Marin County Commuter Toolkit:

Building a successful employee commute program

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2013 San Rafael Chamber Leadership Class

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What is the Leadership Institute?

The San Rafael Leadership Institute, sponsored by the San Rafael Chamber of Commerce, offers a singular opportunity to develop leadership and team-building skills while learning about current issues that impact Marin County residents and businesses. The program brings together many of Marin's key policy makers and offers participants the chance to begin their own relationships with the key stakeholders of the County. For more information about the San Rafael Leadership Institute, to download the application and brochure, please visit: srchamber.com

About the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM)

The Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) is designated as both the congestion management agency and the transportation sales tax authority for Marin County. TAM is a Joint Powers Authority of all eleven cities and towns in Marin County, as well as the county, itself. TAM is responsible for managing a variety of transportation projects and programs in Marin County, receiving federal, state, regional, and local funds. TAM is actively developing commuter assistance programs countywide. For more information, visit the TAM website at www.tam.ca.gov.

For Employers

Why start a commute program?

It's good for business.

Employers who offer and actively promote commute options can improve: **employee recruitment and retention, attendance, productivity and morale in the workplace!** Employers can **reduce payroll taxes** (roughly 9 percent of subject wages), and employees can **lower their commute costs** by up to 40 percent!

It's good for the environment.

Transportation choices improve communities by decreasing both traffic congestion and greenhouse gas and other toxic emissions. **Transportation is the largest source of air pollution in the Bay Area**. Marin residents drive over **2 billion miles** each year. Transportation is responsible for **more than half** of Marin's greenhouse gas emissions.

It's good policy.

Reducing the growth in vehicle miles traveled is necessary to achieve the state's bold climate targets set by Assembly Bill 32 and Senate Bill 375. Senate Bill 1339 will enable the Bay Area to meet this challenge. To comply with SB 1339, employers with 50 or more full-time employees must offer their employees one of the following:

- Paid transit, vanpooling or bicycling expenses with pre-tax dollars, as allowed by federal IRS law;
- A transit or vanpool subsidy up to $75 per month
- A free employer shuttle or vanpool; or
- A similar alternative program that increases shared commuting.
- Smaller companies are encouraged to offer similar programs to their employees.

"It's important for us as a community to address the issue of single-occupancy commutes. It makes sense for business and it makes sense for the environment."

Gary Phillips
Mayor, San Rafael

The math is simple...

1/2 Carpooling with another person **halves** the footprint of driving per person.

1/4 Commuting by bus has only **one-fourth** the footprint of driving alone.

0 Walking or biking has an almost **zero** footprint.

What does an employer commute program involve?

Employers can provide information, education, incentives, resources and tools to employees to support alternative transportation and commute options, develop a customized and comprehensive worksite transportation program, or simply provide transportation information to employees ala carte. **Our toolkit is a one-stop resource hub that will give you everything you need to launch your successful commute program!**

Get started with an employee survey.

A good first step in developing a commute program is to survey your employees to gain an understanding about their current commute patterns and needs. Depending on the size of your company, this can be done informally or formally. This can help you learn how your employees currently get to and from work, what their challenges are, what different types of transportation they are interested in trying, and what might motivate them to try another mode. 511 offers survey and consultation services free of charge (see section "511 Commute Program Assistance").

Once you have analyzed the survey information (511 staff is available to assist with this analysis at no charge), perform an analysis of your site to determine transit access, nearby services, availability and price of parking, and bicycle infrastructure (such as bike lanes, and bike parking). In addition to this, examine employee scheduling in terms of flexibility.

Design the right program for your organization.

Not all elements or strategies will work for each organization. Depending on the size of your company, scheduling needs and where employees live, different approaches will be more appropriate than others. 511 employee surveys, density maps, and consultation services can help you design a program that is a good fit for your organization and the needs of your employees. Here are some trip reduction strategies to consider as you design your program:

