

Minnesota Safe Ride Program Report



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About this Report

Communities across Minnesota and the nation are committed to addressing the complex issues of impaired driving. Although education about the consequences of driving after drinking and enforcement of driving while impaired (DWI) laws may be the most common strategies employed, some communities are also interested in *preventing* impaired driving. One strategy embraced by many communities is that of providing alternative transportation services for individuals who choose not to drive after drinking.

The goal of the *Minnesota Safe Ride Program Report* is to provide critical information about alternative transportation or safe ride programs to individuals or communities interested in providing similar services. With a solid understanding of the elements necessary to build strong safe ride programs, interested stakeholders can create an effective local program that provides a valuable service while reducing the incidence of impaired driving in their communities.

Many of Minnesota's larger urban areas have a number of public transportation options for drinking drivers—light rail, public bus service, and multiple taxicab and private transportation companies. Smaller urban areas often have few, if any, public transportation choices or taxi services—and thus, few options for drivers who have had too much to drink. Although the information offered in this publication may help programs in any community, the *Minnesota Safe Ride Program Report* focuses primarily on guidance for smaller communities.

The final section of this report offers assistance to community leaders, businesses, or individuals interested in creating a safe ride program in their own community. Suggestions for creating a successful program—culled from research and other successful programs—are described for the reader.

Introduction

Humans are social animals. People gather in small and large groups to share stories and celebrate. Food and drink, including alcohol, are often part of the social interaction of these gatherings. Travel is often required to get together with friends, family, and acquaintances, and so transportation, by personal vehicle or public transportation, is often necessary for people to enjoy one another's company.

Alcohol consumption is common in society, be it in private residences, bars, restaurants, or other locations. When consumed in moderation, alcohol generally does not cause harm to those legally able to use it. Problems arise, however, when individuals consume too much alcohol and drive afterward.

In 2008, 11,773 people were killed in crashes resulting from alcohol-impaired driving. These fatalities accounted for 32 percent of the total motor vehicle traffic fatalities in the United States. Of those 11,773 who died in alcohol-related crashes, 9,902 (84 percent) were drivers with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 or higher or passengers in these vehicles.¹ People are literally “dying to get home.”

Background

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 communities have responded by developing transportation alternatives to give drivers another way home after an evening out drinking. Safe ride programs are one approach to preventing impaired driving.² With names such as “Dial-a-Ride,” “Sober Cab,” “Safe Ride,” “Tipsy Taxi,” and “Road Crew,” these and other programs throughout the country have a similar objective: to ensure a

1 <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811155.PDF>. Accessed 10/14/09.

2 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. *Alternative Transportation Strategies to Prevent Alcohol Impaired Driving*. Safe & Sober Community Planner. <http://nhtsa.dot.gov/peple/outreach/SafeSobr/12qp/alternative.html>. Accessed 5/28/2009.

sober ride home for individuals who have consumed alcohol and would otherwise drive,³ posing a risk to themselves, their passengers, and others sharing the roadway.

Safe ride⁴ programs enjoy broad support from potential users, drinking establishments, community organizations, and the alcohol beverage industry and are believed to help reduce the number of intoxicated drivers on the road.⁵ Although some critics are concerned that drinkers will consume more alcohol when they are relieved of the responsibility of driving, research does not bear this out. Instead, research suggests that safe ride programs do not promote or encourage levels of drinking beyond what would otherwise occur,^{6,7,8} and that safe ride programs actually attract drinkers at high risk for DWI.^{9,10}

The mechanics of safe ride programs encompass a wide variety of transportation alternatives, such as taxicabs, limousines, tow trucks, buses, and automobiles,^{11,12} and have various organizational structures. Safe ride programs operate in urban, rural, and suburban locations and are run by several types of organizations: cab and bus companies, charitable organizations, trade associations, hospitals, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations set up specifically for this purpose. Program availability, frequency of service, costs to users, population served, sponsorships, and modes of operation can differ significantly from program to program.¹³ Program variations significantly limit the ability of researchers to generalize about the effectiveness of these efforts. Therefore, broad evidence of the effectiveness of safe ride programs in reducing DWI behavior is largely unknown.^{14,15}

Evaluations of some individual safe ride programs suggest this environmental strategy has promise. The Pitkin County Sheriff's Office in Aspen, Colorado, has operated Topsy Taxi since 1983 as a crime prevention program with assistance from the Aspen and Snowmass Police Departments as well as the local restaurant association. Topsy Taxi is a free ride-home program available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and is guided by an informal advisory committee made up of several local stakeholders. No tax dollars are used to fund the program. Although crash reductions that approach statistical significance are unlikely due to relatively few crashes in Pitkin County overall, examination of crash data indicated that nighttime, injury,

3 Sarkar, S., Andreas, M., De Faria, F. (2005). "Who Uses Safe Ride Programs: An Examination of the Dynamics of Individuals Who Use a Safe Ride Program Instead of Driving Home While Drunk." *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, Vol. 21 (2), pp. 305–325.

