

# THE NEWS & OBSERVER

UPDATES AT WWW.NEWSOBSERVER.COM • FINAL EDITION, 50 CENTS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 2004

©2004 THE NEWS AND OBSERVER PUBLISHING COMPANY • RALEIGH

THE NEWS & OBSERVER  
**City&State**

## State starts anti-driving effort

### 'Best Workplaces' encourages companies to reduce commuting

By **BRUCE SICELOFF**  
Staff Writer

Under the cloud of a federal mandate to make the Triangle's dirty air healthy again, state agencies and regional employers are revving up campaigns to slow the growth of automobile travel and highway congestion.

The state Department of Transportation, acknowledging that it cannot build roads fast enough, has announced a three-year campaign to help North Carolinians cut back on their driving.

As part of that campaign, state and area business groups began Tuesday to recruit employers to reduce the number of employees driving alone to work. The Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Transportation certified 11 public or private Triangle employers as "Best Workplaces for Commuters." Local promoters hope to sign up dozens more by October.

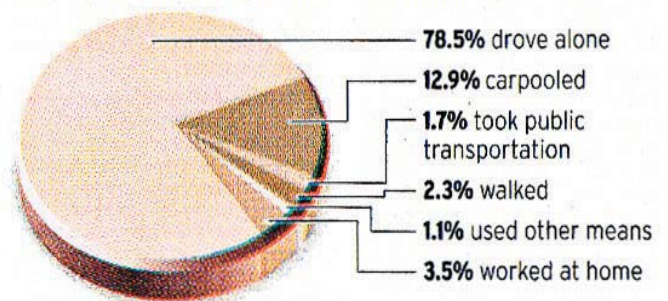
"It's an easy program," said Joseph A. Freddoso, operations director at Cisco Systems in Research Triangle Park, where as many as 11 percent of employees work from home each day. "The benefits don't cost a lot for an employer to offer, but the benefits to employees are great. And the benefits to future generations are great."

Commuter benefits include transit and vanpool subsidies, carpooling incentives, telecommuting and other efforts to make it easier to leave cars at home.

Tuesday's campaign launch was scheduled deliberately to follow last week's EPA announcement that Triangle and other urban counties in North Carolina are violating new standards for ozone pollution. Freddoso called the EPA news "a breath of bad air" for the area. Reducing commuter trips will be part of the region's strategy to restore clean air, he said.

### LONE DRIVERS

Most people in the Triangle drove alone to work in 2000.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau  
Compiled by news researcher David Raynor

WOODY VONDRACEK / The News & Observer

Last week, Transportation Secretary Lyndo Tippett announced plans for a statewide Best Workplaces for Commuters program. He also plans to promote other programs to reduce trips and to create an office to help employees find alternate transportation. While DOT continues to expand the state's highway system, it is proposing a new effort to curb demand for more roads.

"We simply cannot build our way out of the congestion problems that we face," David D. King, deputy secretary for transit, said Tuesday.

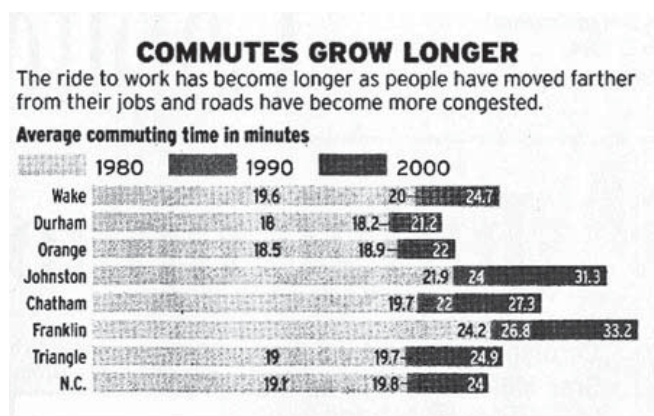
Some progress

Even with planned highway improvements, the Triangle's traffic congestion is expected to double over the next 25 years, said Ellen Reckhow, a Durham County commissioner. Durham County requires major employers to help employees get to work without driving alone.

"We've seen real progress among many of the participating companies, with substantial increases in telecommuting and moderate increases in carpooling, vanpooling and transit use," Reckhow said.

Cisco and N.C. State University are the only Wake employers on the EPA workplace list. Raleigh Mayor Charles Meeker and Harvey Schmitt, president of the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce, said city government and private employers have not talked much about the commuter benefits campaign, whose sponsors include the Raleigh chamber.

The EPA ozone mandate will give businesses more reason to consider the commuter program, Schmitt said.



## Parking a factor

If the solo commuter is a major source of dirty air, a leading promoter of solo commuting is free or cheap parking, King said. Some employers with generous commuter benefits are those with scarce parking.

UNC-Chapel Hill, Orange County's only certified commuter-friendly workplace, will have on-campus parking for fewer than 60 percent of its employees by the time it finishes an eight-year construction campaign. The construction work is adding 5 million square feet of research, teaching and patient-care facilities.

The EPA site in Research Triangle Park has parking space for 1,500 employees, but it uses a variety of commuter benefits to help manage more than 2,000, said Bill Laxton, EPA administration and resources director.

Laxton said more than 50 workers commute in EPA-subsidized vanpools, another 50 ride Triangle Transit Authority buses, about 20 ride bikes or motorcycles, and 90 work at home three days a week. Carpools serve 162 employees, who are allowed to park close to the building.

"You add all that up, and we're close to 20 percent of our

workforce right now," Laxton said. "For that 20 percent, we didn't have to put parking spaces in for them."

King and Dempsey E. Benton, deputy environment and natural resources secretary, vowed that state government, Wake's biggest employer, would win best work-place certification. King said he wants to evaluate subsidized parking and look for ways to encourage commuting alternatives -- without weakening the value of a benefit enjoyed by many employees.

"That's quite a challenge," King said. "Because parking is a birthright -- and viewed as the very bedrock of the benefits package in state government, as in a number of places."

Many state employees in downtown Raleigh, including King, pay \$10 per month for parking. "If somebody in the private sector is having to pay, say, \$40, then that's a \$30 subsidy to drive alone," King said.

Ideally, he said, "for those who ride transit or bike or walk or carpool, that money can be used for those things -- or put in their pocket. So you've got an economic decision to make that should not be influenced in the wrong direction by that implied parking subsidy."

<http://newsobserver.com/news/triangle/story/3529117p-3131417c.html>

## BEST WORKPLACES

*The federal government has certified hundreds of employers nationwide as Best Workplaces for Commuters. Requirements include a guaranteed emergency ride home for workers without cars, a major commuter benefit such as transit subsidy or telecommuting, other supporting benefits and a pledge that within 18 months, at least 14 percent of employees will not be driving alone to work. Here are North Carolina's best workplaces, by location:*

- \* **RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK:** Cisco Systems; GlaxoSmithKline; IBM; National Institute of Environmental Health & Sciences; Research Triangle Foundation; Triangle Transit Authority; and Environmental Protection Agency local office.
- \* **CHAPEL HILL:** UNC-Chapel Hill.
- \* **DURHAM:** City of Durham; Durham County Government.
- \* **RALEIGH:** N.C. State University.
- \* **CHARLOTTE:** Mecklenburg County.