Acknowledgements

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This document is available electronically at bit.ly/42ja62g.
Have you thought about providing transportation or commute benefits to your employees? Do you need to reduce demand for parking at your work site or improve employee productivity and satisfaction? Do you want to help employees reduce the environmental impact of their commutes?

This toolkit includes information on:

- Why to consider offering a commute program,
- What steps to take when building an employee commute program,
- What commuter benefits should be considered,
- How to engage with employees around the program, including marketing and implementation, and
- What resources are available to your organization as you move through this process.
Why should your organization provide an employee commute program?

**Employee retention and recruitment**
Providing a robust employee commute program is crucial to the recruitment and retention of high quality employees. Growing numbers of employers in the Bay Area are experiencing difficulty attracting and retaining staff because of negative commute experiences.

**Employee productivity and satisfaction**
Employees who arrive at work following a stress-free commute are more productive on a daily basis and more satisfied in the long-run than those who experience anxiety surrounding their daily commute. Commute programs tailored to employee needs improve staff morale, build camaraderie, and advance the organization’s long-term goals. Employees who use active transportation for all or part of their commute may experience health benefits and arrive to work more energized.

**Reduced costs**
Introducing a comprehensive employee commute program on a company-wide basis allows organizations to reduce costs in payroll taxes, and potentially costs to employee retention and parking.

**Contributions to a healthy environment**
When organizations facilitate the use of alternative transportation modes by their employees, they are contributing to both the local and global environment.
Comply with local and state legislation

Employers located within the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) boundaries\(^1\) with more than 50 employees must comply with the Bay Area Commuter Benefits Program. Senate Bill 1128 requires these employers to offer either pre-tax transportation costs, a transit or vanpool subsidy, a free employer shuttle or vanpool, or a similar alternative program aimed at increasing shared commuting. Learn more about the Bay Area Commuter Benefits Program by visiting [https://511.org/employers/commuter-benefits-program](https://511.org/employers/commuter-benefits-program).

California state law requires certain employers who provide subsidized parking for their employees to offer a cash allowance in lieu of a parking space, called the parking cash-out program (Assembly Bill 2109, Katz; Chapter 554, Statutes of 1992).\(^2\) Local jurisdictions may have additional requirements for employers.

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\(^1\) The entirety of Sonoma County is not included within BAAQMD boundaries. Portions north of Windsor or west of Occidental may not be included in BAAQMD and are instead part of the Northern Sonoma County Air Pollution Control District. District boundaries are shown here: [https://www.baaqmd.gov/about-air-quality/interactive-data-maps](https://www.baaqmd.gov/about-air-quality/interactive-data-maps).

What steps should be taken when designing a commute program?

1. **Engage with employees** to understand their wants and needs with respect to transportation to and from work.

2. **Identify the level of resources** your organization can make available for a commute program.

3. **Consider the existing nearby resources** you can take advantage of.

4. **Select a package of commute program elements** from the list in the next section – or consider others not listed that are in demand at your organization.

5. **Launch a commute program** and refine based on employee feedback and changing needs.

6. **Ensure communication** between employees and implementing staff about the program.
What questions should I ask when designing a commute program?

1. Do you have employees with set or variable schedules? Do most of your employees live nearby or a significant distance from your work site? Talking to employees in meaningful ways about the challenges they face with commuting will ensure the program you implement is well-used and makes a difference in employees’ commute experience. Communications tools such as surveys, focus groups, and workshops may be appropriate depending on the number of employees at your organization.

2. Consider both program start-up costs and ongoing annual costs of maintaining the program. This should include both financial and human resources, such as a TDM coordinator to work with vendors and employees throughout the life of the program.

3. Are you within walking or biking distance of a SMART rail station or major bus transfer station? Are you in a business park with other organizations that might want to partner on rail shuttles or commuter buses? The presence of such facilities may make some programs more relevant for employees than others. For example, financial incentives to bike to work is only likely to be used if your work site is near robust bicycle lanes or facilities.

4. Make sure your selections match the level of resources you have and the identified needs and wants of your employees. Consider piloting certain programs or introducing programs in a phased approach to ensure a manageable program is launched.

5. Consider developing a brand for your commute program to get employees excited at the point of program launch and to streamline communications about the program in the future. When launching, communicate about the program in multiple ways, including digital and in-person. Consider a mix of email and/or intranet communication, as well as staff presentations, commute fairs and/or tabling.

