

# **Safety Rest Area Free Coffee Program Report**

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As required in ESSB 5689, Section 216 (5), this is a report to the Washington State Legislature (legislature) on the results of an online calendar implemented for volunteers participating in the free-coffee program at the State's safety rest areas.

### Background

The 2019 legislature directed the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to begin a pilot program for the 2019-2021 fiscal biennium at the four highest demand safety rest areas to create and maintain an online calendar for volunteer groups to check availability of weekends for the free coffee program.

The legislature directed the WSDOT to continue the pilot program for the 2021-2023 fiscal biennium and to submit a report on the pilot by December 2022, outlining the costs and benefits of the online calendar pilot, and including surveys from the volunteer groups and agency staff to determine its effectiveness.

Online calendars are available to the free coffee program volunteers for the four busiest rest areas, which are all on Interstate 5: Smokey Point northbound and southbound, Maytown, and Scatter Creek Rest Areas. The calendars were populated with information for volunteers to be able to easily see when there were available time slots. After research of various tools, WSDOT chose the Google calendar. It is free, supported by Google, and relatively easy to use. WSDOT web staff set it up and administrative staff were trained to use to calendar tool.

### Report

In May 2022 the free-coffee volunteer program was reopened as COVID-19 safety concerns were addressed. The WSDOT webpage was updated to reflect the reopening and applications were sent to non-profit groups who participated in the program prior to the pandemic.

At the four locations included in the pilot, one group has signed up and served coffee for three weekends at the Maytown Safety Rest Area in the past 6 months. No groups have signed up to serve coffee at the Smokey Point Safety Rest Areas. While the calendar is easy to use, groups surveyed about the program and the calendar indicated that they were not using the calendar to make decisions about participation. Groups associated with the free-coffee volunteer program indicated several reasons for not participating in the program:

- Many members are not physically capable of volunteering anymore
- New members are not joining their groups
- Many do not have enough volunteers to participate
- Many now raise funds using online methods
- Some do not feel safe at these rest areas

WSDOT is developing a Safety Rest Area Strategic Plan that will have recommendations that shape future program policies. Volunteerism is one area where the agency collected data and public feedback. This information is being analyzed to better inform operational policies of current and future volunteer opportunities. The strategic plan is scheduled to be complete late spring of 2023.