

DEB SMITH: I am from north central Idaho. I represent five counties in north central Idaho. And our demographics are I have 13,500 square miles with 102,000 people. We have 13.2 residents per square mile, literally more deer than people. So we have our challenges. We are also home to a scenic byway and an all-American road, which kind of tells you a little bit about our geography. We're very mountainous. We're very wilderness, very scenic. Our primary industries have been extraction industries, agriculture, mining, and timber. And obviously those are going away. We do have a strong sector of light manufacturing and mid-manufacturing. 21% of my population is 60-plus years of age. The poverty rate for those 5 counties ranges from 13-21%, so I have some distinct challenges. The aging population, the lack of money, and the remote and ruralness of my area has created some distinct challenges to get employers and employees to connect. I also have some geographical challenges. In less than 150 miles, the elevation goes from 700 feet to 8,500 feet. We are the Harley rider's dream. They drool over my five counties, they absolutely love it. The other challenge is I only have 29 incorporated communities where people work in those—in that north central area.

So how many of you have been to Idaho? Great. How many of you thought I meant Iowa? I lobbied in Washington, D.C. for about 7 years for veterans and I got that a lot when I walked through the door. I'd say, "Hey, Deb Smith from Idaho." "Oh, Iowa, I visited Iowa once." Well, okay, so thank you for being in Iowa.

Okay, so what does a mobility manager for north central Idaho do? Or God's country, we truly do call it God's country. I work as a liaison for improving mobility in my district. My role is to identify local mobility needs and create partnerships to fill gaps in services. I promote local mobility and transportation improvements. I'm also charged with cultivating relationships and partnerships with local service providers, local elected officials, and public entities. Basically, what I do is I am an ambassador for public transportation and I develop relationships.

In many of the sessions that we've attended this week, we've talked about relationships and we all know that it's important, but how do you get to develop that relationship? And I want to share with you, being new to mobility, as I sat down to the table, I recognized who was there—our human service agencies. They all knew one another by first name, they knew all of their funding sources, they had all of their acronyms down. And as I looked around the tables at the meetings that we held throughout the district in my first month of employment, the people that I did not see were the employers or employees. They were missing at the table. So I began to think, well, how do I get those people to the table?

And I was pretty fortunate, it's a new program in Idaho, it's called I-way. And we've taken our local stakeholders and we've asked them to identify their needs. And we've built our transportation planning sessions around those needs. So we ask our service providers when they're applying for funds to truly address these strategic plans developed by the people who need the rides the most. When I asked why the employers weren't at the table, and remember I was new, I heard, "Oh, they're so difficult to engage." Really? I came from private industry and I had really hoped somebody would come talk to me about it. And the other thing I couldn't believe is that you're not going to engage employers and employees when in your community you see 70% of your community driving down the highway out of your community to another community to work. How can you sell them lunch if they're gone? So we really needed to look at getting those employers to the table.

The other problem I have is there's no public transportation. As you looked at that map of our 5 north central counties, we're hilly, we're remote, our communities are sometimes 20, 30, 40 miles apart, and we have a low population and an aging population. I have two public service providers in five counties, one ran by a tribe and one that's been in business for about 13 years. So as you can see, public transportation is fairly new to the state of Idaho.

So when I started my job, I went to that service provider and I said, "Wow, I'm new and I want to know why there are not employers and employees at the table." He said, "You need to contact CTAA." Which I did, I went onto their website and I delved in and I learned a lot, and I found something for free. And free in Idaho is always a big deal because obviously our poverty rate is low. It was the Transportation to Work toolkit. I ordered it. It came in the mail, week, 2 weeks later. I plugged that puppy in, and oh my God. There was all the information I needed to connect with the employers in our community. So what did I do next? I called the local barista and I ordered a mocha, of course, and a cinnamon roll, and I had it delivered because I was interested in mobility and keeping people moving. And after my well-deserved break, I began to figure out who truly am I going to contact? I was fortunate. I developed a target list, area Chambers of Commerce, the Idaho Department of Labor, and our district economic planning organization. Well, guess what? I had previously been employed at the Chamber for 5 ½ years, so I was very familiar with what they did and how they served their business community. I had a good friend that worked at the Department of Labor, so I tapped into her. And I'm housed in an economic planning organization. So I really had stacked my hand.

I started with the Chambers throughout the local district. I developed a list of questions. And this is what I wanted to know of their membership. Who is your largest employers? How many of them schedule off-primetime work schedules, so how many have those swing shifts, those graveyard shifts? How many have parking issues? And how many of those businesses are growing? And are there any new potential businesses coming in? And then the kicker was, oh, and I want the contact information for all those people. As an added benefit, when I got into the Chamber, I was able to attend their general membership meetings. Sometimes they're called business after hours, and those are a lot of fun because they have, usually, alcoholic beverages and food, and you primed them well with the wine and the beer, and then you just dove into talking to mobility with those business owners. Membership luncheons, membership breakfasts, any time that I could get in front of a Chamber meeting, I stepped into that meeting and started handing out business cards. A lot of times they said, "Oh, yeah, I have five employees, I don't need to talk to you." That's cool, just hold onto my card because I may come visit you later on.

