



Marketing Commuter Benefits to Employees:

Implementing Commuter
Benefits Under the
Commuter Choice
Leadership Initiative



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- Although many employees are eager to sign up for commuter benefits, others will be unaware of their advantages. Employer marketing can spread information about commuter benefits and contribute to positive perceptions.
 - Employers can choose from a variety of marketing strategies and messages, depending on the type of work site, communications technology, number of employees, and employee perceptions. Employers should choose those strategies and messages most appropriate for their situation.
 - An effective marketing campaign includes a program launch, continuous message exposure after the launch, and periodic special promotions.
 - Centralized commute information and promotion of commuter benefits are two of the required components of participation in the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative (CCLI).
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COMMUTER CHOICE LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

The National Standard of Excellence for Commuter Benefits

This document is one in a series of Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative briefing papers designed to help employers implement commuter benefits.

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U. S. Department of Transportation (DOT) have established a voluntary National Standard of Excellence for employer-provided commuter benefits. Commuter benefits help American workers get to and from work in ways that cut air pollution and global warming pollution, improve public health, improve employee recruiting and retention, improve employee job satisfaction, and reduce expenses and taxes for employers and employees. Participants in the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative (CCLI) agree to meet the National Standard of Excellence, and qualify as Commuter ChoiceSM Employers. CCLI participants agree to:

- Centralize commute options information so that it is easy for employees to access and use;
 - Promote the availability of commuter benefits to employees;
 - Provide access to a guaranteed ride home program;
 - Provide one or more of the following primary commuter benefits:
 - ✓ Vanpool or transit benefits of at least \$32.50 per month
 - ✓ Parking cash out of at least \$32.50 per month
 - ✓ Telecommuting program that averages six percent of daily work force
 - ✓ Other option proposed by employer and agreed to by EPA
 - Provide three or more of the following additional commuter benefits:

✓ Ridesharing/carpool matching	✓ Employee commuting awards programs
✓ Pre-tax transit/vanpool benefits	✓ Discounts/coupons for bicycles and walking shoes
✓ Shuttles from transit station	✓ Compressed work schedules
✓ Parking at park-and-ride lots	✓ Telecommuting
✓ Provision of real-time transit information	✓ Lunchtime shuttle
✓ Preferred parking for ridesharers	✓ Proximate commute (working closer to home)
✓ Reduced parking costs for ridesharers	✓ Incentives to encourage employees to live closer to work
✓ Employer-sponsored vanpool or subscription bus programs	✓ On-site amenities (dry cleaning, etc.)
✓ Employer assisted vanpools	✓ Concierge services
✓ Secured bicycle parking, showers, and lockers	✓ Active membership in a Transportation Management Association (TMA) or similar organization
✓ Electric bicycle recharging stations	✓ Other options proposed by employer
 - Exceed a minimum benchmark of either 14 percent of employees who do not drive alone to work or an average vehicle ridership (the number of vehicles divided by the *total* number of employees) of 1.12.
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Disclaimer

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MARKETING COMMUTER BENEFITS TO EMPLOYEES: A SUMMARY

Although many employees are eager to sign up for commuter benefits, marketing commuter benefits to employees is a necessary element of a successful program. In some cases, employers will market commuter benefits because the firm sees benefits to both itself and to employees when fewer drive alone to work. In other cases, employers in areas with mandatory trip reduction programs need to market commuter benefits to help achieve trip reduction targets. In the terms of the CCLI agreement, employers agree to promote commuter benefits to their employees.

Marketing matters. Before an employee can use a benefit, s/he must be aware of it, and awareness requires marketing. The importance of marketing is highlighted by survey results from Los Angeles showing that, "Awareness of most employer transportation programs continued to decline from 1998 to 1999 after a significant drop from 1996 to 1998. The decline in program awareness is likely to be the result of weakened regional marketing efforts...." (Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), 2000)

Marketing commuter benefits "is not a matter of preaching to the converted." People will change behavior in response to information and marketing. "[T]he single strongest predictor of switching behavior [away from SOV commuting] is extent of exposure to" an employer-based commuter benefits program. (Weber, Nice, and Lovrich, 2000)

Marketing is a continuous part of a successful commuter benefits program. A marketing program should have regular visibility, because employees' commutes change during the course of their employment.

