



# COMMUTESMART

## ANNUAL REPORT 2020



AN INITIATIVE OF THE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM

**BIRMINGHAM METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (MPO)**

# **CommuteSmart Annual Report**

**October 2019 – September 2020**

For further information, please contact  
Mrs. Lisa Smith, CommuteSmart Program Manager  
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham,  
Birmingham, Alabama  
Email: [lsmith@rpcgb.org](mailto:lsmith@rpcgb.org)

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This report was prepared as a cooperative effort of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB), as staff to the MPO, by the requirement of Title 42 USC 7401 et seq., Clean Air Act and 40 CFR Parts 51 and 93, Air Quality Conformity Rules and Regulations. The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the official views or policy of the USDOT.

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## CommuteSmart Executive Summary

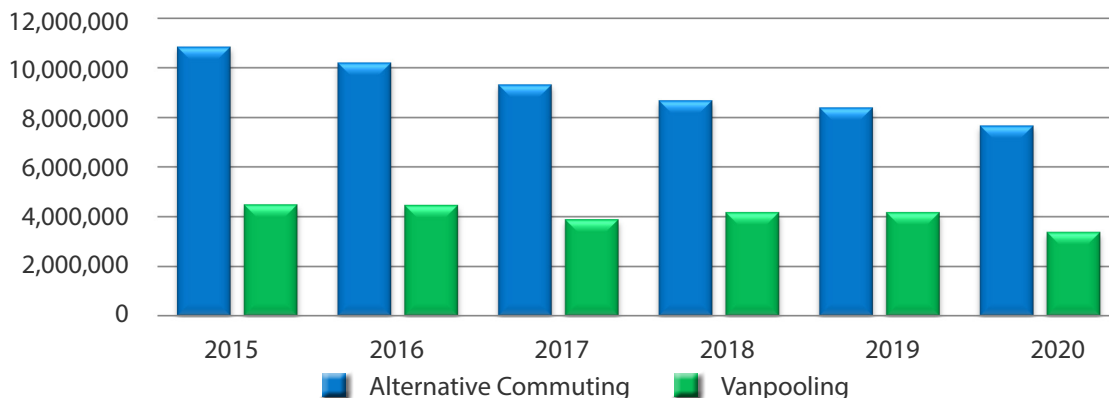
CommuteSmart Birmingham aims to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality in our region. This is accomplished by educating people on how their travel behavior impacts the air we breathe, as well as helping them find cleaner commute modes to work. We promote alternative ways of commuting to work such as carpooling, walking, biking, taking transit, and teleworking. By offering incentives, CommuteSmart helps to ease the transition from driving alone to a cleaner commute. Outreach events and activities focus on building relationships with employers and their employees while providing them additional benefits of cleaner commuting. Any commuter living or working in the CommuteSmart program area, which includes Jefferson, Shelby, South Blount, and West St. Clair counties is eligible to participate. CommuteSmart is an initiative of the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham and is funded by the Alabama Department of Transportation and Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds.

In Fiscal Year 2020, we faced uncertain times with Covid-19 changing not only the way we interacted with each other, but also how we got to work. CommuteSmart focused on adapting to the changes happening around us, while continuing to provide support for our partners and commuters. From October 2019 to September 2020, CommuteSmart added 1,095 new registrants to the Ridematching database, bringing the total to 29,959. New and continuing participants reduced a total of 11,046,363 miles off the road. Commuters logged 3,362,099 vehicle miles reduced through vanpooling, while reducing another 7,684,264 miles through alternative commutes including carpooling, transit, bicycling, walking, and working from home **(Figure 1)**.

Even in unprecedented times, reduction in vehicle miles traveled equals reductions in traffic, vehicle emissions and increased savings for CommuteSmart participants. In Fiscal Year 2020, CommuteSmart participants saved over 270,084 gallons of fuel, which totaled \$724,968 in fuel cost savings. Commuter cost reductions, such as lower maintenance and insurance, helped participants save an estimated \$4,195,063 **(Figure 2)**.

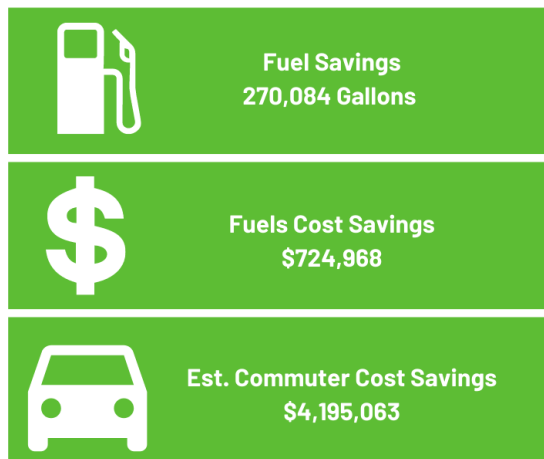
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**Figure 1**  
**Vanpool & Alternative Commute Vehicle Miles Reduced**  
 (Annual Comparisons)



From October 2019 to September 2020, CommuteSmart participants removed **11,046,363** vehicle-miles from the road. Commuters reduced **3,362,099** vehicle-miles through vanpooling, and another **7,684,264** through alternative commutes such as carpooling, transit, bicycling, walking and working from home.