How many of you—raise your hands, everybody raise your hand. Ah, it's a good exercise. Okay, now, how many of you belong to a Chamber of Commerce? Put your hand down. If you do belong to a Chamber, put your hand down. If you do belong to a Chamber. Okay. How many of you have been to a Chamber function? Put your hand down. How many of you know where your Chamber's at? Put your hand down. Okay, those of you that have your hand still raised, I know that there's an executive director of a Chamber somewhere who wants to talk to you. So don't forget to tap into your business resources to join that Chamber. Dues are usually fairly inexpensive and the benefits of Chamber membership are huge. Now I'll get off my Chamber soapbox. All right.

What did I do with the information that I received from the Chamber? Well, I created a list of those employees that they had provided to me and I came up with about 20 major employers in the

region that could benefit from transportation. And I was talking about outside transportation, not your typical public transportation, but more carpooling and vanpooling issues. And so, what did I do next? I called my friend at the mocha stand again. He comes by, he drops off my skinny mocha and my cinnamon roll. Isn't that a contradiction? And he says, "Wow, what are you doing?" I said, "Well, I don't know. I'm amped on caffeine and I'm really full, so what should I do?" I knew that if I walked into the employer's office and I had the contact and I could sit down with the CEO, and I said, "Well, where do your people live? Where do your employees live?" he was going to walk me right down the hallway to human resources and they would give me some zip codes and then I'd be stuck. So what I did is I called my friend at the Department of Labor. I call her my goddess. This woman is truly unbelievable. I told her what I wanted because I'm kind of lazy and I didn't want to go on the census website and do all this myself. And I'm a marketing person and not a techie person. I told her I needed a map of each of those five counties to indicate where residents lived and where residents worked. Our tribe had just passed a green initiative, so I was very interested in knowing where people who worked on the reservation, where did they live. So I called her up, I asked her if she could help me out. In about 2 hours, my e-mail dinged and I opened up my e-mail and I had this handy-dandy little map. We don't go up too high, but up to the north here outside of Troy, very top, you'll see a little tiny cluster. That cluster is in the city of Moscow. Moscow, Idaho is home to the University of Idaho. So now I had some information. I knew where people lived, I knew where they worked. She also did one for school districts for me as well. So now I had a little bit of information. I actually had more—not enough, but I needed more, and I was probably just a little bit dangerous at that point. And I did not call for more mocha because I was pretty hyped up.

One thing that I want to share with you, I asked my Department of Labor to tell me what they could provide for you. And your Department of Labor should be able to get you information about the demographic and economic trends that may affect the need for vanpools, as well as data about workers who commute and your large employers in the communities. I always ask to speak to the economist because those are the number crunchers, they're the geeks, and they love to share their information. So hit that economist in your Department of Labor or your Department of Commerce.

All right, so I knew who the employers were. I knew if they ran multiple shifts. I knew that our college and our hospital, which were locally—closely located, I knew that they had some issues in parking and congestion. And those were the people that I tapped into first. What I didn't have, though, was a real good working knowledge of the tax incentive benefits and really how to sell that program. I knew that there was a need. I knew that there were ways to provide or to fill that need. I just didn't know how to sell it. So I plugged this in and there were 17 pages of information that helped me sell vanpooling and carpooling. Some of the topics include the economic downturn brings increased opportunities for shared-ride commuting, the power of partnerships, joining forces to improve business and environment, tax incentive for businesses, investing in vanpools. This was a good one when I met with county commissioners in our five counties, small towns and rural communities, effective employee transportation options for employers. It was absolutely awesome.

So what I did is I created some snazzy packets. I printed off all these little pages that Carolyn had sent to me and put it in a nice packet with my logo on it, and I started meeting with them. Out of the 20 employers that we have identified, I was able to have face-to-face with 8 of them. And I literally had good conversations with most of them. A couple of them just really weren't ready for it yet and I'm

going to still keep plugging at those people. Four of them just said, “We don’t even want to talk to you about this. Just mail us the information.” I’m going to still hit them as well. But the good news is June 15th the Nez Perce tribe will have their first vanpool hit the streets. [audience clapping]. We’re excited, thank you. For a new mobility manager, I was pretty proud of that. You know, it took me less than 6 months, so that’s going to be a big win.

What helped, though, was, as I had said earlier, the Nez Perce tribe had adopted a green initiative. And being able to use this map, I was able to walk into the tribal transit planner and their economic planner and show them, I’ll back up there, at the very, very top of that map was a cluster, a cluster of employees who drove about 40 miles to and from work every day, and they were people who were in upper-management, in executive committee. And so I was able to meet with them and explain why this was a good project. The city of Moscow where those employees actually reside has a vanpool, so there was a great collaboration for the city of Moscow and the tribe to come together to provide a vanpool. So that’s how they’ve got the first van. But now that they’re more familiar with vanpooling and as they get more employees who would like to participate in the vanpool program, they’re going to purchase and own their own fleet of vans. And hopefully within 2 years they will be transporting their employees to the casino, which right now is very limited options for them.

