

Best Practices for Employer Based Commuter Options Programs

Overview

Employer-based commuter option programs are actions taken by employers to reduce employee's single-occupancy vehicle travel. Successful employer-based measures provide benefits to employers and employees, ease transportation congestion and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This case study describes the motivating factors, actions, and results of several leading companies and agencies that have instituted successful employer-based commuter options programs.



Context

Over-reliance on single-occupant vehicles for employee commuting contributes to traffic congestion, wastes fuel and time, and increases harmful emissions thereby negatively impacting air quality. It also results in a demand for roadway capacity that is limited by space availability and funding. As shown by a recent Metrolinx¹ study, delays in the transportation of goods, services and people lead to decreased productivity and competitiveness.

Reducing drive-alone commuting can offer substantial financial benefit to employers - some tangible and others less so. The most obvious tangible benefit is the moderation of demand for parking and its cost of construction and management. As for less-measurable benefits, employer-based commuter option programs can lessen the stress of commuting, making it easier to retain good employees and contributing to a workforce with higher morale and reduced rates of absenteeism. Employer-based commuter option programs can also generate positive public relations for companies and agencies.

For employees, employer commuter programs can result in travel options that lead to savings in time and money and reduced travel-related stress.

Employer Commuter Programs

Employer-based commuter option programs can provide the impetus that makes the move away from drive-alone commuting attractive for employees. To succeed, commuting alternatives must offer reduced commuting cost and/or time, convenience, availability, accessibility, reliability and safety. In order for employees to consider available commuting alternatives, education and information is necessary to make them aware of the options and their benefits.

Although each employer-based commuter option program varies in the actions

implemented, each is based on financial or operational rationales for moving away from drive-alone commuting. The stages of program development include problem analysis, planning, goal setting, consultation with public transit agencies, implementation, and ongoing education and results measuring.

Every employer is unique in terms of its employee composition (hours of work, travel distances, etc.) and local availability of public alternatives (transit, bicycle and walk paths, etc.). For this reason, some commuting alternatives work better for one company/agency than for others. Some activities intended to reduce drive-alone commuting, such as aiding the establishment of carpools, can be completely under the control of an employer. Other alternatives may involve employer cooperation with public transit agencies to improve routes, frequency and stop facilities. The successful examples reported in this case study share several things in common:

1. Tangible benefits for the employer.
2. The appointment of a dedicated person to plan, implement and measure results.
3. Actions unique to company/agency circumstances, location and employee needs.

Program Examples

Nortel, Ottawa

Known for high technology research and equipment, Nortel has also been a North American leader in providing commuter options for its employees since 1998, both in

Ottawa, and at other company locations. Nortel's Carling Campus is located in Ottawa's west end and is designed to accommodate 8,000 employees.



Problem Identification:

When Nortel was planning to double the size of its Carling Campus, a condition of the municipal approval was that traffic and parking impacts be minimized. To comply, Nortel initiated a transportation demand management program called *GreenCommute* to encourage the use of alternatives to single-occupant vehicle driving. A full-time program coordinator was hired and goals were established to increase the percentage of non-auto trips and to increase automobile occupancy.

Sample Actions:

Nortel set out to implement actions that suited its unique site, work force and public transit potential.



Public Transit:

Nortel worked with OC Transpo to establish a central transit hub on the campus that provided real-time display of bus arrival times and transit information, and bus service was increased to the site.

Ridesharing:

An employee survey had indicated that finding partners was a barrier to carpooling. Nortel developed its own custom intranet-based ride-matching system and in 2006, launched a GIS- based ride-matching system that allowed employees to log their commute and register online for preferential carpool parking.

Carpool Parking Areas:

As an incentive to carpool, 13 % of all parking spaces were dedicated for carpoolers with two or more occupants and for full time teleworkers without a dedicated office space onsite.



Results:

Nortel's employer-based commuter options program achieved its early objectives.

