Ride-sharing program comes to USU | Journalism

01/20/2014

By Manda Perkins

In an effort to make carpooling easier for Utah State University students, faculty and staff, USU Facilities and the Sustainability Council have introduced Zimride, a ride-sharing website.

Zimride Carpool & Rideshare Community is an online platform that facilitates ride-sharing by connecting riders and drivers who have similar destinations.

Anyone with an A number can log in to the USU network, with the option to expand their search to all users in the country. Drivers can set a price for gas and wear-and-tear on their vehicles; riders have the option to pay the driver through the platform using PayPal instead of paying for the ride with cash.

Users also have the option to connect their account to their Facebook profile so potential ride-sharers can look for mutual friends. Alexi Lamm, sustainability coordinator at USU, said one of the reasons the university opted to use Zimride is because of that aspect.

“It’s integrated into social media, so if students choose to link their Facebook pages or things like that, they can use that information to provide legitimacy to their profile," she said.

When Lamm began working for the university two years ago, the university had a ride-sharing website produced by students, but the site wasn’t user friendly and limited search options.

Bradley Janssen, a Sustainability Council intern working with air quality and transportation issues, said Zimride is intuitive and makes it easier to connect with people who have similar schedules.

“The social aspect is really a big part of it because it’s a community-based thing,” he said. “We’re all trying to help each other out by saving gas and wear and tear on the car.”

Lamm said the program costs $6,000 annually and is paid for through the Carbon Offset Fund. The fund receives contributions from university faculty, staff and students who can choose to donate $10 of travel reimbursements when they travel for the university.

“(We) decided that it would be a good use of funds because it would reduce the carbon impact of the university on a daily basis in a way that would save money for students,” Lamm said. “It seemed like a good fit.”

Brigham Young University has been using Zimride for several years and is now a trusted partner on USU's network. From November 2012 to August 2014 BYU has had over 6,800 rides posted and averages six matches per post.

The school configures that users have saved over $500,000 and saved 1 million miles; more than 788,000 pounds of CO2 has also been saved by ride-sharing.

Robert Schmidt, an associate professor in the Department of Environment and Society and chair of the Air Quality Working Group of the USU Sustainability Council, said Zimride provides additional transportation options while improving air quality by reducing single-occupant vehicle use.

“I believe the biggest impact could be its ease of use for students to get a ride from campus to visit friends and family over weekends and during breaks," Schmidt wrote in an email to The Utah Statesman. “If this results in fewer students even needing their own car in Logan, then think of the positives: students and parents don’t need that extra car and the associated expenses, (such as) gas, insurance, license, maintenance. There are no parking issues, and there is a reduction in vehicle emissions.”

Lamm said she hopes Zimride will make it easier for those who wish to carpool to do so.

“I think among students and other people — faculty, staff — we hear that they want to carpool, but it’s kind of hard to find somebody who lives where you do,” she said. “It’s hard to find the people who match their schedule, so it fits that need.”

For more information visit www.zimride.com. Click on “University & Corporate Networks,” then select “Utah” then “Utah State U.” Log in using an A number and university password.

— manda.perkins@hotmail.com