Ridelink is a free carpooling and sustainable transport solution for the University of Cape Town community. The idea of it was to create a platform to easily sharing lifts, as well as incentivising sustainable transport to campus. The benefits of such as system are great for students: it saves them money, reduces their carbon emissions, and reduces congestion on campus. Ridelink is managed by the Green Campus Initiative, with the aim of eventually becoming integrated into the UCT Property & Services department.

Started in 2008 through proposals from students within the Green Campus Initiative, already it was clear that many students were travelling to campus from similar areas and times, mostly on their own in their car. Thus the goal of Ridelink was to create a platform for students to easily find other students to carpool with.

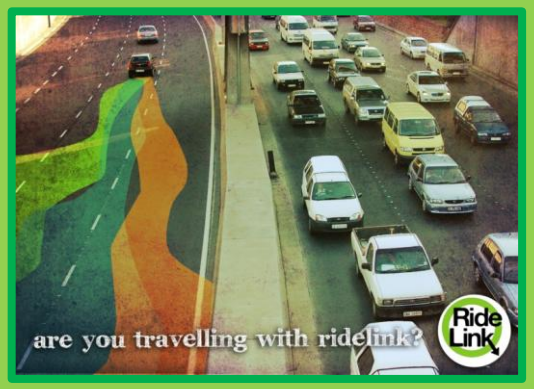
The Ridelink project is run through two major aspects: awareness and infrastructure changes. Awareness around sustainable transport is created mostly through the Ridelink website, run through the student and staff internet portal Vula, as a platform for all kinds of sustainable transport at UCT (easily accessible links to various transport websites, including the university transport Jammie shuttles and Cape Town public transport). A subsidiary project, Bikelink, provides information about cycling to campus and is working with university management to improve cycling infrastructure.

Originally a carpool-matching system was developed which created virtual carpools, so that people with similar schedules and areas would become matched and begin to share lifts. This system was developed by UCT students and a private web developer. However, the software for this was difficult to maintain after these students left, and thus we have been exploring a different kind of carpooling software.

Achievements

The Ridelink system online was well supported, with about 800 site users. On top of this, buy-in from university management allowed the development of a carpool-designated parking lot, which reserves special space for cars with 3 or more people. The parking lot of 80 reserved bays fills up every day, indicating that students are sharing lifts and using the system. The traffic department supports the initiative, as it helps with issues of congestion on the campus. Provision of bicycle infrastructure has also taken great leaps forward in the last years and forms part of the university's commitment to sustainability in the future.

Room for Growth

Despite great support and need in the UCT community, a few challenges still present themselves. Many people who use the system are those without cars looking to share lifts, but less single-person car owners are willing to offer lifts on the site. Buy-in from staff is also slower.

Management of the system has also been a challenge. Whilst driven by the Green Campus Initiative and supported by university management, there is a need for real integration into the institution, who can better monitor and run the system. Formal models of management and funding would help with this process and make the project more effective.