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EPA cites regional firms for being commuter-friendly

BY MARY K. PRATT
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Mike Neville gets a \$94 commuter rail pass each month, but he pays less than half for it.

His employer, Massachusetts General Hospital, picks up \$24 of the monthly tab. The federal Transportation Equity Act of 1997, which establishes pretax limits for such expenses, nets Neville another \$24 in savings.

Neville is just one of 6,800 Mass General workers who take advantage of the federal tax savings and the hospital's decision to subsidize 26 percent of their MBTA passes.

The hospital's aggressive support of commuting options has landed it on the Environmental Protection Agency's first-ever list of New England's Best Workplaces for Commuters.

The EPA is working with New England government agencies, businesses and nonprofit organizations to promote commuting options under the umbrella of New England's Best Workplaces for Commuters Coalition.

The EPA announced the local list of best workplaces at Mass General on Oct. 30. The 83 organizations on the list have had to meet several criteria, such as providing a guaranteed ride home in emergencies, in order to make the cut.

The 83 employers, 60 of which are based in Boston, employ nearly 120,000 people. According to the EPA, their



W. MARC BERNSAU / BUSINESS JOURNAL

Tony Robinson, Peter Mah, Aimé O'Donovan, Eric Langis and Karen Adie get subsidized MBTA passes from their employer, Wainwright Bank, which was named by the EPA for being a prime place to work for commuters.

efforts will take 83,300 metric tons of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere per year — a reduction equivalent to planti-

ng more than 1 million trees each year.

Despite such high figures, the EPA and other like-minded organizations still have a long way to go in reducing traffic. The 2000 Census found that more than 3 million people commute daily in Massachusetts; some 73 percent of them drive to work alone.

Mass General is serious about getting employees out of their cars, said Bonnie Michelman, the hospital's director of police, security and outside services.

Mass General has backed its push for fewer cars with a host of alternative options, Michelman said. It participates in a regional program that guarantees commuters a free ride home for emergencies; offers free shuttles between its 10 facilities and selected T stops; houses several cars from Zipcar Inc., a car-sharing service, for workers who occasionally need to drive; and provides bikers with secure bike lockups and shower facilities.

Across town, in the Longwood Medical Area, the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences is finding success with its program.

The college subsidizes 60 percent of the costs for employees' T and commuter rail passes, said Paul Pasquerella, administrative assistant to the Office of College Relations and Institutional Effectiveness.

The college also made the EPA's list, as did Boston-based Wainwright Bank & Trust Co.