

## **Rideshare Online**

### **Budget, contract, next steps**

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Hello all, I'm here to talk to you about a topic most of you are familiar with. Rideshare Online has been a tool used by transit agencies, jurisdictions, employers and commuters. This resource has been a steady service to support TDM programming for a number of years. However, usage of this tool has fallen dramatically since its peak in 2018, and costs have increased, exceeding the CTR program's ability to pay for the service. This presentation discusses this software its usage the budget that's been sustaining it.

## Today's agenda

1. Problem statement
2. Rideshare Online (RSO)  
Overview
3. Findings
4. Budget
5. Next steps



First, I share with you a problem statement, summarizing the status of this program.

Second, I'll provide an overview of Rideshare online.

Then I'll explain how our team has been reviewing the RSO service, sharing our engagement with implementers about how its usage among CTR partners has changed.

Third, I'll share information about the budget and the type of budget environment we are in.

Lastly, we'll open the floor for discussion about next steps. In that vein, I ask that you hold your questions until the end. Once the presentation is complete, we'll open the discussion to both the committee and the broader audience.

## Problem statement

- RSO exceeds budget; under current budget, WSDOT will not renew the contract
- Contract expires March 2027
- Usage is low
- Implementers procure alternatives
- Software provides solutions



This presentation does not determine the future state of TDM software for partners. Rather, it provides a foundation for a discussion. There is a problem that we need to collectively solve based on a set of objective facts.

We'll dive into them during this presentation, but I'll provide the overview upfront.

First, the cost of RSO now exceeds WSDOT's ability to maintain the service. Under the current budget, WSDOT will not renew the contract.

The current contract expires March 2027 – so there is 12 months to prepare an alternative or communicate a change.

Third, the count of users turning to RSO for ridematching and incentives campaigns is low.

Fourth, partners have procured alternatives to RSO to meet their business needs. Others have maintained RSO to meet their needs. This presentation is not a recommendation of what the needs should or could be. But a firm understanding of the current status may provide a better foundation for a future state.

Regardless of what people think of RSO, it is clear through research and interviews, that TDM software offers an important resource. It seems to be a priority of partners to provide options for TDM programming.

## Rideshare Online Overview

- “TDM software”
- Acquired in 2009 as a pilot
- Statewide service
- Levels of administration, users
- Features to support rideshare
  - Calendaring / incentives
  - Communication platform
  - Ride matching
  - Vanpool management
- Contract expiration: March 25, 2027



So just to baseline about what we’re talking about. Rideshare Online is an online tool to support TDM. I’ll refer to RSO as a “TDM software.” There are multiple TDM software solutions on the market today. Audiences range from government, private enterprise, real estate, transit way-finding, active transportation, parking enthusiasts, and many others. .

WSDOT originally acquired RSO in 2009 as a pilot service to support congestion mitigation activities – particularly around 405. While WSDOT owned the contract, King County Metro managed day to day administration including training implementers, monitoring performance, and guiding the tool’s development. This relationship has continued.

This software offers multiple levels of administration, allowing travelers to associate with the software at the desired or permissible level. For example, all users in Washington state are part of the Washington state network. Those users can join smaller networks, and those networks may be public or private. The networks feature administrators who can determine who has access to the network, and they can create messaging or campaigns within their network. The individual user can be associated with counties or jurisdictions, which are public, or they may associate with private organizations, like businesses.

At the most basic level, the service operates as a communication platform. Organizations can provide information about transportation programs on their associated network to their target audience.

Additionally, people on the call are familiar with RSO’s support of ridematching and calendaring for tracking trips and distributing incentives.

For several transit agencies, a major feature of the platform is vanpool management. Over time, this feature has been updated and upgraded, developing van and ridership tracking for several transit agencies and automating reporting.

RSO has continued since 2009 – being renewed in two-year increments. The expiration of the current contract is a year from now, and in the next few slides, we’ll discuss how continued

renewal under the current budget is not feasible.

