



Program Announcement

EPA's Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative

The Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative is part of an effort to redefine the meaning of the "comprehensive employee benefits package" so it includes a Commuter Choice benefits package. The Commuter Choice benefits package helps American workers get to and from work in ways that cut air pollution and global warming pollution, improve public health, increase worker productivity, and reduce expenses and taxes for employers and employees.

Background

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is partnering with leading U.S. companies, the U.S. Department of Transportation (Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administrations), and state and local government to cut air pollution and improve public health through the new Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative. Some of the commuting options promoted through the Commuter Choice Leader Initiative include parking space cashout (i.e., trading an employer provided parking space for the cash equivalent), transit fare subsidies, telecommuting, compressed work schedules, flexible work schedules, carpools, vanpools, biking to work, walking to work, and others.

The Commuter Choice benefits package is a flexible combination of commuting benefits tailored to a particular company, its employees, and the community. Many employees working for Commuter Choice Leaders enjoy a reduced tax burden due to recent changes in the federal tax code.

What companies are involved?

The following companies Commuter Choice Leaders deserve special recognition for leading the effort to provide Commuter Choice benefits packages to their employees: Calvert Group, Geico, Intel, Kaiser Permanente, Nike, Pitney Bowes, and Walt Disney Company. Each of these companies has already made significant progress in providing commuter options and services to their employees. All have committed voluntarily to offer what we are calling the Commuter Choice benefits package.

What states, local government, and other organizations are involved?

The State of Georgia, the State of Maryland, and the City of Fort Worth, Texas are providing their employees with a Commuter Choice benefits package and for providing more commuting options and services to their citizens. These local and state governments are providing the support and infrastructure necessary to develop and maintain diverse commuting options for their citizens.

What's in it for workers?

Employees working for Commuter Choice Leaders enjoy a range of new commuting options and services that will make it easier, faster, safer, and cheaper to get to and from work. Many employees will benefit from a reduced tax burden due to recent changes in the federal tax code. Workers taking advantage of the Commuter Choice benefits package get the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to improving public health and environmental quality through a reduction in automobile emissions.

What's in it for employers?

Commuter Choice Leaders have a whole new category of benefits to offer their employees: the Commuter Choice benefits.

- Improved ability to recruit and retain employees who value alternatives to the long, costly, and stressful commutes to and from work. This will distinguish these employers in this tight job market and increase the base of potential employees.

- Improved employee productivity due to 1) reductions in commute-related stress, and 2) increases in healthy activities such as walking and biking.
- Reduced employer tax burden due to recent changes in the tax code targeting green commuting.
- Reduced employee tax burden also due to recent changes in the tax code.
- Reduced facility costs such as employee parking.
- Improved brand image due to public recognition provided by the U.S. EPA and our many partners (U.S. Department of Transportation, state governments, city governments, trade associations, professional associations, non-profit organizations).
- Improved community relations due to reductions in traffic, air pollution, and parking spillover into residential areas.

EPA provides technical expertise, tools, materials, and other resources to Commuter Choice Leaders to help them manage the Commuter Choice benefits package.

What's in it for the environment?

The Commuter Choice Leader Initiative will reduce air pollution and global warming pollution. This translates into improved public health and environmental quality. If half of all U.S. employers offered a Commuter Choice benefits package like the Commuter Choice Leaders recognized today are committing to:

- air pollution of 30 million commuters would be eliminated
- air pollution would be cut by the equivalent of taking 15 million cars off the road (for commuting and other trips) (out of 125 million cars as of 1997)
- commuting-related trips would be cut by 15 billion each year (out of about 50 billion commuting-related trips each year in the U.S.)
- commuting related miles driven would be reduced by 150 billion each year (out of about 640 billion miles of commuting per year in the U.S.)

What's in it for the communities?

Communities that are home to Commuter Choice Leaders and employees enjoy improved air quality, reduced traffic, and less “stressed-out” workers. In addition, these communities will gain the reputation for being business-friendly due to reductions in traffic congestion.

How does this differ from the Commuter Choice initiatives already in place?

EPA, with support from the U.S. Department of Transportation, is partnering directly with employers (Commuter Choice Leaders) to help them offer new commuter benefits and services. We are working directly with human resources professionals, in addition to transportation coordinators and environmental affairs professionals. We are asking employers to report their progress to the EPA so we will know what works, what doesn't, and how to improve. The U.S. EPA has committed to recognizing those employers that have done a good job in providing a Commuter Choice benefits package to their employees.

EPA is attempting to redefine the meaning of the comprehensive employee benefits package so that includes a commuter benefits package. We will do all that it can to make it extremely easy for U.S. Employers to offer a Commuter Choice benefits package.

In addition, EPA is enlisting the help of communications and marketing experts who will help us ensure that American workers get every opportunity to learn about and advantage of a Commuter Choice benefits package.

What is the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative Agreement and the Commuter Choice benefits package?

Commuter Choice Leaders have committed to several conditions in order to qualify:

- Appoint a commuter coordinator.
- Centralize and simplify all employee commuter information (e.g. on an internal web site).
- Regularly inform employees of their commuting benefits.
- Offer employees at least one core commuting benefit (e.g., transit

- fare subsidies, telecommuting).
- Offer employees at least three other commuting benefits.
- Report their progress to the U.S. EPA.

EPA has committed to helping the Commuter Choice Leaders and their employees in the following ways:

- Appoint a contact/account manager for each Leader.
- Provide public recognition to Leaders for their efforts in reducing stress, traffic, costs, and pollution.
- Inform future, potential employees of the commuting benefits of working for Leaders.
- Develop and provide assessment tools that help Leaders determine which commuting benefits and commuting information would provide the greatest value.
- Develop and provide communications tools that help Leaders centralize and simplify commuter information and help Leaders inform employees about those benefits.
- Develop and provide analytical tools to help Leaders calculate assess the impact of their commuter benefits package.
- Help Leaders identify companies, non-profit organizations, and other government entities that offer commuting-related products and services that contribute to employee commuter benefits.
- Host conferences and produce materials to help Leaders share commuter benefit information.
- Limit the number of Leaders so each gets a significant voice and attention during the leadership phase.
- Help the Leaders share their success with other employers that may want to offer a Commuter Choice benefits package once the Leadership phase has completed.

How can I get more information?

You can access documents on the Commuter Choice Program electronically on the Office of Transportation and Air Quality Web site at:

<http://www.epa.gov/otaq/traq>

For further information on the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative, please contact Stephen Offutt (202-564-9266) or Stephen Sylvan (202-564-2223).