

UW–Madison Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Evaluation | Executive Summary

The Challenge

Growth, Access, and Structural Parking Constraints

We cannot build our way out of the parking challenges.

UW–Madison and UW Health operate within a geographically constrained environment, and parking supply has not kept pace with demand. Approximately 35,000 employees rely on a parking infrastructure with only 9,000 spaces. An additional 4,000 spaces are available to campus visitors and patients of UW Hospital.

As institutional activity continues to grow, land availability, campus design priorities, and cost all limit opportunities to add parking. At an estimate of \$24,000 per stall, building new structures is neither a quick nor scalable solution.

Commute patterns further complicate this imbalance. More than half of employees live outside the core Metro Transit service area. This rate continues to grow as housing costs push employees farther from campus. Recent Metro Transit investments have strengthened service in key corridors and within the core of campus, yet coverage and reliability remain uneven. This is particularly true for long-distance commuters, clinical staff, and employees working non-traditional hours.

Responding to continued growth requires a strategy that combines Transportation Demand Management (TDM), intentionality around remote and hybrid work, and selective, high-value parking investments. TDM is a critical pillar of this approach to shape travel behavior and expand viable alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle trips.

Leading National Performance

Strong Program Foundation

UW–Madison already operates one of the strongest higher-ed TDM programs in the country. The university performs well when compared to peer institutions, including the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor, the University of Minnesota, the University of Iowa, Texas A&M University, and the University of Colorado–Boulder.

Mode Split Performance (average of faculty, staff, and students)

UW–Madison compared to Peer Institutions (AY 2024/2025)

- Employees drive-alone rate: 45.3% (peer avg 54%)
- Metro Transit/bus rate: 25.4% (peer avg 16.5%)
- Walking rate: 10.5% (peer avg 7.3%)
- Biking rate: 7.8% (peer avg 6.9%)

UW–Madison’s robust set of programs and investments

- Reduced cost or free Metro Transit passes
- Carpool and Vanpool programs
- Walking and biking infrastructure improvements
- Remote and hybrid work options
- Parking pricing and access policies
- Ride-matching tools
- Emergency Ride Home services
- Commute planning assistance
- Marketing and communication about programs

These programs alone cannot absorb current and projected growth in peak-period demand.

The evaluation finds that UW–Madison has the right programs in place. However, gaps in awareness, limited incentives for high-impact modes, and inconsistent user experience across programs limit effectiveness.

What We Heard

Constraints on Mode Shift

Input from more than 120 stakeholders, including focus groups and interviews, surveys, and peer benchmarking, showed that **reliability and predictability are the primary drivers of commute choices**. Employees, particularly clinical and clerical staff and shift workers, prioritize certainty. When commuting alternatives feel unreliable or complex, driving alone becomes the default. Many employees report being unclear about their options or how the available programs can work together. Communications often reach employees once their commuting habits are already established.

Metro Transit is highly valued when service is frequent and direct, but service gaps reduce its usefulness for many employees. Carpooling and Vanpooling generate strong interest, particularly among longer-distance commuters. Participating in these programs remains low due to coordination challenges and limited financial incentives. The existing infrastructure and strong culture support biking; however, ongoing concerns remain around safety, secure storage, and seasonal conditions.

A Systems Challenge—and Opportunity

The evaluation confirms that **UW–Madison’s challenge is gaps in integration, simplicity, and targeted strategy**. From a user’s perspective, programs operate in silos. This makes it difficult for employees to understand, compare, and adapt commute options over time. Targeted improvements in the areas below can create opportunities for existing programs to perform better.

Current State vs. Opportunity

Category	Current State	Opportunity
UW Programs	Strong and diverse	Better alignment + Simplification
Metro Transit	High investment	Improve reliability + Coverage
Carpool/Vanpool	Low participation	Reduce friction + Increase incentives
Communications & Marketing	Fragmented	Centralized, lifecycle-based
Technology	Disconnected	Integrated platform
Policy	Strong for students	Expand to employees

Strategic Opportunities and Priorities

No single action will resolve parking constraints at UW–Madison. Success depends on strategies across TDM, remote and hybrid work options, and parking management working together.

Within TDM, priorities fall into three areas:

- improving the experience and reliability of non-driving modes,
- using incentives and flexible pricing to encourage voluntary mode shift,
- aligning policies, technology, and leadership to support long-term change.

Immediate priorities

- Launching targeted carpool and vanpool incentives
- Implementing “try-it” behavior change campaigns
- Enhancing communications & marketing with clearer, earlier, and more data-driven messaging that begins at recruitment

Longer-term priorities

- Integrating remote and hybrid work with parking optimization
- Expanding vanpool programs with meaningful subsidies
- Strengthening partnerships with the Madison metro area
- Deploying an integrated parking and TDM technology platform

Access and Growth Strategy

As a major employment and activity center, UW–Madison’s and UW Health’s access challenges are shaped by regional travel patterns and workforce dynamics. Together with targeted parking investments and, where feasible, the intentional use of remote work, Transportation Demand Management provides a framework for improving access reliability and expanding viable commute options by making better use of existing systems and services.