

# Breathe Easier: U.S. Companies Sign Up to Fight Traffic and Air Pollution

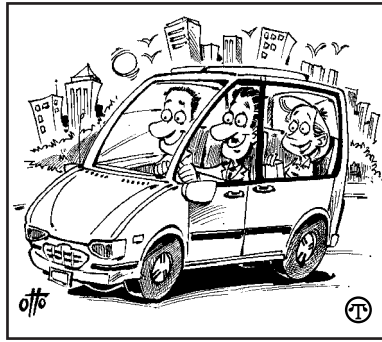
by Stephen Offutt

(NAPSA)—For a growing number of U.S. workers, getting to the office is just as stressful as tight deadlines and annual reviews. Take for example, Hewlett-Packard's Nina White, who last year was spending countless hours in traffic five days a week. Today, White is participating in a new business-government partnership that offers her a better way to work: better for her wallet and for her nerves.

Hundreds of companies like Hewlett-Packard have teamed up with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to tackle traffic and air pollution through the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative. Participating companies, called Commuter Choice<sup>SM</sup> Employers, encourage employees to choose commuting options other than driving alone by offering benefits such as telecommuting, rideshare programs, and public transit subsidies. To sweeten the pot, some even offer extra vacation time or other rewards to employees who take advantage of commuter benefits.

In return, EPA and DOT offer Commuter Choice Employers national recognition for their environmental leadership, technical assistance, and other benefits. Currently, Commuter Choice Employers offer commuting benefits to nearly half a million employees.

Employees credit commuter benefits with saving them money and time, and even improving their health. Says White, "Beyond saving gas and wear and tear on my car, ridesharing allows me to relax on the way to and from work. After work when I'm tired, it feels good not to be the respon-



sible driver all the time. We even work out together at the gym before we drive home, so ridesharing has transformed my lifestyle in many positive ways."

Commuter Choice Employers agree to offer a guaranteed ride home to employees who do not drive to work alone. Under this program, employees can receive free transportation home in cases of emergency or unscheduled overtime. Some employers provide this service themselves; others partner with local transportation companies.

Eddie Bauer employee Michael Blackwood says, "By taking full advantage of our commuting subsidies and guaranteed ride home program, I have been able to save a substantial amount of money and, more importantly, time. I never feel trapped or confined to the transit schedule, because no matter what situation might arise, I know that I have a guaranteed ride home."

Employers realize tangible benefits, too. Innovative benefits offerings help companies recruit and retain qualified staff. Some companies even credit the initiative with saving them money. Thanks to strong participation in its commuter benefits program, the Walt Disney Company was able to save \$2 million in addi-

tional parking facility costs.

But the paramount reason for this initiative is to improve the quality of life in American communities. "If just half of U.S. employees were covered under these benefits, traffic and air pollution could be cut by the equivalent of taking 15 million cars off the road every year, saving American workers approximately \$12 billion in fuel costs," said Margo Oge, director of EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality. "That's both cleaner air and real savings for families."

To learn more about the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative, visit [www.commuterchoice.gov](http://www.commuterchoice.gov) or call the toll-free voicemail request line at (888) 856-3131. Or, give this article to your company's HR director.

*Stephen Offutt is Manager for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative.*

## Reasons to Get On Board

- ✓ **Good for Your Community:** By offering commuter benefits, a company with 1,000 employees can take 175 cars off the road and reduce global warming emissions by 420 tons.
- ✓ **Good for Your Company:** In a study by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, eight out of ten workers reported a higher opinion of their employer as a result of receiving commuter benefits.
- ✓ **Good for Your Wallet:** By offering commuter benefits, a company with 1,000 employees can save participating commuters \$13,000 in taxes and \$160,000 in gasoline, parking, and vehicle costs each year.
- ✓ **Good for Your Waistline:** In a recent *Men's Fitness* magazine study, cities that had high usage of non-automobile transportation were more fit and healthy.