4 The term "safe ride" will be used throughout this report as a general name for alternative transportation programs.

5 Apsler, R. (1988). "Transportation Alternatives for Drinkers." *Surgeon General's Workshop on Drunk Driving: Background Papers*. Rockville, Maryland. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. December 1988, pp. 162–167.

6 NHTSA, "Alternative Transportation."

7 Harding, W.M., Caudill, B.D., Moore, B.A., Frissell, K.C. (2001). "Do Drivers Drink More When They Use a Safe Ride?" *Journal of Substance Abuse*, Vol. 13 (3), pp. 283–290.

8 Rothschild, M.L., Mastin, B., Miller, T.W. (2006). "Reducing Alcohol-Impaired Driving Crashes Through the Use of Social Marketing." *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, Vol. 38, No. 6.

9 Caudill, B.D., Harding, W.M., Moore, B.A. (2000). "At-Risk Drinkers Use Safe Ride Services to Avoid Drinking and Driving." *Journal of Substance Abuse*, Vol. 11. (2), pp. 149–159.

10 Sarkar, S., Andreas, M., De Faria, F. (2005). "Who Uses Safe Ride Programs: An Examination of the Dynamics of Individuals Who Use a Safe Ride Program Instead of Driving Home While Drunk." *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, Vol. 21 (2), pp. 305–325.

11 Decina, L.E., Foss, R., Tucker, M.E., Goodwin, A., Sohn, J. (2009). *Alternative Transportation Programs: A Countermeasure for Reducing Impaired Driving*. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT HS 811 188.

12 Apsler, R. "Transportation Alternatives."

13 Ibid.

14 Harding, W.M., Apsler, R., Goldfein, J. (1988). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. *The Assessment of Ride Service Programs as an Alcohol Countermeasure*. Final Report. HS-807 290 8605-8801.

15 Grube, J. (2006). "Alcohol Regulation and Traffic Safety: An Overview." Traffic Safety and Alcohol Regulation: A Symposium. June 5–6, 2006, Irvine, California. Transportation Research Board, Transportation Research Circular Number E-C123.

and fatal crashes declined after implementation of Tippy Taxi.¹⁶

In a study that examined a different safe ride model—the Road Crew program—three rural communities in Wisconsin implemented a safe ride program that offered drinkers reduced-cost transportation to, from, and between bars in their communities. Extensive market research completed before and after implementation of the Road Crew program shaped the program’s focus and specifics. Overcoming the concern of many drinkers about leaving a vehicle behind at the bar at the end of the night,¹⁷ the Road Crew program charged drinkers a nominal fee for round-trip transportation for the evening, eliminating the need for any driving on the part of the drinker. With almost 20,000 rides provided during the test year, a cost-benefit analysis of the number of potential crashes avoided estimated a 17 percent decrease in crashes after the first year of the program.¹⁸

Since drinking practices are relatively immune to change,^{19,20} safe ride programs can potentially remove many alcohol-impaired drivers from area roadways. As a result, drinking drivers, their passengers, and innocent motorists sharing the road are more likely to get home safely.

Safe Ride Programs in Minnesota

Many safe ride programs operate throughout the state of Minnesota. Programs come in a spectrum of shapes and sizes, from those that provide alternative transportation services within the limited timeframe of a particular community festival or holiday to professional year-round services that pick up drivers and their vehicles at a bar and transport both home after a night on the town. Some safe ride programs are provided by businesses that include the alcohol-serving establishment, while others are run by non-profit groups or community collaborations formed solely to provide impaired drivers a sober ride home. In one Minnesota community that was too small to offer any public transportation options, the police department stepped in and created a program that gives drinking residents a safe ride home without legal consequences.

