



Getting to Work

Spotlight on employer-sponsored
commuter programs

January 2017

Getting to Work

Every day 130 million people commute to worksites across the nation, from large downtown office buildings to suburban office parks, and every location in between and beyond. Employees face increasing challenges getting to work in the most efficient, affordable, and sustainable way – a challenge that can negatively impact productivity if not addressed. Progressive employers understand the steps they take to improve the commuting options for their workforce can have wide ranging benefits, including:

- Attracting and retaining employees
- Improving work life balance
- Achieving corporate sustainability and climate goals
- Reducing transportation costs and tax savings

This paper spotlights some of the best practices in employer-sponsored commuter programs and showcases how people are changing how they get to work with benefits that extend beyond themselves to their communities, their businesses, and the environment. These case studies highlight innovative local transit partnerships, growth in vanpools, creative employee engagement tactics and show how the most forward-looking organizations plan, prepare, and even prosper from their work with government agencies to manage regional transportation demands.

From a new iconic Coca-Cola red bus in Atlanta to a Seattle hospital that pays employees not to drive; from the latest efforts to ease congestion at office parks around our traffic-clogged nation's capital to renewed momentum for 1970s-era eco-friendly programs in Arizona, these stories aim to inspire greater collaboration to improve our commutes and strengthen our communities through the leadership of employers.

The employers featured in these pages believe in the power of networks – between businesses, government and their employees – to make a positive impact on the economy while minimizing their negative impact on the environment and reducing congestion.

The Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT) applauds the leadership of these organizations and the steps they are taking to improve the commutes of their employees. ACT is honored to provide a forum for employers to come together to discuss transportation challenges and share best practices, and we hope that this paper will inspire other organizations to expand their existing efforts or launch new programs.

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Cover Image: Employees pedal off from Salt River Project headquarters in Phoenix. Image courtesy Salt River Project.

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Seattle Children's Hospital

A Hospital on a Mission to Reduce Driving Alone

For Seattle Children's Hospital, how employees commute is so important they pay their employees not to drive alone to work. The benefit is what Jamie Cheney, the hospital's director of transportation, calls the cherry on top of a comprehensive commuter program.

"It's a big investment but the alternative is more expensive. This is an investment the organization is willing to make because we want to achieve our mission and treat more children," Cheney said.

Every day employees do not drive, they go to an online commute calendar, log their commute and get paid \$4. "It's a very effective incentive," Cheney said. "People want that \$4 so they go there and calendar every day."

The payouts are significant and can total more than \$1,000 dollars a year to employees who leave their cars at home. The benefits of reduced parking demand and a healthier environment outweigh the costs and help the hospital achieve its core mission.

"Our mission is to treat, cure, and prevent pediatric disease," said Cheney. "We want to grow and create more clinical space so we can treat more children. The City of Seattle said, 'Not so fast,' so we worked with them to create a plan that guides our growth over the next 20 years. We can build buildings, but we are required to reduce the portion of drive alone commute trips made by our employees down to 30 percent."

\$4

Amount Seattle Children's Hospital employees are paid each day they don't drive alone to work.



9 percent of Seattle Children's Hospital employees bike to work – **three times the national average.**



Seattle Children's runs its own 22-shuttle system, moving employees between worksites and closing the gap between the worksite and transit hubs, which has resulted in 20 percent of employees utilizing public transit.

The transportation master plan developed in 2010 between the hospital and the City of Seattle seeks to reduce vehicle trips and parking, and make transit, bicycling, and walking the preferred way to commute. However, the hospital has been engaged in reducing drive alone commute trips since 1991, when the State of Washington passed the Commute Trip Reduction Law requiring large companies to develop a plan to reduce commute trips.

“On one hand we’re required to do it and on the other hand, we have embraced that challenge and we are well on our way to achieving that very aggressive goal,” Cheney said.

Cheney said the hospital has made a massive 35 point improvement in their drive alone rate since 1995. Thirty-eight percent of their workers currently drive to work alone. The change did not come easily, it was hard-won and achieved through a series of programs and incentives.

If commute trip reduction wasn’t reason enough, Seattle Children’s has another motivator for reducing drive-alone trips. “We want to reduce our impact on generating greenhouse gases here at Seattle Children’s,” Cheney said. “Not just because it’s the right thing to do, but also two of our top three reasons children come to us for help are asthma and bronchiolitis, and air quality has a direct impact on those reasons. We know to keep our community healthy and children healthy we need to do this work.”

Cheney, who heads the hospital’s 41-person transportation department, has a three-layer system aimed at reducing drive-alone trips. First, she explains, address parking, then subsidize all other modes of commuting, and then offer amenities.

