

## Stuck In Traffic? Ask Your Employer For Help

By Mac Daniel  
*Starts & Stops*

**Y**ou have left home for work and you are alone in your car. Again.

You live just 8 miles from work, and only a mile from your door you are already stuck in traffic, moving as fast as a plastic bead in a vat of corn syrup. A song about time lost is playing on the radio. The fuel light blinks on.

Then a statistic comes to mind: The average Boston commuter spends 58 hours a year stuck in traffic.

What do you do?

You blame the Big Dig. You blame the dork on the radio. You blame Grady, Bush, and Saddam, not necessarily in that order. You blame Boston.

Did you ever, however, think about blaming your employer?

If your employer were Yale University, for example, you'd have the option of being handed \$25,000 toward the purchase of a home within walking distance of the New Haven university, or along a main bus line to the campus. No more car, no more blame, and a down payment on a house.

If you worked at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Services in Boston, you could get a 60 percent subsidy to offset the cost of transit or van pools. You could also get up to \$200 a year to buy outdoor gear to make your bike, walk, or rollerblade trip to work more comfortable. The only requirement would be that you walk, bike, or roll to work at least two days a week for six months.

If you worked for Nike in Oregon and you walked to work, you'd get a free pair of sneakers. (OK, that seems a little weak. But local sneaker makers Reebok and New Balance aren't offering this perk).



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/MARK WILSON

**A FREE RIDE ENDS** — Two-way tolls will resume today on Interstate 95 in Hampton, N.H. On Thursday, Governor Craig Benson declared the one-way tolls trial a success and said he'd like to make it permanent.

The examples above are among the employers recognized last week on the **first annual list of New England's Best Workplaces for Commuters**. Sponsors such as the US Environmental Protection Agency hope the recognition will spur other local businesses to become part of the program. In just a year, the Bay Area's Best Workplace for Commuters program grew 50 percent.

In all, the program hopes to take some 4 million vehicles off the road and thus prevent 22 million tons of carbon dioxide from floating into the air, according to Suzanne M. Rudzinski, director of the EPA's transportation and regional programs division.

"It's a challenge," she said. "But what we're trying to do is break that cycle."

To qualify to be part of the list, employers and organizations must:

- Provide a central point of contact for commuter benefits information.
- Offer a "guaranteed ride home" program in which employees who take transit can get home quickly whenever they are needed.
- Offer at least one primary commuter benefit, whether it be a transit pass subsidy, cash in lieu of free parking, or a significant telecommuting program.
- Offer at least three supporting commuter benefits, including carpool or vanpool incentives, lockers and showers for bikers or walkers, incentives to live nearer work, or on-site amenities such as day care or dry cleaning.

Employers are catching on. Some are using their transit perks as a recruiting tool while at the same time lowering salaries (on the theory that employees don't need as much if they don't need a car). Other businesses are discovering major savings from the program. Disney, for example, found it more profitable to offer a transit pass subsidy than pay \$2 million for additional parking space, Rudzinski said.

"It's worth a lot for an employer not to pay for parking," she said.

As for commuters, the savings from making the switch is estimated to be around \$800 annually. And then there are the benefits of reduced stress and better health.

For more information, check out the websites at [www.bwc.gov](http://www.bwc.gov) or [www.bestworkplaceforcommuters.gov](http://www.bestworkplaceforcommuters.gov). On the site, employers can use an interactive worksheet to calculate their estimated cost savings from signing up for the program.

## Eyes on the road

Steve of Pembroke was driving to work on Thursday and noticed three mysterious groups of people parked in roadside turnouts. The groups were stationed from Pembroke to Boston, with one member of each three-person group watching the traffic and "using some electronic device for capturing data."

"I have no idea what the other two were doing. Any idea what these people were doing?" asked Steve.

Watching you, Steve. You too, dear reader. Watching every little thing you do.

In reality, they were harmless traffic planners who were working for the Massachusetts Highway Department, gathering data on commuter trends to help with future traffic planning, according to MassHighway spokesman Jon Carlisle.

Basically, they were counting SOVs (single occupancy vehicles) and gathering other data, Carlisle said, stressing that it was not part of any enforcement effort.

Speaking of enforcement efforts, Peter of Scituate wrote that, after "riding the Expressway virtually every day since the [High Occupancy Vehicle] lane opened," he's seen lone troopers in State Police cruisers and "SOME, not all, personnel driving state automobiles" riding solo in the carpool lane.

"Not responding to calls with lights and sirens, but just reporting to duty," wrote Steve.

How does he know this? "This has been a matter of laughing [and] sometimes good-humored wonderment by those in the non-car pool lane communicating by CB radio since the HOV first opened," he wrote.

## Can't get there . . .

The Massachusetts Turnpike eastbound exits to Interstate 93 (exits 24B to I-93 north and 24C to I-93 south) will be closed from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. Wednesday through Friday morning and from 11 p.m. Friday to 7 a.m. Saturday. Exit 24A from I-90 eastbound to South Station will remain open.

- The Mystic Avenue onramp to I-93 south in Somerville will be closed from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. Monday through Friday morning and from 12:01 a.m. to 6 a.m. Saturday.
- The Rutherford Avenue onramp to the Tobin Bridge will be closed from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. Monday through Saturday morning.
- The Storrow Drive exit ramp from I-93 north and Sumner Tunnel access to Storrow will be closed from 12:01 a.m. to 5 a.m. Wednesday through Saturday morning.
- The Haymarket onramp to the Callahan Tunnel will be closed from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. The North Street onramp to the Callahan Tunnel will remain open.
- The Broadway Connector between Albany Street and Frontage Road Northbound will be closed from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Monday through Saturday morning.
- Exit 27 (Tobin Bridge) from I-93 north will be closed from 11 p.m. tonight to 5 a.m. Monday.
- The Atlantic Avenue onramp to I-93 north will be closed from 10 p.m. to 5:30 a.m. Monday through Wednesday morning.
- The left turn from Storrow Drive eastbound to the Msr. O'Brien Highway at Leverett Circle will be closed from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. Monday through Wednesday.
- Interstate 93 north around the Charles River will be closed between 12:01 a.m. and 5 a.m. Tuesday and Wednesday.
- I-93 south around South Station will be closed from 12:01 a.m. to 8 a.m. this morning.
- Sudbury Street will be closed between Congress Street and Cross Street from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. today. Access to and from the parking garages will be open. Blackstone Street will remain open.
- North Washington Street between New Chardon and Thatcher Streets will be closed in both directions today from 6:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Access to local businesses will remain open.
- The Haymarket onramp to I-93 north will be closed today from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and from 11 p.m. to 5:30 a.m. Monday through Wednesday morning.
- The Sumner Tunnel onramp to I-93 north will be closed today from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.; from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and from 11 p.m. to 5:30 a.m. Monday through Wednesday morning.

*Complain to us at [starts@globe.com](mailto:starts@globe.com). Don't forget to send us your hometown. Outside of the paper, the column can be found at <http://www.boston.com/news/local/startsandstops/>. Our mailing address is Starts & Stops, P.O. Box 2378, Boston, MA 02107-2378.*