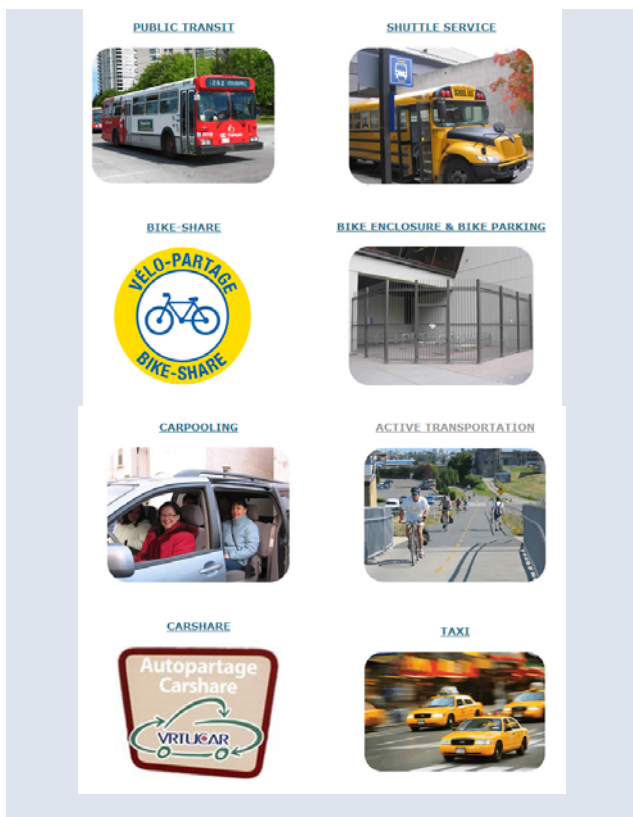
Traffic and survey count data indicated that non-auto mode use went from 12% in 1998 to 20% by 2008. Carpooling increased from 10% to 20%. Awareness of commuting alternatives increased dramatically and special events were highly attended – for example, a transportation fair attracted 45 % of the employees. A survey indicated that 96% of the respondents were aware of the *GreenCommute* program or its components, and believed that it was important for Nortel to act as a corporate role model by offering transportation alternatives; 79% of the respondents agreed that the *GreenCommute* program made it easier for them to get to work without a car.

Additional Steps

Nortel extended its employer-based commuter options program to its other locations in North America, tailoring each program to the particular needs of each one.

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University of Ottawa



Problem Identification:

Located in downtown Ottawa with faculty and support staff members numbering more than 8,000 and more than 36,000 full and part-time students, the University of Ottawa has an ongoing need to reduce single-occupant vehicle parking and traffic flow on and around the campus to avoid congestion and pedestrian/vehicle conflicts, and to allow the university to expand.



Sample Actions:

The actions implemented by the University of Ottawa reflect its unique client base, location and proximity to OC Transpo bus routes.

Public Transit:

The University of Ottawa was the first Ottawa employer to implement OC Transpo's ECOPASS program that provides employees with a 12% discount on OC Transpo passes and payment through payroll deduction.

Bike-Share:

Members of the university community that successfully complete applications can borrow Bike-Share bicycles available on the campus.

Carpooling:

Members of the University community have free access to a ride-matching website (Carpool uOttawa) and carpoolers have access to designated parking spaces. Carpool members also have access to the Emergency Ride Home program that provides carpool members access to alternate transportation in the event of an emergency.

Carsharing:

Members of the carshare program can reserve a vehicle online or by phone, and pick-up it up at a designated parking area.



Shuttle Service:

Students have access to a free shuttle bus service that connects the University of Ottawa's downtown campus, Saint Paul University, Roger-Guindon Hall and Carleton University.

Cycling:

The University actively encourages cycling to and from the campus by offering cycling education seminars and bike theft prevention sessions.

Bicycle Storage:

There are approximately 170 bicycle racks on the campus and most are protected from the

weather. There is also a centrally-located, secure enclosure located close to shower facilities.



Taxi:

The University has established six taxi pick-up points on campus and entered into agreements with taxi companies to have taxis waiting or dispatched quickly on demand.

Events:

The University organizes yearly events such as Commuter Challenge and International Car Free Day to promote sustainable modes of transportation to and from the campuses.

Results:

Modal Split: As a results of its sustainable transportation programs, the University of Ottawa's sustainable modal split to and from the University increased from 79% to 82% during a five-year period when the number of commuters increased by 45%

Parking Demand: From 2003 to 2008, the University population increased over 45% while the average number of vehicles parked on campus increased by approximately 5%.