Some safe ride programs operate using unpaid volunteers, and others support a revenue-generating business. Several programs combine the resources of multiple local businesses to support a community safe ride program. While some programs operate in larger metropolitan areas where users also have access to public transportation, many programs are active in rural communities where users have few alternative transportation choices.

Most Minnesota safe ride programs choose to offer only rides home from drinking establishments where a patron leaves his or her vehicle overnight, presumably to pick it up at a later time when he or she is sober. Some programs offer rides to, between, and home from bars. Other programs offer a combination of both models.

Cost to the patron varies significantly among programs. Many safe ride services are offered without cost; in some cases a small fee may be charged if certain distance criteria are exceeded. Other programs subsidize the fee paid by the patron to reduce the cost, and yet other services are wholly paid for by the patron. Bars, restaurants, local beer distributors, businesses, and community groups often contribute to the cost of providing reduced-cost ride services to drinking drivers. At least one Minnesota community group has formed a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that enables it to accept gaming receipts to offset safe ride program costs.

16 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2000). “Evaluation of a Full-Time Ride Service Program: Aspen, Colorado’s Tippy Taxi Service.” <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/People/injury/research/tipsytaxi/toc.htm>. Accessed 7/27/09.

17 Apsler, R. “Transportation Alternatives.”

18 Rothschild, M.L., Mastin, B., Miller, T.W. (2006). “Reducing Alcohol-Impaired Driving Crashes Through the Use of Social Marketing.” *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, Vol. 38, No. 6.

19 Apsler, R. “Transportation Alternatives.”

20 Harding, W.M., Caudill, B.D., Moore, B.A., Frissell, K.C. (2001). “Do Drivers Drink More When They Use a Safe Ride?” *Journal of Substance Abuse*, Vol. 13 (3), pp. 283–290.

Case Studies

In the following pages, four safe ride programs operating in different areas of Minnesota are profiled. Each program developed independently of the others, maintains different levels of business and community involvement, and possesses unique aspects that contribute to its success. Communities considering a safe ride program can read these case studies and gain insight into the type of program that might work well in their own community.

Breezy Point Safe Ride

In June 2007, Clyde Brodt started a shuttle service in the Crosslake area of north central Minnesota to keep himself busy after he retired. Working with a single seven-passenger vehicle, Brodt thought residents and visitors to the popular Minnesota vacation area might appreciate the convenience of rides to and from local drinking establishments during the summer. The popularity of his idea caught on immediately, and within two months he had added another vehicle; two months later he added a third. Today, nine “Safe Ride” 14-passenger shuttle buses operate seven days a week, year-round within a five-mile radius of the cities of Breezy Point, Crosslake, Emily, Gull Lake, and Pequot Lakes, an area with a year-round population of almost 19,000²¹.



Each vehicle is independently owned and operated, but owners agree to work cooperatively. Each shuttle owner possesses the required licenses, certification, and insurance necessary to operate commercial transportation services.

The shuttle service is complimentary between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m.; after 10 p.m., riders are given a wristband and are charged \$10. The \$10 fee entitles a rider to unlimited transportation to, between, and home from almost 20 area bars and restaurants. If a rider wants to visit an establishment that does not participate, the cost is \$15. Patrons who drive themselves for an evening out but later decide they do not want to drive home are also welcome to leave their vehicle at the bar and use Safe Ride services for \$10. Shuttle service is available until the last riders have been taken home.



Brodt does not keep track of the number of rides he and his colleagues provide, but based on calls for service and revenue, he estimates up to 300 rides are provided each weekend evening in the summer. Approximately 30 percent of rides occur between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. and are complimentary. Brodt says many of the early evening riders are area seniors who appreciate being able to go out for a meal or meet friends for a drink. Shuttle service is often prearranged by wedding parties and other groups.

Participating bars and restaurants contribute between \$200 and \$400 per month for the Safe Ride shuttle service, depending on the level of service required by each establishment. Marketing efforts are modest, consisting primarily of word-of-mouth at the participating establishments and some advertising

21 E-mail correspondence with Crow Wing County, Minn., Auditor's Office, 10/27/09.

fliers printed by the area beer distributor. The beer distributor also provides funding for the Safe Ride lettering on shuttle vehicles.

For more information, contact:

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218-851-2009

Cleveland “Sober Cab”

Cleveland, Minnesota, is a small town of 800 people in south-central Minnesota. The taxi service in the nearest town will not travel to Cleveland, leaving the small community without any public transportation options. After the Cleveland Police Department was criticized for making too many DWI arrests in 2003, a sergeant with the department came up with an idea. He reasoned that critics could not complain when impaired drivers were arrested after having the option of a free ride home and not using it. So the Cleveland Police Department started its own “Sober Cab” program.