**Figure 2**  
**Commuter Savings**



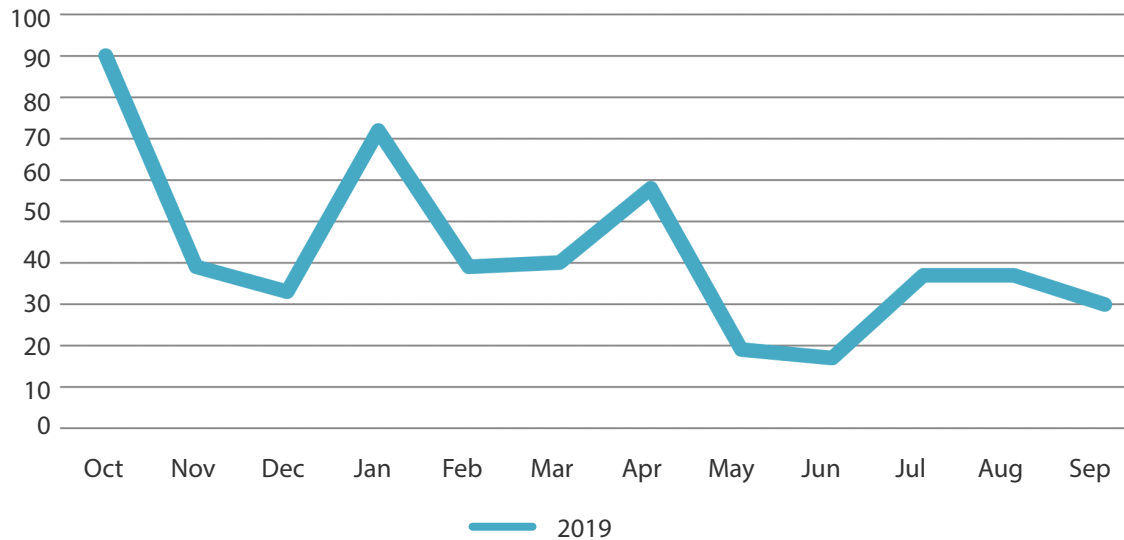
## CommuteSmart Incentive Programs

### GetGreen

CommuteSmart's GetGreen program encourages commuters to try an alternative commute option by offering an incentive. Under this one-time program, new participants logging a minimum of 20 alternative commutes in the first 90-days earn \$1 per day, up to \$70.

In FY 2020, CommuteSmart outreach events, virtual events, social media, advertising, and employer engagement yielded 511 GetGreen enrollees (**Figure 3**). Participants in GetGreen reduced roughly 518,094 vehicle miles last year, or an average of 1,014 miles reduced per participant. The GetGreen program cost \$23,549.72 or 5 cents per vehicle mile reduced.

