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Complete weather, 8B

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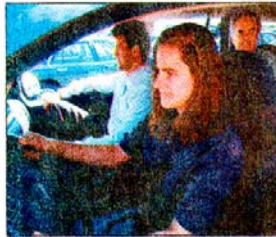
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Voice of the Rocky Mountain Empire

★★ 50¢ — May vary outside metro Den

## Colo. firms hailed for easing daily commute

By Jeffrey Leib  
Denver Post Staff Writer



The Denver Post / Hyoung Chang

### COMMITTED TO THE COMMUTE

Several Colorado employers lead the nation in offering commuting alternatives for workers.

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After moving from New York to work for TIAA-CREF in Denver, Denise King looked for a place to live where she could take advantage of public transportation.

Now a resident of Highlands Ranch, she takes light rail from the Mineral station each day to her downtown Denver job with the financial services company.

"I'm absolutely convinced, especially on the ride home, that it's faster than driving," King said about hassle-free trips that give her a window onto jammed South Santa Fe Drive.

Light rail also is a bargain for King, since TIAA-CREF picks up much of the cost of her transit pass. The company was among

about 150 named Colorado's "Best Workplaces for Commuters" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency this week.

Colorado employers such as TIAA-CREF lead the nation in offering commuting alternatives for workers, said Robin Snyder, manager of the Best Workplaces program at EPA's Washington, D.C., headquarters.

"Something about the culture here demands transportation options," Snyder said Monday on a visit to Denver.

King's company makes transit passes available to employees through the Regional Transportation District's Eco Pass program. Under the plan, an employer buys discounted transit passes for all employees from RTD, and can pass part of the cost on to workers.

About 150 companies in metro Denver, Boulder and Aspen got the "Best Workplace" distinction, for



The Denver Post photos / Hyoung Chang

Phillip Velaquez of CH2M Hill takes the bus to work Tuesday. His Arapahoe County employer is among many in the area that provide incentives for workers to use mass transit or telecommute for home.

offering free or low-cost transit passes, telecommuting, flexible work schedules, amenities for bikers and other commuter-friendly options.

At least 50 of the companies are located in the Flatiron shopping district on U.S. 36, where operators provide free transit passes to as many as 3,600 workers, said Eric Bernal, Eco Pass administrator for Flatiron.

About 1,400 employers participate in the Eco Pass program, covering 79,000 workers in metro Denver.



Tiffany McEachen drives Josh Nall, left, and Bob Pearson to work at the Meridian office park south of Denver on Tuesday from Interstate 25 and 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue as part of CH2M Hill's van pool service.

For TIAA-CREF, picking up much of the cost of transit passes for its 1,100 employees in downtown Denver is not altruistic.

"A light bulb went off for senior management that this is a great way to recruit and retain employees," said company spokesman Steve Ludwig. "Keeping turnover low really makes it cost-effective to offer the Eco Pass. When our company trains someone, it's expensive."

The engineering firm CH2M Hill, another workplace cited positively by the EPA, offers a number of commuter options for employees at its campus in the Meridian office park near Interstate 25 and Lincoln Avenue, south of the Denver Tech Center.

The company encourages many employees to telecommute from home, promotes carpooling and van pooling, and allows workers to

compress their schedules so they work fewer days a week, said Michele Wagner, of CH2M Hill's human resources department.

In July, the company will offer about 260 employees in one division a \$30-a-month transit subsidy to encourage RTD rider ship.

When RTD opens its southeast corridor light-rail line in late 2006 at the completion of the T-REX project, CH2M Hill should see a "sharp increase" in transit use, Wagner said.

The University of Denver, another employer on the EPA's list of Best Workplaces, also expects a sizable increase in transit use when the southeast rail line opens, said Allison Billings, executive director of Transportation Solutions, which helps DU and other employers design commuter options.

The university already pays the full cost of transit passes for 2,000 DU employees, Billings said.

Now, about 35 percent of the university employees use alternate modes of commuting, Billings said. Others say, "When light rail opens, I'll be there," she added.

### COMMUTER-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES

*Click here for the complete list of best workplaces for commuters.*

<http://www.denverpost.com/Stories/0,1413,36~53~2112377,00.html#>