its offices in suburban, congested Silicon Valley. The pilot operated between January 1 and March 5, 2020 before it was paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Via2G services were rolled out gradually across seven zones and available free to employees from 7am to 10am and from 4pm to 7pm Monday through Friday. During pilot hours, users could request a ride between either campus or anywhere in the pilot zone. All rides could be shared with other travelers and, in some cases, riders were required to walk short distances to be picked up.

This brief overviews key performance metrics from the pilot and offers recommendations to future employer-based microtransit programs aimed at reducing solo driving.

Study Methods

This study uses two data sources: first, survey data about Google employee commute patterns; and second, Via trip

data for each trip taken during the first three months of the pilot (January 1–March 5, 2020). In the following section, we describe primary performance metrics from the Via2G pilot.

The Via2G pilot grew in popularity over time; it complemented rather than substituted peoples' existing commute modes.

Findings

The large majority (92%) of surveyed employees (n=2,306) expressed interest in participating in the Via2G pilot. While the staged pilot rollout and COVID-19 pandemic meant that not all interested employees were able to participate in the program, 895 employees requested a Via2G trip and 595 completed at least one trip. In sum, 595 employees completed 7,537 rides between January 1 and March 5, 2020. The average trip distance was 3.4 miles, average wait time about 11 minutes, and average trip duration was 18 minutes.

While the pilot was cut short due to COVID-19, it grew steadily during operation. The average number of riders per day grew from 79 riders in January to 123 and 121 riders per day in February and March, respectively.

Of trip requests, 8,636 (87.8%) resulted in a ride offer. Most unfulfilled requests were outside of pilot operating times; other unmet ride requests were likely because demand exceeded supply when the requests were made.

Prior to the Via2G pilot program, two-thirds (66%) of survey respondents drove to work at least one day per week, while a plurality (42%) drove five days per week. Compared to employees who did not participate in the pilot, pilot users were more likely to take shared ride-hail (14 vs 22 percent) or the Google Bus (24 vs 30 percent) at least once a week prior to the pilot.

Employees who completed at least one trip took 12 trips (or about 2.5 trips per week) on average. The majority of riders were recurring Via2G users: 72% (n=646/895) of users requested at least two Via2G trips. Of those who requested at least two trips, 74% (n=481/646) actually completed two or more rides. Recurring Via2G users were less likely to complete errands on

the commute and a lower share had a car available for commuting compared to all surveyed Google employees.

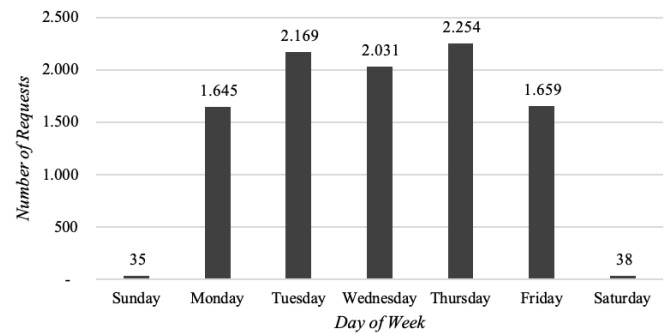


Figure 1. Number of requests by day of the week

Policy/Practice Recommendations

Findings suggest that future studies and pilots at Google or other central employment centers should:

- Provide more flexible service hours adjusted to context-specific traveler needs;
- Seek to better understand the travel needs of employees who trip chain on their commutes;
- Examine ways to minimize deadheading and increase the vehicle occupancy; and
- Monitor patterns and create context-sensitive performance indicators that can evaluate shifting priorities for commuting in a post-pandemic world.

About the Authors

Anne Brown is an Assistant Professor at the University of Oregon and researches issues of transportation equity, shared mobility, and travel behavior.

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To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2002



MTI is a University Transportation Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology and by Caltrans. The Institute is located within San José State University's Lucas Graduate School of Business.