**Figure 3**  
**New GetGreen Members**

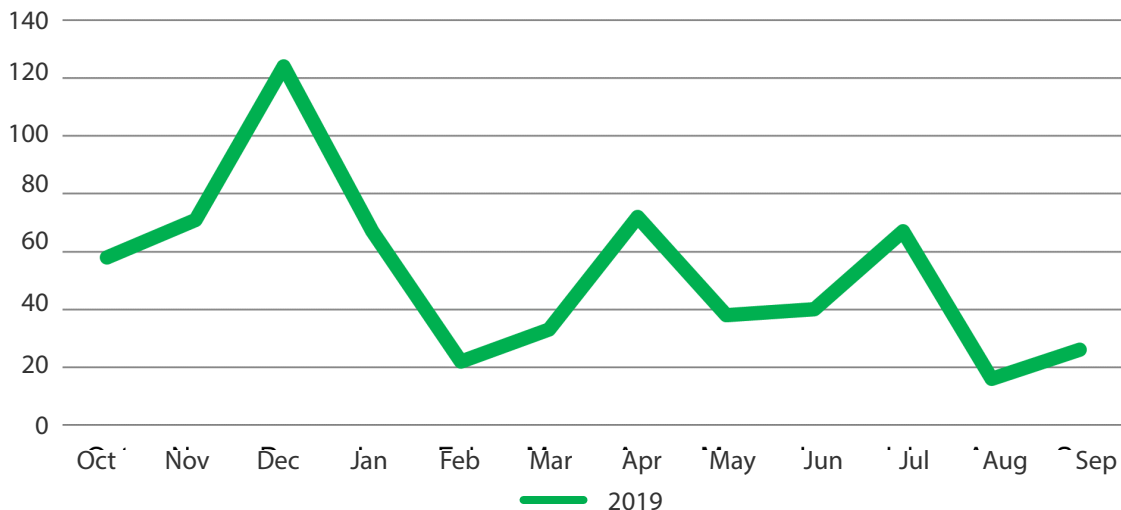


## CommuterClub

Once the initial 90-day GetGreen period is over, commuters are automatically enrolled in CommuterClub to boost the continued use of alternative commutes. CommuterClub is an ongoing program that awards a \$25 gift card quarterly for commuters that log at least 20 alternative commutes during each quarter. Participants choose one of 8 gift card options including Chevron/Texaco, Publix, BJCTA Transit Pass, Cahaba Cycles, CVS, Express Oil Change, and Target. Employees and students at the University of Alabama at Birmingham may also choose the option of having \$25 added to their Blazer Bucks account, a balance account linked to each employee and student’s identification card.

In Fiscal Year 2020 there were 634 new commuters registered in CommuterClub (**Figure 4**). The CommuterClub program cost \$157,342.50 in Fiscal Year 2020 and resulted in the elimination of 7,166,170 vehicle miles from the region’s roadways. As such, the program cost approximately 2 cents per vehicle mile reduced.

**Figure 4**  
**New CommuterClub Members**

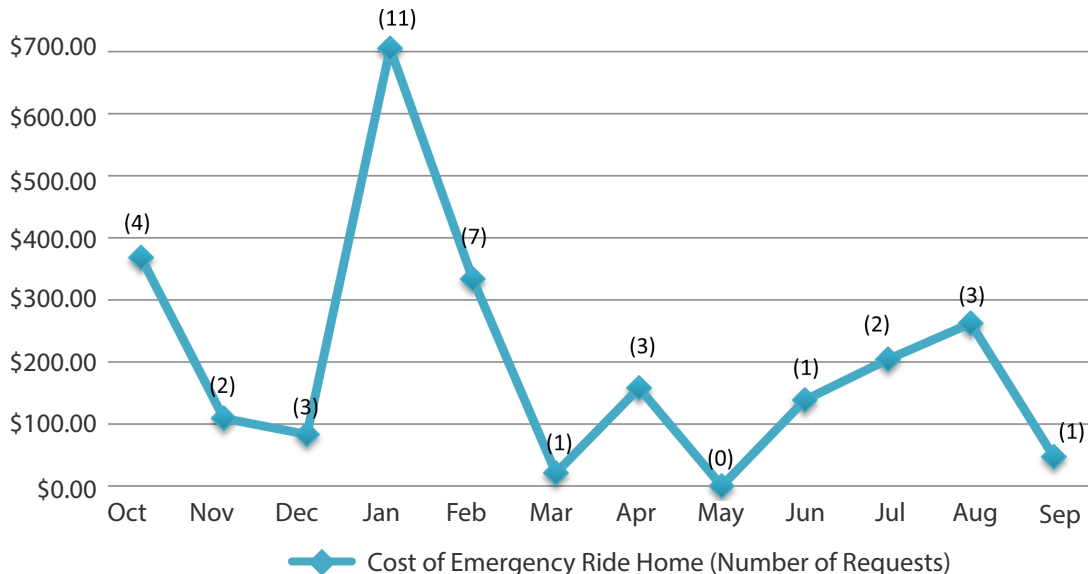


## Emergency Ride Home

Switching from driving alone to taking an alternative commute can create a little hesitation for some commuters. The security of having a private vehicle for emergency situations is often one of the most significant hurdles to making a change. CommuteSmart helps remove this obstacle by providing an Emergency Ride Home (ERH) benefit. Participants actively logging their commutes, as well as active vanpool members, are eligible for up to 5 Emergency Ride Homes each year for qualifying events such as illness, family emergency, or unscheduled overtime. In these instances, active participants contact CommuteSmart to arrange transportation back to the origin of their commute at no cost to the participant. Commuters can also choose to be reimbursed for taking Uber/Lyft in case of an emergency.

In FY 2020, CommuteSmart participants received 38 ERHs at a total cost of \$2,431.87 (**Figure 5**). The average cost per ERH was \$64.00 this fiscal year.