“We deliberately try to reduce demand for parking by ensuring it is at market rate,” Cheney said. “The single most effective thing we can do to reduce commute trips is to charge for parking and better yet, eliminate monthly permits.” When people pay for a monthly permit, they naturally want to maximize their investment to the point employees drive on days they don’t need to. Cut the monthly permits out and you immediately can stop that type of economic behavior, Cheney advises.

“Vehicle use is imbedded as a cultural foundation to freedom and liberty here in the U.S.,” she said. “You have a car parked out there, and each time you use it, it feels free. And freeing. It is not necessarily either.”

That is where the next layer of Seattle Children’s Hospital’s commuter program comes into play.

To support the freedom and choice of movement, the hospital subsidizes every way of getting to work besides drive-alone commutes, including: bike, walk, ferry boat, carpool, vanpool, transit, and shuttles.

Seattle Children’s runs its own 22-shuttle system, moving employees between worksites and closing the gap between the worksite and transit hubs, which has resulted in 20 percent of employees utilizing public transit.

Cheney, said approximately 1,600 riders use the shuttles each day. Ridership on Children’s shuttle system has grown by 25 percent over the last five years. The sharpest jump in ridership came in March 2016 when a new shuttle route was established as a last mile connection between the hospital and a new light rail station.

Shuttles operate for between 5 a.m. and midnight and travel among three main geographic locations where Seattle Children’s has worksites: Downtown Seattle, the University District, and main hospital in a NE Seattle neighborhood. The shuttle is designed to transport Children’s workforce and connect the workforce with public transit.

Through Seattle Children’s focused efforts to promote all forms of ridesharing, they have seen the most success in carpools and vanpools, which are now used by 19 percent of their workforce. Cheney credits the rise in carpooling and vanpooling to the free parking the hospital provides for vanpools and discounted parking for carpools. “We also help subsidize the cost of commuting by carpool or vanpool with our parking discounts and we offer resources to help vanpoolers manage their vanpool and find riders,” she said.

An additional 9 percent of employees bike to work – three times the national average and just 1 percentage point shy of the goal established in their transportation master plan.

“It’s hard to get here and biking is a good way to do it because it’s on-demand. You can do it yourself,” Cheney said. “Biking is a good option for a worksite not well-served by transit.”

“Vehicle use is imbedded as a cultural foundation to freedom and liberty here in the U.S. You have a car parked out there, and each time you use it, it feels free. And freeing. It is not necessarily either.”

Jamie Cheney
Seattle Children’s Hospital,
Director of Transportation

Seattle Children's Hospital encourages novice bike commuters through a biking 101 class, where you learn how to bike commute, and by offering a full-service bike service center on campus.



To hit the goal, Seattle Children's has put in place a variety of programs and services aimed at attracting more employees to biking. "We design our bike program to be very user-friendly," said Cheney. Children's encourages novice bike commuters through a biking 101 class, where you learn how to bike commute, and by offering a full-service bike service center on campus. Employees who bike to work get two free bike tune-ups a year.

"Our staff are involved in really critical, life-saving work, and they don't tend to have a lot of time to get their bikes fixed after hours or on the weekends. Having this amenity keeps people biking and maintains a high level of bike commuting," Cheney said.

In spite of all of these efforts to support commuting options, Seattle Children's still needs to lower their drive-alone rate by another eight percentage points by 2030 to hit their goal.

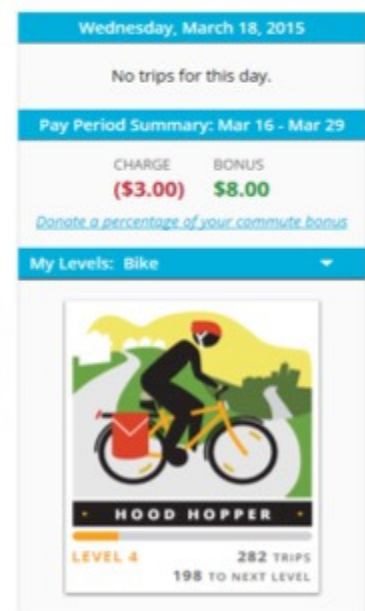
"While we have been able to make a lot of progress, that eight percent is going to be the toughest," Cheney said. "We need to continue to be innovative and really push the envelope on how do we coax and invite people out of their cars."

The challenge is one shared by employers across the country and Cheney utilizes her membership in the Association for Commuter Transportation to network and hear new strategies for how to get that last eight percent out of their cars.

"We need to understand all the opportunities that are out there so we can meet our goal," Cheney said. "We don't have all the answers here. We need to make sure to continue to innovate, to understand what others are doing and how to apply that in our own organization."

Cheney said, often what other companies are doing sets a precedent which can help garner buy in at the hospital for new ideas.

