



# *A Safer Way Home:* The Minnesota Safe Ride Guide



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Additional information on safe ride programs, including case studies of Minnesota programs, can be found at [www.minnesotatzd.org/saferideguide](http://www.minnesotatzd.org/saferideguide). Questions can also be directed to Jean Ryan at the Minnesota Department of Public Safety—Office of Traffic Safety, 651-201-7074.

**[www.MinnesotaTZD.org](http://www.MinnesotaTZD.org)**

## A safer way home for drinking drivers

Communities have long struggled with the negative impacts of impaired driving. From needless death and injury to overloaded criminal justice systems, alcohol-related crashes and DWI arrests take an emotional and economic toll on society.

Some Minnesota communities have responded by developing transportation alternatives to give drivers another way home after an evening out drinking. These “safe ride” programs are one strategy to prevent impaired driving.

The goal of *A Safer Way Home: the Minnesota Safe Ride Guide* is to help individuals or groups in communities that lack alternative transportation start a program to provide safe ride services. To that end, the guide includes suggestions and critical information for creating a successful program—culled from research and other successful programs.



Because many of Minnesota’s larger urban areas offer transportation options for drinking drivers, this guide focuses primarily on guidance for smaller communities with few, if any, taxis or public transportation alternatives.

With planning, commitment, and the involvement of concerned and supportive stakeholders, communities can replicate the success of existing safe ride programs and improve the safety of their roads by creating a valuable community service.

### Minnesota safe ride program examples

Many safe ride programs, maintaining various levels of business and community involvement and following different service models, operate throughout Minnesota. The four examples described here serve Breezy Point, Cleveland, Isanti County, and the Quad Cities. Organizers wanting to start a safe ride program are encouraged to look to these examples for insight into the type of program that might work well in their own community.

#### *Breezy Point Safe Ride*

Breezy Point Safe Ride provides rides to and from local drinking establishments for residents and visitors to the popular Minnesota vacation area of Breezy Point, Crosslake, Emily, Gull Lake, and Pequot Lakes. Nine 14-passenger shuttle buses operate year-round seven days a week. Each vehicle is independently owned and operated, but owners agree to work cooperatively. The service is free for riders between 6 and 10 p.m. and \$10 thereafter for unlimited transportation to, between, and home from almost 20 participating area bars and restaurants, which contribute between \$200 and \$400 per month for the service.

For more information, contact:

Clyde Brodt  
Crosslake, Minnesota  
218-851-2009

*Cleveland Sober Cab*

Since the town of Cleveland, Minnesota, lacked public transportation services of any kind, the local police department started its own safe ride service. Sober Cab offers free rides from area bars, the municipal liquor store, or private residences to a residence within a 10-mile radius of Cleveland. Rides are provided only to a person's final destination for the evening, not to or between locations. Rides are available from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. seven days a week year-round and are funded wholly through the police department's budget.

For more information, contact:

Chief Randall Tiegs  
Cleveland, Minnesota, Police Department  
507-931-6380  
clevpoli@mchsi.com

*Isanti County SafeCab*

The Isanti County SafeCab program offers rides home to patrons of participating bars and restaurants, with patrons returning later to retrieve their vehicles. Services are provided by the local taxi company and are available Thursday through Saturday nights and on special occasions from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. Services are free up to \$15; for rides exceeding that amount, the patron is responsible for the difference. SafeCab fares are subsidized equally by participating bars and restaurants, a local beer distributor, and a community fund that includes donations from local businesses and grant funding.

For more information, contact:

Bob Bollenbeck  
East Central Regional Development Commission  
Mora, Minnesota  
320-679-4065  
Robert.Bollenbeck@ecrdc.org

Judge James E. Dehn  
Isanti County Government Center  
Cambridge, Minnesota  
763-689-2292  
james.dehn@courts.state.mn.us

*Quad Cities Last Call*

Quad Cities Last Call is run and funded solely by local businesses in the Minnesota Iron Range cities of Virginia, Eveleth, Gilbert, and Mountain Iron. Last Call operates year-round seven days a week, using a local taxi company to provide rides to patrons during the same hours bars are open. Patrons of participating bars receive free rides home if they leave their vehicle behind to be



picked up later. For fares up to \$15, costs are shared 50-30-20 between the bar where the rider was last drinking, one local beer distributor, and the taxi company. The bar pays the overage for fares exceeding \$15.