**Figure 5**  
**Emergency Ride Home Totals**





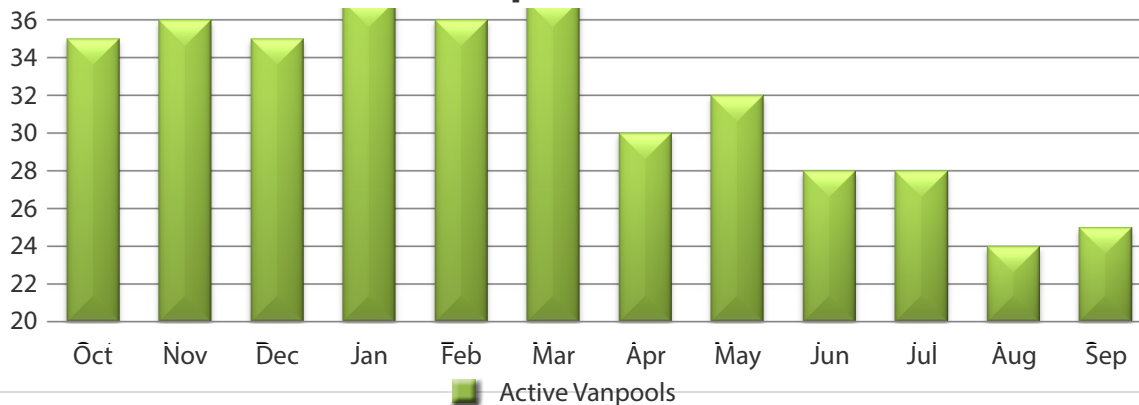
## Vanpool

Currently the CommuteSmart vanpool program is managed by Commute with Enterprise. Vanpool commuting has numerous benefits for individuals and employers including increased commuter savings, less stressful commutes, reduced parking demands, lower levels of tardiness and absenteeism, and higher work morale. To help incentivize more vanpools, the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham provides a \$400 subsidy for 7 to 9 passenger vans and a \$450 subsidy for 12 and 15 passenger vans that begin or end in our region.

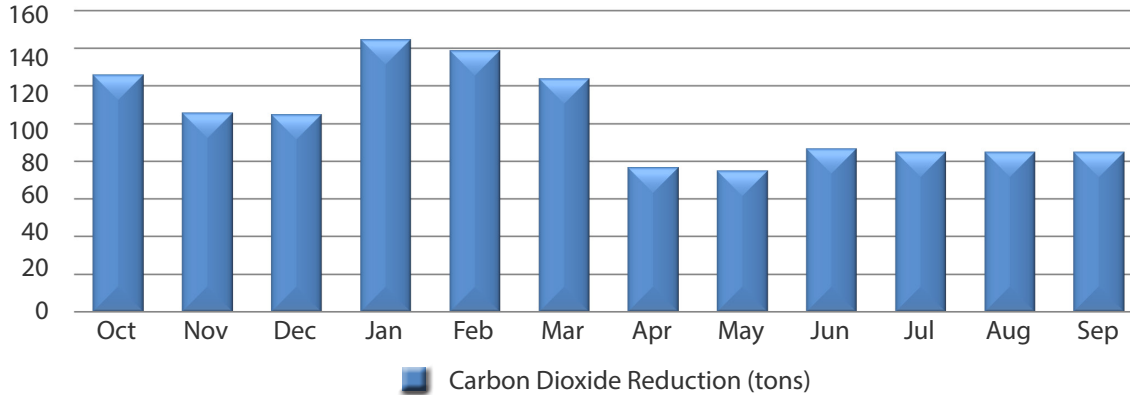
The Commute with Enterprise staff worked with CommuteSmart outreach coordinators at special events and supported marketing campaigns with local businesses, civic groups, and communities to promote vanpooling and its benefits. As a result of these efforts and the subsidy, vanpool participants:

- Maintained an average of 32 operating vanpools each month (**Figure 6**), resulting in 36,696 cars off the highway in 2020.
- Lowered carbon dioxide emissions by 1,250 tons and carbon monoxide emissions by 50.25 tons (**Figure 7**).
- Reduced 128,871 gallons of fuel used for a total savings of \$263,175 in fuel costs (**Figure 8**).
- Took 63,883 fewer passenger trips, which reduced vehicle miles travelled by 3,362,099.
- Filled 171 available seats on vanpools, maintaining 61% occupancy for 2020.

