Enhancing Commuter Services in Urban Areas with

Emergency Ride Home Programs

> "Having an emergency ride home makes commuters comfortable trying transit and other alternative commuting modes for the first time."
>
> — Kelly McHugh
> Executive Director, Seaport TMA
> Boston, Massachusetts

Many large urban areas already benefit from mature public transit infrastructures with established riderships. How can more commuters be coaxed off the congested thoroughfares in and around city centers? By providing emergency ride home services to individual commuters.

Establishing an emergency ride home (ERH) program is an inexpensive and effective way to encourage more environmentally friendly commuting choices, reduce traffic, and improve both the air quality and the quality of life in urban areas. That's why organizations in major metropolitan areas—from Washington, DC to San Diego—operate ERH programs to maximize their transportation management efforts.

A recent study completed by the Best Workplaces for Commuters℠ team found compelling reasons to offer an ERH service in major metro areas:

◆ **Commuters love it.** Those who don't drive appreciate the peace of mind that comes with knowing that they can get home in the event of a personal emergency or illness.

◆ **It is cheap and easy to administer.** ERH programs in urban areas cost less than 45 cents per month per commuter and require minimal staff time—on average 15 minutes per week per 100 commuters—to administer.

◆ **As "commuter insurance," it gets commuters out of their cars.** Many commuters claim that without access to an emergency ride home, they would drive alone to work.

◆ **It fills gaps in transit services.** No transit service can respond quickly to all emergency or illness situations. With an ERH program, no transit service needs to.

◆ **It's rarely misused or abused.** Thirty-three percent of ERH program managers could not recall their program ever being abused or misued. Another 25 percent of programs in urban areas programs cited only a single case of misuse in years of operation.

26 percent of the Seattle-based University of Washington's monthly transit pass holders said that the school's Emergency Ride Home program was important to their commuting decision.

5 Steps to Emergency Ride Home Success

If you are ready to establish an ERH program in your area, follow these steps to get off to a good start:

1. **Investigate funding sources.** While some agencies have set up ERH programs with less than a few hundred dollars, others have tapped CMAQ funds, state department of transportation grants, and internal budgets to finance ERH programs and associated marketing costs.

2. **Set ERH guidelines.** Decide who can use the service, how often they can use it, and under what circumstances a ride is warranted. Refer to the Best Workplaces for Commuters℠ Benefits Brief on ERH programs, available at <www.bwc.gov>, for more information on how different ERH services have set these program specifics.

3. **Negotiate contracts with ride providers.** Be sure to specify the maximum cost per ride that your ERH program will pay to rental car agencies and taxi services.

4. **Assign staff.** Most programs, even large ones, only require a fraction of one person's time to market and administer.

5. **Spread the word.** Incorporate information about the new service in your ongoing outreach on commuter services. Preregistering also helps inform commuters and prevents ineligible commuters from misusing the service.

Visit the ERH toolkit online at www.bwc.gov

Consider Incorporating Transit into Your ERH Program

Transit is often the fastest and most convenient means of getting in and out of a city center. Don't overlook this inexpensive and convenient resource when designing your ERH program! For example, consider providing free transit fare to commuters in need of a ride along with a taxi ride from the transit station to the final destination. Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' ERH service uses a similar design, providing taxi rides from subway or bus stations as part of their ride home.