For more information, contact:

Nancee Norri  
Norri Distributing, Inc.  
Virginia, Minnesota  
218-290-3757  
nancee@norridist.com

Additional information regarding these Minnesota safe ride programs is available on the Toward Zero Deaths Web site ([www.minnesotatzd.org/saferideguide](http://www.minnesotatzd.org/saferideguide)) or by contacting the organization listed. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has conducted a national evaluation of alternative transportation programs, information for which can be found in its document *Alternative Transportation Programs: A Countermeasure for Reducing Impaired Driving* (available at <http://tris.trb.org/view.aspx?id=905347>).

## How to create a safe ride program

There is no one way an alternative transportation program must be organized; rather, this guide covers the common key elements that should be addressed whatever approach is used. A safe ride program has the greatest likelihood of success if it can acquire broad support and follow carefully crafted program parameters.

### *Step 1: Assess community needs by researching impaired driving issues and talking to others*

Key questions to consider:

- What is the scope of our community's impaired driving problem?
- Is the community ready and willing to start a safe ride program?
- Are there community ordinances in place that would affect a safe ride program?
- What transportation alternatives exist in our area?
- What are the costs to the community of DWI arrests and crashes?

Groups, businesses, or individuals wanting to start a safe ride program should begin by planning, which can help avert problems later on and will lay the foundation for a solid, sustainable program. Planning includes assessing the needs and readiness of a particular community for a safe ride program.

Safe ride programs come in many shapes, sizes, and configurations. After a careful assessment of community specifics, new program organizers must decide which type of program will best serve their community.

Program organizers should also research and assess key issues related to impaired driving and alternative transportation in their community—for example, current DWI arrest rates, alcohol-related crash statistics, and ordinances governing existing community transportation options. Data can be found on the Minnesota Department of Public Safety's Web site ([www.dps.state.mn.us/ots](http://www.dps.state.mn.us/ots)). Information about local ordinances can be found by talking with local officials and possibly by checking a city's or county's Web site. In addition, talking with those who have experience with safe ride programs in other areas may yield helpful advice and cultivate resources for future questions.



### *Step 2: Determine potential supporters*

Key questions to consider:

- Who in our community has a stake in preventing impaired driving?
- How could a safe ride program benefit potential partners?
- What is the best way to find and get the word out to potential partners?

Bars and restaurants, law enforcement, public health, alcohol distributors, taxi companies, and many others have a stake in preventing impaired driving. Building a wide network of supporters and sponsors in a program's earliest stages will help shape an effort that best meets the needs of the community. Creating a list of potential community stakeholders should be one of the first tasks in planning a program. The following list is a starting point for safe ride program organizers to consider:

- |                            |                                    |                             |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Bar owners               | • Local judiciary                  | • Hospitals                 |
| • Restaurant owners        | • Liquor stores                    | • Public health departments |
| • Alcohol distributors     | • Hospitality groups               | • Faith communities         |
| • Taxi cab companies       | • Chambers of commerce             | • Service groups or clubs   |
| • Transit operators        | • Local businesses                 | • Funeral homes             |
| • Law enforcement          | • Major employers                  | • Media                     |
| representatives: city,     | • Insurance companies              | • Elected officials         |
| county, and state agencies | • Institutions of higher education | • Concerned citizens        |

### *Step 3: Call a meeting*

Key questions to consider:

- What is the best way to bring potential partners together?
- When and where should a meeting be held that will allow the most potential supporters to attend?
- How will program buy-in be fostered?
- Who will lead the meeting, and what information will be communicated?
- What is hoped to be accomplished from the meeting?

Once a list of potential supporters has been determined, program organizers should bring stakeholders together to announce their intentions, solidify support, and brainstorm ideas for the community's safe ride effort. The meeting is a time to discuss those issues researched by program organizers.

For some programs, the initial stakeholder meeting leads to the formation of a formal group with a mission to organize and run a community's safe ride program. For others, it gives local stakeholders a chance to learn about the plans of organizers, make suggestions, and offer support. In either case, a meeting to discuss the new safe ride program with community stakeholders may give program organizers a sense of the receptivity of the community to this new effort as well as information about potential concerns.