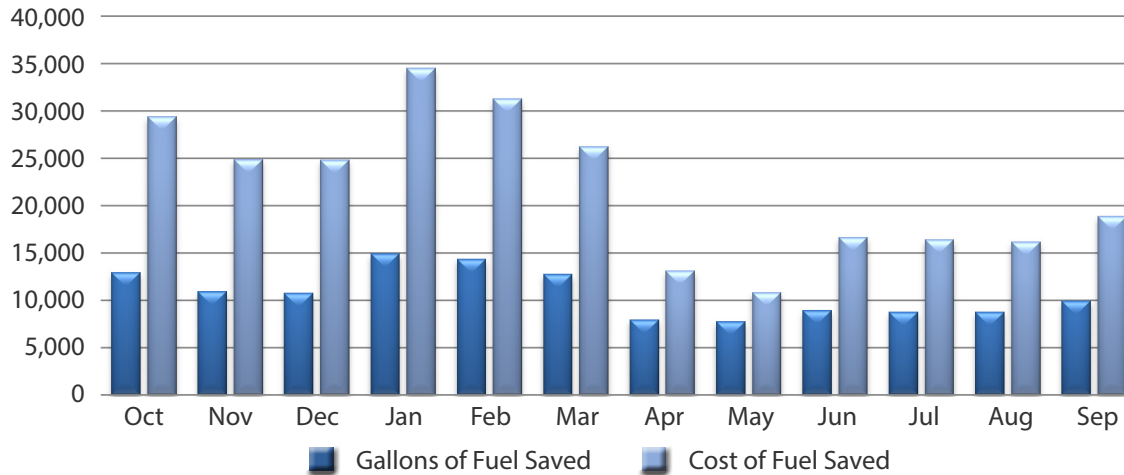
**Figure 6**  
**Vanpool Totals**



**Figure 7**  
**Carbon Dioxide Reduced (Tons)**



**Figure 8**  
**Vanpool Fuel Savings**



## CommuteSmart Outreach Activities

CommuteSmart Outreach Coordinators work with employers and community partners to create customized programs to increase the number of employees and residents utilizing alternative commutes. Outreach consists of a variety of events and activities including developing community and employer partner relationships, providing promotional items and information pamphlets, engaging individuals in person and online, and building awareness through traditional advertising and public relations campaigns.

### Outreach Coordinators

The Outreach Coordinator's primary focus is to expand awareness of the program's mission and benefits by engaging audiences through their employers. CommuteSmart provides a host of marketing tools such as presentations, special events, giveaways, monthly email blasts, cluster analysis mapping, and social media strategies. Those tools, as well as re-location planning, commuter surveys, bike racks, and preferred parking signs are offered to employers at no cost. The CommuteSmart Outreach team faced new challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic in FY20. We worked hard to develop virtual outreach tools that would allow us to continue promoting the program's mission during this time. CommuteSmart was able to adapt to the changes the pandemic brought through the introduction of virtual meetings, events, and webinars.

In order to celebrate Bike to Work Day 2020 during the pandemic, CommuteSmart worked to adjust the event to allow opportunity for as many riders as possible to participate. During the annual event, CommuteSmart launched an online campaign to engage with riders and encourage them to get out and ride during the month of May. Utilizing the theme "May is Still Bike Month", CommuteSmart created a social media push to promote the benefits of riding. In September, CommuteSmart revisited Bike To Work Day, celebrating "Biketember", with another social media push that involved commuter testimonials, giveaways, and video tutorials.

CommuteSmart welcomed 58 Inc., EBZ, Systec, Inc., Middle Alabama Agency on Aging, and Pack Health as new partners this year. These partners connected CommuteSmart to an additional 196 employees.

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# CommuteSmart in Numbers

## 2020 Outreach Coordinator Accomplishments

---

**58**

Meetings

---

**1,201**

Client Contact (phone/emails)

