



# Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> Network

## The Kickoff: Introduction to the Network and the National Standard of Excellence

*Tele-Seminars provide valuable information to help Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> Network members grow their own commuter programs and promote the Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> (BWC) brand. Moderated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), these seminars feature experts on key topic areas.*

On March 3, 2004, Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> held a kickoff Tele-Seminar to welcome members of the newly-formed network and to provide an overview of the Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> program. Patty Klavon, National BWC Network Manager, provided opening remarks.

### The BWC Network

The BWC Network was formed in early 2004 to pool the resources of organizations that are committed to reducing the number of cars on the road. More than 80 network members nationwide have joined, forming a national coalition to help transform the way people get to work.

EPA's goal is to reduce the congestion and pollution caused by single-occupant vehicle commuting. It has found that commuters are much less likely to drive their cars alone to work if their employers provide commuter benefits such as subsidized subway passes or telecommuting programs. Working with EPA, BWC Network members can encourage employers to provide these benefits.

Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> is a national program that adds value to its member organizations' regional programs—it provides new promotional opportunities, increased media visibility, and a host of resources provided by EPA:

- e-Updates: For supporting organizations (TMOs, transit organizations, councils of governments, etc.),

quarterly newsletters providing cutting-edge news and tips on such topics as marketing, gaining media attention, and highlighting employers' commuter benefits programs.

- Campaign Coordinator Toolkit: For organizations that want to establish a Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> campaign in their area, an online tool kit with tips and sample documents for every step of a successful campaign.
- Network Member Promotional Toolkit: For network members, a Web site collection of materials useful in marketing the Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> brand and highlighting its success.
- Tele-Seminars: A teleconference in which members can learn from experts in the field of commuting benefits, interact with other network members, and give feedback to EPA's Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> program coordinators.
- Training conferences: EPA will co-sponsor courses with BWC network members to train employers how to administer commuter benefits.
- Network directory: Patty proposed that a directory be compiled of BWC Network members' contact information; it would be made accessible on a password-protected network member site, enabling network members to quickly and easily communicate. She asked for feedback from Tele-Seminar participants. What do you think? E-mail <bwc@epa.gov>.

Patty closed by highlighting the effectiveness of Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> as a marketing tool during the last several years; it has increased employer participation in commuter benefits, driven enrollment campaigns across the country, and reinvigorated employer and employee interest in commuter benefits. She is happy that there is now a coalition of organizations "working together to help change the way people get to work."

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## Open Discussion

Michelle Shaffer, from Wood River Rideshare, inquired if small, non-campaign regions would have access to training conferences. Ms. Klavon explained that small regions will have access to training conferences and that the network is intended to support regions not yet ready for large-scale campaigns. She added that the next Network Tele-Seminar will focus on strategies to recruit employers not in a campaign area. Susan Berry, from Upper Valley Rideshare, suggested that rural area marketing strategies vary from urban strategies. Ms. Klavon solicited feedback from small-region network members to learn how EPA can better support their programs.

Ms. Klavon asked for feedback about her idea to compile a Web-based network member directory. Dorothy Birch, from the Alamo Area Council of Governments, expressed enthusiasm and suggested that a bulletin board, on which network members could post messages to the entire group, could be very useful. Donna Norfleet, from Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, agreed.

## History of Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup>

Steve Offutt, who has been an integral part of Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> since its foundation, spoke about the history of the program.

In June 2000, Mr. Offutt was pulled away from Energy Star to begin a program recognizing employers who offer excellent commuter benefits. By October 2000, Mr. Offutt and the rest of the newly created team had established a pilot program of a dozen companies and developed the National Standard of Excellence, a list of criteria employers must meet to be recognized under the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative. To meet the National Standard of Excellence, an employer must offer at least one of the following primary benefits:

- \$30/month transit or vanpool subsidy
- A telecommuting program that reduces total commutes by 6%
- Cash instead of free parking for employees
- Another option approved by the EPA team

And three supporting benefits, which range from assisting employees in finding carpool matches to holding employee commuting rewards programs. Finally, the employer programs must be effective enough to result in a 14% employee alternative-commute rate. Note: For an inclusive description of the National Standard of Excellence criteria, visit [www.ergweb.com/projects/ccli/enroll/doiqualify.htm](http://www.ergweb.com/projects/ccli/enroll/doiqualify.htm).

In August 2001 at the ACT conference in Portland, Oregon, the team held a launch event to recognize the first 175 Commuter Choice Employers. The event attracted attention from transportation demand management (TDM) organizations, who were interested in connecting their regional efforts to a national program.

The Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> brand was conceived in October 2002 and tested in an enrollment campaign in San Francisco shortly thereafter. It was a rousing success. Prior to the campaign, there were only 24 certified employers. In the first eight weeks of the campaign, 66 new employers enrolled. The campaign received media attention and support from TDM organizations, business coalitions, and councils of governments in the Bay Area. Because of this success, the team decided to phase out the name "Commuter Choice" and officially replace it with "Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup>."

