COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC ABOUT TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

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Three Thoughts on MBUF/RUC/VMT/Road Charges

- Electric vehicles, hybrids, ICE vehicles improving fuel efficiency
  - Biggest problem is improvement in mileage ICE vehicles
  - Electric vehicles good place to start, but need long-term plan
- Collection costs will be higher than fuel tax
  - Goal is to get to 5%, which is realistic
  - Fuel tax is closer to 2%
- Don't wait for the federal government

Basis of Presentation

- Based on Synthesis report (compiles info from other sources) written on communications and outreach aspects for FHWA on 11 RUC pilots
  - Six chapters, two appendices
  - Part of Surface Transportation System Funding Alternatives (STSFA), now Strategic Innovations in Revenue Collection (SIRC)
    - States/regions: CA, CO, HA, MN, MO, NH, OR, UT, WA, Eastern Transportation Coalition, RUC West now RUC America
    - Other RUC reports for other topics
- Supplemented with newer state pilot info
- Most of the information applies to all new/supplementary transportation funding sources

Communications Framework

- Effective Communications include five components:
  - Audience: Five different target audiences
  - Messengers: Six different types of messengers
  - Messaging Strategy: Six types of messaging strategies
  - Information content: Ten messages that needed to be communicated
  - Communication methods: Four formal, four in-person methods

Who is Your Audience?

- Political leaders (Governor, legislators, commission members)

- Governmental groups and agencies with a transportation focus (MPOs, DOTs, DMVs)

- News media (print, broadcast)

- Industry/advocacy groups (AAA, IBTTA, Sierra Club, American Farm Bureau Federation)

- The general public (EV owners, early tech adopters)

Who Are Your Messengers

- State DOT engineers: Technical experts speak with other technical experts
- DOT communication staff: Provide web page content, organize focus groups, draft press releases
- Outside communications firms: Similar to in-house staff but more specialized
- Political leaders: State legislators
- Industry/advocacy groups: Environmental advocacy groups, groups with members who may be opposed
- Business partners: Chambers of commerce

Messaging Strategy

- States varied from having a limited to a comprehensive communications strategy, generally comprehensive is better
  - Comprehensive communications plan
    - Multiple communications channels including web, e-mail, tv, radio
  - General public focus
    - Targeted general public through webpages, e-mails, commercials
  - Advisory group
    - Tasked advisory group with handling content
  - Stakeholder focus
    - Deliberately reached out to legislators, media, think tank, advocacy groups
  - Pilot participant only focus
    - No specific approach, target stakeholders or vehicles, choose due to lack of time, resources, politics, comprehensive plan
  - Reactive communications
    - Limited statements due to lack of time, resources, policy or planning
    - Defense but no offense

Information Content (1)

- Try to anticipate concerns:
- Why are we doing the pilot: Explain declining purchasing power of gas taxes; electric vehicles don't pay gas tax
- Is the pilot part of a permanent change: Varies based on permanent program or pilot. Replace or supplement fuel tax. Timeline for implementation
- Context: Explain how much Americans pay in transportation funding compared to other services such as Starbucks
- Privacy: State consumer protection laws, how technology works
- Security: What are states doing to prevent hacking, what type of encryption available

Information Content (2)

- Scalability: Transition costs, scalability and timeline of expanding to all motorists (not a common concern)

- Administration costs/collection costs: Collection costs are higher for RUCs, will need to decrease (a growing concern)

- Urban/rural equity: Rural drivers pay less in RUCs due to low fuel-efficiency of vehicles. Counterintuitive so needs detailed explanation

- Other states: Different pilots focus on different priorities, rural concerns, interoperability

- Choice: Multiple options include GPS-enabled, odometer reading, etc.