- **Commuter Choice tax benefits** enable employees to set aside pre-tax money to pay for transit, vanpooling, or some bicycle maintenance costs. Visit rideshare.511.org/rewards/tax_benefits.aspx for more information.
- **Emergency Ride Home Program** is a service provided by the Transportation Authority of Marin that provides a free ride home in cases of emergency for employees who use alternative transportation. Visit www.marinerh.org/ for more information including program rules and to register your organization. Employer registration is required.
- **511 RideMatch Service** helps employees find carpool, vanpool, or bicycle partners. 511's online system matches commuters with similar travel routes and patterns. Visit www.ridematch.511.org for more information.
- **Preferential parking** for carpools and vanpools can be provided near the entrance to your building.
- Bicycle amenities such as **lockers, showers, changing rooms and secured bike parking** can help employees hop onto their bike instead of into their car. In addition, partner with a local bike shop and offer bike tune-ups and bike maintenance classes to your employees.
- **Car/bike sharing** can help employees get workday appointments and errands done. Provide fleet cars and loan bikes to employees, or participate in a carshare or bikeshare program, where available.
- **Monetary incentives** can entice employees to switch their commute mode. Provide subsidies to employees who use alternative modes.
- A **parking cash-out program** reimburses people for not using a parking space at work.
- **Charging for parking** provides a disincentive to drive as well as creates a fund that can be used for a parking cash-out program, a bike loan program, or other incentives.
- **Compressed work weeks and telecommuting** means driving to work less! By allowing employees to work a full-time schedule in fewer days, you can reduce commute trips.
- **Flexible working hours** help employees with certain commute needs, such as the timing of carpools and bus schedules. Make sure your employees have enough flexibility in their work day to accommodate for these types of commute.

"The only lasting solution to our congestion problems is to change the way we move at peak times. This helpful toolkit offers ways to do just that."

Steve Kinsey
District 4 Supervisor,
County of Marin

Commuter Choice Tax Benefits

A Win-Win situation is the goal of everyone doing business. Commuter Choice Tax Benefits are a Win-Win-Win for employers, employees and the environment. The Commuter Choice Tax Benefits program is a valuable addition to any benefits package. Unlike health care or vacation plans, employees can use the Commuter Choice Tax Benefit every day they commute to work.

The program, based on Section 132(f) of the federal tax code, allows employers to offer employees a variety of financial incentives for using alternative commute modes. Section 132(f) covers transit, vanpool and bicycle benefits as well as qualified parking. Employers and employees save money, employees save time, the employer is viewed as a good corporate citizen and the environment benefits from reduced traffic congestion. With vehicle exhaust as the number one source of air pollution in the Bay Area, Commuter Choice Tax Benefits can lead to cleaner air.

Employers offering a Commuter Choice Tax Benefits program, have the ability to offer the benefit in one of three ways:

- In addition to compensation (offer a subsidy);
- In lieu of compensation (allow employees to set aside pre-tax dollars); or
- As a combination of these two methods (subsidize part of the commuting cost and allow employees to pay for the remainder of the cost, up to the monthly limit, with pre-tax dollars).

The Commuter Choice Tax Benefits program is exempt from the usual restrictions and reporting requirements that accompany other pre-tax programs allowed by the IRS. There are no plan filings or forms for the employer to fill out, no irrevocable elections and no mandatory enrollment dates. It is not subject to the regulations governing cafeteria plans – and cannot be offered as part of a cafeteria plan.

Employers offering Commuter Choice Tax Benefits will enjoy increased tax savings, improved employee recruitment and retention, improved employee morale, and a reduction in operating costs for parking, among other benefits. Employees will enjoy reduced commuting costs, reduced vehicle ownership costs and more time saved by commuting by transit or vanpool. Employees using alternate forms of commuting frequently have less stress and demonstrate greater productivity.

Top ten tips to market and promote your program

1. **Find employee champions** and leaders to help promote your program. Establish a list of employees who already use alternative modes and show employees that their coworkers have already had success using different modes of transportation. One way to do this is to incorporate employee testimonials in your marketing materials. An employee committee can help raise awareness, answer questions, and develop marketing material and promotions.
2. **Communicate often.** Send periodic e-mail reminders about your program. People's schedules and commutes change. Re-send information once a month to remind employees about the benefits of the program.
3. **Seek the leadership of the owner or CEO** of your company and ask them to walk or ride a bicycle to work and say a few words about alternative transportation. It will show employees that the whole company is devoted to changing the way it commutes. If you represent Human Resources, Facilities, or a Green Team, you may be able to get extra employee attention if upper management sends out a supportive e-mail, or tries an alternative mode him/herself.
4. **Hold periodic drawings/raffles** for employees using alternate modes. This creates publicity for your program. Offer anyone who is carpooling, vanpooling, walking, biking, or riding transit a free raffle ticket and give away prizes such as a free meal, bike tune up or iPod, plus a spotlight in the company newsletter.
5. **Include information in new-hire orientation** packets and follow up with an e-mail after a new employee starts work. Employees are starting a new commute pattern when beginning a new job so this is a great time to encourage them to try a new mode.
6. Providing information and raising awareness is only one part of the equation. A successful program focuses on the **financial incentives or disincentives** as well as **special programs or amenities** (such as the provision of a vanpool or showers and lockers for bicyclists).
7. **Individualize Your Program.** Involve employees in the promotion of your program by highlighting personal commute stories. Help employees find carpool and vanpool partners that live near them and locate nearby Park & Ride lots.
8. **Host a commuter fair** for your employees or include transportation resources at existing health and benefits fairs. Invite transit agencies, bicycle organizations and shops, vanpool companies, and 511 representatives to serve as resources and answer questions employees may have about different commute options.
9. **Be creative and make it fun.** Commuting doesn't have to be so boring. Use light-hearted marketing campaigns and imaginative promotions to create a buzz about the program. Check out these inspired examples:
   - City Smart: http://bit.ly/P5lkQk
   - Stop Being an SOV: http://bit.ly/YwhLcc
10. **Work closely with 511 and Transportation Authority of Marin.** They have information and materials to help you design and promote an effective program for your employees.