Next Steps:

The University of Ottawa's target is to achieve a modal split of 85% for sustainable modes. It is working to establish a campus bicycle co-op and to expand the cycling network on campus. It is also seeking to increase the number of carshare vehicles available on campus

For more information, contact Danny Albert, Sustainable Transportation Manager
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Alberta Health Services

The Calgary Region of Alberta Health Services (AHS) employs approximately 31,000 staff and volunteers in the City of Calgary, and like many companies or agencies, demand for parking far exceeds supply – in January 2009 there were 25,500 parking permits issued for 13,000 available parking stalls.

Problem Identification:

Alberta legislation prohibits publicly-funded agencies from subsidizing parking. This means there is a financial imperative for AHS to ease demand for parking. In 2006, AHS engaged a dedicated transportation demand manager and a strategic plan was developed in consultation with the City of Calgary.

Sample Actions:

AHS Calgary has taken a number of actions to reduce the demand for drive-aline parking. Like the other examples reported in this case study, action are tailored to the particular location, workforce and alternative transportation infrastructure at each of its Calgary locations.

Planning:

The home locations of staff was mapped to identify target areas best suited to certain modes of commuting, which allowed transportation managers to identify commuting options most likely to be viable for certain groups of employees.

Employee Information:

An internal web page is used to educate staff about alternative means of getting to work and special events are used for promotion (Earth Day, Commuter Challenge Week, Carpool Recognition Week, Bike to Work and Alternative Transportation & Rideshare Fair, etc.).

Improved Transit:

Customized transit rider's guides were developed for each medical/administrative site. The guides provide bus route maps and schedule information for all transit lines that service a

site. A handicap-accessible, heated transit station was built at Rockyview General Hospital in 2008 to make public transit more accessible, convenient, comfortable, and appealing.

Rideshare Program:

A carpooling program was initiated that designates a number of indoor parking stalls for carpool vehicles. Carpool participants also qualify for the *Emergency Ride Home* program that provides up to four taxi rides to a maximum of \$200 annually to allow them to get home quickly in case of an emergency or unexpected overtime work.

Bicycling: Secure bicycle storage facilities were installed at several hospitals.

Flex Work Hours: Flex work hours (at a manager's discretion) provide staff some flexibility that makes it easier to arrange carpooling or to better coordinate work hours with public transit schedules.

Telecommuting: The Health Records department successfully implemented a telecommute program that resulted in reduced traffic to the work place.

Results

As of January 2009, the number of single-occupant vehicles was reduced by 1,250 per day based on:

- Increase of 0.35% in carpooling (183 vehicles)
- Increase of 1% in use of public transit
- Increase of 1.5% in walkers
- Increase of 0.1% of teleworking

Next Steps

AHS is examining the feasibility of an inter-site shuttle service between main hospital facilities, which would eliminate 65 daily reciprocal parking visits and reduce single-occupant car traffic. It is examining the implementation of a shuttle service between major facilities and the light rail transit (LRT) system. AHS is in the

process of extending traffic demand management to other parts of Alberta.

For more information, contact Karen Lim Karen Lim, Provincial TDM & Southern Parking Operations, Alberta Health Services, Tel: 403-943-1327, E-mail:

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Bell Canada

Problem Identification

Bell Canada (Calgary) wished to relocate from its downtown location to a stand-alone property that would provide more flexibility for expansion and a location that would enhance company identity and branding. To effect a relocation that employees would enthusiastically embrace, it was established that the new location must provide commuting alternatives. Bell worked with Calgary Transit to understand commuting impacts for each of the sites under consideration. Preparation work included mapping routes, travel times and options for all employees for each of the sites under consideration.



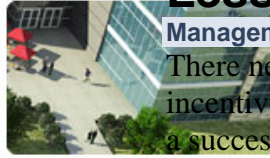
Sample Actions

Bell Canada's actions were selected to meet its unique goal of making the relocation of its office location acceptable to employees by creating the conditions that make drive-alone options alternatives attractive - reduce commuting cost and/or time, and offer convenience, availability, accessibility, reliability and safety.

New Office Site Selection:

Bell Canada completed relocation of its Calgary operations from downtown to the east side of the Calgary early in 2008. Site selection included mapping routes, travel times and options for all employees for each of the locations under consideration. Final selection

was based on several criteria, with high ratings given for ready access to public transit. The new location, known as the Bell Westwinds Campus, provides direct access to the C-Train and bus routes. It is adjacent to bicycle routes and close to the airport.



