



Lawrence OnBoard

Roadside Ridesharing

2979 Republic Rd Oskaloosa KS 66066 785-856-2272 www.lawrenceonboard.org

The following is a summary of the activity of Lawrence OnBoard. Any questions should be directed to Jennifer O'Brien at jenny@lawrenceonboard.org or at 785-856-2272

What is Lawrence OnBoard?

Lawrence OnBoard is a nonprofit organization that seeks to transform hitchhiking into a safe, mainstream and reliable form of public transportation.

Lawrence OnBoard is based on a club membership system. Members will sign up as riders or drivers or both. All participants will be registered and issued a photo ID. Drivers will get a window cling with their member ID to show they are in the network. Riders will receive folding dry-erase board with the club logo. Riders can go to any safe road side, write their destination on the white board, and catch a ride with any willing driver.



The rider will then sends a text message to the Lawrence OnBoard office with the member number of the driver (or license plate number for non member drivers at the rider's discretion). That creates a record of the ride for safety, for leaving feedback and for entering drivers in a drawing for prizes. Lawrence OnBoard will institute a marketing and information campaign to create awareness of the program. An online map will show successful locations to get rides. The club will provide training to riders and drivers to ensure a safe and positive experience for all.

Why is this important?

Transportation experts agree that we will never again have the cheap gas we have enjoyed for the past 3 decades. Here in the Midwest, we are heavily dependent on cars, and even a small spike in the price of gas can have a devastating effect. Public transportation is notoriously difficult in sparsely populated areas, like the small communities surrounding Lawrence. Even in town, the T-bus is slow, limited in area, and doesn't even run on Sundays. There is currently no way to commute to a job in Kansas City or Topeka that does not involve a car.

People love to travel in cars, and we have plenty of them. An estimated 79% of our passenger capacity is riding around empty. However, traditional ridesharing and carpooling demands we sacrifice flexibility. With a system like Lawrence OnBoard, the carpooling is done from the side of the road at the convenience of the rider, and the time, effort and expense for the driver is minimal.

. A system like Lawrence OnBoard is incredibly cheap to run, scalable and easy to implement. It gets cars off the road, which eases congestion and makes roads safer and creates less pollution. Best of all, Lawrence OnBoard builds community connections and promotes an economy based on trust.

Research:

Lawrence OnBoard started field testing on September 11, 2012. Director O'Brien conducted the early test rides from September to April. On April 13, 2013, a team of 11 citizen researchers went out to designated locations to the east, north and west of Lawrence, far outside the area serviced by the T-bus. They were given white boards and some training. Emergency back-up drivers were on hand. These riders all travelled successfully back to the command center in downtown Lawrence with random strangers who happened to be driving by. Upon the successful completion of a ride, the researchers participated in a post-ride videotaped interview, filled out a questionnaire about their experience and a ride record with facts about the ride.

On May 5th, another group of 12 researchers gathered for another round of rides. The research was essentially the same as the April ride day, but these riders were assigned locations within the city limits. Once again, all the riders managed to get rides to and from their destinations back to the command center at 1301 Vermont. The riders again recorded a post-ride interview, filled out a questionnaire and ride records.

From June to November, O'Brien and 4 other researchers continued to conduct test rides and collect data. O'Brien used Lawrence OnBoard to entirely replace a car for two days a week during two months of the summer.

The complete report of the preliminary research can be read in the paper authored by Anne Dunning and Jennifer O'Brien, *Community Rideshare for a Small City: Preliminary Results for the Lawrence OnBoard Prototype Program*. This paper was selected for presentation at the 2014 Transportation Research Board annual meeting.

Quick facts:

Total attempted rides logged: 121

Number of unsuccessful rides: 6

Number of volunteer riders: 23

Total miles travelled: 573

Driver gender: 2/3 male and 1/3 female

Average wait time per ride: 7 minutes

Observations:

Legitimacy: The white boards and name tags added a layer of legitimacy to the riders' appearance, as reported by the drivers. Some comments: "I would never pick up a hitchhiker, but I could tell he (research rider) was something different." "That sign

looked legit!” This branding is one key component to distinguishing our riders from traditional hitchhikers.

Location: The riders success at getting a ride seems to be dependent on the location where he/she is standing. We have identified four characteristics of a good location for getting a ride:.