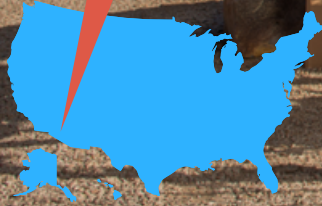
"A lot of us are doing this work, and a lot are doing it in isolation. It's important to do it together so we can improve the travel environment for all of our employees," she said. ■



Seattle Children's Hospital employees log their commutes online each day and depending on how they get to work, they are rewarded.



Salt River Project



A History of Finding New Ways to Work

The CEO of Phoenix public utility Salt River Project has a message for his employees — “1 in 5 for cleaner skies.”

It’s a call for carpooling, at least once a week to make a difference for the region’s air quality.

But the campaign rhyme is actually not new. That was the slogan from the 1970s when the electricity and water provider first began promoting employee commuting options as part of an overall sustainability push. By 1979, SRP launched their first employee benefit: vanpooling.

“Being a utility, we are very concerned about our stewardship and management of resources for today and future generations,” said Tony Perez, SRP’s transportation coordinator and sustainability program strategist. “To this day I keep learning how far back we’ve been promoting this.”

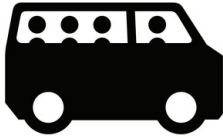
Building on that history, ridesharing remains a top commuting option for the utility, where around 350 of their 5,600 employees vanpool each month to reach 20 Phoenix area locations.

As they have since vanpooling launched, SRP fully subsidizes vanpool leases. Employee riders only split the cost of the gas.

“We subsidize the vanpool because it’s been, hands-down, one of the most effective ways of getting employees involved in an alternative mode of commuting,” Perez said, also



Bike share
400 employees



Carpool/vanpool
640 employees



Compressed work week
2,686 employees

From the 1970s...

to today. From bugs to bicycles.

Help us win: Buddy up behind the wheel



pointing to the vans as more effective at reducing congestion and emissions than carpooling. SRP also fully subsidizes public transit.

"The carbon footprint involved in transportation is huge. Air quality will always be on our radar," Perez said. "We want to do our part as an employer to encourage other employers to do the same." The Maricopa Association of Governments reported on-road emission sources account for about 40 percent of the region's emissions.

Taking a leading role in employee commuting options is also closely tied to local regulations, including a 1980 mandate from surrounding Maricopa County that requires every employer of 50 or more employees to designate a transportation coordinator, survey their employees to learn transportation patterns, and implement a plan to reduce drive-alone commuting.

Approximately 20 percent of SRP employees use a commuting option, like carpooling, vanpooling, transit, or biking, to reach the main administrative office. It's a number Perez aims to increase in part to stay in front of government regulations, but more as part of a broader strategy for engaging employees in sustainability programs.

As a community-based, not-for-profit utility, community service is one of SRP's core values, said Kelly Barr, senior director of environmental management and chief sustainability and compliance executive.

"Employers have a lot of influence in how employees choose to get to work, and when employers get involved in transportation demand management beyond compliance, we can effectively engage employees while improving local air quality and reducing congestion," Barr said.

If 40 percent of employees use a commute option besides driving alone, Maricopa County would not require further travel reduction measures by the employer, but Perez said as his team formalizes its goals regarding employee commuting, they will likely do more benchmarking well beyond what is required for compliance.

"We don't anticipate compliance to be a big driver of our future strategies related to employee transportation," he said.

"When employers get involved in transportation demand management beyond compliance, we can effectively engage employees while improving local air quality and reducing congestion."

Kelly Barr

SRP, Senior Director,
Environmental Management
and Chief Sustainability and
Compliance Executive

The current strategy of commuter rewards and benefits seems to be working. Carpoolers and electric vehicle owners also receive closer reserved parking spaces and free work-place charging.

For employees like Shari Wildberger, who commutes 80 miles each day, SRP's current incentives help more than their wallet. "The cost savings is a definite benefit," she said, "but the reduction in stress is an added benefit as well. Not having to deal with rush-hour traffic is priceless."

To attract more employees to get to work differently, Perez turned to the Association of Commuter Transportation, particularly the Employer Council, a group of employers who meet regularly to share best practices and strategize toward new employee transportation solutions that put less cars on the road and happier employees at work.

"SRP is constantly looking to improve our transportation program, so it's great to be able to go to more experienced companies and ask how they deal with transportation demand management and employee engagement," Perez said. "ACT has been such a great resource." SRP has been an ACT member since 2006.

Perez brings that learning back to a dedicated sustainability team led by an executive-level member. Perez says there is no question he's got plenty of support for his transportation efforts at SRP, where he says there is a culture of people who genuinely care about the environment.

By having voices from the executive ranks promoting commuting options that reduce one-driver commutes, SRP employees become motivated to participate as a part of their broader organizational culture.