Cleveland has three bars and a municipal liquor store. Free rides are available from any of these establishments or from private residences to a residence within a 10-mile radius of Cleveland. Rides are not provided to or between locations, but only to a person’s final destination for the evening. The police will respond to a call from any establishment staff or from a driver.

Operating only when Cleveland has police coverage, rides are available from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m., seven days a week, 365 days a year. Cleveland generally has a single squad car working each evening, but with

extra Sober Cab demand on many holidays, the department will staff a second squad car for Sober Cab duties. This unusual public service is funded wholly through the police department’s budget.

The program has received mixed support from the Cleveland City Council, primarily because of questions of liability for the police department. An opinion was sought from the Minnesota League of Cities, which counseled that liability for the City of Cleveland would be greater if individuals were knowingly allowed to leave the municipal liquor store, the source of the most Sober Cab calls, than by transporting impaired individuals in police vehicles.

The Cleveland Police Department estimates it receives approximately 80 to 100 calls for rides annually and transported 145 persons in 2009. Marketing efforts are limited to word of mouth, Sober Cab fliers at the bars in Cleveland, and a page describing the program on the police department’s Web site.



For more information, contact:
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Isanti County “SafeCab”

The creation of the Isanti County “SafeCab” program represents the meeting of several minds with similar ideas about the need for alternative transportation in the county. It began in 2003, with a local resident of Isanti County’s largest city, Cambridge, a town of approximately 7,500 located less than an hour north of the Twin Cities. The resident tells the story:

We had been [out] drinking for several hours when I told a friend (who lived in our town for many years) that we needed to call a cab for a ride home. He laughed and told me they did not have a cab service. I said that our city needed a cab. He laughed again and then told me I was right.²²



That experience was the beginning of a taxi business in Cambridge. Jump ahead to the spring of 2004, when community stakeholders, including a local judge, were at a meeting of the local Toward Zero Death (TZD) traffic safety coalition. The group decided that transportation alternatives were needed for patrons of local bars and restaurants who would otherwise drink and drive home. With that, a partnership was born to provide SafeCab services in rural Isanti County, population 39,000. Rides began in 2005.

Today, the Isanti County SafeCab program offers rides home to patrons of participating bars and restaurants after an evening of drinking. Drivers return at a later time, presumably sober, to retrieve vehicles left in the parking lots of participating establishments. The program does not provide rides to or between bars. SafeCab 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. The service is free to the patron for rides up to \$15; for rides exceeding that amount, the patron is responsible for the difference. SafeCab fares are subsidized by a formula in which one-third of the program’s funding comes from each of these three sources: participating bars and restaurants, a local beer distributor, and a community fund that includes donations from local businesses and grant funding.

An estimated 50 percent of the bars in Isanti County participate in the SafeCab program, and in 2009, 726 rides were given to 1,347 people. In 2009, the SafeCab board became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable corporation to aid in encouraging, facilitating, and organizing community donations to the SafeCab program, including proceeds from pull-tab gaming. Other program-related financial and administrative oversight duties are performed by an official from the regional planning and development organization.

The Isanti County TZD traffic safety coalition has been actively involved in marketing the efforts of the SafeCab program. The ride service is heavily promoted through use of program-related napkins, table toppers, and window signs in bars; by media promotion of special events and competitions for top bar and top bartenders; at community celebrations; and by local judges informing DWI defendants in court about the availability of the program.

²² Brown, Pete. President, Cambridge Cab, Inc. “How to Start a Safe Cab.” Undated, unpublished personal report, pg 1.

For more information, contact:

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Quad Cities (Virginia, Eveleth, Gilbert, Mountain Iron) “Last Call”

The longest-running safe ride program of the four efforts profiled, the “Last Call” program, is run and funded solely by local business entities in the northeastern Minnesota Iron Range cities of Virginia, Eveleth, Gilbert, and Mountain Iron. An area beer distributor learned from a colleague in Wisconsin about a safe ride program established there by Miller Brewing Company and thought a similar effort might be a positive addition to the communities served by its distributorship. The company approached local bars about pilot testing the program over the winter holidays in 2000. What began as a seasonal safe ride effort for the holiday season was so popular with customers it quickly turned into a seven-days-a-week, 365-days-per-year community service.

