



Alamo Area Council of Governments Commute Solutions Program

The Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) promotes alternatives to single occupant vehicle (SOV) transportation in San Antonio and its eight surrounding counties through its Commute Solutions program. This program offers commuting services to businesses in the area by providing an employer information/resource packet; meeting with key personnel; giving presentations or demonstrations, addressing new employee orientations, submitting newsletter articles or social media content; informing and helping to register employees for its alternative transportation reward program and carpool matching service at events; and engaging employees in its annual Walk & Roll Challenge. AACOG's Commute Solutions program offers these services for free in the interests of improving air quality.

Mobile sources, particularly those related to on-road transportation, are the largest contributor of the chemicals that form ground level ozone, the area's primary form of air pollution (commonly referred to as smog). Since 2012, the San Antonio area has failed to meet federal standards for ground-level ozone. Unlike the naturally occurring ozone in the earth's upper atmosphere that protects us from the sun's ultraviolet rays, ozone that forms in the air we breathe as a result of human poses health risks, including respiratory distress and damage. Reducing SOV transportation reduces ozone-forming emissions.

Employers Benefit by Supporting Commuting Options

Businesses can benefit from promoting commuting alternatives not only in terms of their employees' improved health, such as a reduction in absences due to asthma attacks, or increased stamina and lowered stress levels due to walking out rather than driving out to lunch. Employees who ride a bus or carpool, for example, use fewer parking places. For companies that provide employee parking, supporting commuting options through the Commute Solutions program may alleviate the need to find or create additional parking space as the workforce grows.

In addition, having an array of commuting options, including alternative work scheduling such as telecommuting, can be an attractive, potential perk to highly sought-after, talented employment candidates who are considering various employment prospects. Providing access to such options can also help employers to retain talented employees who may be tempted to look elsewhere.

Under U.S. Internal Revenue Code section 132(f), employers may provide qualified transportation benefits to their employees for transit passes and vanpooling as well as for parking. Companies can offer a tax-free, employer paid subsidy, a pre-tax employee-paid payroll deduction, or a combination of both. When an employer provides a subsidy for employees to commute by transit/vanpool and/or a subsidy for qualified parking, the employer benefits by getting a tax deduction and the employees benefit because the amount does not show up on their W-2 forms. When the employees pay for the commute benefit with earnings set aside on a pre-tax basis, the employees save money on their income taxes while employers save in payroll taxes on the amount that employees set aside. Employers can also gain tax deductions for limited reimbursements to employees for qualified bicycle commuting.

Finally, there are bragging rights associated with being a good air quality steward and corporate citizen. A number of honor programs exist, such as AACOG's AIR Quality Stewardship Award or the Center for Urban Transportation Research's Best Work Places for Commuters Award, which draw positive attention to corporate efforts to help improve air quality. Such good deeds do not go unnoticed!

Commute Solutions Facilitates Employees' Transition to "Smart" Transportation

"Smart" trips are those either taken for commuting or other transportation purposes by bus, carpool/vanpool, biking and walking, or saved by telecommuting or working a compressed workweek. The Commute Solutions Program sponsors NuRide.com to encourage and facilitate smart transportation choices. When people who live or work in San Antonio or one of its eight surrounding counties take and record smart trips on Nuride.com, they receive points that they can redeem for goods and services from over 100 participating businesses. Businesses offering discounts and other rewards to individuals using NuRide include Dell Computers, Petco, Bike World, Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, Clothesline Cleaners, Dave and Busters, Mama Margie's, Advance Auto Parts, and dozens of others, both locally-housed and Web-based.

Through NuRide, Commute Solutions also offers its CARE program. For individuals living and working in the San Antonio area who regularly record their trips on NuRide, the CARE program provides reimbursement for a ride home (up to \$50) when an emergency occurs while they are at work (up to 4 times within 12 months) and they must hire a taxi or other ride service to drive them home or to where they have left their vehicle before carpooling, vanpooling, or taking a bus to work. The CARE program helps to alleviate employees' concern that they will be stuck without quick way home if an emergency arises and they do not have their own vehicle with them at work.

Additionally, for employees who would like to carpool but don't have a carpool partner, NuRide may be used as an online carpool matching service. Users simply input their origin and destination addresses, along with other basic details, and they are provided a way to communicate with others who have similar origins and destinations, without divulging more personal information unless and until they are comfortable with doing so. With Nuride, there is no need for an employer to organize carpooling!

Employers may choose to participate in the Commute Solutions annual Walk & Roll challenge as a means to encourage the adoption of transportation alternatives. Through the Walk & Roll Challenge, employers compete with one another to see which can take the greatest number of smart trips per employee. Participating employees gain access to special prices, while participating employers gain community recognition.

Ozone Action Day Notification System

In addition to facilitating smart commuting, the Commute Solutions program maintains an Ozone Action Day Alert notification program to help minimize ozone exposure for sensitive groups (such as those with respiratory ailments) and to give others adequate time to plan how they might reduce the buildup of ozone the following day. The program distributes email alerts to anyone who would like to receive one the day before ozone is predicted to reach unhealthy levels by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Ideally, an appointed individual and an alternate from every business in the area would be on the notification list, who would be responsible for alerting all personnel the day prior to an expected ozone standard exceedance.

Interested in learning more? Just contact us! Commute Solutions staff may be reached by phone at (210) 362-5213 or by email at aprosterman@aacog.com.