"These programs help to actively engage everyone in finding innovative solutions to issues that are much bigger than any one person or company," Barr said. "We believe that small steps can add up to big improvements and our employees are excited to do their part."

That employer-employee dialogue gets generated in all sorts of manners at SRP, which has several campaigns and high-profile transportation events for employees throughout the year.

April is Valley Bike Month, which led to an SRP bike push in 2016 that generated more than 300 rider-submitted photos as part of a selfie campaign to promoting pedaling to work.

October is ride-sharing month, an activity that is also promoted year-round through an app SRP's IT team developed to help employees find carpool or vanpool partners and routes.

"The platform is definitely influencing change and will increasingly do so as we streamline more of our processes," Perez said, looking ahead to having a mobile app for greater employee access.



SRP's online bike-sharing reservation system uses check-out/check-in time and destination data to track mileage and employee usage.

Launched in 2013, SRP's bike share program is "pretty modest" and "easy to use," Perez said. Employees go online, sign a liability waiver, register, and reserve a bike, and then access the bike cabinet at a participating facility. The online reservation system asks for check-out/check-in time and destinations, which SRP uses to track mileage data without installing equipment on the bikes themselves. Employees return bikes to the same location where they were checked out and the bikes are available for any reason during business hours.

Aside from word-of-mouth and occasional flyers, Perez and his team rely heavily on internal email communications to promote these employee commuting options. According to their email analytics, the most opened emails are those that announce the prize drawing winners.

Though SRP has a history of efforts aimed at reducing employee environmental impacts, the sustainability team is always seeking new ways to reengage people. Three years ago that led them to launch a street fair outside an SRP office. The fair initially featured only ride-sharing programs, but "now it is the broader way to share with employees our entire sustainability effort," Perez said. His team has a two-page transportation plan and a much more comprehensive sustainability report it releases annually.

Various booths describe the team's ongoing work or teach employees how they can find a carpool group. Employees can also ride in one of SRP's 40 plug-in electric vehicles.

The fairs offer one more chance for Perez and others to talk to employees who may have not yet considered anything other than driving alone to work. "The typical pitch to employees has been, 'It saves you money,' and that's most effective," Perez said.

Today's SRP may not be pushing new jingles, but they still stand behind the need for employees to do their part and see the far-reaching impact commuting has on the environment at large. The new sustainability motto drives the message home: "Think Big, Start Small."

SRP's sustainability works combine to help reduce their own carbon footprint and support greater regional air quality efforts. For a utility that was founded nine years before Arizona became a state, SRP's progressive work continues to keep the utility in line with new local regulations aimed at long-term environmental sustainability. ■

"We subsidize the vanpool because it's been, hands-down, one of the most effective ways of getting employees involved in an alternative mode of commuting."

Tony Perez
SRP Transportation
Coordinator & Sustainability
Program Strategist



The Red Bus is the Real Thing

How Coca-Cola employees are bucking Atlanta's car culture

Few cities are as inextricably linked to a company in the popular imagination as Atlanta is to Coca-Cola.

The iconic beverage maker has been a major employer and significant civic leader in Atlanta since the late 19th century. In that 130 years, the company and the city have had their share of collaboration with Coca-Cola being a part of major innovations in transportation, including investing \$2 million in Atlanta's Beltline project to create a 22-mile loop of parks, trails and transit.

For Eric Ganther, who heads Coca-Cola's employee transportation efforts, the civic involvement is borne out of altruism. "We love our hometown and we want it to succeed. We love our planet and we want to be able to continue to inhabit it," he said. "We are in it for the long haul."

Unfortunately, for too many Atlanta workers the long haul is a twice daily experience, with Georgia's State Route 400 – a major north-south artery feeding downtown Atlanta – among the most unreliable commute times in the nation, varying from 30 minutes to 3 hours.

"That's a very frustrating experience when you're trying to go home to your family after work," said Ganther, Coca-Cola's global workplace strategy and operations transportation manager. To address the frustration, Coca-Cola began serving up more transportation options for its 7,000 downtown Atlanta employees, encouraging them to leave their cars at home. The whole city can see Coca-Cola's efforts in the form of The Red Bus.

A company bike rack now exists at the choice parking spots that Coca-Cola executives gave up in the name of a more bike-friendly commuting culture.



The three buses run continuously on a loop between the company's two downtown offices and the World of Coca-Cola, which includes a stop at MARTA's Civic Center station to connect with the rest of the region's rapid transit system. Ganther said, one of the main reasons people cite for not using public transit is inconvenience – even if the ride gets them close, they still need to find a way to solve the “last mile” problem.

