

# EPA Pushes Benefit for Commuters

**By Kevin Flynn**

*The Lane Ranger*

If you've ever thought of trying a different way to get to work other than driving alone, now might be the time to think about it a little harder.

Denver is among three cities picked for an intensive sign-up campaign among employers to offer incentives for alternative commuting.

The Commuter Choice program is spearheaded by the Environmental Protection Agency, whose goal is cleaner air but could also save you some bucks in the process. The EPA hopes that Commuter Choice will join the ranks of other employment perks such as 401k plans, health and dental benefits and paid vacations.

"We're trying to focus on downtown Denver because 40 percent of workers there already do not drive alone," said Jeffra Rockwell, an EPA official from Detroit who is on the agency's Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative team.

Commuter Choice has been around for more than a year. Of the 300 employers nationwide already on board, 46 are in Colorado and 35 of those are in the Denver-Boulder metro area.

To take part, an employer must agree to offer at least one primary benefit, such as monthly subsidies for the Regional Transportation District's Eco Pass, cash payments for workers to give up free parking or a significant telecommuting program.

In addition, three other secondary benefits have to be offered. They could be such things as providing bike lockers and showers, preferred parking for carpoolers or compressed work schedules.

Tax laws allow commuters to set aside \$100 a month from their wages tax-free for qualifying commuting costs - public transit, vanpools and the like. It means you could write off up to \$1,200 a year from your taxable income if you use that money to commute.

Employers who offer commuting benefits can slightly reduce their payroll taxes.

To participate, check the program's Web site at [www.commuterchoice.gov](http://www.commuterchoice.gov) or call 1-888-856-3131.

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