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Federal Government Recognizes Employers Who Ease the Commuting Snarl

FOURTEEN CITY GOVERNMENTS LEAD BY EXAMPLE

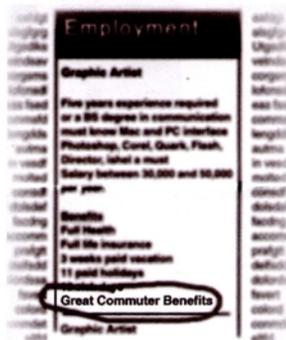
Commuters in major American cities spend more than 40 hours every year delayed in traffic. With the number of cars increasing twice as fast as the population in the United States, it's not surprising that even smaller urban areas, and suburbs surrounding cities are feeling the effects. As traffic congestion increases, so does its impact on American communities. To ease the burden, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) are teaming up with employers nationwide to tackle daily commuting challenges through a new voluntary partnership called the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative. Participating companies, called Commuter ChoiceSM Employers, offer employees an exceptional package of "commuter benefits" to reduce traffic and air pollution in their communities. In return, they receive national recognition for their environmental leadership, and many direct bottom line benefits such as tax savings, lower parking expenses, and improved employee recruitment and retention.

Fourteen city governments are setting an example for employers in their cities and across the country by joining the initiative. In Colorado, the cities of Aspen, Boulder, and Greeley have joined. In California, the cities of Anaheim, Long Beach, Palo Alto, Pleasanton, and Sunnyvale have joined. And, in the State of Washington, the cities of Bellevue, Issaquah, Mercer Island, Redmond, Tacoma, and Tukwila have signed up. As a result of their combined efforts, over 12,000 employees receive comprehensive commuter benefits.

Commuter Choice Employers are given the flexibility to tailor their commuter benefits to their business goals, their employees' commuting preferences, and their communities. For example, among other benefits, the City of Palo Alto offers a \$30 monthly cash incentive to employees that car-pool to the work-

site. The City of Aspen encourages walking and biking by providing cash subsidies, lockers and showers, as well as a city bike fleet. The City of Boulder has a formal teleworking policy, offers flextime, and variable work schedules. And, the City of Tukwila's package includes reimbursement for bus passes and a cash subsidy for train riders.

Transportation Coordinator Lynn Bader has not only signed up her own employer—the City of Aspen—but has helped to recruit six other Aspen-area businesses for the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative. Says Bader, "If you want businesses in your area to take traffic, growth, and environmental issues seriously, you have to 'practice what you preach.' By joining the initiative we have shown local businesses that offering commuter benefits is feasible and yields measurable results. Also, since this is a voluntary, not a mandatory program, it creates a feeling of camaraderie between the city and local businesses."



Margo Oge, director of EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality, says that the effects of commuter benefit programs can be dramatic. "If just half of all U.S. employees were covered under these commuter benefits, traffic and air pollution could be cut by the equivalent of taking 15 million cars off

the road every year, saving American workers about \$12 billion in fuel costs." She adds, "That's both cleaner air and real savings for families."

Commuter Choice Employers range in size and industry, and include companies such as Chevron, Pitney Bowes, Pixar Animation, Stanford University, Yahoo, and even a shoe store with five employees in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Since the launch of the initiative's pilot phase, the number of participating employers has swelled from 11 pilot partners to more than 200 Commuter Choice Employers cov-

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ering more than half a million employees in 21 states.

To learn more about the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative please call the Commuter Choice Hotline at 1-888-856-3131 or email commuterchoice@epa.gov