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## *EPA Plans to Offer Incentives to Curb 'Sprawl' Pollution*

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WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency, concerned about urban sprawl and air pollution caused by the traffic congestion that sprawl creates, is teaming with employers and local governments to offer incentives to lure commuters out of their cars.

The move represents a policy shift for the agency, as it seeks additional means to attack the nation's air problems. With recent EPA regulatory programs implemented to curb urban smog, soot and regional haze, officials say further voluntary efforts are needed.

The EPA announced its first volunteer partners for the effort, representatives from four state and local governments and seven major corporations. They have agreed to offer their employees a variety of commuting-related benefits, running from paying annual transit costs for commuting by bus or subway to providing free roller skates.

The program builds on a tax law change passed by Congress in 1998 that let employers provide workers with as much as \$65 a month in tax-free commuter vouchers or let them buy as much as \$65 in transit passes with pretax payroll deductions. The Commuter Choice program was slow to catch on, though, until the Internal Revenue Service issued clear rules for employers this summer.

The goal of the EPA's efforts is to sign up 1,000 major employers in the next two years. Noting that the total miles driven by commuters has doubled since 1970, Margo Oge, who heads the EPA's office of transportation and air quality, said a program that reached half of the nation's commuters could save \$10 billion annually in fuel costs. Air pollution would be reduced by an amount equivalent to taking 15 million vehicles permanently off the road.

"It's these kinds of initiatives that really are the future of environmental protection in this country," said Deputy EPA Admin-

istrator W. Michael McCabe, who said clean-air regulations do not curb gases like carbon dioxide, thought to be one of the main gases causing climate change.

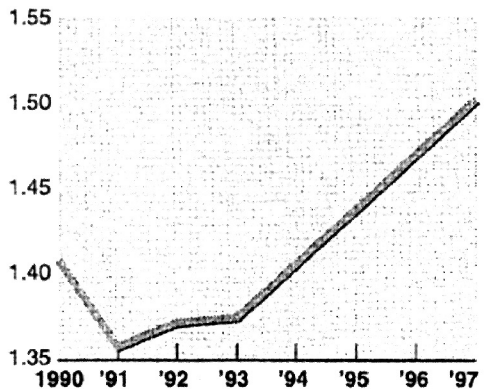
Harold F. Reheis, head of Georgia's Environmental Protection Division, described what may be the nation's most ambitious alternative-commuting program, designed to fight the problem in Atlanta. By offering choices such as subsidized transit cards, the state government has changed commuting habits of 20% of Atlanta-area workers. More than 300 Atlanta companies, he said, have agreed to provide similar benefits.

Stephen Harper, manager of health and safety policy for Intel Corp., said his company has offered commuting alternatives for 10 years, including subsidies for workers who arrive by roller skates. Since the company's rapid growth has caused more congestion and pollution at some company locations, a compensation package that subsidizes nonauto commuting has become more critical.

Among the more imaginative and expansive programs, the city of Fort Worth, Texas, offers a free hour off work for workers to try alternative commuting for a week. Calvert Group Ltd., a Bethesda, Md., subsidiary of Ameritas Acacia Mutual Life Insurance Co., pays for walking shoes and bicycles or will reimburse workers for all of their annual transit costs.

## **Growing Gridlock**

Annual U.S. passenger car miles traveled, in trillions



Source: Department of Transportation