---

**4**

New Partners

---

**32**

Partner Events

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**27**

Presentations

---

**204**

Rideshare Applications Collected

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**0**

Maps/Cluster Analysis

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**22**

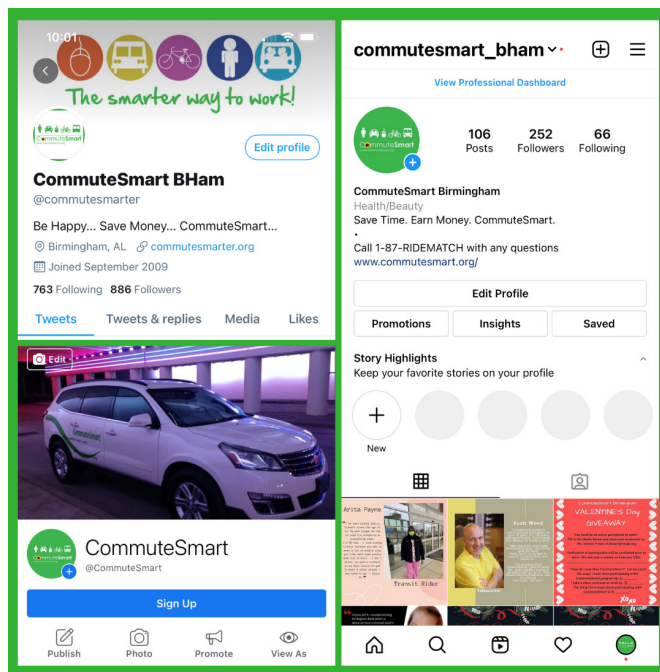
Blast Emails

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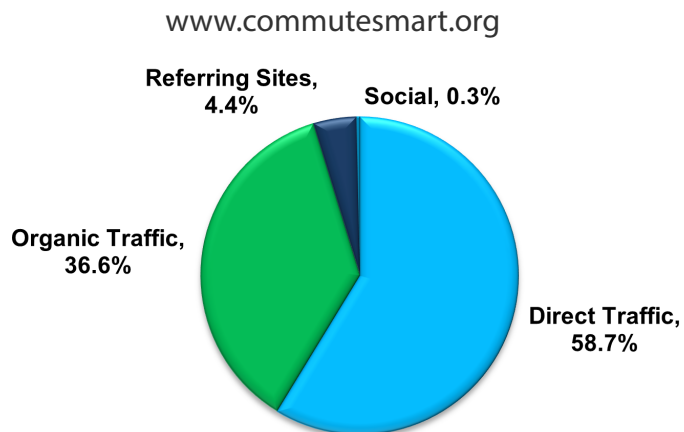
## CommuteSmart Social Media and Website

The importance of social media increased exponentially in FY20. CommuteSmart utilizes our website and social media channels to interact and engage creatively with current and potential program participants. As our outreach efforts transitioned to primarily virtual, we increased our social media activities by creating programming to increase website traffic, create brand awareness, improve customer service, and capture new business opportunities. CommuteSmart currently focuses its social media efforts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Our annual series of promotional giveaways continued to create a huge surge in activity on our Facebook and Instagram pages.

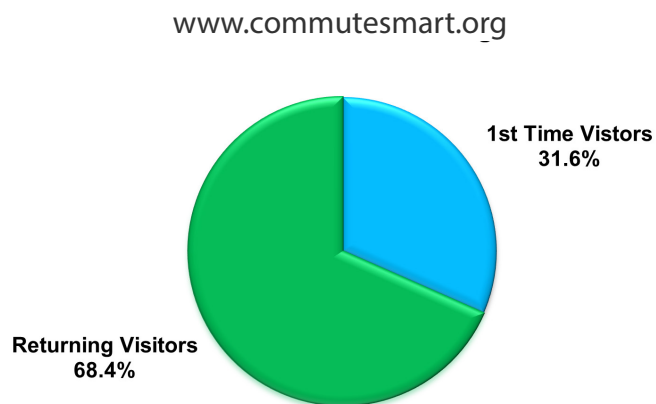
In 2020, CommuteSmart increased the number of Facebook Page “Likes” to 1,321 and reached approximately 18,167 people through this platform. On Twitter, CommuteSmart now has 886 followers and garnered over 11,629 impressions. Our Instagram currently has 254 followers.



**Figure 9**  
**2020 Traffic Sources Overview**



**Figure 10**  
**Website Statistics**



## CommuteSmart Public Relations and Advertising

InMarketing and public outreach for CommuteSmart is an essential part of the program's overall success. The focus is educating the public about air quality issues and how individual choices such as travel behavior affect these issues. The objective of the campaign is to increase participation in CommuteSmart while motivating people throughout Jefferson and Shelby counties to make changes in behavior that will help maintain air quality standards and reduce the number of single occupied vehicles on the road.

Marketing strategies for 2020 were altered due to the Global Pandemic. In the past the focus of the campaign was to encourage commuters to find a clean commute to work through van pooling, carpooling, riding a bike, walking, or telecommuting. The initial stage of the outreach campaign was implemented during the lockdown period. A new campaign was developed to meet the needs of the changing work environment during this unusual time. Mark Hendren, producer with WIAT-TV, wrote and produced a 30 second television commercial addressing the need to find a clean commute, "When We All Get Back to Work". This highlighted the positive message that air quality had improved with the decrease of single occupied vehicles on the road. Consumers were encouraged to sign up for CommuteSmart to help keep the air quality at this level by finding a clean commute to work when things began to open back up.

Strategies for the outreach campaign include a multi-media approach with a combination of radio, television, digital media, print, and interviews targeting commuters. The media campaign aired during the lockdown and was followed later in the year with a series of interviews promoting "Walktober" which encouraged viewers to walk and to sign up for CommuteSmart. The outreach campaign targeted Adults ages 25-54 with specific target demographics that included women and the African American community. Research has shown that women are more likely to carpool to work with co-workers than men. However, men are also targeted but in a secondary manner. The African American community is an important demographic that was also taken into consideration when implementing the media outreach strategy. CommuteSmart focused on networks through Spectrum Reach, BOUNCE-TV, a digital station, and print ads in the Birmingham Times newspaper that focus on the African American community.