This briefing discusses both marketing *strategies* - the means used to communicate information with employees - and marketing *messages* - the substance and associations that form the content.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

Employers can select from a variety of strategies to publicize commuter benefits to employees. Marketing techniques should be tailored to the individual employer - what messages its employees are likely to respond to, what communications technology employees use, the size of the employer, and whether there are one or more work sites.

As with any new benefit, employers will want to raise awareness, and increase use, of commuter benefits among employees. Most employers will undertake two related marketing efforts: a kick-off campaign when an employer begins implementing a commuter benefits program, and ongoing marketing efforts to ensure that both new and continuing employees are aware of the program.

Program Implementation and Launch

One guide (UK Department of the Environment, Transport, and the Regions, 2000) recommends a three-step marketing plan for implementing commuter benefits:

- **Introduce the plan with flyers and posters for visibility.** Even before the plan is implemented, employees should be aware that a new benefit will be introduced.
- **Disseminate results from employee travel survey.** Generally employers survey employees about their current travel patterns before implementing a commuter benefits program. These results should be publicized.
- **Launch the commuter benefits plan, preferably in conjunction with an event such as bike to work week.** A major event gives the new benefit a higher profile. Events could be entirely employer-sponsored, or linked with region-wide events.

Larger employers seeking ways to solicit input from employees might convene focus groups. These provide valuable information to human resources and management regarding employees' problems with commuting, perceptions about changing modes from solo driving, and potential messages about the program.

Ongoing Marketing

Keep the program prominent after the launch. In order for a program to be as effective as possible, employees need to be periodically reminded of it. Employees' commute situations may change during the course of their employment, so even if they were not interested in participating initially or when they began employment, they may later become interested.

"Ridesharing [or any transportation decision] is not a 'one-time purchase'. The average rideshare arrangement lasts two and a half years." (SCAG, 2000) An employee may transfer from a location not well served by transit to a downtown office, or move closer to the workplace. "A significant number of commuters change their work location and/or residence in a two year period." (SCAG, 2000) Other circumstances may change; congestion along a corridor may worsen dramatically, or the employer may expand so that adequate parking is at a premium. Not surprisingly, satisfaction with the commute declines as congestion worsens (SCAG, 2000), and congestion is worsening in most metropolitan areas. An employee dissatisfied with the current commute is more receptive to a message about how to change, and employees will reach the threshold of dissatisfaction at different times. Whatever the reason that an employee's commute and/or attitude changes, a marketing program with regular visibility ensures that when it does change, s/he has recently seen commuter benefits information. For all these reasons, employers should ensure that employees are aware of commuter benefits programs throughout their tenure with the employer.

Ongoing marketing includes three components: new hire orientation, ongoing awareness, and special promotions.

1. Company orientation for new employees.

This is an excellent time to introduce commuter benefits to new hires. Employers may also wish to use commuter benefits as a selling point for potential new hires during the recruitment process. Numerous employers have reported that commuter benefits are extremely useful recruiting tools. (US EPA, 2001)

2. Ongoing awareness marketing includes:

- **Advertisements in places seen frequently by employees** (cafeteria, garage, elevators, etc.). Most employers have formal or informal areas for disseminating information. Some employers with extensive commuter benefits programs have designated areas for program information and updates.
- **Flyers/brochures/posters**, posted in visible locations, and given out at orientation and to employees interested in the program, and at special promotional events. If there is a theme to the campaign, it should be featured prominently.
- **Face to face meetings.** This technique is more applicable for a small employer with one work site, but could also be used by a large employer in a group format. The commuter benefits staff can meet with interested employees one-on-one, give presentations to various departments, or speak at employer-wide events.
- **Company newsletters.** Monthly or quarterly newsletters are good opportunities to remind employees about commuter benefits.
- **Voicemail or e-mail broadcast.** If an employer regularly uses this channel to communicate, this is an excellent way to alert employees to changes in or deadlines

connected with the commuter benefits ("This Friday begins open season for registering for transit vouchers...") Employers should ensure that if such broadcasts are not accessible to all employees (for example, if some employees have no or limited computer access), then other strategies be used to reach these workers. Also, employees already participating could have a separate list for special announcements.