### *Step 4: Determine the service area*

Key questions to consider:

- Will the program serve a single town? A group of towns? An entire county?
- How will boundaries be determined?
- What, if any, areas are currently served by public transportation?

The geographic area to be served is perhaps the most fundamental decision to be made for a new safe ride program. It will be a factor in pricing decisions for safe ride services as well as marketing efforts to users and sponsors. The area covered by a community safe ride program—whether a single town, a group of towns, or an entire county or region—will define whom its customers will be.

#### *Step 5: Choose or create transportation providers*

Key questions to consider:

- What transportation providers already operate in the area? What services do they provide?
- Would it be possible to partner with existing transportation providers, and what limits would a safe ride service need to operate within?
- Would it be more feasible to create a new transportation service to serve the safe ride market?
- Does the transportation provider have appropriate licensing credentials and insurance coverage to provide public transportation services in the community?



Some decisions about transportation providers may be limited by partnerships with existing transportation services, such as local taxicab companies. While these partnerships can provide an established transportation option that is trusted and familiar to community residents, they may also be less flexible in defining safe ride service boundaries and other operational specifics. Safe ride programs that choose to create new transportation services may have greater latitude in defining the area to be served and may be better able to expand services as specific demand grows.

Communities considering the creation of a new transportation provider must be certain to research applicable licensing and insurance requirements and insist on these standards for all providers. Because the service will be transporting patrons to private residences in what may be a vulnerable condition, both volunteer and paid drivers, and any program volunteers, should be screened for criminal histories. Organizers should also check with community officials to see what ordinances may apply in a particular area, as failure to satisfy these requirements may leave an organization open to liability claims.

#### *Step 6: Pick a program model*

Key questions to consider:

- How will rides be provided? Will the program use a “ride home” model, a “rides to, between, and home” model, or a combination of both types of service?
- Which type of program model would work best for the community?
- Can the drawbacks of a particular model be overcome or alleviated? How?
- How will ride services be accessed? Can a patron call for a ride or must he or she access the service through staff of a participating bar or restaurant?

Several options exist for the type and level of service a community safe ride program will provide to clients. The basic choices are:

1. A program that provides rides home from an establishment
2. A program that provides rides to, between, and/or home from an establishment(s)
3. A combination of the above programs

#### 1. "Ride home" model

A program that provides a ride home from an establishment is the most familiar type of safe ride program in Minnesota. It provides a safe transportation alternative for people who have driven themselves to a bar or restaurant and, after drinking alcohol, seek another way home. Generally, a patron's car remains at the establishment until later the next day, when he or she, now presumably sober, picks it up.



The primary benefit of a ride home model is that it can easily be accommodated by existing community transportation providers. If a taxi, bus, or shuttle service already operates, the addition of a safe ride program may entail only changes in the cost of a ride (usually a reduction) or availability of rides (usually an increase) during nighttime hours.

Challenges exist, however, with the ride home model. A ride home program assumes the patron (or someone around her or him, such as a friend or a server) is making rational assessments of the patron's fitness to drive after drinking. The patron must also have the financial resources at the end of the evening to pay for the safe ride service if there is a charge.

The ride home model also assumes that a patron is willing and able to leave a vehicle behind for the night. Because some patrons do not like leaving their vehicle behind, a variation of the ride home model is one that takes a patron's vehicle home at the end of the evening along with the patron. This is accomplished by having two people respond to a request for safe ride transportation service, with one person driving the patron home and the other driving the patron's vehicle.

With the traditional ride home model, a patron must also have the ability and resources to retrieve the vehicle at a later time. A possible solution is for the program to provide a voucher for a return trip to the bar or restaurant to retrieve the vehicle as a part of its service.

Finally, in many towns and cities, ordinances prohibit parking on streets after certain hours. Unless the bar or restaurant has a private parking lot, vehicles parked on city streets overnight may be subject to ticketing or towing. A ride home program may want to make arrangements with local law enforcement agencies early on to support the safe ride patrons by temporarily exempting their vehicles from these ordinances.



## 2. “Rides to, between, and home” model

Safe ride programs adopting the “rides to, between, and home” model are less common in Minnesota. These programs offer pick-up service that, in addition to transporting patrons from their homes to a bar or restaurant and back home at the end of the night, will often allow patrons to move between bars in the community. A safe ride service using this model might be developed specifically to provide safe, entertainment-oriented transportation.