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## Media Campaign

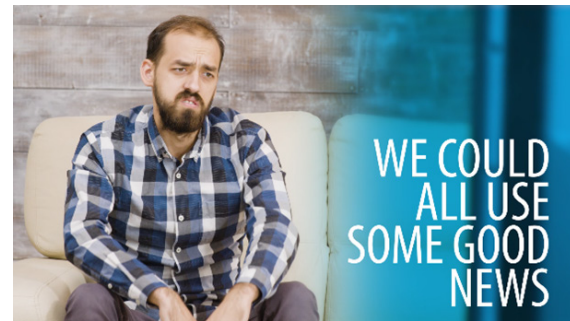
The media outreach campaign combined several media sources including digital, print, television, and radio. This combination of media helped build the brand and drive consumers to the website, featuring the CommuteSmart logo. CommuteSmart's logo includes simple icons to demonstrate the various options to participate in the program including walking, riding a bike, taking transit, carpooling, vanpooling, and telecommuting.

A radio campaign aired March 30, 2020 to May 17, 2020. Summit Media included Birmingham Mountain Radio which focuses on "all things local" and reaches the cycling community in addition to people concerned about environmental issues. This station was utilized to reach a demographic that is most likely to choose a clean commute to work. CommuteSmart did an interview on "Morning Blend", to promote "Biketember". Joining the National Bike League in celebrating Bike Month in September, CommuteSmart created the event "Biketember" to focus on promoting biking in our region with useful bike safety tips and a social media giveaway.





For television, commercials were purchased in programs that targeted commuters including early morning news and late news programming. Interviews on news programs were also incorporated into the media campaign later in the year. Each station provided added value. Cable was included to add frequency and to include prime time programming. Due to the reduced number of people at worksites, more people were home watching television. Local stations were generous with no charge messaging to help make the campaign successful. CBS 42 produced and aired an interview for Lillian Lalo's segment called "Living Local." This segment was filmed at Railroad Park and encouraged viewers to sign up for CommuteSmart and to participate in "Biketember".



## Television

A total of 4 local television stations, along with multiple cable networks, were purchased in the market for the flight which aired March 30, 2020 to May 17, 2020. **(Figure 11)** breaks down the television campaign and the total amount of added value television stations provided CommuteSmart. The total of the campaign was \$80,744 including expenditures and added value.

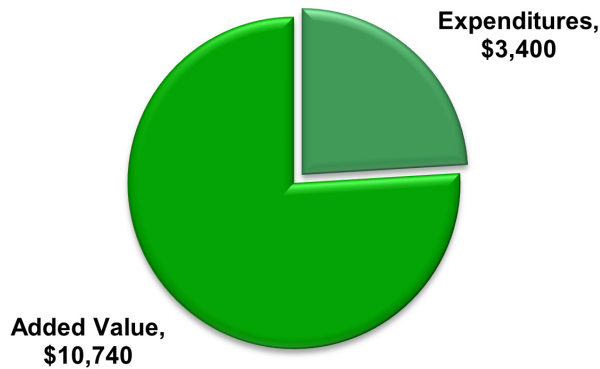
**Figure 11**  
**2020 Television Campaign**  
Cost and Value Added Comparison



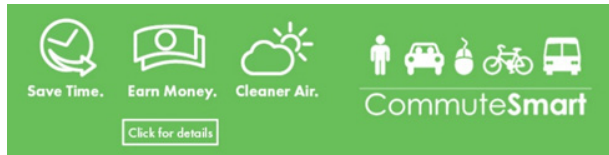
**Radio**

CommuteSmart purchased spots from Summit Media stations airing between April 2, 2020 to May 10, 2020. Through these spots, CommuteSmart received \$10,740 in added value. **(Figure 12)** illustrates the breakdown of the radio campaign and the total amount of added value the radio stations provided the program. Altogether the radio campaign was valued at \$14,140.

**Figure 12**  
**Radio Campaign**  
Cost and Added Value Comparison



## Print / Digital / Sponsorships



### Birmingham Times

This The Birmingham Times is a weekly newspaper that is distributed throughout Jefferson County on a weekly basis with a focus on the African American community. A total of 4 quarter page full color ads ran from April 9, 2020 to May 7, 2020. In addition to the discounted rate for ads, Birmingham Times Media Group featured digital ads each week on [www.birminghamtimes.com](http://www.birminghamtimes.com).



### Starnes Publishing

Email newsletters are sent through Starnes Publishing to local communities. CommuteSmart ads were featured in 97 email newsletters in the following: Homewood Star, Vestavia Voice, Village Living, Hoover Sun, and 280 Living.