Okay, I’ve talked about two of the three players, the Chamber and the Department of Labor. And I want to talk a little bit about economic development planning. Some of you may ask why is a mobility manager an economic development organization? And I think maybe they might have asked that themselves. Other than they recognized a need in our rural communities for us to attract employers to those small communities. Many of those towns don’t have the capacity, either through skill-sets or through the population, to provide employees to those employers. But we do have a lot of land available. So what we did is we decided we’d have a mobility initiative. And it’s very loosely written. Our goal is just to enhance transportation options for the citizens and residents of our five north central Idaho communities. That being said, how do we go about doing that? Well, as I sat around the table every morning with the rest of the staff, I have two economic development specialists and two community development specialists. Our economic development specialists, they actually focus on business recruitment and retention. Community development specialists work on finding funding for infrastructure such as sewer systems, water systems, community centers, and libraries. And as I listen to each of the staff members talk, our meetings are about 3 hours every Monday morning, we go in depth about the projects that we’re working on. And as I heard a community development specialist talk about a part—or excuse me, talk about a sewer project that was going in and how much land they were removing and what the city was doing with this land, I asked her, “Have you thought about putting a park-and-ride in that community?” “Well, no, I haven’t thought about that.” Well, that community is located about 20 miles north of Moscow, which is home to the University of Idaho and a large employer in our area.

Now, as we break ground, the city of Potlatch, where the sewer project is going in, has set aside an acre for a park-and-ride lot because every day they see many, many, many, many cars leaving that town to go 20 miles down the road to go to work. And now they’re suggesting and facilitating the opportunity to carpool. Hopefully, we’ll have a vanpool running there as needs arise and as we can see how many people are actually going to use this park-and-ride. And of course, we found that the university people, they’re a little bit greener than some of our others, so that’s worked really well.

Another opportunity that I had, and this was kind of an afterthought, I have to be really honest with you. We just purchased 18 acres in a very small community. It has about 720 people, to place a foundry. We have an anchor tenant, a gentleman who's going to build a foundry there. And when he opens, he'll have about five employees. Within 2 years, he hopes to have 15 to 20. We also have space on that industrial park area for two other tenants. We have now recognized, and through the Department of Labor, identified the skill-sets within that population of 742. There is not enough machinists to help out—to help fill those spots in that foundry. There's also no housing available. There is absolutely not one house to rent in that town. So we know that those workers are going to be commuting probably from Lewiston, Idaho, which is our largest suburban area. And so, when we've talked to our anchor tenant and he's applied for funding, we've asked him to include a requisition for a 15-passenger van that now will become the transportation system for the employees that commute from Lewiston, Idaho to Craigmont, Idaho to work in that foundry, and the potential to new businesses that will be there. If I had not been at the table in my organization, in my planning organization, if mobility had not been a part of it, it never would have been considered. And it might have been detrimental to this foundry that's going in.

So, let's see, what else can I say? Ah, this is kind of a cool thing. As an employee of an economic district, on my board I have lots of city councils and lots of county commissioners. And so this is a great way to get in to meet with them. And they are helping us to put pressure on our employers to look at carpooling and vanpooling. Was it a sell? Yes, because most of my county commissioners own the high-lift Ford truck with the gun-rack in the back and the deer horns on the front, and so they really kind of glazed over when I started to talk to them. But when you talk about the return on investment and seeking new employers in our area from California, from Washington, from Oregon, and many of you may have heard about the campaign that Idaho has now to steal employers from other states, we have to look at those green initiatives. So that's also kind of also been a system for me.

Okay, I just want to recap here just for a second. Key partnerships, relationship, relationship, relationship. I'm a talker, so it's really easy for me to walk in and say, "Hi, how are you all doing? What do you know about mobility?" I am a marketing person. I am not a transit person. And it was nice, Dan, to hear you kind of relate that because transit is such an organism in itself, sometimes it just goes right over the heads of the county commissioners and then the employers. And if you find a way to connect, which is that bottom line.

So number one, don't forget your area Chamber of Commerce, they are the business resource in your area. They know who the players are, they know the economic trends in your community, your business climate, and most importantly, they have platforms that allow you to get to those members. I'm actually going to speak before a general membership meeting. I get 15 minutes to talk about transportation and I'm going to promote carpooling and vanpooling.

Don't forget your Department of Employment or your employment security boards. They can provide you information that I as a techie do not want to have to dive down. I don't have time to do that. I'm out selling carpooling and vanpooling. And this service is free. Katherine Tackey is my economist at the Department of Labor. She has so much fun with this. And just before I came, I received an e-mail from her, and it was a really long e-mail. It shows the number of employment establishments in my five counties, the average number of employees, the payroll by the size of firm for the private sector, and average length of employment, which goes back to Julie, what you were talking about, so.

And then third, be a part of your region's planning organization. And I'm sure Nick's going to go into that as well. Get to know them, make sure that they know you. Make sure that you educate them. What I want the economic districts throughout the state of Idaho to do is any time they think about a project, they think about mobility and how that impacts their communities. And last but not least, don't forget to order your CTAA Transportation to Work toolkit.