For a set fee paid by the patron at the beginning of the evening, the rides to, between, and home model solves some of the issues presented by the more common ride home model.

These include eliminating a patron’s need to decide at the end of the evening whether she or he is able to drive; the need to have funds left over at the end of the night to pay for a ride; and the need to leave behind (and later retrieve) a vehicle. Proponents of this model say that when patrons or their passengers do not have to worry about transportation, the occasion “out on the town” can be more enjoyable.

Among the concerns with this model are that it requires planning on the part of the patron. Some critics contend that people who go out spontaneously or drink more than planned are unable to take advantage of this type of safe ride program. Despite research to the contrary, others fear this model may appear to encourage excessive drinking.

## 3. “Combination” model

Another safe ride option combines some benefits of the two previously discussed models to form a combination model. For example, the safe ride program operating in Breezy Point, Minnesota, is the result of an entrepreneurial business venture that offers bar and restaurant patrons “rides to, between, and home” service in several lakes-area communities north of Brainerd. The transportation service also offers rides home to patrons who drive to community bars and restaurants and decide against driving their personal vehicles home. By providing both types of alternative transportation services, the Breezy Point safe ride program takes advantage of the benefits of each model to meet the needs of a community.

### *Step 7: Establish hours and days of operation*

Key questions to consider:

- When does the community typically need safe ride services? Where are the gaps in service?
- What are the local bar and liquor establishment hours?
- Does the community hold any festivals or special events that involve significant alcohol consumption?
- What days of the week, and during what hours, would the service ideally operate? What can the program do with the resources it has?

The hours of operation for safe ride programs vary considerably. A community must realistically assess its needs and ability to meet the demand for safe ride services. A continuum of options exists in programs throughout Minnesota, and many start at one level of service and grow as demand and sustainability increase. Some examples include:

- Holiday safe ride services, which focus on providing services on major holidays associated with significant alcohol consumption, such as New Year’s Eve and St. Patrick’s Day.
- Community event safe ride services, which offer services in connection with larger community celebrations that involve significant alcohol consumption.



- Seasonal safe ride services, which cover a longer length of time, such as a winter holiday period (Thanksgiving through New Year's) or a summer vacation season (Memorial Day through Labor Day).
- Year-round safe ride services.
- Weekend safe ride services.
- Seven-days-a-week safe ride services.

#### Step 8: Price services and secure funding

Key questions to consider:

- What will the service cost to operate?
- What will the service cost the user?
- How will funding be used to subsidize ride costs?
- How will funding be solicited and received from community supporters and stakeholders?
- Will funds be received on a per-ride basis or a set-contribution basis?
- Will external fundraising be necessary to support program costs?

Generally speaking, alternative transportation programs offer rides home to bar and restaurant patrons at rates that are free or less than the price of commercial transportation and offer a tangible benefit to the drinking patron (e.g., getting a patron's vehicle home or providing a limo experience). Safe ride programs generally subsidize some portion of the ride cost to keep the rate low enough to attract clients and be perceived as a cost-effective alternative to driving home after drinking. Therefore, program planners must determine what price to charge for alternative transportation services as well as find sources of funding to offset the cost of the rides.

Correctly pricing the safe ride service is critical, as the affordability of the service will influence the number of individuals who choose to use it. Ideally, the service would be free or modestly priced, which would encourage use by persons of all economic situations. Once a pricing structure is determined, organizers must create a funding formula and communities must raise funds to subsidize ride costs and underwrite program operations.

Sources for financial program support are best found within the community. Successful alternative transportation programs can benefit program funders as well as the patrons who use the service. Establishments that serve alcohol are likely to support programs that help their customers. Alcohol wholesalers, distributors, and retailers also have a significant stake in the success of their community's hospitality industry. If a community uses an existing transportation provider for its safe ride services, the additional business generated may allow owners to contribute to the program's funding stream. Program planners should also consider approaching businesses, major employers, foundations, or other charitable organizations for support. The key is to find stable, committed funding partners who will support program efforts for the long term, enabling them to grow and continue providing services.