6. This may include a designated email address, monitored by a dedicated person. You may also consider creating a small employee focus group or advisory committee to ensure ongoing employee participation in the commute program.
How To: Pre-Tax Commuter Benefits

Employers interested in implementing a pre-tax commuter benefits program should begin by designating a commute benefits coordinator to field employee questions and make arrangements to either administer in-house or select a payroll service or vendor to administrate the program (e.g. WageWorks).

The coordinator should then set up a pre-tax deduction protocol in partnership with your organization’s payroll administrator. Next, market and enroll employees in the pre-tax program. The pre-tax benefit should then be distributed to employees through the designated process (e.g. Clipper card, transit vouchers). Finally, maintain records about participation in the program and continue to enroll new employees.

In many cases, utilizing a vendor pays for itself through the savings employers receive in payroll taxes.
What commuter benefits should be considered?

Bay Area employers use a combination of the programs described in the following table depending upon their employees’ needs and the organization’s available resources. The potential impact of each commute program element shown below is based on the estimated level of trip reduction provided by the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association (CAPCOA).

Note that the potential impact of a program element will be highly dependent on the land use and transportation network near your work site, and the willingness of your employees to explore new commute modes. For example, public transit subsidies are only likely to be highly impactful at work locations served by multiple frequent public transit routes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commute Program Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Resources to Consider</th>
<th>Potential Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lowest Cost Programs</strong></td>
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| Pre-tax commuter benefits     | Pre-tax commuter benefits allow employees to exclude up to $300* per month from their paycheck to pay for commute costs (transit, vanpool, biking, and parking) on a pre-tax basis. Pre-tax commuter benefits can save employees up to 40% of their commute costs and save employers an average of 7.65% in payroll taxes. To start this program, employers are encouraged to select a third party commuter benefits vendor to implement the program. *$300 is the annual IRS limit for 2023 | 511.org commuterbenefits.com  
Third party vendors: commuterbenefits.511.org/docs/benefit_providers.pdf | 🟢🟢🟢 |
<p>| Parking cash-out program      | Parking cash-out is designed to incentivize the use of alternative commute modes by providing cash in lieu of subsidized parking. This could be a daily, monthly, or annual incentive. Most successful is a program coupled with a permit program for tracking purposes. Parking cash-out is required by law for certain employers who subsidize parking. | California Air Resources Board arb.ca.gov/planning/tsaq/cashout/cashout.htm | 🟢🟢🟢 |
| Emergency / Guaranteed Ride Home program | The Sonoma Emergency Ride Home program will reimburse rides home in a taxi, TNC (e.g., Lyft or Uber), car share, or rental car in the event of an emergency for anyone who works in Sonoma County and arrived at work using alternative transportation. | Sonoma Emergency Ride Home Program GoSonoma.org/ERH | 🟢🟢🟢 |
| Preferential parking for carpools/vanpools | Offering preferential parking spaces at work for carpool or vanpool vehicles is a perk for those who travel with others; it is a low-cost incentive with the biggest impact at sites with high parking occupancy. | Landlord if leased work space | 🟢🟢🟢 |</p>
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<tr>
<td>Smart Cycling Classes</td>
<td>Smart cycling classes improve safety and confidence for employees wishing to commute by bicycle. Employees can attend one of the monthly courses or the Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition is available to teach a private course at your office.</td>
<td>Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition <a href="http://bikesonoma.org/our-work/traffic-skills-101/">bikesonoma.org/our-work/traffic-skills-101/</a></td>
<td>🟢🟢🟢</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parking fees</td>
<td>Introducing parking fees at your work site is the most drastic measure to affect commute mode choice. It can be implemented at a daily, weekly, monthly, or annual permit basis – but is most effective as a daily fee.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexible work arrangements</td>
<td>Flexible work policies allowing for compressed work week schedules, telecommuting, and flexible schedules.</td>
<td><a href="http://511.org">511.org</a> <a href="http://511.org/employers/commuter-benefits-program">511.org/employers/commuter-benefits-program</a></td>
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### Moderate Cost Programs

