KEVIN WISSELINK: Thank you very much for having me this morning. Once again, Kevin Wisselink. For those that don't know, Grand Rapids is the second largest city in Michigan, located in southwestern Michigan. The Rapids serves a 6-city regional area, kind of the urban area around the Grand Rapids area with a variety of services, primarily bus and public transportation services, but also of course an array of rideshare services as well. I want to first look at our employer partnerships to give context to our services, and then really focus in on our carpool/rideshare aspect of that.

So, my overall sphere is business transportation services. One of the primary things behind that is we convened a group of employers a number of years back called the Employer Advisory Council. Basically, we brought them in to talk about what were their transportation needs were and how we could work together to meet the transportation needs in the community. This was back in a day in Michigan where we had a very low unemployment rate and they were desperate to find workers. Of course, things have changed dramatically since then. There still is, of course, the need to provide employment transportation services. Through these partnerships, we have come up with a number of different solutions for transportation in the Grand Rapids area.

First, we have an employee bus pass program. This is with Spectrum Health, which is the largest employer locally and is a health care consortium. They have adopted a program where they provide free rides to all of their employees with their passes, and then reimburse the Rapid on a monthly basis for that. We have a vanpool program where we provide vanpool services for long-distance commuters to kind of extend the range of transit services since we are really confined to the urban areas for the most part. And then we also come with a program that I want to focus on a little bit, and this is our Job Access Reverse Commute program called County Connection. Like I said, we serve a six city area but we are the transit provider for the greater county but unfortunately, with very limited options to get out there.

So to kind of fill in the gaps where our transportation provider service was lagging, we provided this 24 hours a day, 7 days a week service that provided public transportation to all of Kent County, which is the county that Grand Rapids is located in. Basically arriving at relationships with these various employers, we kind of filled one of the gaps in the transportation network in the greater Grand Rapids area.

Another one was just to provide commuter transportation services because there is a lot of people that commute long distances in our region too. Before I get into this, is there anyone here that has an online carpool matching service in your region? Okay, there is a few of you. I just want to take some time to talk a little bit about how it works in our area. This is another tool you could use in going forward on rideshare services. So basically, it is an online carpool

match service. It is free to everyone in the West Michigan area. And like I said, the goal is to extend this reach of our service and provide commuter transportation options. I think that the success we have experienced has really been dependent on that we have established these relationships with our local employers, and they have really been the catalyst in getting people involved with these programs.

Ours is GreenRide. We purchased this from a company called Ecology in Environment, which is a specifically built for our area and tailored to our transportation needs, but there is many other vendors out there that provide various similar services, but the one we happen to have is called a GreenRide service. The way the service basically works is you go to the website through our website you go there, you create a user ID, create an account there. It takes just a minute or so to set up, you put your home address in and you put your destination address in, and then you hit "select my matches" and then basically it goes through all the people in our database and it screens people that have a similar origin address and a similar destination address, and it brings up those folks. It kind of pre-selects. As opposed to you having to look through all these, like, is this one a match, no, is this one a match, no, or having me as the rideshare coordinator have to manually do that. This just automatically does that so that within 5 minutes, you have a list of people that you can possibly rideshare with. At that point, then you have a map that shows you kind of the matches. We don't give specific addresses at this point, they are just general like we have an intersection at that level, so you are not giving out any personal information and you are only giving out first names. We are trying to keep the information that is given out to the minimum necessary, of course, you need a certain level.

At that point, then you get the option of sending person X an e-mail saying "I looked you up on"—there is an email generator but you can customize it, "I looked you up on the rideshare, I go from here to here, would you be interested in sharing a ride with me?"; So, it really automates the whole process. At that point, it is up to the individual people to try to make that connection. So at that level, it really keeps me as the transit—the car rideshare coordinator out of it. It really makes a very slick automated service whereas our job is more to market the service and get people involved, and then provide any technical support necessary, but it allows people to make the interaction with each other. The other thing this can do is we have our vanpools linked to this as well, so if there is a vanpool that fits their route, then that will come up as well and they can see if there is a vanpool option available to them.

I just want to talk a little bit about the, we recently conducted a survey of the people involved with us and talked a little about the characteristics of the people that are using this. First, in the West Michigan area, the big spike there is that 81% of the people said that cost savings were the primary reason they use rideshare services. So it is not a congestion issue, it is not a green issue necessarily, it is a bottom line issue. This was taken this year when gas prices

had been a bit lower, but really, we just don't have the congestion in our area that other big cities do. It is really suburban and rural is really when you have to get to the rideshare portion.