The Last Call program uses a local taxi company working in the Quad Cities to provide rides to patrons who have had too much to drink, operating, as the distributor put it, “Whenever the bars are open.” More than 50 percent of area bars take part in the program. Patrons simply ask bartenders at participating bars for a Last Call voucher; either the patron or the bartender can call for the cab. Rides home from the bar are provided free of charge to individuals who leave vehicles behind to be picked up at a later time. The Last Call program does not provide rides to or between bars. 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. If a fare exceeds \$15, the bar pays the overage.

In 2009, 1,010 rides to 1,390 passengers were provided through the Last Call program in the Quad Cities. According to the beer distributor, the program is well known in the region, where the combined population of the cities it serves is just under 20,000. Early on, posters and table tents were used to create program awareness; more recently, signs in participating bars and word-of-mouth advertising are the primary means of marketing the program. The program was featured in a news segment from the ABC-TV affiliate in Duluth. (The segment is highlighted on the home page of the Minnesota Beer Wholesalers Association Web site.) The local beer distributor that began the program handles all financial details and administrative oversight of the Quad Cities Last Call program.

For more information, contact:

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Creating a Safe Ride Program

A safe ride program can be a positive addition to a community. Helping community members get home safely after a night out is itself a worthy goal; an alternative transportation program such as safe ride may also help reduce impaired driving arrests and prevent the needless tragedy of alcohol-related crashes.

The following pages offer guidance to individuals or groups interested in starting a safe ride effort in their community. Because each community has unique resources and needs, this information serves more as a roadmap, pointing out possible places to visit, rather than as a recipe dictating specific quantities and ingredients. After reading the four preceding case studies, it should be evident that there is no one way a safe ride program must be organized. There are, however, basic elements that should be addressed when setting up a successful alternative transportation program. This report addresses key issues helpful for those considering safe ride programs as a strategy to improve road safety in their communities. (This information can also be found in condensed form in a companion document, *A Safer Way Home: The Minnesota Safe Ride Guide*.)

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

Safe ride efforts can be initiated by individual citizens, businesses, or other community groups. A safe ride program has the greatest likelihood of success if it can acquire broad support and follow carefully crafted program parameters. Those considering a safe ride program are advised to spend time assessing the needs and readiness of their communities for such a program up front. Time spent on planning will often help avert problems later on and can lay the foundation for a solid, sustainable program.

Safe ride programs come in many shapes, sizes, and configurations. After a careful assessment of community specifics, new program organizers will have many important decisions to make about the type of safe ride program needed to serve their community.

Program organizers should research and assess several key issues related to impaired driving and alternative transportation in their community. These topics might include current community DWI arrest rates, community crash statistics, and the availability of, and ordinances governing, existing community transportation options. In addition, talking with others who have experience with safe ride programs similar to what a community is considering may be useful. The experience of others familiar with safe ride efforts can yield helpful start-up advice and resources for future questions.

Step 2: Determine potential supporters

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 its community. Community safe ride programs have a number of natural stakeholders. Bars and restaurants, law enforcement, emergency medical services, judges, public health, alcohol suppliers and distributors, taxi companies, and many others have an interest in preventing impaired driving. Therefore, creating a list of community stakeholders who might be interested in a safe ride program should be one of the first tasks in the development process. By gaining input and support at the beginning of the process, a strong foundation for future partnerships can be formed. The following list of individuals and organizations is a starting point for safe ride program organizers to consider as supporters:

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

Step 3: Call a meeting

Once a list of potential supporters has been determined, program organizers should consider bringing 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 the impaired driving and alternative transportation issues researched by program organizers.

For some safe ride 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 safe ride organizers, make suggestions, and offer support for the program. In either case, a meeting to discuss the new safe ride program with community stakeholders may give program organizers a sense of how receptive a community will be to this new effort, as well as information about concerns that might be encountered along the way.

Step 4: Determine the service area

The 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 making pricing decisions for safe ride services and in determining the limits of marketing efforts to users and sponsors. The area covered by a community safe ride program will define whom its customers will be. Will the safe ride service be restricted to a single town or city? A group of towns near one another? Or an entire county or region?

Step 5: Choose or create transportation providers

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, there may be less flexibility in defining safe ride service boundaries and other operational specifics. Safe ride programs choosing 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 for their community and insist on these standards for all providers.



