# The Ins and Outs of Carpooling
# June 24, 2004

*Available exclusively to Best Workplaces for Commuters℠, phone forums provide cutting-edge information on a range of topics related to commuter benefits. Moderated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), these forums feature experts on key topic areas.*

On June 24, 2004, Best Workplaces for Commuters℠ hosted a phone forum to discuss carpool programs as an easy, low cost commuter benefit and as a way to get large numbers of employees involved in alternative commute programs. Carpooling has become more popular as parking has become more difficult, more cars are on the road, and employers look for ways to save on expenses.

Patrice Thornton, EPA forum moderator, provided opening remarks and introduced the featured participants.

## Featured Participants

### Brenda Williams, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada

Ms. Williams is a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) market analyst at the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) of Southern Nevada. She discussed ridematching services that a typical TMA might provide to local employers and the advantages of such a service. RTC provides ridematching services for all employers in southern Nevada by using a software package called RidePro, which was installed on the organization's local area network. The software includes a registration function that allows both employers and employees to sign up free of charge. In addition, commuters can use the software to locate carpools, vanpools, park-and-ride lots, biking partners, day care centers, telework centers, and construction information. In the future, the software will have the capacity to aid commuters in planning public transit travel itineraries. RTC uses the software as a one-stop shop for commuting needs.

RTC also uses the software as a way to manage its program. Account managers are able to enter and track information on marketing contacts and can run reports at the end of the month to gauge marketing results. The software's reporting capabilities include showing how many records are added, changed, or deleted in a certain time period, the total number of commuters on file, mode splits, distances from home to work, and number of active companies in the database. The software can also organize information into various lists and generate reports to determine the activities of specific carpools.

Ms. Williams also discussed the program's "estimated program benefit" function. In this scenario, RidePro assumes that 20 percent of the successful match reports will result in a rideshare arrangement. Based on that assumption, the software can present corresponding information on commuting costs, reductions in parking spaces, and reductions in emissions of certain air pollutants.

RTC also has a program in place to track employees' commute modes. Each commuter is issued a swipe card to record his/her daily commute trip. RTC works with a fulfillment house to provide prizes and incentives for the commuters participating in alternative commute programs. The data tabulated

from the use of the swipe cards allow RTC to know how many individuals participate, when they participate, and what modes of transportation they use. To be eligible for the fulfillment house's monthly drawing, employees must have swiped their cards at least four times per month, which provides an incentive to use alternative modes.

Ms. Williams cited several advantages of an employer's participation in this type of ridematching service, including: ease of implementation, generation of both qualitative and quantitative data to support a commuter strategy, and the provision of structure and guidance in a ridematching program.

### Mike Wallace, University of Arizona

Mr. Wallace is a customer relations specialist with the University of Arizona's Department of Parking and Transportation Services. Four years ago, construction projects and increased student enrollments at the university created severe parking problems. The University of Arizona's carpool program was organized to help reduce the number of cars on campus and to address air quality issues.

To participate in the program, carpools are required to have a minimum of three people and the riders are required to be affiliated with the university as faculty, staff, or student. When a carpool joins the program, it is guaranteed a space in a reserved parking area. The carpool is charged a low parking fee that is then split among all the riders. The program began with 24 participants and now includes **almost** 90 participants, resulting in almost 200 fewer **cars** being driven onto campus. Sometimes, members of a carpool need to bring their own cars to campus. To respond to that need, the university issues each carpool 12 permits per year per to park in surface lots at no charge.

The university conducted a travel reduction survey in September 2003. It surveyed 7000 employees, finding that 1,213 of them participate in carpools. The university has encountered some problems with people abusing the program, and deals with those situations on a case-by-case basis.

### David Jay Lieb, Cornell University

Mr. Lieb is the communications and marketing manager in Cornell University's Office of Transportation and Mail Services. For the past 13 years, Mr. Lieb has been a part of the team responsible for the successful design, implementation, and marketing of Cornell's transportation demand management (TDM) program.