The second one, actually interesting, the 43%, is that sustainability thing. So, I think that for people, first it's the bottom line, and second, they do feel good about being better for the environment. So, there definitely is that aspect as well. If you look at the demographics of it, it really caters to a more of a moderate income there. As you can see, the biggest spike is between families that make $61,000 to $80,000 and there is still a very significant making $81,000 and over that are part of this rideshare program. So, interestingly enough, at least our program to this point has really catered to the higher income demographic. I want to talk a little at the end about ways we might think about maybe capturing more of the bottom end as well. These are the people we have captured, making the longer distance commutes.

One of the successes we've had is, what this program allows us to do is to work with local employers. One of the biggest objections to carpooling that we get in our area at least, is that people are afraid to kind of match with complete strangers. They don't want to go outside their comfort zone to who they are going to get. We haven't had any issues, but people are just afraid to go beyond that. One of the things we can do is work with local employers whereas they kind of build on our own carpool matching site and build their own version of it. They are using our software, but they put their own information up and they limit the searches to their own employees. So basically, the, Spectrum Health has 13,000 employees, so a Spectrum Health employee can go to the Spectrum Health GreenRide car matching site built on ours to conduct a search, and then it will just be with Spectrum employees. Of course, this makes sense because that is who they are most likely going to match with anyway, but we find that it really gives employees a comfort level if they know that they are only going to be matching with their own fellow employees. So that's been really . . . We have been very successful in bringing local, through our employer partnerships, bringing them in. As you can see, we have 4 of the top 5 West Michigan employers have purchased this from us and are using this service. And we have another – others – as well, that are learning... and we have a couple of educational institutions as well.

As you can see, oh that turned out wrong there. Basically, the spike there was, we brought most of our employers on in the middle of last year. That was, of course, when we had the big gas price spike as well. As you can see, that is when we had the dramatic increases through those employer partnerships to where we are now above 5,000 users. It is a program that really—the more users you have, the more matches you are going to get, and the more successful it is going to be, so it is a matter of creating that critical mass and I think we are getting there. I think we have a long ways to go in building it, but it has brought us a long ways.

Briefly, some of the benefits I think we experience from that. It is a relatively low cost to provide carpool matching. There is not a lot of staff time involved. There is the capital cost in purchasing the program up front. There are a lot of different vendors and if cost is an issue, you can really collaborate with other people in there because it can cover a wide range. You can cover really as big a range as you want. I mean, you can even do a statewide system if that is what you so choose to do. Splitting the cost, as you ramp up the geography, it doesn't really ramp up the cost that much necessarily since it is just really a basic GIS program that these companies are providing to you. The key really is just providing the marketing support as you go through. It is easy to implement. Like I said, they set it up for you. You can add different modules to provide different functionality, but the key of course, is getting users to find out about it and actually register and that's where I think that the local partnerships really come on. And it can be integrated into all the other transportation services as another option you are providing.

In our case, it is a public transit agency that's providing it and of course, TMAs and pretty much any agency if they so choose could take this on, but any transportation related service could definitely do this.

And I think one of the things, looking to the future, I was asked to ruminate on a little bit is about how do we expand this. As you saw, we really focused on the higher income ridership. You can market this to any target population, so we do have the information available at workforce development centers and such, so we could probably do more to that. I think yesterday someone talked about how you can kind of incentivize people, the drivers to take on people with someone who may not have a car and to provide maybe gas money or various incentives to do that. And then, yeah, like I said, partner with local employers and employment agencies to promote the services to existing and potential employees.

Thank you very much for your time and I will be happy to take questions later.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I know we have been talking about, like, chambers and different private companies. Has anybody worked with, like, their local job service or any agency like a statewide job providing agency with transit?

KEVIN WISSELINK: I mean, the one service, coming in early County Connection that really came up with our partnership with local employers but also our workforce development agencies. They were the ones that told us they needed services. Actually, the gateway to get into that program really is through those agencies, so that's where we've been focused. They have information about our other rideshare programs but we honestly haven't targeted that as a potential, but I think there is more we could do in that area.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We've looked into carpooling, and my whole board is lawyers, so maybe this is the problem, but they are all, "The liability." I am just wondering if you can talk a little bit about liability and how do you tell someone in your general, non employer-based rideshare program that it's okay, you can get in this car?