Step 6: Pick a program model

As demonstrated by the four Minnesota case studies, at least a few different options exist in terms of the type of service a community safe ride program might provide. This represents another key decision to be made by a new safe ride effort: the “level of service” the program will provide to its 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

“Ride Home” Model

A program that provides a ride home from an establishment is the most familiar type of safe ride program in Minnesota (see the Cleveland, Isanti, and Quad Cities case studies). It provides a safe transportation alternative for people who have driven themselves to a bar or restaurant and, after drinking alcohol, seek another way to get home. Generally, the patron’s car remains at the establishment until later the next day, when the vehicle owner, now presumably sober, is able to pick it up. Some ride home programs provide a voucher for a return trip to the bar or restaurant to retrieve the vehicle as a part of the safe ride service.

Because some patrons do not like leaving their vehicle behind, another variation on the ride home model involves safe ride programs that take 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 home.

The primary benefit of a ride home model is that it can be easily accommodated by existing community transportation providers. If a taxi, bus, or shuttle service already exists, the addition of a safe ride program may only mean changes in ride cost to a patron during nighttime use (usually a reduction in cost) or in the increased availability of rides at a later hour.

However, challenges exist with the ride home model—first with the patron, and second (in the case of most ride home programs), with the vehicle. In terms of patron-related challenges, 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).

Vehicle challenges associated with the ride home model include the assumption that a patron is willing and able to leave a vehicle behind for the night. When a vehicle is left behind at a bar or restaurant, the patron must also have the ability and resources to retrieve the vehicle at a later time. 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 unless arrangements are made with local law enforcement agencies.

“Rides To, Between, and Home” Model

Safe ride programs adopting the rides to, between, and home from an establishment(s) model are less common in Minnesota but could also be adopted by existing community transportation entities. A safe ride service using this model might also be specifically developed to provide safe, entertainment-oriented transportation, as was the case described in the Wisconsin study of the Road Crew program. 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. 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 decision-making by a patron at the end of the evening as to 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 if there is a cost for the safe ride service, and the need to leave behind and (and later retrieve) vehicles. Proponents of this model feel that when patrons or their passengers do not have

to worry about transportation, the occasion “out on the town” can be more enjoyable.

Concerns about the “rides to, between and home” model of safe ride programs also exist. This model requires planning on the part of the patron. Some critics are concerned that people who go out spontaneously or who end up drinking 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.

“Combination” Model

Another option for safe ride programs is to combine some of the benefits of the two previously discussed models. The safe ride program in Breezy Point, detailed in a case study in the earlier section of this report, is an example of the combination model. This alternative transportation service is the result of an entrepreneurial business venture that offers bar and restaurant patrons rides to, between, and home from establishments in several lakes-area communities north of Brainerd. The Breezy Point Safe Ride 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 for community bar and restaurant patrons, the Breezy Point Safe Ride program takes advantage of the benefits found in each model to fit the needs of a community.

Step 7: Establish hours and days of operation

Safe ride programs vary considerably in terms of when they operate. Ideally, alternative transportation services would be available year-round, 24/7, but this isn’t possible for every community. A community must realistically assess its needs and ability to meet the demand for safe ride services. A continuum of options currently exists in programs throughout Minnesota. Many programs start at one level of service and grow as demand increases and the program can be sustained. Some basic options to consider include:

- Holiday safe ride services. These efforts often focus on providing alternative transportation services on major holidays associated with significant alcohol consumption such as New Year’s Eve, St. Patrick’s Day, and similar holidays when impaired driving is an issue.
- Community event safe ride services. Local communities offer special safe ride services in connection with larger community celebrations that involve significant alcohol consumption.
- Seasonal safe ride services. While not provided year-round, these services may 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), when increased alcohol consumption by residents or visitors is an issue.
- Year-round safe ride services. Alternative transportation services that serve a community 12 months of the year.
- Weekend safe ride services. As programs begin, communities sometimes focus on providing safe ride services on the weekend days, when impaired driving is most likely to occur in their communities.
- Seven-day-a-week safe ride services. If demand is sufficient, some communities find it feasible to offer alternative transportation service throughout the entire week.

Step 8: Price services and secure funding

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, or that offer a tangible benefit to the drinking patron (e.g., getting a patron’s vehicle home along with the patron 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. To that end, program planners must determine the price to be charged for alternative transportation services as well as find sources of funding to offset the cost of the rides.