Information Content
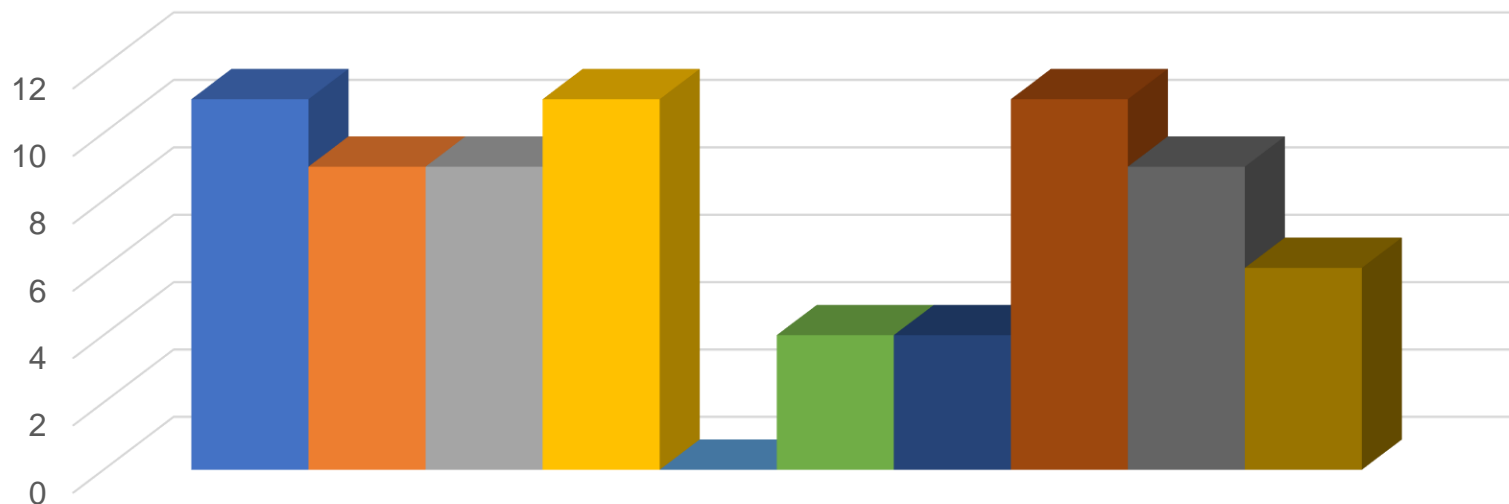
Number of Pilots State/Regions

- Why are we Conducting the Pilot
- How Does the Pilot Align with Long-term Strategy
- How do we pay for Transportation; Would we pay More Under a RUC
- How Does the Pilot Maintain Privacy
- How Does the Pilot Protect Security
- Explain the Transition to RUC
- What are the Costs of Using RUC
- Would Rural Residents pay More
- Are Other States Conducting Pilots
- Do the Pilots Offer Technology Choices

Communications Methods (1)

- Traditional Methods
  - Webpages: De facto communication method, most popular and effective
  - Social media: Facebook most popular, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and Pinterest, concern due to social media "trolls" (challenges, limited audience reach)
  - Paid advertising: Targeted ads in newspapers, radio, and tv
  - News media: Press releases stressing program details and double taxation, meet with editorial boards, beat reporters

Communications Methods (2)

- Personal Contact
  - Steering committees: Composed of DOTs, elected officials, stakeholder groups, Colorado steering committee included ACLU
  - Focus groups: Initial group to measure pre-program support, longitudinal group to measure support over time
  - Town-hall meetings: Officials can communicate with multiple people at once
  - One-on one conversations with elected officials: Build support and answer questions in a relaxed setting