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<tr>
<th>Program Element</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Resources to Consider</th>
<th>Potential Impact</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public transit subsidies</td>
<td>Monthly or annual transit passes are good incentives for commutes that are convenient on public transit. Check transit websites for available discounts.</td>
<td>Petaluma Transit <a href="http://transit.cityofpetaluma.net/foares">transit.cityofpetaluma.net/foares</a>, Santa Rosa CityBus <a href="http://srcity.org/1658/Fares">srcity.org/1658/Fares</a>, SMART <a href="http://sonomamarintrain.org/fares">sonomamarintrain.org/fares</a>, Sonoma County Transit <a href="http://sctransit.com/fares/passes">sctransit.com/fares/passes</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shuttles to transit</td>
<td>Free or subsidized shuttles between your work site and transit hubs or stations make transit more appealing; ensure this service matches work hours and is offered as frequently as possible.</td>
<td>Partnering with nearby employers can defray the costs of a high quality service</td>
<td>🟢🟢</td>
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<td>Financial incentives to use vanpool</td>
<td>Vanpool programs facilitate 5-15 employees who live near each other riding to work together in a leased van which is maintained by an outside vendor. The Bay Area Vanpool Program provides subsidies for qualified vanpools.</td>
<td><a href="http://https://511.org/vanpool">https://511.org/vanpool</a></td>
<td>🟢🟢</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial incentives to carpool</td>
<td>Employer provides a financial incentive to carpool with colleagues (e.g. $2 per ride). Employer incentives can be in addition to carpool matching and reward programs through Sonoma Commute Rewards or the Bay Area Merge program.</td>
<td>Sonoma Commute Rewards <a href="http://GoSonoma.org/CommuteRewards">GoSonoma.org/CommuteRewards</a>, Bay Area Merge <a href="http://merge.511.org">merge.511.org</a></td>
<td>🟢🟢</td>
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<td>On-site car share station and/or subsidies</td>
<td>Bringing car share vehicles to your work site offers employees an option for quick trips during the day if they did not drive to work; more robust implementation may include offering to cover membership costs, subsidize use of car share, or using car share for your organization’s car fleet.</td>
<td>Car share operators like Zipcar, Enterprise Car Share, Car2go Zipcar.com</td>
<td>![ ] ![ ] ![ ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-site bike share station and/or subsidies</td>
<td>Helping to bring bike share to your work site allows employees to quickly travel from transit stops to work and make short trips nearby during the day by bike. Employers may consider covering membership or use costs in bike share. This program is likely to be more successful at work sites accessible by high-quality and low-stress bike facilities.</td>
<td>Sonoma County Transportation Authority scta.ca.gov Local jurisdiction</td>
<td>![ ] ![ ] ![ ]</td>
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**Highest Cost Programs**

| Commuter bus or shuttle program | Commuter bus or shuttle programs offer a one-seat ride from pick-up locations near home to work; these programs are very appealing to employees but come at a high cost. | Partnering with nearby employers can defray the costs | ![ ] ![ ] ![ ] |

**Alternative Commute Program Model**

**A La Carte Menu**

As an alternative, employers may explore offering an “a la carte menu” of commute programs to employees. Using this model, employees are allocated a set dollar value in benefits and can select from a menu of commute programs up to that value on a monthly or annual basis. Employees are able to select programs which work for them; for example, employees for whom public transit is a viable option may choose transit passes, while others who prefer to carpool can select a rideshare subsidy.

Though this model may be more time-consuming to implement, it can be cost-effective in the long run. This model allows employers to offer a wide menu of program elements while reducing the number of programs paid for but not used by employees.
**How do I engage with employees around a commute program?**

Diverse methods of communication should be utilized to ensure adequate promotion and understanding of the commute program across staff. A list of communications tools, as well as the recommended touch points with employees is discussed below.