With the shuttle's launch in 2013, Coke has replaced about 800 trips per day that would otherwise have been in cars, Ganther said. By launching the service, Coke was able to better promote public transit in a town where the car is about as ubiquitous as a can of Coke. Up to 500 employees now commute by transit, Ganther said.

“Our core task is to educate people that we actually have an efficient transportation network,” Ganther said. “No, it does not go to your front door, but it may still save you time, and it will definitely save you money.” Coca-Cola's two-person transportation team regularly holds informational events and promotes transit use on the company's internal communications channels.

To encourage employees to use public transit, Coca-Cola leverages the federal qualified transportation fringe benefit, which allows employees to purchase passes with pre-tax dollars and further incentivizes employees with a tax-free subsidy of \$50 per month, which covers more than half the price of a monthly public transit pass. Currently about 250 employees (just under 4 percent of the workforce) utilize this benefit.

“The transit benefit helps. But the [most impactful piece] is the shuttle,” Ganther said. “It's that direct connection from transit stop to doorstep that makes the choice to leave your car at home easier, one part of helping ease the barrier to entry for those who have never used public transit to get to work.”

When it comes to keeping executives in support of employer-sponsored transportation options, the numbers speak for themselves. Coca-Cola's investments in its shuttle system and transit has reduced demand for new parking garages, which can cost upwards of \$25,000 per space in Atlanta. This means a reduction of 500 cars could save the organization tens of millions of dollars, while at the same time the company gets to help



Coca-Cola distributes custom maps showing employees how, where (and how far) various commutes can take on various modes, such as Atlanta's MARTA combined with the company's Red Bus shuttle system (inset).

improve the quality of life of its employees and increase the livability and sustainability of the Atlanta region.

The company also offers 95 electric vehicle charging stations and sets aside 40 prime parking spaces near entrances for ride sharers, whether they are registered as car- or vanpoolers. The latest change in Coca-Cola's parking lot was a high-profile one for bikes.

This spring the company's chairman, Mukhtar Kent, decided to convert the covered executive parking lot into parking for 300 bikes with tables, chairs, and a bicycle repair station. "He's very supportive of our efforts. He's a world citizen. He's a global leader, and he can bring that world vision to Atlanta," Ganther said.

While Atlanta has not historically been a leader in bike-friendly commuting, Coca-Cola is doing what it can to make bicycle commuting a viable and safe option for employees. With a successful corporate bike share program in place for four years, Coca-Cola went a step further last spring to be among the first major employers in the South with showers and lockers adjacent to a main entrance of its corporate headquarters.

Coca-Cola is now working with the non-profit PATH Foundation, a group behind Atlanta's Beltline project, to complete a new cycle track that will pass by Georgia Tech, Coca-Cola's headquarters and take cyclists and walkers straight to Centennial Olympic Park in the heart of the city. The cycle track will provide a protected lane for cyclists and is designed to encourage 300 new bike commuters, further connecting Coca-Cola with Atlanta. The City of Atlanta recently launched a bikeshare program on which the company hopes to piggyback to replace its aging fleet and take advantage of the city's marketing and management efforts.

Coca-Cola's Red Bus and planned cycle tracks may have a modest role in keeping Atlanta's traffic flowing, but Ganther sees potential for real impact if the region can continue to invest in a multi-modal transportation system and support the development of new transportation technologies. Coca-Cola is looking at how to bring together new app-based transportation and commuter service providers and help improve ridematching and commuter choices for employees.

At the same time, Ganther suggests government needs to get serious about transportation regulation and treat it with the same tenacity as they did smoking more than a decade ago. Governments should design regulations that focus on the needs of people and business, he said. "We can't densify our cities if people still drive to go to the bathroom."

With a nudge from the government, some excitement from new technology, and new awareness about how good it can feel to not drive alone, Ganther sees a host of options on the horizon that could be Coke's new secret formula to change employee commuting behavior, even in Atlanta.



"[Coca-Cola Chairman Mukhtar Kent] is very supportive of our efforts. He's a world citizen. He's a global leader, and he can bring that world vision to Atlanta."

Eric Ganther
Coca-Cola,
Global Workplace
Strategy and Operations
Transportation Manager



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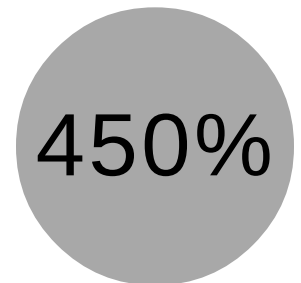
The Power of Transit Incentives and Creative Commuter Benefits

When Washington, D.C. Metro’s Silver Line extended to McLean, Va., in 2014, MITRE got the boost it needed to get more employees out of their cars during their commutes to work. MITRE, a not-for-profit organization that operates research and development centers sponsored by the federal government, employs approximately 3,500 people at its suburban headquarters, just 10 miles from Washington, D.C., and how they get to work is changing.