#### *Step 9: Determine program structure and management*

Key questions to consider:

- What is the organizational structure of the body running the safe ride effort? Will the program be run by an existing nonprofit, for-profit, or governmental organization, or will a new entity be created to manage the program?

- Who will be responsible for day-to-day management of the program?
- How will rides be tracked? Will vouchers be used? Other types of records?
- What ride information will be tracked? (Suggested information to collect includes name of the originating establishment, number of rides and number of riders, ride distance, and day and time of ride. Having baseline data will provide important feedback to organizers and funders.)

Program organizers must create a vision for how the safe ride program will operate and monitor itself. There should be agreement on how finances will be managed, how the organization will be structured, and how key regulatory requirements will be satisfied. Many of these decisions must be made before the first ride can be provided. Because legal requirements vary depending on a specific program structure and from one community to another, program stakeholders may choose to seek legal counsel in sorting out the many operational aspects of a new safe ride program.

Some safe ride groups have incorporated as nonprofit organizations, enabling them to accept charitable gaming proceeds from community service clubs. Groups seeking 501(c)(3) nonprofit status should also anticipate engaging legal counsel to complete this process.

These are just a few of the organizational issues that will need to be addressed. Taking time at the outset to plan and organize will help create a viable community service beneficial to both supporters and users.

#### *Step 10: Market the program to the hospitality industry and its patrons*

Key questions to consider:

- Who is the target audience for marketing efforts?
- What information is the program trying to communicate, and what is the best way to do that (e.g., posters, billboards, word of mouth)?
- Which program partners can help with advertising in their establishments?
- What are the short-term and long-term goals for marketing efforts?

Once program specifics have been determined, program organizers should consider developing a strategic marketing plan to introduce the program to the community. The plan should target activities that get the word out to potential supporters and additional stakeholders as well as marketing efforts designed to engage the community's hospitality industry and its patrons.

Marketing strategies need to create interest and excitement around this new community service and its benefits. The safe ride marketing efforts must make clear the specifics of the program, why patrons should try it, and what they can expect when they do. In addition, marketing efforts should:

- Create an awareness of the program. The focus should be on helping people understand the concept of alternative transportation as well as the specifics of a community's program. Creating curiosity and awareness will be the first step in getting people to consider using the service.
- Generate positive feelings in patrons about using alternative transportation when they go out for the evening. Although the program is ultimately about creating safer roads, marketing efforts should focus on encouraging the use of services with affirming messages rather than by just scaring patrons with messages about the possible negative consequences of driving after drinking. Getting people to embrace the safe ride service as an acceptable alternative to driving after drinking will encourage its use.





- Motivate patrons to choose and continue using services. Ongoing marketing efforts are needed to keep safe ride services in the public eye and remind users of its benefits. Marketing efforts should send a positive message to encourage more individuals to try safe ride services and reinforce previous users' experiences to make it a habit and an ongoing choice.

### Final thoughts

Safe ride alternative transportation programs offer a significant opportunity to positively affect the safety of a community by reducing the number of impaired drivers on its roads. By engaging stakeholders interested in community health and safety, the local hospitality industry, and transportation advocates, safe ride programs can provide a community service that benefits all involved. Although these programs employ a number of operational models and vary in program specifics, all share a common goal: giving drivers a safe, positive, and affordable alternative to driving after drinking.

Additional information on safe ride programs, including case studies of Minnesota programs, can be found at [www.minnesotazd.org/saferideguide](http://www.minnesotazd.org/saferideguide). Questions can also be directed to Jean Ryan at the Minnesota Department of Public Safety—Office of Traffic Safety: 651-201-7074.

## Quick checklist for starting a safe ride program

- Assess your community's needs by researching impaired driving issues and talking to others.
- Find potential supporters and stakeholders among local bar owners, alcohol distributors, law enforcement, taxi providers, businesses, and others.
- Call a meeting of stakeholders to discuss intentions, brainstorm ideas, and build support.
- Determine the geographic area the program will service.
- Choose or create new transportation providers.
- Pick a program model, whether providing rides home only; rides to, between, and home from an establishment(s); or some combination of models.
- Establish hours and days of operation for providing rides.
- Price services and secure funding from local businesses to subsidize those services.
- Determine how the program will be structured and managed, including day-to-day operations.
- Market the program to the hospitality industry and its patrons.