In 1990, as Cornell was investigating its projected need to build as many as 2,500 additional parking spaces to keep up with increasing demand, it decided to create incentives to get people out of their single occupancy vehicles. Cornell has a total campus population of 30,000, including approximately 9,000 faculty and staff, and only 10,000 parking spaces. Cornell determined that the faculty and staff were the biggest burden on the university's parking system and made them the initial focus of the program.

The university raised its parking fees to create a disincentive to driving to campus alone. This change resulted in more carpools, with 600 fewer cars being driven to campus each day. Currently, Cornell has approximately 1,370 people participating in 625 carpools. The average occupancy is 2.2 people per car. Participants benefit from the program by sharing the cost of the parking permit, which is heavily subsidized by the university, among the group. In addition, if certain conditions are met, carpools are given a cash rebate each year.

Similar to the University of Arizona, Cornell recognizes the need for people to occasionally bring their own cars to campus. Each individual in a registered carpool receives up to two books of 10 one-day parking permits per year. Individuals who have childcare or other similar responsibilities have the option of obtaining additional books.

Cornell helps to avoid abuse of its carpool program by making each of its commuter benefits programs mutually exclusive from the rest. It is impossible for an employee to sign up both for a carpool and a transit pass. These benefits are only available to benefits-eligible faculty and staff and are funded by the university through its employee benefits pool.

The group that originally set up this program 14 years ago was able to convince the university that, in the long run, it would be far less expensive to provide these benefits than it would be to keep up with the demand for parking. Cornell estimates its net cost savings, after 10 years of the program, are approximately $36 million. The university continues to spend some money on parking, but those expenditures only maintain the number of existing spaces on campus.

The overall result of all of Cornell's commuter benefits programs combined is approximately 2,400 fewer cars coming to campus each day. In addition, in the last 14 years, Cornell estimates that these programs have reduced commuter miles by 10 million each year, which results in numerous benefits in terms of air quality and traffic congestion.

Additional information on Cornell's program is available at <www.parking.cornell.edu>.

## Open Discussion

Lou Gomes from Bay Area Commuter Services asked Ms. Williams to elaborate on the swipe card concept. Ms. Williams explained that this is a system customized for RTC in which employees are assigned an identification number associated with a plastic swipe card. Each work site has a card reader where the employee can swipe his/her card and indicate how s/he got to work that day. Employees may also report their commute mode on a Web site or via telephone.

Gaye Pierce from the Houston Galveston Area Council asked how RTC pays the cost of using the fulfillment house. Ms. Williams explained that RTC spends about $350,000 per year on program incentives and uses Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) funding to cover those costs.

Shelly Daronche from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center asked Mr. Lieb what Cornell's parking fees are based on. Mr. Lieb explained that Cornell's parking fees are designed to discourage people from commuting to campus alone. Parking costs are separated into tiers, each of which increases a certain fixed percent each year

Janet Redeker from TREK asked Mr. Lieb how Cornell ensures that employees are not misusing the carpool program. Mr. Lieb believes that 90 percent of the participants in the program are using it properly—an acceptable rate. He emphasized that Cornell's commute programs are mutually exclusive, so employees are not able to take advantage of multiple benefits.

Patrice Thornton from EPA asked Mr. Lieb what made Cornell decide to offer rebates to certain carpools. Mr. Lieb explained that those rebates were a way to encourage larger groups to carpool and for those groups to park farther away from the central campus.

## Conclusion

Ms. Thornton closed by thanking the featured participants for their presentations and thanking the employers for participating in the forum. She indicated that a summary of this forum will be posted at <www.bwc.gov> and reminded employers to periodically visit the Web site to explore the Employer Resources Page for additional information on different rideshare programs both locally and nationally. If employers have topic ideas for future phone forums, they are encouraged to submit them to EPA by e-mailing <bwc@epa.gov> or by telling their account manager. Ms. Thornton also advised employers to stay tuned for more details on the next phone forum, which will be an interactive training on the Members-Only Toolkit.

Contact information for the featured speakers is listed below:

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