## Findings - Engagement

- Available tool for employers
  - Provides a solution
  - Alternatives to advance programs
- Vanpool programs (KCM, Kitsap, CT)
  - Commuter tracking
  - Ridematching
  - Fleet reporting
- Business needs beyond RSO = procure alternatives
- Fragmented adoption
- Usage fallen



I'll start with reporting on our team's engagement with implementers. We've been discussing Rideshare Online and its role with KCM since 2022, beginning to collect usage data as well as investigating the role of TDM software at different organizations in the state and at other state DOTs.

Over the last year, our team has interviewed multiple users of the RSO system, discussing its strengths, weaknesses and how organizations use it. We've also met with many implementers who do not use RSO to discuss why.

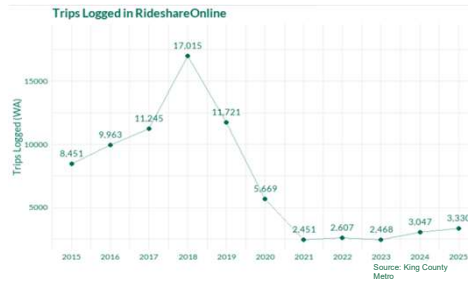
What we heard is that several transit agencies and jurisdictions value RSO because it provides a solution. It is a helpful tool for providing incentives, and some organizations use it to fulfill their transportation programs. Even WSDOT, as an organization communicating with WSDOT employees, uses Rideshare Online to administer incentives for non-drive alone commuting. While several implementers commented that its user interface is not intuitive, many have become familiar enough with the service to develop unique programs and campaigns.

Meanwhile, several transit agencies have turned to RSO to support vanpool ridership and vehicle tracking. The functionality, applications, and data reporting have helped these agencies improve their services and management.

Despite those benefits, many CTR partners including implementers and businesses do not use RSO. Several CTR partners within and outside the Puget Sound have procured alternatives. Partners cited multiple reasons for adopting competing TDM software solutions. The result has been fragmentation of usership leading to diminishing engagement with this tool. I'll stress that WSDOT's decision to not renew the tool is a result of the budget, but over the next few slides I'll provide information about how the public engages with the tool.

## Findings – Users logging trips

- Not used statewide
- Jurisdictions procure alternatives
- Falling engagement with the service
- Development focused on vanpool support, not statewide CTR



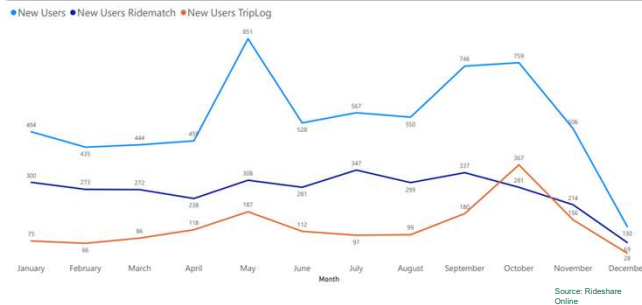
This graph shows the count of users who have logged trips over the last 10 years. Logging trips is a primary function of the service. You can see that the number of users who logged a trip peaked in 2018, and engagement fell after that. The low was obviously 2021, and the four years following it have not begun to recover previous. There could be a number of reasons for this.

As mentioned, several jurisdictions have left the service. Large businesses have even procured their own TDM software, giving them greater control over transportation outreach and engagement programs with their own network of the employees. It could be turnover among TDM implementers and a loss of institutional knowledge, or the shifting of CTR program administration to other organizations.

Meanwhile, the focus of RSOs development has not been on ridematching and trip logging or enterprise level transportation programs. Most development and improvements to the service have been through vanpool program management.

