



VDOT STATEWIDE PARK & RIDE PROJECT

MARKETING PLAN

February 11, 2013

Objective of Document:

This document sets forth a plan to market and “promote” Park & Ride (P&R) in Virginia. It is designed around a series of tactics to bring about the increased use of P&R, to launch VDOT’s P&R program and, specifically, to “announce” and generate usage of VDOT’s new P&R website. The strategic positioning for P&R is based on this premise: Marketing of P&R alone is not sufficient. Rather, marketing of P&R must be integrated with marketing of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) and transit.

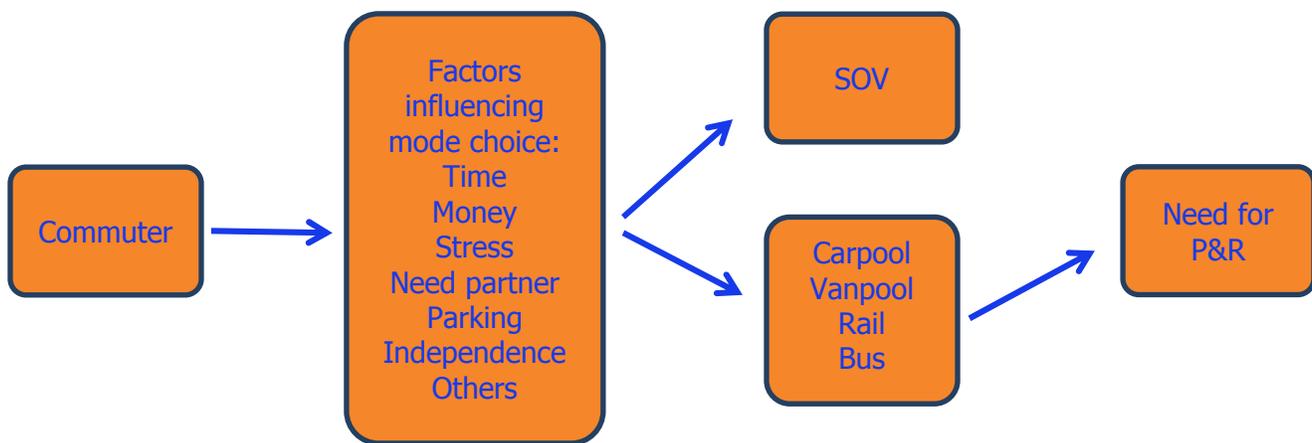
Introduction

Fundamental to VDOT’s statewide Park & Ride study is an inherent belief in the importance of Park & Ride. VDOT recognizes that P&R is an essential component of a successful transportation plan and for the adoption of alternate or non-Single Occupant Vehicle modes (SOV). Consequently, it will be important to “inform” Virginians about the Park & Ride program and the resources available to them, particularly the new P&R website. In this era of strict budgetary stewardship, however, VDOT’s marketing funds for P&R are limited. Creativity and ingenuity are the watchwords for marketing P&R.

Fortunately, the foundation for a successful marketing plan for Park & Ride already exists in the form of Virginia’s investment in TDM and transit programs and infrastructure, such as HOV lanes, Park & Ride lots, ridematching services, commuter outreach marketing, guaranteed ride home services, and so forth. To the extent possible, VDOT will need to marshal the TDM-related resources of Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), the state’s rideshare agencies, transit agencies, and corporate partners providing commuter programs and services to educate and inform citizens about P&R and encourage them to use P&R lots. This can be done with minimal budgetary outlay by VDOT working to include P&R as part of the larger marketing strategies of DRPT, rideshare agencies, transit agencies and companies providing commuter services and support.

This marketing plan is crafted upon the fundamental recognition of the relationship between Park & Ride and TDM/transit. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, growth of the usage of P&R lots is dependent upon growth of usage of alternate modes: carpooling, vanpooling, rail, and bus. Commuters who use these modes have a need for P&R. Commuters who use SOVs do not need P&R lots.

