

## Boston ranks among nation's worst in traffic

*Organizations urge business to do their parts for commuters*

By Bill Archambeault

U.S. Census data suggest that Boston-area commuters are bogged down with the 10th-longest commuting times in the nation, costing an average of 28.2 minutes to get to work.

That's slightly worse time than 2001, when it took an average of 27.2 minutes—ranking Boston ninth in the country—and far worse than 2000, when the average was 24.5 minutes, earning Boston a relatively respectable rank of 17.

IN 2002, the most recent year available, New York City; Chicago; Philadelphia; Riverside, Calif.; Baltimore; Washington, D.C.; San Francisco; Oakland, Calif.; and Los Angeles ranked worse than Boston for time spent commuting.

Regardless of Boston's rank, commuting time is widely seen as a local problem, but one that businesses can do something about. Organizations like the Artery Business Committee Transportation Management Association, which calls itself ABC TMA, are encouraging members to do all they can to ease their employees' commute.

"It's one of the biggest complaints by employees, but it's something they live with everyday," said David Straus, director of the ABC TMA. "It's like taxes—you've got to pay them."

Even if commuters have grudgingly accepted their fate,

there are things employers can do to make the commute a little less congested and frustrating for everyone, Straus said.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Transportation jointly developed the Best Workplaces for Commuters program, which recognizes companies that offer employees driving alternatives and incentives, including tax-free transit passes, tax-free van-pool benefits, telecommuting opportunities and "guaranteed ride home" programs.

Guaranteed ride home programs, for instance, persuade employees not to drive themselves to work by ensuring them they won't be stranded if they have to stay late or they miss their train or carpool.

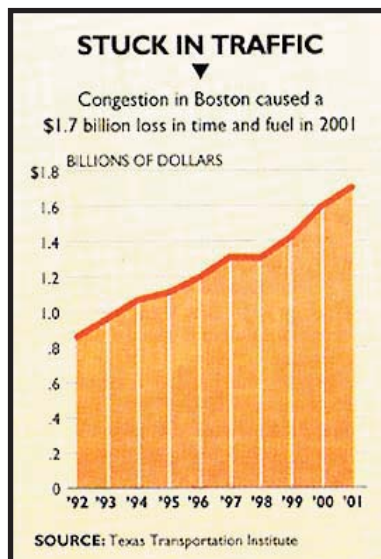
ABC TMA members' employees have access to prearranged cab or rental car service, depending on how far they have to travel. The ABC TMA has roughly 1,500 people registered in a database and typically provides the service 10 to 20 times a month.

Booz Allen Hamilton Inc., the McLean, Va.-based consulting firm, pays the public transportation costs for the 50 employees in its Boston office, and also offers incentives such as telecommuting options.

The one missing element was a guaranteed ride program, said associate Gary Hobday, who coordinates transportation for the Boston office. Employees get reimbursed if they have to take a cab home, he said, but there was no formal program in place, so Hobday arranged to join ABC TMA, which will become official on Monday.

"For us to have that covered, I wanted us to get into the TMA," he said.

Straus, who is also president of the Patriot Chapters of the



Association for Commuter Transportation, is also preparing for the second annual New England Transportation Demand Management Conference on May 4.

In addition to addressing perennial commuting issue, this year's conference will also tackle what officials are doing to address the chaotic disruption anticipated during this summer's Democratic National Convention.

Lucy Edmonson, transportation policy analyst at the EPA's New England region offices, said the Best Workplaces for Commuters program started with 33 companies last May. Now, 83 have been recognized.

"We hope that the number will continue to grow," she said. "They're all encouraging their employees to commute to work in ways that help reduce traffic congestion and air pollution through transit and buses."

These 83 companies, she said, account for some 120,000 commuters and a reduction of 83,000 metric tones of pollution.

Edmondson, citing statistics from a Texas Transportation Institute study; said that Boston's traffic congestion cost an estimated \$1.7 billion a year—in 2001—in lost time and fuel.

"Everyone knows that traffic congestion's a problem and that commuting time is a problem and everything they can do to reduce that is important to employees," she said.

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