

# PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: EXPLAINING THE WHY AND HOW OF ROAD USAGE CHARGES TO THE PUBLIC

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# Bridging the Communications Gap in Understanding Road Usage Charges



- Synthesis report written on communications and outreach aspects for FHWA on 11 RUC pilots
  - Six chapters, two appendices synthesis (takes information from other sources)
  - Part of Surface Transportation System Funding Alternatives (STSFA)
    - States/regions: CA, CO, HA, MN, MO, NH, OR, UT, WA, Eastern Transportation Coalition, RUC West
  - Other RUC reports for other topics





# 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
- Business partners: Chambers of commerce





# Messaging Strategy

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







# Information Content (I)

- Why are we doing the pilot: Explained 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
- Source of transportation infrastructure funding: 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)

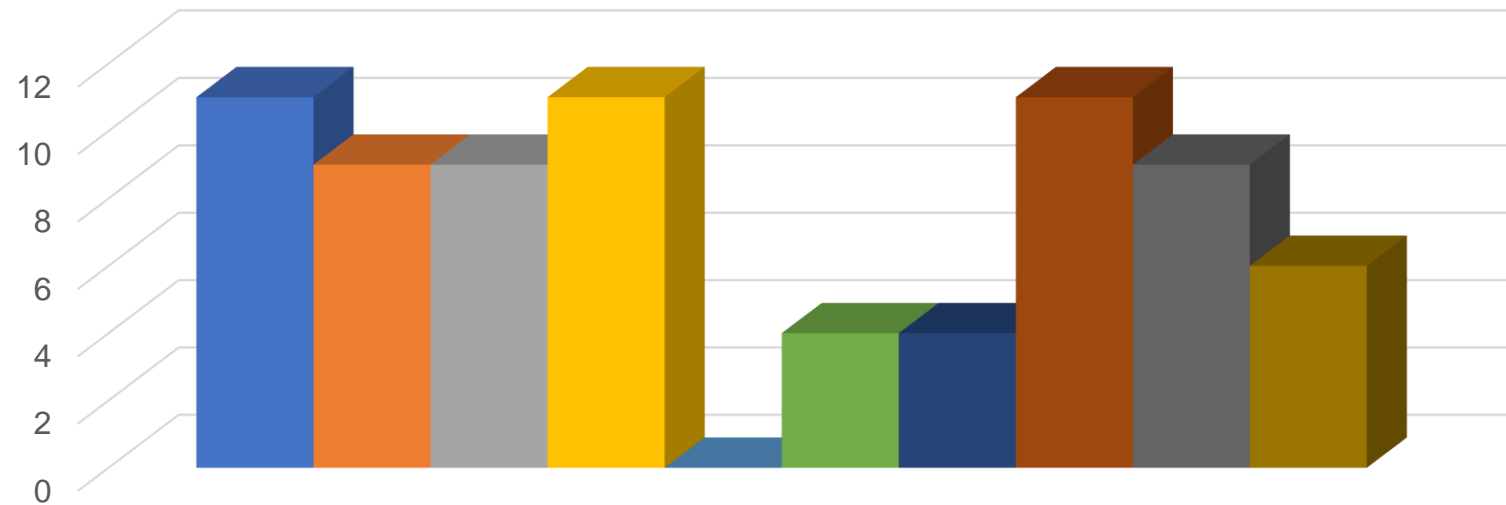
- Scalability: Transition costs, scalability and timeline of expanding to all motorists (not a common concern)
- Administration costs/collection costs: Collection costs are higher for RUCs, will need to decrease (not a common concern)
- Urban/rural equity: Rural drivers pay less in RUCs due to low fuel-efficiency 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 (I)



- 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"
  - 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





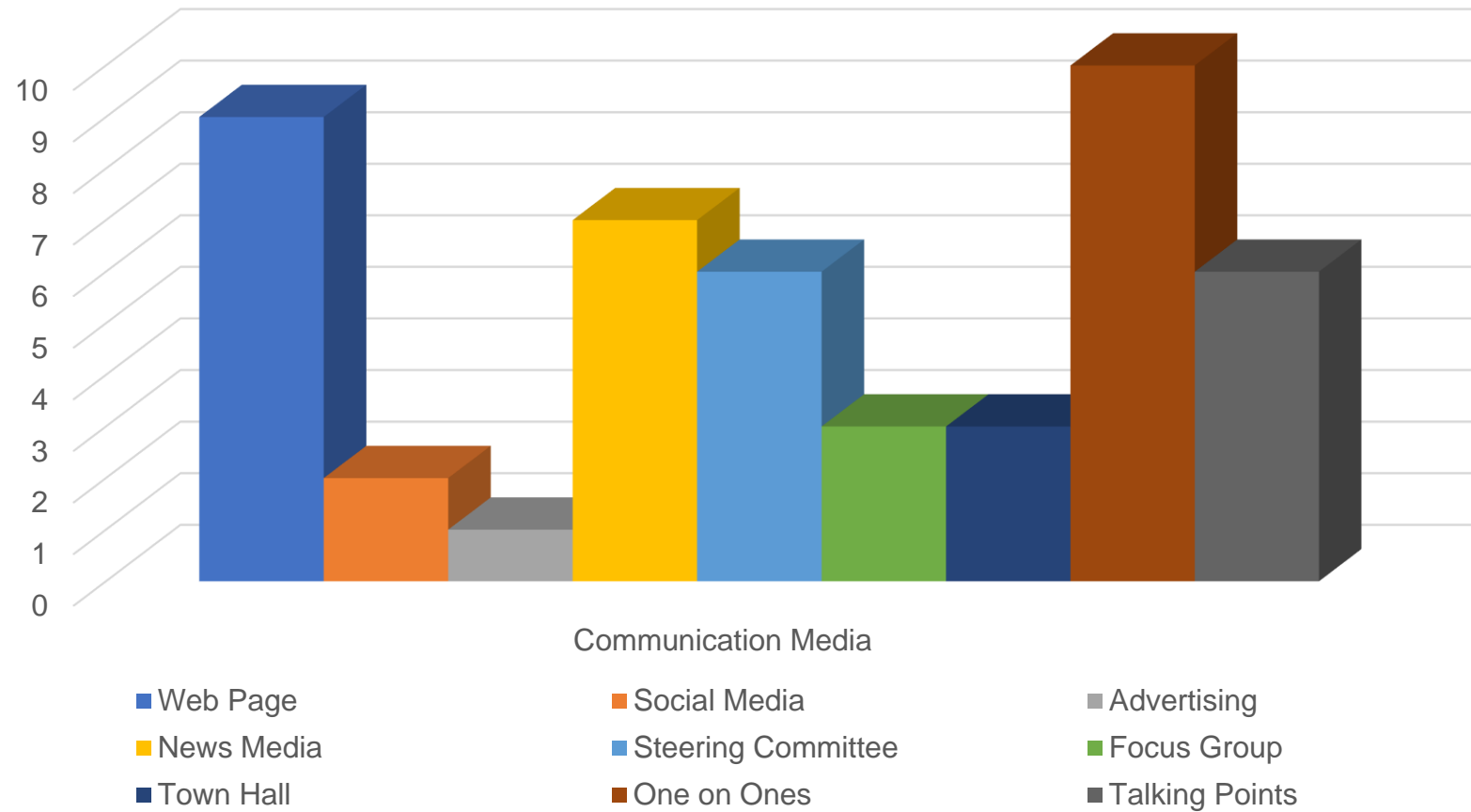
# Communications Methods (2)

- 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>
- Questions