- 1) Long line of sight: drivers should be able to see the riders at least 15 seconds ahead of time. A stop light or stop sign is also helpful.
- 2) An easy, safe and obvious place to pull over: A wide shoulder is good, or a quiet side street (not a private driveway). A parking lot with a couple of entrances works well, but be riders need to check with the owner if it is a business.
- 3) Traffic flow: 1-4 cars per minute is ideal, but a busier street could work if there is some traffic slowing device like a stoplight or sign and an easy and obvious place to pull over.
- 4) Turn-around: a handy place to turn around a short way downstream is helpful, since drivers often change their minds and come back for a rider.

Driver Motivation: From the verbal reports of the drivers and the surveys sent back by the drivers, it seems that the main motivation for picking up riders is a desire to be helpful. Curiosity is also a cited reason. Approximately 1/5 of drivers are friends or acquaintances of the rider. In recent months, more drivers are stopping because they have heard about the program and want to support it.

The driver survey asked whether a small cash payment (\$1) or a chance at a prize (\$20) would make them more willing to pick up riders. All answered no to the cash payment. About half answered yes to the prize, but many stated that it “made it more fun”.

Security Concerns: The California Highway Patrol’s extensive study of hitchhiking concluded that hitchhikers were no more likely to be involved in violent crime than the general population. Our interviews with local and long distance hitchhikers bear this out. A system of semi-organized hitchhiking in Washington DC has been transporting thousands of people a day for the past 30 years with no reported incidents. However, since hitchhiking has been portrayed by the media as a dangerous activity, security will likely be a major concern for some time. Therefore, all riders will be subject to background checks. To increase the safety of the riders when interacting with driver who are not members, Lawrence OnBoard recommends the following: Riders only solicit rides during daylight hours, unless from a secure and well lit location. Women riders should not get into a car with 2 or more men in it. All riders should check to be sure the passenger door can be opened from the inside.

A fleet of trained, safe and willing driver members will greatly aid in the safety and comfort of the riders. Driver members will be registered with license plate, driver’s license and insurance information. They will be asked to verify that their seatbelts are in good working order. Lawrence OnBoard will promote basic rules of etiquette for both drivers and riders. For example; no smoking or cell phone use during a ride, riders should not ask drivers to go more than 5 blocks out of their way, and riders should not distract the driver.

Building Community: Many of the riders and drivers were glad to make a connection with another person. Driving a car is often a solitary occupation. When we speed through our neighborhoods, there is almost no chance to interact with our neighbors. Picking up a Lawrence OnBoard rider breaks that solitude and creates an opportunity for a connection. The vast majority of citizens who have heard about this project are enthusiastic and supportive. The Lawrence Sustainability Advisory Board as well as other community groups lending support to bring about this project.



Other components of Lawrence OnBoard

Legal Status: Lawrence OnBoard was incorporated in the state of Kansas on June 14, 2012 as a non profit organization. The legal name is Lawrence OnBoard Association. Lawrence OnBoard is sponsored by the Sustainability Action Network, a 501c3 entity. Lawrence Onboard has its own FEIN. Lawrence OnBoard is directed by Jennifer O'Brien.

Web Presence: Lawrence OnBoard has its own website, which is listed above. The website is primarily an information website and blog documenting the development of the program. Lawrence OnBoard publishes an online newsletter and has a Facebook page.

Map: We are mapping locations where riders have successfully solicited a ride. Each location lists direction of travel and destination. The map can be found at <https://mapsengine.google.com/map/edit?mid=zwIdasUYr7hs.ke9ZcGpEOD7k>

Research Paper: As mentioned earlier

Next Steps

Ordinance Change: According to Standard Traffic Ordinance Section 69, Article A, “No person shall stand upon or along a street or highway for the purpose of soliciting a ride” Lawrence OnBoard is working with the City Attorney, Sustainability Advisory Board and police department to determine how to revise this ordinance to allow this program to operate to the benefit of all citizens.

Funding: O'Brien is currently assessing funding needs for a pilot project. Possible funding sources are membership fees, grants, strategic partnerships, and a Rockethub Crowdsourcing campaign.

Potential Launch of Pilot Project: Summer of 2014

This is a brief overview of the activity of Lawrence OnBoard since its inception in May of 2012. If you have questions or would like to discuss any of these items in greater detail, please call or email Jennifer O'Brien.

jenny@lawrenceonboard.org

785-856-2272