## Findings – New users

New Users, New Users Ridematch and New Users TripLog by Month



While the previous graph shows year to year engagement with trip logging, this graph focuses on 2025 and month by month measures of new users. We see new users overall in light blue, followed by new users that engage with the Ridematching tool in purple and the new users that logged a trip in orange. You see peaks in use of the tool during periods that correspond with trip logging campaigns, particularly Bike month in May and Switch Your Trips in October. New users are presumably logging into the tool to fulfill an objective. Note that all months demonstrate a gap between total new user counts and total engagement with the calendar or ridematching tool. This graph only shows RSO new user log ins, so you would not see total engagement in the Switch your Trips campaign.

I'll repeat that these numbers provide context for a discussion, and the PTD management team requested an investigation of RSO's use to better inform of the impact of allowing the contract to expire. The primary reason behind the decision is financial, which is that cost of the service exceeds the ability to pay for it. The next slide will provide greater detail.

(alt text): This visual is a line graph of three series demonstrating how new users engage with Rideshare Online by month between January 2025 and December 2025. New users begin with 494 users and stay level until May when there is a spike to 851. Users call back between 558 and 567 between June and July. They spike again in September and October to 759, and then they fall in November and December to 608 and 130 respectively. The next series is new users who have used the ridematch function. This demonstrates largely flat use of around 300 users through most of the year, and then falling in November and December again. Lastly is new users trip log, of those who users who logged a trip on the calendar. Usage is lowest, peaking to 187 in May, dipping again, and peaking again in October to 367, lastly falling to 69 in November.

## Budget

2025-2027 Budget		
\$ 9,000,000	Total budget	Fixed
\$ 6,536,000	Grants	Fixed, potential increase
\$ 555,000	Performance measurement	Fixed, potential increase
\$ 1,540,000	Admin	FTE, WSRO, board support
\$ 520,000	Admin – RSO	Paid from Admin; Increase from \$350K - \$520K in 2025
<b>\$ 9,151,000</b>	<b>Total spend</b>	<i>Exceeds budget</i>

While engagement and usage have fallen, costs to administer the program have increased. In the 25-27 2-year contract cycle, the program budget increased from \$350K to \$520K. In the world of transit procurement, that may not amount to much; however, the CTR budget is fixed, and the program’s multiple cost centers don’t typically get smaller.

This slide demonstrates the categories of the CTR program’s budget and how RSO fits into it. Our total budget is \$9 million per biennium. About 6.5M goes to CTR grants. After that, we spend half a million on the CTR survey technology requirements. Additionally, this program features an administrative budget. This is how the program pays for staff, provides funding for WSRO, or may acquire additional services to support the technical committee. An example was the equity analysis performed by Steer to support CTR planning in the previous biennium.

Currently, we are operating this program and we’re exceeding budget. That can’t continue. A requirement of the CTR program’s RCW is have a sustainable financial plan. The CTR program features multiple variable costs. For example, the survey platform will face increasing costs – either planned or the result of partners needing unplanned changes.

Meanwhile, the PTD’s budget in general is less flexible due to requirements of other programs. It’s possible in a budget to find funds to plug holes, but PTD can’t keep doing that, especially in a more restrictive budget environment.

The point is, there are multiple required activities to operate this program, and Rideshare Online is not required by law. It has been an elective expense to support services.

## Problem statement – Next steps

- RSO exceeds budget; under current budget, WSDOT will not renew
- Contract expires March 2027
- Usage is low
- Software provides solutions
- Implementers procure alternatives
- How do partners hope to approach this problem?



As I stated at the start, this presentation shares a set of problems that we hope to solve with the community of practitioners.

Multiple TDM partners in the state value software solutions. There are challenges and opportunities to administer them.

We hope that this presentation is informative for how to move forward. We'd like to open the floor for discussion, but please note, that we don't anticipate a discussion today to immediately develop a path forward. Instead, we anticipate this conversation to continue, which our team can support.

Before we jump into discussion, can I ask if anyone has questions about what's been presented in this presentation?

Don – you've seen multiple programs and committees address problems together. Would you have any words or advice for the folks on the call as we start a discussion?

Questions?  
Send us an email:  
**TDM@wsdot.wa.gov**

10