Communication Media
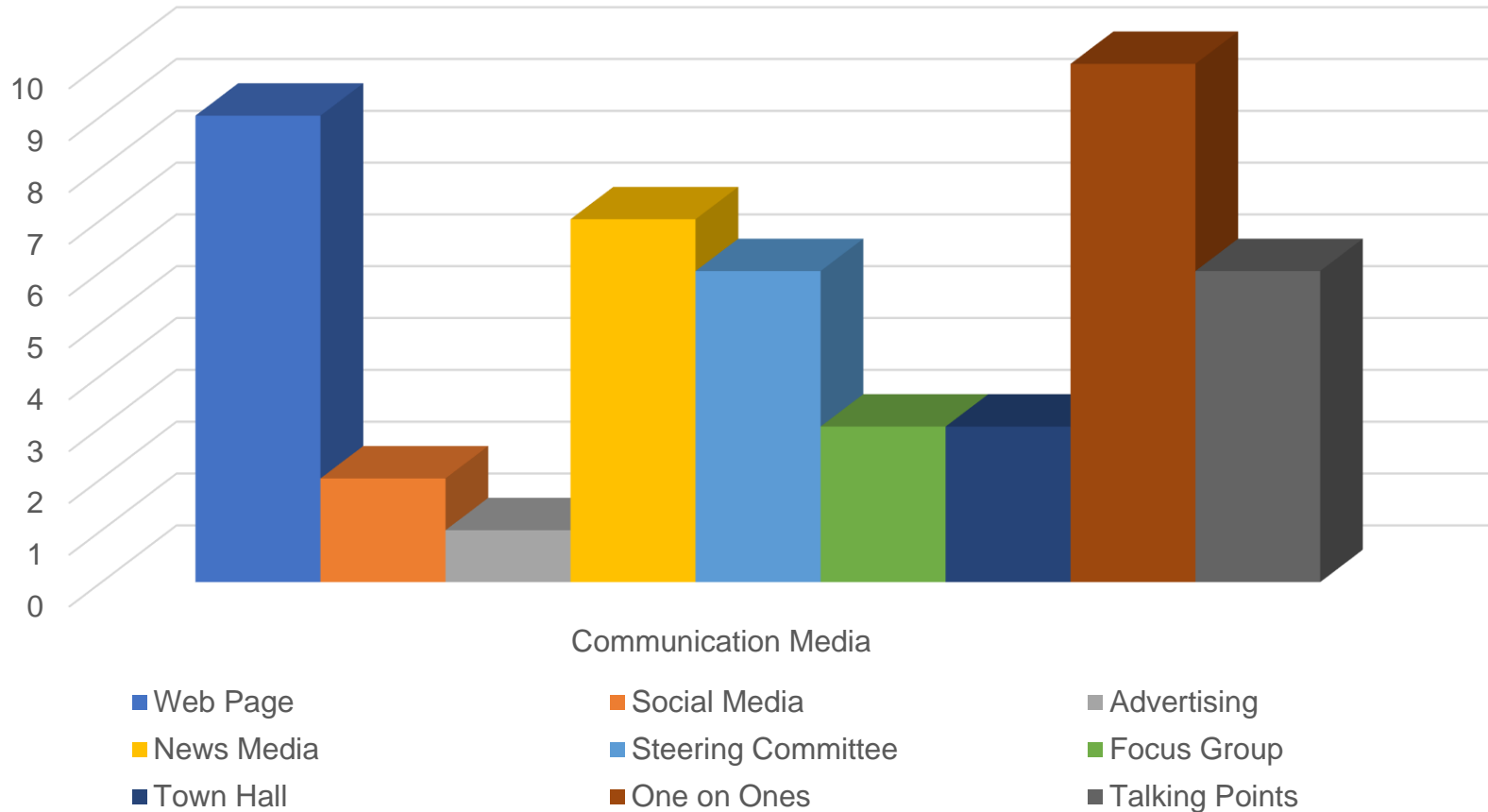
Recommendations

- Create a detailed plan: States that invested time/resources before the pilot were most successful
  - Understand goal, use communications pros, anticipate challenges
- Use a comprehensive approach
  - States who skimmed on resources initially spent more time and money addressing problems in the end
  - Stakeholder focus, basic message to everybody are effective
- Engage in careful/consistent messaging
  - Provide simple information with context, include unknowns and other state practices
- Use multiple media
  - Messages need to be consistent, webpages are a great source of info, one-on-ones are important

Questions

- Link to full report: https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/fhwahop20008/fhwahop20008.pdf

- Link to Reason's transportation work:

  https://reason.org/topics/transportation/

- Questions