Figure 1: Relationship between TDM/Transit and Need for Park & Ride



Overall Marketing Strategy

The marketing plan for Virginia’s Park & Ride lots leverages the existing TDM and transit marketing infrastructure and takes advantage of the commuter assistance programs and transit agencies to the extent possible. These programs and agencies are already promoting Park & Ride facilities as part of their ongoing marketing activities. The new state-of-the-art P&R web tool provides the opportunity for VDOT to further leverage these activities to take advantage of a successful system already in place and engage others in the transportation sector in Virginia, such as VDOT District Offices and DRPT, to work to promote and advance Park & Ride in Virginia. These efforts can be reinforced by the use of certain low cost communications, such as social media.

The marketing plan for Virginia’s Park & Ride Program incorporates these fundamental ideas:

- Build excitement and buy-in for P&R, VDOT’s P&R program, and the new website among those managing and facilitating the adoption of transit and TDM
- Generate awareness, understanding, interest, and support for the program among personnel at VDOT’s Central Office and in the District Offices

- Increase support for P&R from DRPT
- Release the updated website so that transportation professionals in Virginia who interact with the public are aware of the new website, understand it and can facilitate its usage
- To the extent possible with limited budget, take the message of P&R, TDM and transit to the public
- Emphasize the new website, **while making the “search for a lot” function of the website available on the websites of rideshare agencies.** In this way, commuters will not have to leave the website of the rideshare agency to find a lot. Additionally, this will facilitate having one location wherein P&R data are housed and maintained.

Strategy Rationale

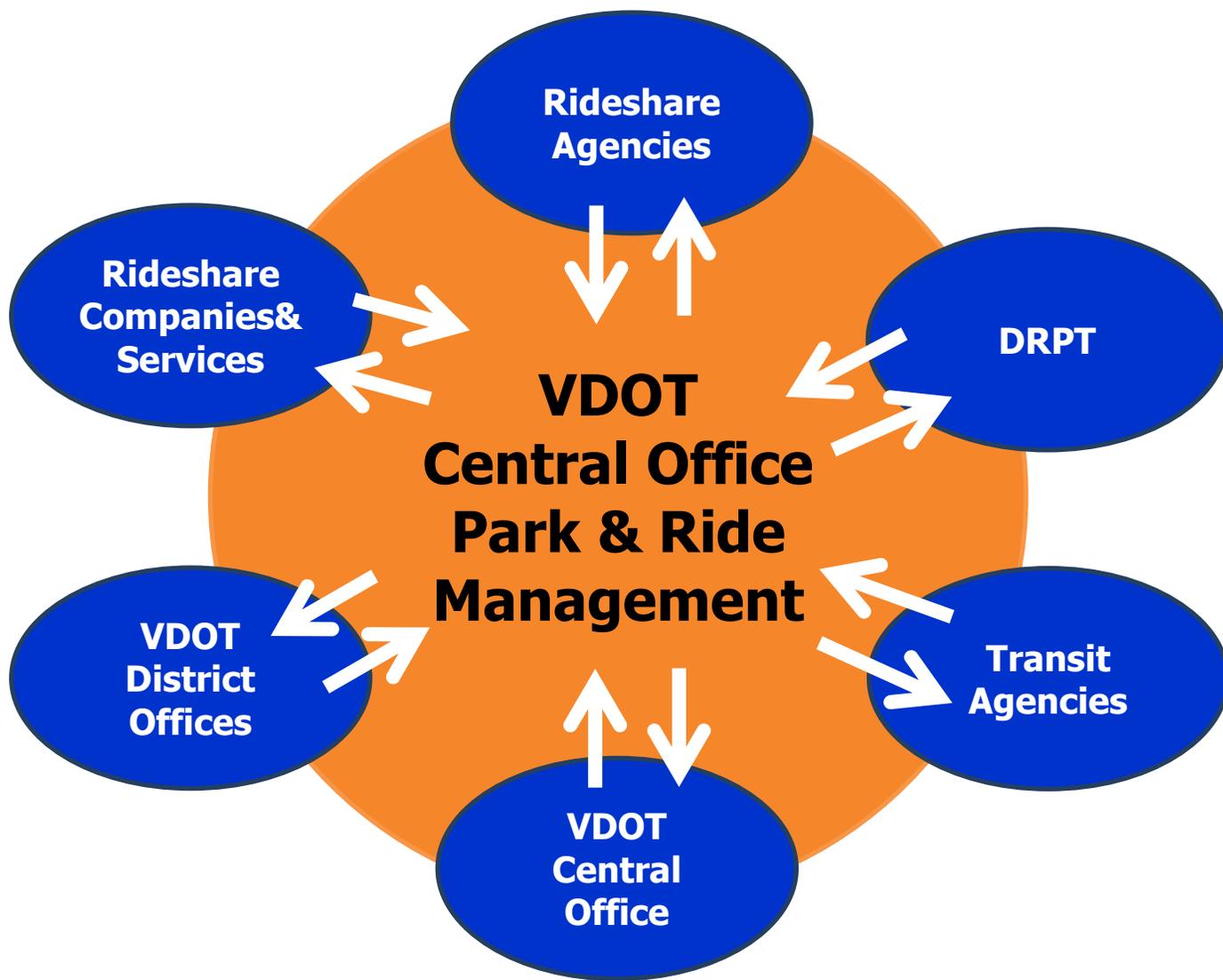
The initial key message should focus on sharing the ride and the associated benefits of these alternate transportation modes such as cost savings, time savings, and so forth rather than the marketing of Park & Ride directly. Currently, commuter assistance programs and transit marketing promote the use of alternate modes or ridesharing. Marketing P&R specifically would confuse the marketplace and dilute the message by adding another call to action. Instead, P&R lots serve to facilitate ridesharing and the use of alternate modes. Use of P&R lots – and dissemination of information about the new website – will be part of the larger ridesharing and alternate mode message. Messages about P&R will work hand-in-hand with messages about rideshare.