- **Inserts to paychecks.** Because all employees receive paychecks or payroll advisories, this method ensures that employees will see the information.
 - **Company web site or intranet.** Usefulness depends on employees' access to computers and whether information on other employer programs is also available this way. If employees are accustomed to obtaining information at a company site, information about commuter benefits should be posted here and updated as necessary.
3. **Special promotional events.** Special events call attention to a commuter benefits program in a very visible way. For example, an employers could sponsor a "Pool Day" to encourage car/vanpooling. Such days could be sponsored exclusively by the employer, coordinated with other area employers (for example, all the tenants of one building or office park could jointly sponsor such an event), or held in conjunction with area-wide promotions, such as a regional "Bike to Work Week."

Marketing may also include incentives such as:

- **Awards or prize drawings to recognize employees using transit or carpools.** Awards can range from low value items such as T-shirts and commuter mugs to prizes such as generous gift certificates to area retailers and weekend trips. Employers can tie chances of winning directly to the frequency of non-

solo driving. Alternatively, employers can set low requirements (for example, ridesharing once per week) for participation in awards programs to encourage wider use of ridesharing.

- **Commuter Club.** Commuter Clubs are composed of members who do not drive alone to work at least a minimum number of days per week. Members may receive such incentives as gift certificates, discounts at participating merchants, and/or coupons.

Role of the Commuter Benefits Administrator

In addition to the strategies employed, the person administering commuter benefits - whether a human resources manager, benefits specialist, or employee transportation coordinator - plays a major role in the success of the program. If the administrator does not drive alone to work, s/he can be an excellent advocate for the program, and explain benefits based on personal experience. It also greatly aids the program to have a "champion" at the employment site, whether or not that person is the same one who administers the program.

The office administering commuter benefits should be a repository of all necessary information for non-solo driving. This includes employer-produced information such as:

- Detailed explanations of how benefits work (either stand-alone documents or information incorporated into a package on other benefits);
- Average cost or time savings for various benefits (for example, an explanation of how much money the average employee could save with parking cash out, including the cost of the space, decreased fuel cost, and wear-and-tear on the vehicle); and
- Answers to employee questions.

If the employer offers transit benefits, the person administering the program should also have transit information available, such as routes and

schedules, so that an interested employee can obtain everything necessary to begin using transit. The same is true for vanpool schedules, park-and-rides, and bicycle parking information. Providing information through a centralized office is one of the required provisions of the CCLI agreement.

Measuring Employee Awareness

Many employers use surveys to help determine commuter benefit effectiveness. Questions about awareness of the program could be added to surveys to find out how many employees are aware of the program, and to what extent (for example, they may have a vague idea that such a program exists but not understand the details). A survey could also be used to solicit ideas for how to better market the program.

MARKETING MESSAGES

The messages that the employer uses to promote the program are important. Some of the messages below, selected from various programs, may be useful in persuading employees to try switching from solo driving:

- **"We encourage you," not "You have to."**
Employees can be skeptical of efforts to reduce solo driving if they see the program as mandatory. Marketing should emphasize that employees have the option of trying other commute modes. One guide (UK Department of the Environment, Transport, and the Regions, 2000) recommends paying particular attention to language, noting that employers should say, "We encourage people to try alternative modes" instead of "We would like people to use alternative modes."
- **"Try another mode at least once."**
Employees may be more easily convinced to switch from solo driving once they have successfully tried other modes. The goal is a "conversion experience"-a personal experi-

ence more powerful than any factual information or testimonials from other people. For example, Penny Baxter, Vanpool Coordinator at University of California at San Diego, has a program in which potential riders can ride for three days free on a trial basis. While Ms. Baxter did not have figures available on the number of people who had tried this option, she said that everyone who has tried it has become a regular rider. Employers may wish to give incentives for trying non-solo driving modes at least once, in order to promote such conversion experiences.