Within four months of the Silver Line’s opening, MITRE more than doubled the number of employees commuting by public transit. Before Metro’s extension, only 75 employees took advantage of MITRE’s pre-tax commuter benefit. Soon after Metro’s arrival, that number jumped to 250, and it is on track to double again thanks to a \$30 per month subsidy that MITRE began offering in January 2016 on top of their pre-tax commuter benefit.

“Since the start of the subsidy, we’ve seen steady growth in participation each month with the most recent month [September 2016] encompassing 412 participants. It hasn’t leveled off yet,” said Nick Amatuzzi, Senior Financial Analyst and Commuter Program Manager at MITRE. Amatuzzi works daily to encourage MITRE employees to get to work without driving.

With half of the company’s approximately 7,500 employees working in the thick of DC beltway traffic, MITRE has created a robust commuter benefits program that is such a major part of the employee experience they feature it as the first visual on their careers page.



Increase in employees taking pre-tax commuter benefit after Metro station opened nearby



MITRE employees bike to work double the Virginia average

“We offer commuter benefits as a recruitment and retention tool to broaden the range of commute options available to employees and to incentivize sustainable behavior and green practices,” Amatuzzi said.

Some DC-based new hires have even cited Metro accessibility as one factor that drew them to join MITRE. “After the Metro came to town, development in McLean took off,” Amatuzzi said. “The vision the county has is that this will be an urban community and to have everyone driving all over the place, it just won’t work.”

To be part of that vision, MITRE has agreed with Fairfax County to reduce peak time car travel to 1,006 cars by October 2017. That is a 31 percent reduction in car trips, and to help hit the target, the county offers a suite of employer resources, including a partnership with the Washington region’s Commuter Connections, which offers \$1 per trip to anybody who starts a new carpool group and logs their trips online. The maximum reward is \$130.

While some of MITRE’s own transportation plan is based on plans with Fairfax County, the details sometimes stem from what Amatuzzi and others learned from their peers. Three years ago, a benchmark study of other federally funded research and development centers, like MITRE, showed MITRE was one of the only ones that did not offer a transit subsidy. “That data was used to launch our subsidy at \$30 per month,” Amatuzzi said.

Since the subsidy rolled out, MITRE says it has taken 387 cars off area roads each workday, reducing employee vehicle miles traveled annually by 5 million miles, and saving 254,222 gallons of gas, all through a series of benefits, incentives and regional partnerships. MITRE’s broader transportation program also includes:

- Free Metro and interoffice shuttle
- Commuting subsidy
- Up to \$225 pre-tax withholding for transit and parking
- Carpool matching
- Secure bike parking, storage
- Free showers and dedicated lockers for bike/walk commuters
- On-site amenities to reduce mid-day trips

MITRE has taken an active role with the Tysons Partnership Transportation Management Association (TMA), serving as a founding member of the TMA. Amatuzzi attends regular meetings with other employers, developers, and government entities to discuss how to make Tysons, Va., a great place to live and work. The Tysons Partnership TMA, like others around the country, aggregates efforts from private employers and developers in partnership with public agencies to address the regional impacts of congestion by providing shared commuter services.

“The vision the county has is that this will be an urban community and to have everyone driving all over the place, it just won’t work.”

Nick Amatuzzi
The MITRE Corporation,
Commuter Program Manager



MITRE's secure, badge-accessed bike storage gets full during campaign months that promote biking to work, when the company greets cyclists with coffee and snacks on arrival.

Amatuzzi said he also wanted to cast the net a little wider and learn what other companies outside the D.C. region are doing with their commuter programs. That led MITRE to join Best Workplaces for Commuters and the Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT). “Our involvement with those groups helps me learn what other companies are doing in other parts of the country,” he said.

“We share best practices and benchmark with each other,” said Amatuzzi, who tracks transportation trends at MITRE through internal surveys and employee data from the human resources department.

“We are doing things with our commuter program that other companies are adopting.”

Locally, MITRE was among the first in Fairfax County to take advantage of a lesser-known county incentive called SmartBenefits “Plus50,” which pays employees \$50 to try commuting with public transit. You only need to take one trip, but of 396 MITRE employees who received the \$50 incentive, 67 percent continued using public transit for over a year afterwards.

To make taking the Metro even easier, MITRE runs an interoffice and Metro shuttle, complete with wifi on board. The shuttle, which is free for all MITRE employees and guests, runs between MITRE's five office buildings and can be tracked in real-time on a company website and mobile app.

The shuttle helps connect the last mile for people who commute by Metro or by bus and it helps employees get between meetings at different campuses and still have a car-free commute.