<table>
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<th>Tool</th>
<th>Description and Purpose</th>
<th>Touch Points and Frequency</th>
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| Brochures                   | Provide detailed information to employees regarding the commute program. Download the How to Use Emergency Ride Home flyer here: https://scta.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ERH-how-to-flyer.pdf                                                                 | -New employee orientation  
-Update and distribute annually, at minimum, to describe any program changes |
| Emails                      | Provide information and brief updates on commute programs digitally.                                                                                                                                                   | Quarterly or as-needed                                                                     |
| Commute App and Intranet Website | Track commute behavior on a voluntary basis in order to facilitate contests, raffles, and prizes. House commute program information and brief program updates.                                                      | Daily                                                                                      |
| Program Champions           | Identify champions for the commute program among organizational leadership who can encourage use of the program and contribute to institutional and cultural change.                                                 | -Commute Fair  
-Other events like Bike to Work Day  
-Emails                                                                                       |
| Commute Fair                | A tabling event at the work site to encourage use of the commute program, introduce program updates, and ideally sign-up participants in real-time.                                                                 | -In-person at work site(s)  
-Bi-annually                                                                                |
| Annual Survey               | Conduct an annual survey of employees about the commute program – what’s working, what’s not working, and what improvements they might like to see. Generate a meaningful feedback loop by providing an update on the results of the survey to all employees after analysis. | -Promote through emails, posters, intranet and app, as applicable  
-Annually                                                                                 |
What resources exist to help employers with commute programs?

Regional and local agencies are available to provide assistance and act as resources for employers in Sonoma County:

- GoSonoma for information and tools on encouraging ‘drive-less’ commute modes: [www.gosonoma.org](http://gosonoma.org)
- 511 Employer Assistance - including ride-matching, worksite events, and vanpool and incentive programs: [https://511.org/employers/services/overview](https://511.org/employers/services/overview)
- 511 Commuter Benefits Program: [https://511.org/employers/commuter/overview](https://511.org/employers/commuter/overview)
- Sonoma Emergency Ride Home program will reimburse rides home in cases of emergency for anyone who works in Sonoma County and uses an alternative transportation mode to get to work: [www.scta.ca.gov/ERH](http://www.scta.ca.gov/ERH)
- SMART fare programs: [www.sonomamarintrain.org/fares](http://sonomamarintrain.org/fares)
- Santa Rosa CityBus fare programs, including UR Free - Employer program offering deeply discounted passes for bulk purchases: [https://srcity.org/1658/Fares](https://srcity.org/1658/Fares)
- Sonoma County Transit fare programs: [http://sctransit.com/fares/passes/](http://sctransit.com/fares/passes/)
- Petaluma Transit fare programs: [http://transit.cityofpetaluma.net/foes/](http://transit.cityofpetaluma.net/foes/)
- Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition – available to offer smart cycling classes to your employees on-site or at the Coalition office in Santa Rosa: [http://www.bikesonoma.org/our-work/traffic-skills-101/](http://www.bikesonoma.org/our-work/traffic-skills-101/)

Consider this: Are you in a business park with other organizations that might want to partner on rail shuttles or commuter buses?
Welcome to Sonoma Commute Rewards!

A reward program for Sonoma County commuters to earn points for choosing sustainable alternative travel options for their commute to work or school.

How to Earn Points
Employees can earn points that go toward gift cards of their choosing by using clean and active travel modes of transportation:

- **Active Transportation** (Walking, Biking, E-Scooters): 10 points (one-way)
- **Public Transit** (Rail, Bus, Ferry): 10 points (one-way)
- **Ridesharing** (Carpool/Vanpool): 10 points (one-way)
- **Teleworking**: 10 points (full day)

For more information, visit [gosonoma.org/commuterewards](http://gosonoma.org/commuterewards).
FOR EMPLOYEES

What are the elements of your ideal commute?

Have you considered different ways to get to and from work? Exploring new ways to commute can save you money, allow you to get some exercise, or be productive with work.

What are the elements of your ideal commute?
Do you like to…

- **Read or check phone apps?** Consider using transit or carpooling with colleagues as a rider.

- **Be with other people?** Find a carpool partner or use rideshare services to match with those who live and work near you. Join a bike group.

- **Sleep?** Join a vanpool group or find a colleague to ride with to work. Use shuttle buses if available.

- **Be active and get some exercise?** Bike, walk, or take transit to work – or use a combination of these! Join or start a bike group from your neighborhood.

- **Help the environment?** Use almost any alternative mode to driving alone to work. Sharing a ride with a colleague halves your environmental impact, while biking almost eliminates it.

- **Save money?** Owning and maintaining a car costs an average of $10,728 per year. Using alternative commute modes may reduce your maintenance and gas costs, or even allow you to shed a car in your household.³

LIKE WALKING?

Build extra active time into your commute by walking to the bus.

Visit [www.gosonoma.org](http://www.gosonoma.org) for information and tools to help you use “drive-less” commute modes like bicycling, transit, rideshare, and more!
For More Information

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