Pricing the safe ride service will be a critical element in the development of a new program, as the affordability of the service will influence the number of patrons who choose to use it. Ideally, the service would be free or have a very modest cost, which would encourage use by persons of all economic situations. Once a ride 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. Community establishments that serve alcohol can be natural partners in safe ride efforts and are likely to be supportive of programs that assist customers of their businesses. Alcohol wholesalers, distributors, and retailers also have a significant stake in the success of their community's hospitality industry and thus are another potential source for program and funding assistance. If a community uses an existing transportation provider for its safe ride services, the additional business generated by the safe ride program may allow owners to contribute to a safe ride program funding stream. Program planners may also want to consider approaching other funding sources within the community, such as local businesses, major employers, foundations, or other charitable organizations for support of the safe ride effort. The key will be to find stable, committed funding partners that will support program efforts for the long term, enabling safe ride efforts to grow, and provide patrons of local establishments a better way to get home after an evening of drinking.

Step 9: Determine program structure and management

Several aspects of a safe ride program structure should be considered when setting up a new service. Program organizers must create a vision for how the safe ride program will operate, monitor, and market itself. There should be agreement on how finances will be managed, the structure will be organized, and key regulatory requirements will be satisfied. Many of these decisions must be made before the first ride can be provided. Because legal requirements may vary depending on the specific program structure chosen and from one community to another, program stakeholders may find the assistance of legal counsel helpful in sorting out many operational aspects of a new safe ride program. Some administrative issues program organizers may need to consider include:

- 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?
 - Some safe ride groups (see the Isanti County "SafeCab" case study) have been incorporated as nonprofit organizations, enabling them to accept charitable gaming proceeds from community service clubs. Groups seeking 501(c)(3) nonprofit status should anticipate engaging legal counsel to complete this process.
- Who will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the safe ride program?
- How will rides be provided? Will an existing transportation provider be used, or will a new transportation service be created 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? Organizers should check with community officials to see what ordinances may apply in their area, as failure to satisfy these requirements may

leave an organization open to liability claims.

- Have transportation service drivers been subject to criminal background checks? Because the service will be transporting patrons who may be in a vulnerable condition to their private residences, volunteer and paid drivers, and any other program volunteers, should be screened for criminal histories.
- 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?
- What will be the cost of the service to the user? How will funding be used to subsidize ride costs?
- How will rides be tracked? Will vouchers be used? Other types of records?
- What ride information will be tracked? Suggested information about program usage to be collected might include the name of the originating establishment, number of rides and number of riders, ride distance, and day and time of ride. Having baseline data about safe ride service use will provide important feedback to organizers and funders.
- How will funding be solicited and received from community supporters and stakeholders? Will funds be received on a per ride basis (see Quad Cities “Last Call” case study) or a set contribution basis (see Breezy Point “Safe Ride” case study)?
- Will external fundraising to support safe ride program costs be necessary?

While these are just a few of the organizational issues safe ride organizers will need to address, 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

Once program specifics have been determined, safe ride 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 the availability of this new community service and the benefits the program can bring to the community. 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. Safe ride marketing efforts should attempt to:

- Create an awareness of the safe ride program. The focus should be on helping people to understand the concept of alternative transportation and the specifics of a community’s program. Creating curiosity and awareness will be the first step in getting users to consider using the service.

- Create positive feelings about using alternative transportation for patrons when they go out for the evening. Although the program is ultimately about creating safer roadways, marketing efforts should focus on encouraging the use of services with affirming messages, rather than scaring patrons with messages describing the possible consequences of driving after drinking. Getting people to embrace the idea of safe ride services as an acceptable and fun alternative to driving after drinking will encourage its use. Positivity sells!
- Motivate patrons to choose and continue using safe ride services. Through on-going marketing efforts, keeping safe ride services in the public eye will remind people of the program's existence and emphasize the benefits of alternative transportation. Keeping a positive message, marketing efforts should encourage new users 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 impact 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. Safe ride programs employ a number of operational models and vary in program specifics, but all share a common goal: giving drivers a safe alternative to driving after drinking.

This report shares four examples of Minnesota safe ride programs that successfully provide this critical public service in diverse communities. It also provides direction and assistance to those considering safe ride programs in their own communities.

With planning and commitment, communities can replicate the success of existing safe ride programs and improve the safety of their roadways. By involving concerned and supportive stakeholders, a valuable community service can be created that addresses the needs of the community and is accepted as a positive and affordable alternative to driving after drinking.