"Engaging in commute programs is a tangible benefit for businesses, their employees, economic vitality, and the future of our community."

Rick Wells
CEO, San Rafael
Chamber of Commerce

511 Commute Program Assistance

511 can help you develop a customized and comprehensive worksite transportation program, or simply provide transportation information to employees. Services include:

- **Consultations**—511 staff can consult with your organization regarding programs that save money, make employees happier, improve productivity, and green worksites.
- **Worksite Events**—Employees can speak directly with a 511 transportation expert at health and benefits fairs about commute options.
- **Employee Surveys**—Using survey data, your organization can design an effective transportation program and greener worksite.
- **Density Maps**—Large-scale, color maps that display where your employees live will determine which commute options work best.
- **Relocation Assistance**—Moving or considering a site change? 511 staff can facilitate a smooth transition for businesses and employees.
- **RideMatching**— The 511 RideMatch Service is an interactive, on-demand system that helps people find carpools, vanpools, or bicycle partners. The 511 RideMatch Service can be customized, free-of-charge, to match the look and feel of a company's website. This allows employees to access the RideMatch Service with the added confidence of knowing that their employer supports ridesharing. Registrants have the option to limit their match results to company-only employees, or to expand their search to all regional matches.
- **Vanpool Formation and Support**—511 can help companies start vanpools. Employees save money, and businesses have a greater influence on reducing greenhouse gasses as well as parking needs. Visit rideshare.511.org/vanpool/ for more information.
- **Rewards**—Employees using alternatives to driving alone can qualify for local and regional rewards. Visit rideshare.511.org/rewards/ for more information.
- **Employer Referrals**—What are other companies doing about transportation issues? 511 can connect you with other companies that share program advice.

For Employees

Why commute without your car?

Top five reasons to stop driving solo

1. **Save money on car costs and parking.** According to AAA, in 2012 the average household spent about $8,946 a year on car expenses, plus more for parking. Calculate your annual car costs based on commute miles and driving habits at www.commutesolutions.org/calc.html.

2. **Get tax benefits.** When you commute by bus or vanpool, you can pay the fare with pre-tax income. Your employer can deduct up to $245 per month through your payroll check – and you pay less income tax.

3. **Cut out the commute stress.** When you bike, bus or walk to work, you gain more control of your schedule, instead of being at the mercy of unpredictable highway conditions. And if you carpool or vanpool, you can use the priority lane (HOV) for smoother passage and may get preferred parking.

4. **Feel healthier and be more fit.** You can build regular exercise into your commute by walking or biking Marin County's network of bike routes. You can also combine a bike and bus trip since all Marin Transit and Golden Gate Transit buses are equipped with racks to accommodate bicycles. Walking to the bus stop —or to work—is a good way to enjoy our beautiful area and stimulate creative thinking.

5. **Make our environment and community healthier.** By reducing your car use, you help make a difference in our local quality of life. Vehicle emissions cause 50% of Marin County's air pollution. Switching to an eco-friendly commute also helps curb global warming, reduce energy consumption and decrease traffic congestion.

"Engaging in alternative means of transportation is a healthy thing to do. I would encourage people to look into it and try it. It is healthy for the environment as well as our minds and bodies."

Pat Kendall
Medical Group Administrator,
Kaiser Permanente

What commute options are available?

Share a Ride

It's smart to share your ride, and your expenses. You can cut your daily commuting costs by 50% and save wear-and-tear on your vehicle and yourself.

Carpooling is a door-to-door commute option for a small group of people who live near one another. To connect with these neighbors, you can visit 511's free 511 RideMatch Service at rideshare.511.org or dial 5-1-1 for more information.

Vanpools are groups of commuters who share the ride and travel cost by using a van. New vanpools may be eligible for a $3,600 cash incentive from Transportation Authority of Marin. If you'd like to join or start a vanpool dial 5-1-1 and say "rideshare" or ask for a vanpool specialist.

