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Coalition of Environmental and Transportation Organizations Launch 2005 Campaign to Ease Commutes and Reduce Air Pollution
Leaders in Commuting Alternatives Honored



BOSTON – At a conference today, the US Environmental Protection Agency and a coalition of environmental and transportation organizations launched the 2005 "Best Workplaces for Commuters" campaign to recognize the growing number of employers across New England promoting carfree alternatives for commuters. Also at the conference in Boston today, the Patriot Chapter of the Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT) honored US Rep. Michael Capuano and six New England organizations for their outstanding efforts to reduce air pollution and traffic congestion.



EPA's Best Workplaces for Commuters

In just the past year, the number of New England companies and organizations offering strong commuter benefit packages has increased from 91 to 118. This distinguished group of companies and organizations is helping to boost commuter traffic on buses, trains, ferry boats, bicycles and other modes of transportation, according to Linda Murphy, director of EPA New England's Office of Ecosystem Protection. Murphy made this announcement today at a conference of the Patriot Chapter of the Association for Commuter Transportation at the World Trade Center.



"Through transit subsidies, biking incentives and other offerings, these companies are spurring thousands of New England workers to leave their cars at home in favor of alternative commuting modes. And, that is leading to twin benefits of improved air quality and reduced traffic congestion," Murphy said, noting that the employees with commuter benefits are eight times more likely to use transit than those without them.



The Best Workplaces for Commuters campaign began in 2003 when EPA joined forces with a dozen leading New England government and business organizations dedicated to reducing traffic, improving air quality and cutting global warming emissions while helping to make commuting less stressful and costly.

Air pollution from cars contributes to ground-level ozone pollution, known as smog. Over the past five years, New England has had an average of 25 days per summer when air quality was unhealthy due to high levels of smog. This pollution affects everyone, but some people are especially sensitive to it, including children and adults who are active outdoors and people with respiratory diseases such as asthma. Exposure to high ozone levels can cause breathing problems and aggravate asthma and other pre-existing lung diseases.



Reducing ozone levels is especially important in New England, where asthma rates are significantly higher than in the rest of the country. All six New England states have childhood asthma rates above 10 percent. A 2004 study by the New England Asthma

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Regional Council found nearly one of every five households with children in the region had at least one child with asthma. More than 400,000 children in New England – 12.3 percent – suffered from asthma at some point in their childhoods, according to the study.



“Traffic congestion costs the Boston area nearly \$1.4 billion a year,” Murphy added. “The average Boston peak commuter spends 54 hours a year stuck in traffic and the average Boston household spends 16 percent of its income on transportation. This is more than families spend on food.”

Although the number of employers involved in the Best Workplaces campaign has grown substantially in the past year, EPA hopes more employers will join the effort. Qualifying employers who sign up by Sept. 9 will be part of a list that will be publicized in October.



To be eligible, companies must offer employees at least one major commuter benefit, such as \$30 per month in transit passes, vanpool subsidies or cash instead of subsidized parking spaces. Also, they must offer three other commuter benefits such as carpool matching, bike lockers and compressed works.

A list of the New England Best Workplaces for Commuters is attached. For more info about the program, visit <http://www.bwc.gov>.



Patriot Chapter of the Association for Commuter Transportation’s TDM Awards

Also at today’s conference, the Patriot Chapter of the Association for Commuter Transportation honored Rep. Capuano and six New England organizations, including two on the list of Best Workplaces for Commuters, for outstanding efforts to improve commute alternatives.

“ACT is pleased to work with such a vibrant industry committed to reducing emissions and improving our region’s air quality through transportation management,” said David Straus, President of the Association of Commuter Transportation, Patriot Chapter. “ACT recognizes the importance that each individual and organization no matter how small or large plays in educating the public about the importance of making available and using an alternative mode of transportation.”



This year’s award winners are:

US Representative Michael Capuano is a consistently strong voice for Massachusetts, fighting to protect the state’s share of federal transportation dollars. He is also a tireless advocate for the Urban Ring and Silver Line projects and is working to secure funding for more transit projects, including \$1 million for improvements at the Lechmere MBTA station.



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Campus Area Transportation Management Association (CATMA), in Burlington Vt., pioneered an innovative arrangement with the Chittendon County Transportation Authority to provide students, faculty and staff of the University of Vermont with unlimited access to authority buses, successfully increasing bus ridership by 75 percent and reducing the number of student cars on campus by 4 percent. The association is one of New England's Best Workplaces for Commuters.



Metro West Area Public Transportation Map provides information on public transportation routes in the 17 communities that comprise the Metro-West/495 Transportation Management Association. The map also highlights places of interest that are accessible by public transportation and provides essential information in both English and Portuguese.



Rte 128 Business Council, Waltham Mass. provides shuttle buses that help reduce air pollution and traffic congestion in suburban Boston. Its Alewife Shuttle provides more than 85,000 people with direct service between the Alewife MBTA station and businesses along Rtes 2 and 128 each year. Its Bentley College *Citibus* provides a direct link between Bentley's Waltham campus and downtown Boston. The Route 128 Business Council is one of New England's Best Workplaces for Commuters.

The Boston Public Health Commission's Walk this Way program teaches safe pedestrian behavior to children in Boston and encourages them to walk to school.



Timberland Company, in Stratham, NH offers employees up to \$3,000 to offset the purchase of a new hybrid vehicle, helping reduce air pollution in this community. Already, three employees have acquired hybrid cars through this program, and seven more have signed up.

The Town of Lenox, Mass. Idle-Free Campaign is a grassroots program to protect public health and the environment. The campaign, which has increased awareness of the harmful effects of idling and reduced air pollution in Lenox, is a model for how a community can reduce air pollution.



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