Since then, there have been six successful campaigns in major metropolitan areas: District of Columbia, Tucson, Houston, Sacramento, New England (six states), and a second campaign in San Francisco. These campaigns have garnered significant media attention, earning at least 49 broadcast (television and radio) placements and 75 print placements. There are more than 650 Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> providing outstanding commuter benefits to 1.3 million employees and 11 Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> Districts, which provide benefits to 4,000 employers.

To conclude his presentation, Mr. Offutt outlined four conditions that increase the chance of a successful campaign. A campaign area should have:

- A capable campaign coordinator.
- An infrastructure of supportive local groups.
- Employers who have commuter benefits and might be members of another commuting program.
- A pre-existing emergency ride home program.

## Open Discussion

Cecelia McLaughlin, from Transvirological Solutions, Inc., asked about the cost of running a campaign. Mr. Offutt explained that campaigns can be organized for as much or as little money as the coordinator wants to commit. He advised that campaign coordinators with limited money work closely with their coalition members to distribute the cost of the campaign. He suggested that coalition members might be asked to disseminate mailings, reducing the financial burden on the campaign coordinator.

Kathy Stefani, Director of Transportation for the

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Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership, asked why the 14% participation requirement of the National Standard of Excellence is less than the 20% national non-drive-alone commuting average. Mr. Offutt explained that rural areas have a significantly lower non-drive-alone percentage than the national average, so to require a rural employer to exceed that average would be to set a prohibitively high bar for Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> qualification.

Michelle Shaffer asked if network members had access to Commuter Benefits Briefs. Ms. Klavon explained that the briefs are available on the Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> Web site at <[www.bwc.gov](http://www.bwc.gov)>. Mr. Offutt added that the briefs are currently being updated and that a small percentage of the information might be dated.

Lynn Lewenberg Jones, from San Diego Association of Governments, asked if an employer would satisfy the criteria of the National Standard of Excellence if it offered either a transit benefit or a vanpool benefit to its employees, but not both. Mr. Offutt answered that an employer would still qualify if it provided one or the other benefit.

Cecelia McLaughlin asked if an employer who provides a subsidy to employees for only the first three months of

transit use would qualify for the list of Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup>. Mr. Offutt explained that, while such a benefit would encourage employees to use alternative transit methods, it does not qualify as a primary benefit because it is not ongoing. He added that the program is designed not only to encourage employees to leave their cars at home, but also to reward employers who continually provide excellent commuter benefits.

## Closing

Ms. Klavon concluded by asking for feedback and encouraging network members to participate in next month's seminar. She thanked all for their participation in the Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup> Network.

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## Attendees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>E-mail address</b>
Karen Allen	University of Illinois at Chicago	karina@uic.edu
Janet Berardi	MORPC RideSolutions	jberardi@mail2.morpc.org
Susan Berry	Upper Valley Rideshare	sberry@uppervalleyrideshare.com
Dorothy Birch	Alamo Area council of Governments	dbirch@aacog.com
Julie Bond	Utah Transit Authority	jbond@uta.cog.ut.us
Sandy Clarke	Anchorage Share a Ride	clarksk@muni.org
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Roland Feit	VPSI,Inc.	roland.feit@rideone.com
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Rita Hildebrand	Pima Association of Governments	rhildebrand@pagnet.org
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Brooke Hoberman	Rideworks of Greater New Haven, Inc.	bhoberman@rideworks.com
Terri Jimenez	Long Island Transportation Mgt.	terrij@litm.org
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Lynn Jones	RideSolutions	ljones@morpc.org
Melissa Laeser	City of Glenwood Springs	mlaeser@ci.glenwood-springs.co.us
Lynn Lewenberg Jones	San Diego Association of Governments	lle@sandag.org
Sharon Lewinson	Nortel Networks Real Estate-Ontario	lewinson@nortelnetworks.com
Marcia Maffei	Commuter Solutions	marcia.maffei@ltd.org
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Mark McCrummen	Greater Houston Partnership	mmccrummen@houston.org
Cecelia McLaughlin	TransVironmental Solution, Inc	cj@tvsinc.intranets.com
Christine McMullen	Cross County Connection TMA	mcmullen@ transportationchoices.com
M Kathleen Miller		
Kathleen Montgomery	South I-25 Urban Corridor TMA/CO	kmontgomery@sebp.org
Donna Norfleet	SEMCOG	norfleet@semcog.org
Ruth Reinman	Indianapolis Public Transportation Corp	reimanr@pbworld.com

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## Attendees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>E-mail address</b>
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Meredith Schuft	Campus Area Transportation Management Association	catma@uvm.edu
Michelle Shaffer	Wood River Ridershare	michelle@wrrs.org
Kathy Stefani	Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership	kstefani@ downtownpittsburgh.com
David Straus	Artery Business Committee TMA	dstraus@abctma.com
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