Central to implementing this marketing strategy for P&R is the establishment of a Community of Park & Ride Professionals. This community, with VDOT’s P&R Program Manager at the helm, will communicate regularly to advance alternate modes and P&R and to work proactively to identify and generate opportunities for P&R. This community, portrayed graphically in Figure 2 on the following page, will consist of the following members:

- VDOT Central Office Park & Ride Management
- Rideshare Agencies
- DRPT
- Transit Agencies
- VDOT Central Offices (extraneous to P&R management leadership)
- VDOT District Offices
- Rideshare Companies & Services

Communication will be key to mobilizing this force of P&R advocates. VDOT Central Office Park & Ride Management will work proactively to initiate and perpetuate conversations among members of the P&R community by keeping community members informed, updated and excited about P&R.

Figure 2: Park & Ride Community of Professionals



Strategy Implementation: Tactics

The recommended marketing plan for P&R consists of 14 specific tactics. These tactics, designed to promote P&R in Virginia, are crafted around these premises:

- P&R is inextricably linked to adoption of TDM and transit
- To grow the use of P&R requires, primarily, growing the use of TDM and transit
- There is limited budget to market P&R
- VDOT must leverage the resources/reach that the community of P&R professionals offers

Tactics #1-#4: Prepare Marketing Materials

Tactic #1: Produce a Park & Ride show (in either PowerPoint, Prezi, Slidrocket or comparable software).

Develop a PowerPoint show about VDOT's P&R program. Through this slideshow, tell the "story" of VDOT's P&R Program – its purpose, its resources and its desired outcome. The presentation should include the role of TDM in Virginia's transportation system, P&R's role in TDM, highlights of P&R survey findings, best practices, and a description of the P&R program. The presentation should also showcase the new website. Designate two or three VDOT speakers to give the presentation, making certain that they are trained and rehearsed. Once the presentation is complete, it can be placed on the P&R website.

Tactic #2: Produce a P&R newsletter.

VDOT will produce a regular newsletter about P&R. (Note: This newsletter is already being planned by VDOT.) In addition to information about P&R, the newsletter will strengthen the tie between transit and TDM and P&R by including information and updates on transit and TDM and will have "guest" columns by Virginia experts in transit and TDM. This newsletter will be distributed to both professionals (e.g., rideshare agency management, VDOT personnel, transit management, etc.) and commuters/the public who sign up for it. This newsletter could be designed to focus specifically on TDM. But, in that event, there should be a specific column in the newsletter devoted to P&R. To generate interest and excitement about the newsletter, its availability will be announced on the DRPT website, Telework!VA website, rideshare agency websites, and so forth.

Tactic #3: Create a VDOT TDM/transit blog and make P&R a pivotal message of the blog.