KEVIN WISSELINK: If you actually were to go to the site, it actually has a little disclaimer of course, all the legal copy is written into that and once they agree to sign on, of course that only goes so far. Personally, we have never had an issue with anyone coming up and raising that liability. Even nationwide, there is very few cases of that. I can't say that would never happen, but people seem to understand that they are the ones getting into developing the carpools. Yeah, I think there are other people that can answer that better than I. You can look at kind of what's out there. If you go to ridetherapid.org and follow our carpooling links, when you get to this GreenRide site I showed you earlier, if you look on the agreement, it gives you all the legal copy that we provided. I mean, your lawyers could look at it too and add their own whatever clauses and such, I mean that is for you to decide. I mean it has seemed to, I am no expert on it, but it seems to have held up very well to this point.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I might be able to shed a little light on that. We have a system similar to Kevin's and I am with Southwest Michigan Planning Commission and run the Rideshare program. Ours, I don't think is graphically as good-looking as Kevin's. Theirs is, GreenRide is beautiful. We used carpoolworld.com as kind of our third party and then that is kind of embedded into our site. We have a school-pool program and a carpool program, so we will list each school, each employer, and we didn't ask permission to necessarily list the employers, we just listed all the major employers so you have your choice if you want to commute with someone from your company or just go out on the web if you will and see what is available. But we have run into the same questions, especially with the school pool, and it really comes back to that it's not our agency that would be liable because it is all third-party. They are making the choice to go on, make that match, almost like a Facebook where you are agreeing to be someone's friend. And we do give a lot of tips though as far as, especially with school pool, things that you know if you are going to arrange a ride with a family, questions that you should ask, you know, insurance... We give them the tools, if you will, online. I know the Association of Commuter Transportation (ACT) you can go on their website and I think they have some tools as far as the legalities. I had the same issue with Whirlpool when I got them involved. They were so afraid that, you know, they were going to be responsible if their employee got in with somebody and it all worked out great.

KEVIN WISSELINK: In a meeting with the local employers, they have had the same questions, but they have all come on and they have actually it's been fine with them. Some of them have added their own legal copy, like I said, to

their own customized versions. Like she said, we are just providing, we're facilitating the match, but it is actually up to them to take liability for that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: As a follow-up, I have planned with local schools and you said that you had a couple schools that were on there.

KEVIN WISSELINK: Colleges and universities are the ones that are on.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Uh-huh, and their concern was that they would have students out there and it was a privacy issue and not so much a liability issue. Is there something, and I guess beyond providing the resources and letting people know that you are throwing your information out there, how do you address that concern, I guess?

KEVIN WISSELINK: I think we try and the first thing is to limit the information to what is absolutely necessary. For one thing, you can go on there and actually choose just a search so you put your information, you search for others and you try to connect, but then you don't have to put your information out there yourself. So, nobody else could actually search and find you. But if you do put your information out there for others to find, all they will find to begin with is a – you'll put a major intersection, so they don't get your address, and then they will see your first name and a last initial. They will send you an e-mail, but it is up to you to get that e-mail and respond back. At that point, of course, then you are trying to arrange the rides and you need to know where each other are and such. We try to provide as little information as possible up to the point where you actually have to make that connection. Even then, you could say I will meet you at this park-n-ride lot as opposed to I will meet you at my house. There are different ways and it is up to the individual person to kind of give as much or little information as they want to give.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I am wondering why you each chose the third party that you chose.

KEVIN WISSELINK: I mean, when we set this up it was kind of a newer thing and we actually, with GreenRide, I think we were the second agency that took it on. It was just one we found out about and we were very happy with the partnership that we built there and they were really responsive to us. Since then, there has been a whole host of ones that have sprung up. I was at the ACT conference a couple of weeks ago and there were probably five or six different agencies that provided a very similar type, they all have their own niches and stuff. Like I said, it's what we found what was available and we have been happy with it, and that's who we have gone with to this point.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We had not heard of GreenRide when we got involved. You know, I had seen carpoolworld.com come up, I contacted them and then found out that they could customize pages, so I have worked with them

and they've, I have to say been really really helpful as far as by, you know, changes or I want to add things into the database. For $10 a month and I don't have a huge volume, I am in a much more rural area then Kevin and the average commute is like 17 minutes and there is zero congestion, so it really comes down to people either feel it's green or they can save a buck. One thing I think that we're really working on is how do we get our, like, workforce agencies involved in making the service work. That's why we signed up for, I guess, different systems. You know, I see no reason that this could not be a statewide system. You buy one system and through a series of being able to kind of sort, you know I am in this county and on the next page you could break it down for employer, so you still could have a lot of the benefits and you could have one statewide system.