Based on an idea picked up from peers nationally, MITRE built a spacious and secure bike parking area that employees access by badge to further encourage bike commuting in the relatively flat Virginia suburbs. The facility is helping grow the number of bike commuters, which, while still a small percentage of the workforce, is 32 percent higher than the Virginia average.

MITRE also pays attention to more creative ideas other companies are experimenting with, such as giving employees free bikes if they ride them a certain number of days over a six-month period, or launching commuting challenges that reward individuals and departments for commuting by alternative means.

“It’s nice to know these ideas are out there,” Amatuzzi said. “If there comes a time when we are missing our parking requirements from the county, we might want to implement programs like these.”

Fairfax County regulations have increasingly aggressive parking ratios for new office buildings to reduce the number of drive-alone commuters.

For now, MITRE will continue to monitor the impact of their current transit incentives and how having a long-awaited Metro station nearby changes commuting patterns.

“Since the Silver Line opened two years ago, MITRE’s drive-alone percentage fell from 84 percent to 77 percent,” Amatuzzi said. “And our share of public transportation commuting more than doubled from 3.4 to 7.3 percent.”

MITRE recently finished construction of a new office building, MITRE 4, that will eventually bring together approximately 1,000 employees from previously leased spaces in the area, a further sign of a growing campus seeking to accommodate more people and looking to do it without more cars.

It’s one more reason MITRE will continue to work internally and with regional and national partners to find the best solutions to decrease drive-alone car commutes, expand commuter programs – sharing, leading and learning from others in Virginia and beyond. ■



Metro's Silver Line arrival to McLean has been a catalyst for MITRE programs, cutting drive-alone commutes by seven percentage points.



Marriott's Maryland Commuter Makeover

In the hospitality industry, hoteliers often sell rest and relaxation, but for the 3,000 employees at Marriott's headquarters in Bethesda, Md., getting to work can be anything but.

Given Washington, D.C., had the worst congestion in the country in 2015 – 82 hours of delay per commuter, according to the Texas A&M Transportation Institute – Marriott has invested in helping its people avoid it where possible.

The company's most recent effort is vanpooling. It's a commuter solution that may seem like a natural to a hotel giant that is used to operating shuttles of their own to transport guests to and from airports around the globe. The company has been a leader on other transportation demand management fronts as well, from transit benefits, to bike programs, and telework options.

At Marriott's headquarters the challenge is to get employees between suburban locations that are just too far from train stops to make the region's Metro an attractive option. An estimated 1 in 10 employees commuted via Metro in 2015.

Vanpooling on the other hand has been a hit since Marriott launched their program in early 2015.

When Marriott transportation manager Jude Miller reached out to employees based on where they lived to gather feedback on their commutes and how Marriott could help improve their options, she was "amazed at how many people responded and showed up for the formation meetings – the room was packed."

90

Average commute time for Marriott employees participating in van pool.

4

Number of organizations collaborating to improve Marriott employees' commutes.

“So many people showed up because of the great partnership we have with the team at the North Bethesda Transportation Management District, who has worked with Marriott for years to help our associates with their commute options,” Miller said. The North Bethesda TMD is one of five TMDs funded by Montgomery County to encourage transit and other commuting options that reduce single-occupancy vehicle in the county’s major employment centers.

Within a few months two vanpools formed from Frederick, Md., and Ashburn, Va., each about a 30-mile trip that could easily take over 90 minutes during rush hour. Since then, four other vanpools have been added. To ensure a strong launch of the program, Marriott gave employees the option to pay for their vanpool fare through a pre-tax commuter benefit – a \$120 per month subsidy to support employees using transit and vanpools.

“They come from all over,” Miller said. “In a van, driving in an HOV lane, it definitely takes less time to get here, making employees happier and more productive.”

Marriott’s vanpooling stemmed not only from their partnership with the TMD, but from conversations Miller had with Enterprise Rideshare’s Michelle Althoff, who is also chair of the Vanpool Council at the Association for Commuter Transportation.

“All I really do is bring people to the sessions,” Miller said. “The TMD and Enterprise do all the matching. It’s a good collaboration and certainly not something I could do on my own.”

Enterprise considers partnerships with major employers as critical to the growth and success of alternative transportation programs. “The ability for Marriott to provide information to a broad base of commuters who share the same end destination dramatically improves the odds of vanpool and carpool groups forming,” said Richard Dampman, director of business rental sales at Enterprise. Dampman credits Marriott’s employee education efforts, financial incentives, and email and in-person events with partners like Enterprise with increasing awareness of vanpool options to the point that “new vans are forming on a regular basis.”