### Summit Media

The digital display campaign with Summit Media was targeted in Jefferson and Shelby counties. Behavioral retargeting and keyword marketing strategies were used that included: green living, environmental and ridesharing. There was a total delivery of 278,577 impressions. CommuteSmart Partners

CommuteSmart purchased \$3,810 worth of advertising and received \$2,800 worth of added value. Total print, digital, and sponsorships was valued at over \$6,000 combining the purchased and added value (*Figure 13*). CommuteSmart Partners

**Figure 13**  
**2020 Print/Internet Campaign**  
Cost and Added Value Comparison



# CommuteSmart Partners

Last Updated September 2020

## Gold Partners

- Alabama Power
- City of Montevallo
- Fortis Institute
- Encompass Health
- Protective Life
- Southern Company Services
- The University of Alabama at Birmingham
- VA Medical Center

## Silver Partners

- American Cast Iron & Pipe Company (ACIPCO)
  - Baker Donelson
  - Cahaba Cycles
  - Children's Health System
  - Children's South
  - City of Birmingham
  - Daxko
  - Harbert Realty
  - Jefferson County Department of Health
  - Lawson State Community College
  - PRA Group
  - Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB)
  - St. Vincent's Health System
  - Samford University
  - SPOC Automation
  - University of Montevallo
-

## Bronze Partners

- 58 INC.
  - Action Enterprises
  - Advantage Resourcing
  - Alabama Media Group
  - Altec, Inc.
  - American Family Care
  - Autotec
  - Balch & Bingham, LLP
  - Barber's/Mayfield
  - Barnes Reality Group
  - BBVA Compass Bank
  - BE&K/KBR
  - Birmingham Association of Realtors
  - Birmingham Business Alliance
  - Birmingham Coca-Cola
  - Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority
  - Birmingham Jefferson Convention Center
  - Birmingham Public Library
  - Bradford Real Estate Group
  - Brasfield & Gorrie
  - Brookwood Baptist Health
  - Buck Creek Stain Glass
  - Bud's Best Cookies
  - Callahan Eye Foundation at UAB
  - Cardiovascular Associates of the Southeast
  - City of Hoover
  - City of Mountain Brook
  - City Wholesale Inc.
  - Cooper Green Mercy Hospital
  - Corporate Realty Services
  - Daniel Corporation
  - Dollar General
  - EBZ Systec, Inc.
  - EyeSight Foundation of Alabama
  - Glenwood, Inc.
  - Golden Flake
  - Grandview Medical Center
  - HMS Host
  - Hoover Chamber of Commerce
  - Intermark Group
  - Jefferson County Commission
  - Jefferson State Community College
  - Kinder Morgan
  - Lakeshore Foundation
  - Middle Alabama Agency on Aging
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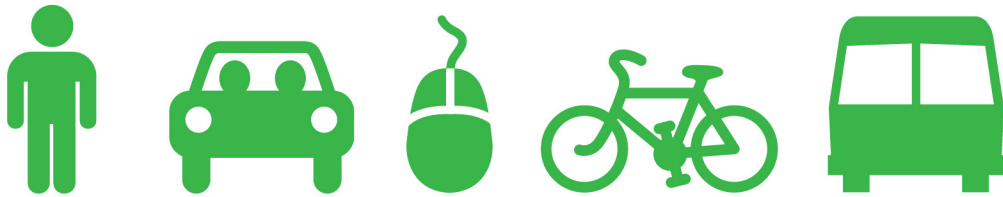
## Bronze Partners

- Molton, Allen & Williams, LLC
  - Motion Industries
  - Mountain Brook Chamber of Commerce
  - Nathan & Nathan, PC
  - Pack Health
  - Piggly Wiggly Distribution
  - Positive Maturity
  - Pride Staffing
  - Princeton Baptist Medical Center
  - Regions Financial Corporation
  - Schnellecke Logistics Alabama
  - Shelby Baptist Medical Center
  - Shelby County Board of Education
  - Sheraton Birmingham Hotel
  - Shipt
  - Sign Faces
  - Southern Research Institute
  - South Shelby Chamber of Commerce
  - Spire
  - State Farm Insurance
  - Superior Mason Corporation
  - Thompson Tractor
  - T-Mobile
  - University of Alabama
  - University of Alabama Health Services
  - University Place Apartments
  - U.S. Pipe and Foundry
  - Viva Health, Inc.
  - Vulcan Materials
  - Watts Realty
  - Z-Modular
-



## Community Partners

- Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition
  - Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs
  - Alabama Environmental Council
  - Alabama Partners for Clean Air
  - Alabama Rivers Alliance
  - BiciCoop
  - Birmingham Bike Club
  - Birmingham Botanical Gardens
  - Black Warrior Riverkeeper
  - City Action Partnership (CAP)
  - Cobbs, Allen & Hall
  - Eco Three
  - Gateway
  - Homewood Rotary
  - Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity
  - Sain & Associates
  - Vallocycle
  - The WRATT Foundation
  - YMCA of Greater Birmingham
  - YWCA Central Alabama
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# CommuteSmart

[www.commutesmart.org](http://www.commutesmart.org)



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