VDOT P&R management will launch a TDM and transit blog. Authorship will rotate among personnel at VDOT, both Central Office and District Offices, who can provide insight about TDM, transit, "how to use" a P&R, updates on P&R developments, and "fun" news about P&R. This blog will be available to anyone interested in the topic – the public, the media and public officials. Create a "catchy" name for the blog to generate awareness and insight. Announce the launch of the blog through social media.

Tactic #4: Publish a TDM/P&R Annual Report.

VDOT will publish an annual TDM report to document the impact of TDM in Virginia. Although it may focus on TDM, this document will call out the specific impact of P&R by reporting such measures as:

- VMT reduction as a result of P&R
- Number of vehicles removed from the road each day by P&R

- Number of commuters who have switched to an alternate mode because of P&R
- Reductions in NOx, VOC and CO2 as a result of P&R
- Impacts of P&R on quality of life and satisfaction with transportation system

The annual report will be distributed throughout VDOT (including the Commissioner), to the Secretary of Transportation, and to elected officials and other decision makers who are in positions of budgetary authority. The report will provide justification for investing in P&R (and other TDM components) – in order to maintain and grow the P&R budget – and will make a link between P&R and TDM and transit.

Tactics #5-#8: Tap into Transit and TDM Community

Tactic #5: Work directly with each rideshare agency to ensure the website is launched and is operational.

Crucial to generating awareness and use of the new P&R website is support and promotion of the website by Virginia's rideshare agencies. To ensure adoption of the website by the rideshare agencies, VDOT will make a web-link available for the rideshare websites. Where feasible, VDOT P&R management will visit each rideshare agency personally to "launch" the website. VDOT will train the agencies to use the website and make sure that it is functional on each agency website. Armed with key messages about P&R and the website, VDOT P&R management will be a statewide P&R ambassador for this launch.

To ensure agencies are able to embed and incorporate content into their pages, a "Web Developer Kit" will be provided with easy-to-follow instructions.

Tactic #6: Work with rideshare agencies to ensure that P&R is part of their ongoing messaging.

Work with rideshare agencies across Virginia to make P&R part of their regular messaging strategy. P&R should be a part of the marketing programs of rideshare agencies, including programs like "Clean Commute Challenge," bike-to-work days, and so forth. P&R should be identified on the homepage of every rideshare agency (with the "search for a lot" link). Elevating the role of P&R in rideshare messages will require diligent communicating on the part of VDOT P&R management. Communication with rideshare agencies should not be left to only email or newsletters. Instead, a regular series of meetings (teleconference, web meeting, etc.) should be put in place through which the VDOT P&R manager reaches out to 2-3 rideshare agencies every month.

Tactic #7: Make DRPT an integral part of the P&R community.

DRPT is a Virginia leader in regard to transit and TDM. VDOT will work with DRPT to capitalize on this strength to market and grow P&R in Virginia by:

- Including DRPT in VDOT P&R activities
- Announce the new P&R website on DRPT's website
- Provide P&R updates/presentations at DRPT's regular meetings with rideshare agency managers from across the state
- Provide "talking points" for DRPT personnel to use to speak with the public and stakeholders regarding P&R
- Meet with DRPT Director at least annually to provide P&R update

Tactic #8: Take advantage of the companies that work within the ridesharing and commuting sector to reach commuters with a message about P&R.

Managers of transportation and commuter service companies regularly speak to the public. Take advantage of the power of this commuter marketing by including a P&R message within their overall message about rideshare and transit. Companies such as NuRide, Zipcar, VPSI, and so forth have marketing programs. Pursue these companies as partners of P&R marketing. Include them in P&R functions to keep them informed and enthused about P&R. Give them key messages and tactics about the P&R website.

Tactics #9-#10: Tap into VDOT Infrastructure

Tactic #9: Arm VDOT personnel with information and resources to support VDOT's P&R program and website.