Car Pooling:

Employees at the Bell Westwinds Campus can post carpooling requests and offers on the company Intranet site.

Cycling:

Bell employees are encouraged to use adjacent bicycle paths and free onsite, indoor storage for 50 bicycles. Bicycle commuters are able to enjoy access to health and wellness centre lockers and showers without requiring membership to the health and wellness centre.

Promotion: Bell Calgary employees are encouraged to participate in programs such as Commuter Challenge.

Results:

For Bell Canada, the successful relocation of its offices to the Westwinds Campus met the corporate goal of having the move enthusiastically embraced by employees. One of the features of the new location that contributed to the positive acceptance of this major change was the provision of commuting alternatives. Acceptance of the move has been demonstrated by surveys and no increase in attrition or absenteeism rates.

Next Steps

Bell Canada is working with its property developer and the City of Calgary to construct a pedestrian overpass to shorten the walking distance between the campus and the new McKnight-Westwinds C-Train terminal. Continuing education measures will be used to further reduce drive-alone commuting.

For more information, contact Derek Weiss, Asset Management, Western Canada Bell Real Estate Services, Tel: 403-410-4400, E-mail: derek.weiss@bell.ca

Lessons Learned

Management Support

There needs to be a financial or operational incentive that drives an employer to implement a successful employer-based commuter options program. Senior management support is necessary at all stages of a program, from planning to implementation and ongoing measurement, including the provision of resources and a dedicated person responsible for execution. In the case of Nortel, the employer incentive was based on the fact that municipal approval of expansion of the Carling Campus was based on taking measures to limit traffic flow to and from the site and to limit parking demand at the site.

Options

It is obvious that a variety of commuting options is necessary – only a portion of employees lives within walking distance of work or is willing and able to commute by bicycle. Both Bell Canada and AHS Calgary developed maps showing where employees commuted from in order to identify commuting options best suited for different locations and travel distances.

Customized Programs

Every company or agency has unique circumstances that require tailor-made commuter options. For example, Bell Calgary's proximity to a light rail line is not often available at other Canadian locations. However, carpooling is an example of one measure that can be implemented at any workplace. Successful carpooling programs include an Intranet site that facilitates communication between potential riders, preferential parking in terms of proximity or cover from the elements, and in some cases, some type of back-up service to assure convenience in the event of emergency.

Communications

Supportive infrastructure (transit improvements, bicycle parking, priority carpool parking, etc.) alone is a start but does not guarantee widespread acceptance. Effective and ongoing communications is necessary to make employees aware of commuting options. Even when viable options are available and promoted, it takes time to change commuting behaviour.

Overcoming Hurdles

As stated in the Overview, viable transportation options must reduce commuting cost and/or time, and offer convenience, availability, accessibility, reliability and safety. Employer-based commuter options must meet these conditions to succeed. Recognizing that car pooling is less able than drive-alone commuting to accommodate sudden schedule changes or emergencies, AHS Calgary implemented *Emergency Ride Home* to overcome this hurdle and make car pooling more attractive.

Measuring Results

Continued employer support depends on results that justify the resources dedicated to providing commuting options and changing behaviour. The examples provided here involved setting goals, benchmarking, and measuring results. For example, AHS Calgary continually monitors the use of car pooling and off-site parking, and conducts a system-wide attitudinal survey every two years.

Conclusion

Employer commuter programs provide benefits for employers, provide alternatives for employees, and help society in general by reducing road congestion and emissions. Several Canadian companies/agencies, each with different motivations and solutions, have recognized the benefits of reducing single-occupant vehicle commuting. Of the four examples provided, each employer is committed to continuing efforts to find more reductions of single-occupant vehicle commuting. For example, Alberta Health Services is extending pilot programs to other Calgary health centres,

and is in the process of transferring successful activities and practices to other parts of Alberta.

Resources

1. Cost of Road Congestion in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, Metrolinx, December 2008, <http://www.metrolinx.com/en/informationAndResearch.aspx>
2. Association for Commuter Transportation of Canada <http://www.actcanada.com>
3. University of Ottawa <http://www.protection.uottawa.ca/en/sustainabletransportation.html>
4. Nortel http://www.nortel.com/corporate/community/environment/initiatives/commute_alt.html