Hop on the bus

By taking the bus, you save money on gas, parking and car maintenance. Leave the driving to the pros, while you read, chat or just relax. When you ride Marin Transit or Golden Gate Transit, you can save by purchasing a package of fares in advance. Or simply pay when you board the bus. Discounts are available for disabled riders and those age 65 and over.

Visit www.marintransit.org information on finding the closest bus stop and real time bus arrival or visit www.511.org and click the Transit tab at the top of the page for help planning your route and to find schedules, maps and fares.

Park & Ride lots in Marin County currently allow you to park your car for free and complete your commute on a Golden Gate Transit bus or carpool. Buses are equipped with bike racks, so you can also combine biking and riding. Learn more at goldengatetransit.org/services/parkride.php.

Ride your bike or walk

The Marin County Bicycle Coalition provides information about bicycle policies and regulations and route information, too. They've produced a bike route map, which is free with membership. You can join or just purchase the map at www.marinbike.org. More information about walking and biking in Marin is available at www.walkbikemarin.org.

"Marin has tremendous congestion, and with Go Time Marin now available, I hope more people will take advantage of alternative commute options."

Dianne Steinhauser
Executive Director,
Transportation Authority of Marin

Take the ferry

Golden Gate Ferry operates ferry services from Larkspur and Sausalito to/from San Francisco. This is one of the most unique and beautiful commutes in the Bay Area and they also have a full bar! Check out www.goldengateferry.org for more information about schedules and fares.

Catch the train

Starting 2016, Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) will operate commuter train service along the 101 corridor. The initial segment will run from Northern Santa Rosa at Guerneville Road to Downtown San Rafael, stopping in Downtown Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Cotati, Petaluma, Northern and Southern Novato and Marin Civic Center. Eventually, the train service will run from Cloverdale to the Larkspur Ferry Terminal. Visit www.sonomamarintrain.org for more information.

Mix & Match

Ride your bike or walk to the bus; take a bus to the train station or ferry; ride the bus one day and ride your bike another! There are many ways to combine transportation choices and still avoid a single-occupancy automobile.

What if there's an emergency and I need to get home?

Get an emergency ride home - free.

To encourage commuters to use alternative forms of transportation (carpooling, vanpooling, biking, walking or transit) the Transportation Authority of Marin offers the Emergency Ride Home program. If you are without your car and need to get home quickly, you can take a taxi and TAM will reimburse you.

To be eligible for the program, make sure your Marin-based employer registers at marinerh.org. Then you can take a taxi to your destination and submit the receipt online under your company name. TAM will reimburse you directly. You may use this service up to four times per calendar year, with an allowance of up to $125 per trip.

Commute Resources

General Links

- Bay Area Transportation Information: www.511.org
- Transportation Authority of Marin: www.tam.ca.gov
- Best Workplaces for Commuters: www.bestworkplaces.org/
- Association for Commuter Transportation: http://bit.ly/Z1Os1L

Commute Calculators

- Individual Commute & Carbon Calculator: http://stanford.io/170fVDE
- Business Carbon Calculator: http://bit.ly/112eI6j

Vanpool

- Vanpool information, assistance and incentives: rideshare.511.org/vanpool/

Carpooling

- General Info: www.rideshare.511.org
- Find a Carpool Partner: www.ridematch.511.org
- Calculate the cost savings of Carpooling: www.rideshare.511.org/calculator
- Carpool Lane and Park & Ride Lot map: www.rideshare.511.org/511maps
- Vanpool Information: www.rideshare.511.org/vanpooling
- Fastrak®: www.bayareafastrak.org/

Bicycle

- Marin County Bicycle Coalition: www.marinbike.org
- MCBC Bike Routes Map, PDF: www.marinbike.org/Map/SideA2008.pdf
- Bay Area Bicycling Resources: bicycling.511.org
- Walk Bike Marin: www.walkbikemarin.org
- Google Maps (click bike icon for bike routes): maps.google.com/
- Bicycle Friendly Business Program: http://bit.ly/b49jo

Transit

- Trip Planner, Routes and Services: www.transit.511.org
- Marin County Transit District: www.marintransit.org
- Golden Gate Transit and Ferry: www.goldengate.org
- Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit: www.sonomamarintrain.org
- Clipper Card: www.clippercard.com

Employer Case Studies

- Commuter Challenge: http://bit.ly/10KwD2w
- Metropolitan Planning Council: http://bit.ly/11KRgCc
- Sun Microsystems: http://bit.ly/11KRkSw
- Clif Bar: http://bit.ly/JjEI52
- Genetech: http://bit.ly/v5BhKT
- Seattle Children's Hospital: http://bit.ly/Z1OKpB
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs: http://bit.ly/Z1ONS9
- Community Transportation Association: http://bit.ly/14dkLto