VDOT's P&R management will "spread the word" throughout VDOT by:

- Announcing the program and the new website through VDOT's employee newsletter and the in-house video screens
- Announcing the program and the new website by attending various departmental staff meetings at Central Office – P&R program management will demonstrate the service capabilities when appropriate
- Announcing the program and the new website through in-person presentations at staff meetings at all VDOT District Offices – again demonstrating the site's functions when appropriate

VDOT's P&R management will do more than spread the word about P&R at VDOT. P&R management will enlist others at VDOT to communicate with other transportation professionals and the public about P&R and the new website. P&R management will request others at VDOT to talk about P&R in professional and public meetings, will provide a list of talking points about P&R and will provide small cards (the size of business cards) with the link to the website listed. These cards will be distributed throughout VDOT, made available at public meetings, distributed through employers to their workers, and distributed through rideshare and transit agencies.

The message will focus on the P&R program, the new website and the role of P&R in advancing TDM and transit.

Tactic #10: Make VDOT experts on Park & Ride and ridesharing (TDM) available for public speaking.

Park & Ride and ridesharing should be included as part of the list of "area of interest" on the "request a VDOT speaker" page on the VDOT website.

It will be important to prepare all VDOT's senior management, including the Commissioner, with information about P&R, the new website and TDM. These highly visible VDOT ambassadors interact with the public and the media regularly. Regardless of the specific content of their interaction (e.g., public speaking), proper preparation can help them to spread the P&R message.

Tactics #11-#13: Hold series of announcements/kickoff the website

Tactic #11: Announce the new Park & Ride website.

The new P&R website is an important communications tool for P&R and transit/TDM in Virginia. VDOT Central Office must work to "spread the word" when it is launched. Messages should focus on P&R, the new website and the importance of P&R to TDM and transit. "Announce" the new website through every possible vehicle that is without cost, including:

- Currently published newsletters/e-newsletters: Many of the rideshare agencies and transit agencies already publish newsletters, e.g., RideShare (TJPDC) and On the Move (HRT).
- Transportation and commuting blogs, e.g., RIDE Solutions (Roanoke).
- The Megaprojects' newsletter (published by Steve Titunik of VDOT).
- VDOT's website, FCDOT (Fairfax County) website, county and municipal websites, and transit websites.
- Employer commuter support and programs, e.g., Omni SmartCommute employer program (PRTC), employee newsletters and intranets and so forth.

Tactic #12: Utilize social media to "get the word out."

VDOT already has a presence in the social media: Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube. Take advantage of these inexpensive ways to reach the public and TDM/transit professionals. Talk about the new P&R program and the P&R website. But, strengthen the message about P&R by linking it with a reason **to use** P&R: TDM and transit. Play up the benefits of TDM and transit. Bring the message to life through the development of inexpensive videos and photos that demonstrate usage of TDM and transit and post them on social media. Hit the message

home by emphasizing the benefits (e.g., save time, save money, protect the environment, etc.) of TDM and transit. Work with VDOT's communications professionals to formulate a detailed social media action plan that ensures that Park & Ride and TDM are regular components of social media outreach.

Tactic #13: Issue a press release about the new website and VDOT's P&R program and support of TDM.

VDOT's P&R management will work with VDOT's Media Relations/Communications department to produce a press release announcing the new P&R website. An important focus of this press release will be P&R's role in TDM and transit, again emphasizing the benefits or reasons to select an alternate mode of transportation. Include in the press release that the "search for a lot" link is available on the websites of local rideshare agencies.

Tactic #14: Fuel the momentum

Tactic #14: VDOT will convene an Annual Park & Ride Summit.

In order to update P&R community members and create excitement and enthusiasm for P&R, VDOT will organize and host an annual Park & Ride Summit. This summit will be a half day meeting at which VDOT P&R management shares information about the P&R program and provides updates about lot development, maintenance and other changes. In addition, VDOT will provide a "keynote speech" either given by VDOT senior management or another P&R/TDM/transit leader. Each summit will be organized around a "theme," e.g., the role of P&R in VDOT's long-term plan, the relationship between ITS and P&R, how P&R reduces VMT, and so forth. In order to generate interest and excitement regarding P&R, the summit meeting room will be decorated with charts and graphs reporting factoids and findings related to P&R. Each person who attends the P&R Summit will be presented with a "P&R Certificate of Merit." This certificate will be an actual certificate, presented to each attendee at the close of the Summit. Attendees can take their certificates back to their office for display – an additional way of promoting P&R and reminding summit participants to include P&R in their marketing messages.