KEVIN WISSELINK: Yeah. Even in Michigan we have investigated it a little bit actually because the Flint/Detroit/Ann Arbor area, they have actually adopted their own GreenRide system. Lansing has a different one, which is a central city, and then we are on the west side that has GreenRide again. There have been discussions and the cost would not be much more than a local and the nice thing is that you could extend it to the entire state. We have very rural areas in Michigan that really have no rideshare office and there is no real rideshare or transit options in many cases. This would at least give some options throughout the entire state. That would make sense.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have one question. Using software, I use Route Match now, I am looking at EcoLane, I run fixed route and paratransit, but of course, I am here looking into vanpool and car share. Anybody who uses this vanpool and/or car sharing, is this software compatible for vanpooling and/or car sharing?

KEVIN: Oh yeah, very much so. Actually, we manage our entire vanpool system, we have a very small vanpool system, but we manage it through the system so that for one thing it will show all the vanpools so when someone searches for carpools they are also searching for vanpools at the same time because the routes are in. Another thing, the actual vanpools themselves, we have them all entered in the database through this GreenRide system and all the riders are assigned to vans through this too. This is really a two-in-one service so yeah, they are directly integrated.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You mentioned a few of the marketing concepts that you are using. What was most effective for you?

KEVIN: It really was the employer partnerships. I mean, the fact that we were able to go in and meet with these employers, talk about what their transportation needs were, and in most cases, it resulted in . . . . They purchased their own version of the GreenRide that I talked about. In Spectrum Health, our biggest employer, that actually had a very good downtown and actually good

transit service and we created an employer bus pass. I think that someone mentioned yesterday the same thing. We'd love to market that too but our fare box is limited that we only have one employer we can add to that. We hope to add, in about the next year, to add technology where we are actually going to expand that program and add more employers into that as well. It really was just meeting with the individual employers that was by far the most effective in moving forward.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Did you demand they purchase their own software?

KEVIN: They don't have to. Anyone in the community can use it, so, I mean, it is open to all of their employees. They just liked it for a couple of reasons. The main one is that they could provide, like I said before, the comfort level of its employees looking for employees. Plus, they control the contents, so the home page, they control the content, the messages they want to put on there, they control all of those aspects. They didn't want to do any additions like, I didn't mention this, but you can add customizations where they have security so basically employees have to put a pass code to even get in. So, there are a whole bunch of different customizations that you can add. I think it was just controlling the content and then their employees can just look for like employees then.

Every cost is big these days, but it is about $3,000 for the employer to set up. By most of these big employers' standards, that is a relatively low cost, which makes it attractive to them.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Not to put the other woman from Michigan on the spot, but since you are from the rural area versus the more urban area, do you go to employers to market as well? How do you do that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, I do. You know it's interesting that the employers and the schools that I have done a lot of individualized tailored marketing to, it's dramatic as far as when I look at the results as far as who's signed up. You can tell where I have gone in and really worked with a particular employer or a particular school versus where I have just kind of done general outreach to all the school administrators or the PTA or the human resource people. It is night and day as far as the people that I get registered once you make that specific contact.

KEVIN WISSELINK: It is really up to the employer. Like we have different levels. Some employers are more involved than others and the incentives they provide, like a lot of them provide carpool spaces and stuff like that, it can be a big difference in how effective it can be based on how well you direct and how much they adopt the program as well, of course.

CAROLYN JESKEY: I had one segue, I think it is between you both, when I was talking to Kevin in D.C. I started to ask him about, you know, there are a lot of people that we're here trying to serve who don't have cars and cannot drive cars if they are a person with a certain disability. He was saying that a lot of the ride matches are, there is no exchange of money because on Monday and Tuesday Joe drives and then Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, Sam drives, and there is no change of money. I am thinking, how can we get, you know, how can we as caseworkers and whoever else, get our folks signed up and be able to say 'I don't have a car, but guess what, I have a voucher program funded by New Freedom and JARC that is actually going to reimburse you for your time and trouble, and I also will offer you a gas card once a week. So that they come to the table with the ability to match because they have something to offer. That's, I think, is what we can thank Kevin and see what Bill has to offer on all of that. Do you have anything to add?

KEVIN WISSELINK: I mentioned it earlier but I probably could elaborate a little more. Kind of like the work buddy that was talked about yesterday, I think that is one way you could begin. You're right, in our area it's really, it's car sharing if not one person riding with another. I think provide those incentives and maybe some education around that it works out to do this just fine, but we do have a ways to go in that area.