For those who may think vanpooling comes with a longer term commitment, Enterprise stresses the flexibility of commuter van options. “Marriott has the ability to add or drop the number of vans based on demand, while only paying for those that are actually in demand,” Dampman said. “This is a great example of a creative solution that takes the employee’s demand and the corporate expense into consideration while still taking cars off the road.”

While vanpooling has been popular, Marriott continues to look for more transportation options to help employees reach their LEED Gold certified headquarters building in a business park that sits about three miles west of the nearest Metro stop.

“We wanted to start a shuttle from the Metro stop and I reached out to neighboring businesses in the office park,” Miller said. Then the county stepped in and offered a free express bus service, which started July 25, 2016. During the first two weeks of service, an average of 200 riders per day used the Rock Spring Express (not all from Marriott). “This exceeded expectations,” she said.

*“Everything we do is
about the
environment.
We really take it
seriously.”*

Jude Miller
Marriott
Transportation Coordinator

Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett called the express connection shuttle to Metro “the first step” in a larger effort “to transform Rock Spring from a traditional office park into a more lively business destination.” To add to placemaking efforts around the office park, the county is working with businesses and landowners to identify areas for public amenities and events that could happen during and after the work day as well.

“It is wonderful to be able to work with a company like Marriott who is such a leader when it comes to providing a wide array of commute option programs and benefits to their employees. They understand how important these programs are to their associates and as a way to attract new employees,” said Peggy Schwartz, director of the North Bethesda TMD.

According to Sandra Brecher, chief of commuter services with the county’s department of transportation, which funds the North Bethesda TMD and four other TMDs in the County, “The County is fortunate to have companies like Marriott who fully embrace TDM programs. They are a tremendous asset to the County and set a great example for other employers in North Bethesda and Montgomery County, as well as for other major employers around the country.”

These commuting options to traditional office spaces are right in line with Miller’s work at Marriott to change how people commute and view their time in the office park. “Marriott is trying to change the culture to get more people using vanpools and Metro,” Miller said. “It’s a process.” Miller has leveraged her peers from ACT’s Employer Council, a network of major employers across the country that share best practices, assist each other with strategies to overcome challenges facing employees, address regulations for employers to reduce drive-alone commute trips, and strategize to incorporate transportation into overall corporate social responsibility efforts.

“It’s a great forum to share ideas and help you enhance your program,” Miller said. “Some people have big, elaborate programs and teams. We don’t, but we have our partner organizations who assist Marriott’s commuting efforts.”

Miller promotes commuter options, benefits and ways employees can change their habits mostly through in-person events and Marriott’s intranet site. Marriott’s most important tool though is its \$120 per month subsidy for transit and vanpools. They also have a bikeshare program and host a “Pit Stop” at the annual region-wide Bike to Work Day celebration. The company has installed bike racks for commuters. There are plenty of reserved parking spaces for vanpools and carpools, so there are many options other than single occupancy vehicles. Marriott also recently installed a TransitScreen to help commuters gauge traffic and find transportation network providers, like Uber and others.

To Miller it’s simply an imperative — just like encouraging a hotel guest to reuse a towel to save water. “Everything we do is about the environment. We really take it seriously.”

Someday, Miller guesses, Marriott may not be sitting on the 32 acres the headquarters has now with parking room aplenty. “How does that work?” she wonders of the future, “Where do people park? Change is not easy but it is necessary.” Despite change, Marriott will always be able to get their employees to work – and just maybe make rush hour have a bit of that built-in hotel-inspired relaxation. ■



Marriott worked with Enterprise Rideshare to establish a vanpool program.

Conclusion

ACT hopes that these case studies will serve as a resource and inspiration for employers, large and small, in communities across the country. Employer-sponsored commuter programs are essential to creating worksites that support the choices of employees to commute to work with the most efficient, affordable, and sustainable option available, whether they choose to carpool, vanpool, take public transit, bike, walk, or telecommute.

The benefits of these programs are shared with the employer through increased recruitment and retention rates, lower parking costs, improved productivity, cost savings, and a higher quality of life for employees.

As the nation's leading advocate for transportation demand management strategies and supporter of the organizations and professionals that develop and implement TDM programs, we welcome the opportunity to assist your organization in its efforts to implement and/or grow its employer-sponsored commuter programs. We invite you to learn more about ACT and join our Employer Council, which provides a platform for networking, sharing, and learning.

Visit our website at www.actweb.org to learn more about ACT and our Employer Council.



The Association for Commuter Transportation, (ACT), is an international trade association and leading advocate for commuter transportation and TDM. Commuting by bus, train, rideshare, bike, walking, or telework improves our world by contributing to energy independence, better air quality, sustainability, urban mobility, and reduced congestion. Through advocacy, education, and networking efforts, ACT strives to improve the lives of commuters, the livability of communities, and the economic competitiveness of businesses.