- **"Switching can be incremental or occasional."**
Because the prospect of stopping solo driving altogether may be daunting, employees may be more responsive to a message that encourages them to use other modes occasionally. The Regional Public Transportation Authority (Phoenix, Arizona) sponsored a "Don't Drive One in Five" campaign aimed at encouraging people to change modes once per week.
- **"Reduce stress by not driving alone."**
According to research cited in the Washington State Employee Transportation Coordinator (ETC) Handbook, "reducing stress" is the primary motivating benefit in encouraging employees to switch modes from solo driving. Marketing materials on this topic can include images of frustrated commuters stuck in traffic, breathing smog, and risking accidents.
- **"Save money."** This is the second motivating benefit cited in the Washington State ETC Handbook. Although messages will differ depending on whether the employer provides benefits or the employee pays for them with pre-tax dollars, either arrangement saves the employee money. If an employer has parking cash out benefits, marketing messages can emphasize that the employee takes home more money by giving up a parking space.

- **"Help the environment."** Although this tends to influence commuting decisions far less than personal considerations, for some employees reducing pollution may be a motivating factor. It may also be a factor in areas where poor air quality is widely perceived as a problem; for example, a survey for the Regional Public Transportation Authority (Phoenix, Arizona) found that over half of respondents has a household member who experienced health problems when pollution levels were high. Employers can emphasize these messages in conjunction with regional clean air campaigns, such as "Ozone Action Days."

Some employers write tag lines for their marketing campaigns that emphasize their message, and use the slogan throughout their marketing materials.

Employee Perceptions and Demographics

The Washington State Employee Transportation Coordinator Handbook emphasizes the importance of identifying employee attitudes and targeting marketing messages accordingly. They divide employees into five rough groups:

- Dedicated non-single occupant vehicle (SOV) commuters. This group can provide excellent examples and testimonials, as well as direct implementation assistance. The program should be sure to reward people in this category.
- Borderline non-SOV commuters. They have a strong interest in ridesharing, but need encouragement to make the change from solo driving. Personal attention to this group is recommended.
- Passive solo drivers. This group is unaware of or has only a mild interest in ridesharing. It is important to convince this group that potential benefits outweigh perceived drawbacks.
- Borderline anti-HOV commuters. This group will require strong incentives to switch from solo driving. They may try ridesharing only after it becomes the workplace norm.

- Dedicated solo drivers. This group enjoys driving alone and is very unlikely to change. A program should not waste time on this group.

The same handbook also cites research from the Washington State Department of Transportation that found the most receptive employees for non-SOV commuting are 25-44 years old; work at professional, skilled labor, or administrative jobs; have at least some college education; and are middle class or upper middle class.

A more in depth analysis of Washington data developed a useful portrait of the switcher: the employee who switched from driving alone to some other mode. (Weber, Nice, and Lovrich, 2000) They found that switchers:

1. Are more aware of a Commute Trip Reduction program,
2. Come from organizations where the Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) program is strongly supported,
3. Engage in other environment-protective activities,
4. Are less concerned with the "convenience and flexibility" costs and benefits of SOV commuting than non-switchers, and
5. Perceive the presence of reasonably convenient alternatives to SOV travel.

Marketing can help on four of these five points:

1. increase program awareness;
2. demonstrate organizational support for the program;
3. highlight the environmental benefits of switching; and
5. provide information on reasonably convenient alternatives to an SOV commute.

The fact that those most likely to switch are less concerned about convenience and flexibility (#4) does not mean that marketing this point should ignore this point. Those most ready to switch may need less persuasion on this point, but others do need information of convenience, and many will respond to it.

EMPLOYER CASE STUDIES

These case studies describe approaches taken by three employers to market commuter benefits to their employees. Although these do not span the entire range of possibilities, they show how different strategies can fit different situations.

Beaverton, Oregon - Nike

Nike, a footwear manufacturer headquartered in suburban Portland, has an extensive commuting program whose main incentives are monthly and quarterly prize drawings. According to Linda Odekirk, Nike's Employee Transportation Coordinator, employees using non-SOV commute modes previously received "Nike Bucks," vouchers that could be used to purchase food, merchandise, or other on-site services, every time they arrived in a carpool at the main campus.

However, this program proved to be too expensive, so three years ago it was replaced with the prize drawings. Under the Nike Bucks program, Nike spent approximately \$250,000 on commuter incentives; currently, they spend \$41,000. (Of that \$41,000, \$23,000 is spent in the Portland area; the rest is used for commute incentives in other locations.) Prizes range from gift certificates in increments of \$25, \$50, or \$100 for company store or local retailers to \$400 for mountain bike purchase or "get-away" weekends.

Because there is no registration for employees who do not drive alone, Ms. Odekirk tracks participation through entries for prize drawings. Anyone who uses a non-SOV commute mode during a given week is eligible to register for that week's drawing. When they register online for the drawing, commuters list the number of times they

used a particular mode during the week. These figures then form the basis for reporting use of various modes under Oregon's trip reduction mandate.

Ms. Odekirk thought there was more potential for fraud under the Nike Bucks program. Under that program, commuters received Nike Bucks vouchers from the security guard when they arrived at work. However, off-campus employees did not have to pass a security guard, so they requested vouchers from a receptionist, who could not verify if they had carpooled. Although there may be some fraud under the current program, because commuting behavior is self-reported and not verified, she thinks the fact that participants only register for a chance to win, rather than a guaranteed benefit, mitigates against fraud.

San Antonio, Texas - United States Automobile Association

The United State Automobile Association (USAA) has an extensive vanpool program at its San Antonio headquarters. The program is publicized throughout the year, but especially during the ozone season between May and October. Publicity events include a vanpool fair, media events, commercials on the in-house television system, online information on the company's intranet system, and articles in company newspapers. In addition, there are quarterly meetings for vanpool riders that routinely attract over 100 participants; vanpoolers are asked in advance if there are particular topics they would like to see covered. The vanpool program also publicizes potential cost savings for vanpool participants, estimated at \$5,200 to \$7,100 per year.

According to Chris Treutler, Director of Vehicle Operations and Maintenance, continued publicity is essential to the program; without reminders of Metropolitan the program, the pool of interested vanpoolers would probably dry up.

Minneapolis, Minnesota - American Express

American Express was the first employer to enter into a partnership with area transit provider Metro Transit to purchase deeply discounted bus passes for resale to its 6,000 employees. Metro provided schedules and route information to American Express for distribution to employees. American Express also promoted the program through public announcements, a press conference, bus logo cards, and mass e-mails. As the launch date approached, American Express also set up a booth at a local bookstore and sponsored an essay contest for the best bus story. The publicity campaign was integral to ensuring the success of the program.

ASSOCIATIONS AND CONTACTS

Employers who would like assistance in promoting commuter benefits or would like access to marketing materials are encouraged to contact the Transportation Management Association (TMA), rideshare organization, or transit agency in their area. These organizations often sponsor regional events such as a Bike to Work week or Ozone Action Days, and may be able to provide promotional materials to employers. Some of these agencies even have branches that focus on working with employers on promotion and implementation of commuter benefits. Detailed lists of TMAs, rideshare organizations, and transit agencies are found in the briefing papers on Guaranteed Ride Home and Carpooling Incentive Programs.

Information Clearinghouses

The following organizations may also offer assistance for employers in promoting commuter benefits:

Association for Commuter Transportation
P.O. Box 15542
Washington, DC 20003
Tel: 202-393-3497

Fax: 202-546-2196
Act@act-hq.com
www.ACTweb.org

The Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT) is a membership organization that promotes commuter choice and transportation demand management. They sponsor annual conferences on commuting, and publish educational materials for employers.

National Transportation Demand Management (TDM) and Telework Clearinghouse
National Center for Transit Research
University of South Florida
4202 E. Fowler Avenue
CUT100
Tampa, FL 33620-5375
Tel: 813-974-3120

www.nctr.usf.edu/clearinghouse

The National TDM and Telework Clearinghouse is a compendium of research and information on TDM and telecommuting. TDM refers to Transportation Demand management—a set of programs and policies that are designed to make the best use of existing transportation resources without additional infrastructure investment. Much of the Clearinghouse information is available electronically. The web site contains information for employers interested in establishing trip reduction programs and commuter benefits.

Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative

For more information on the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative, contact the Commuter Choice Hotline at 888-856-3131, or visit www.commuterchoice.gov

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ORDERING

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

This guidance document and other information about the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative are available at www.commuterchoice.gov or by calling the Commuter Choice voicemail request line at (888) 856-3131.

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