

Marketing Your Worksite's Bicycle Commute Program

A guide to developing and implementing a successful bicycle commute program at your worksite.



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Acknowledgements

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Active Transportation Alliance <http://www.activetrans.org>

Cascade Bicycle Club <http://www.cascade.org>

Commute Seattle <http://www.urbanmobilitygroup.com>

Washington State Department of Transportation <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov>

Washington State Ridesharing Organization <http://www.wsro.net>

Available Grants

Bicycle commute grants, incentives, and special assistance periodically become available through various organizations and jurisdictions. At the time of this workbook printing, the following grants are available to qualifying employers:

The **Smart Commuter Project Grant** is available to CTR-affected and voluntarily affected worksites in Snohomish County and the City of Bothell that have an active Employee Transportation Coordinator. The total amount available through this grant program is up to \$5,000 per project. Employers may submit more than one grant application. The total grant funding to be awarded is \$40,000. Funding for selected projects is available June 1, 2010 through May 31, 2011. **Applications due by April 20, 2010.**

You may submit a joint application with other employers or public agencies. Non-CTR affected worksites may partner in the project if the application demonstrates that results at the CTR-affected or voluntarily affected worksite are improved by having the non-affected worksite participate. On joint employer applications, one CTR-affected employer must take the lead for funding, contracting and reporting purposes. This grant may be used for implementing a bicycle commute program or other Commute Trip Reduction related projects. Applications are available at www.communitytransit.org.

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Section 1: Overview

Bicycling to work is not just about staying fit and healthy. When you leave your car at home you're helping everyone by reducing traffic congestion, wear and tear on the roads and the need for more roadway infrastructure and parking. You're also helping to keep the air clean and neighborhoods quiet, while conserving fuel.

Reducing traffic congestion, air pollution and energy use are the three main goals of the Commute Trip Reduction Efficiency Act. Whether you are a CTR affected worksite or not, there is value in supporting a bicycle commute program at your workplace.

This training will focus on the benefits of having an employer based bicycle program as well as suggest helpful tips and ideas for implementing a program at your worksite.

Section 2: What is a Bicycle Commute Program?

Bicycling is an option for many employees, particularly those who live within five miles of your worksite. Even if the employee lives further than five miles away, they may still commute by bicycle by combining the trip with a vanpool or transit. Because there are different ways of commuting by bicycle, employees may need assistance in planning their commute. Bicycle commute programs are programs that provide resources and facilities for employees to be successful in their bicycle commute.

Employer bicycle commute programs come in all shapes and sizes depending on the worksite resources that are available. However, strong bicycle programs include the following basic elements:

- Employees have a reserved location to park their bicycles
- Employees have access to information about bicycle commuting at their worksite
- Employees are registered in the worksite's Commute Trip Reduction program.

Benefits of a Bicycle Commute Program

Both employers and employees experience benefits when it comes to a bicycle commute program.

A. Employer Benefits

- Bicyclists tend to be healthier due to the aerobic activity involved in their commute. This leads to lower rates of absenteeism and potentially lower health care costs for the employer.
- Bicycles require little parking space which can free up parking for your business.
- Bicyclists tend to have a strong community, which can increase workplace camaraderie and improve work place environment.
- Many businesses in Washington State have employee bicycle commute programs. Having this type of program allows your business to be competitive in the labor market.
- Supporting a bicycle program helps promote an environmentally friendly public image.

B. Employee Benefits

- Bicycle commuting costs much less than driving a car, saving employees money.
- Bicycling is an efficient and non-polluting form of transportation.
- Bicycling is aerobic. Starting the day with exercise gives employees more energy and improves their overall health.
- Bicycling is efficient and a time saver. If your commute is short, or requires multiple bus transfers, it is probably as fast, if not faster, than by car or bus.

Section 3: How Do I Implement a Bicycle Commute Program?

Implementing a successful bicycle commute program starts with analyzing the different barriers for employers and employees. This section will discuss some of the most common barriers that employers and employees face when trying to implement and participate in a bicycle commute program. Be sure to discuss your program ideas with management at your worksite in order to gain the necessary support for its implementation.

Barriers to a Bicycle Commute Program

All bicycle commute programs have potential barriers to success for both the employer and employees. Identifying these concerns ahead of time will help you develop an effective program that supports both your employees' and worksite goals.

A. Employer Concerns

The ability to find staffing resources that are able to support a bicycle program.

Implementing a bicycle commute program will require the support of management and staff. Businesses may be wary of starting a new program out of fear that they do not have the staff time available. The question of staff time is even more important in times of economic stress that causes competition for limited resources. Your worksite may not see the need to support bicycling, especially if a program has yet to be implemented or the current program does not have the demand to support increased funding.

The ability to supply bicycle facilities.

Similarly to staffing, supplying bicycle facilities comes at a cost. Businesses may be cautious about starting a program out of concern of the unknown. Management may have concerns about not just the initial cost of the program but also the future costs. Businesses may choose not to start a program if they are in doubt it can be supported down the line.

The ability to connect bicycle commute program to company values.

All businesses need to evaluate whether or not their business activities are in line with the organization's mission. Management may be skeptical about programs that are not related to their organization's business values. Making an argument in favor of supporting a bicycle commuting program can be difficult to accomplish if organizational leadership fails to see the connection of a bicycle program to the organization's value system.

B. Addressing Employer Concerns

Staffing Resources

Allocating staffing resources for a bicycle program can be addressed through existing activities. As an ETC, you are required to promote commute alternatives such as bicycle commuting and therefore additional staff time should not be necessary. Bicycle commute programs typically do not require much dedicated staff time especially if the program includes bike buddies or bicycle commute champions within the organization.

Worksite Bicycle Facilities

It would be great if all worksites had the ability to supply showers, locker rooms and covered bicycle parking, but that is not the reality for many businesses. However that does not mean that bicycle facilities will need to be purchased and installed in order to support a bicycle program. Many worksites already have available bicycle parking. Unlike automobiles, bicycles can be stored indoors in offices, storage rooms and under stairwells. In addition, many park and ride lots have bike lockers that can be rented at a small fee.

Company Values

More and more businesses are recognizing the value of environmentally conscious business activities and incorporating it into their mission. By supporting a workplace bicycle program, businesses demonstrate their interest in being environmentally conscious.

C. Employee Concerns

Failing to recognize the benefits of bicycle commuting.

Commuters are creatures of habit. Most employees are set in their commuting ways and often fail to recognize the real benefits associated with bicycle commuting. Unless there is a strong argument in favor of changing the way they commute, most employees will ignore bicycle commuting in general.

The need to feel safe on the road.

For many people the perceived danger associated with traveling by bicycle on roadways shared by automobiles is very high. If an employee is already apprehensive about trying bicycle commuting, the worry about safety will prevent them from trying it even once. The perception of danger is one of the most common reasons why people do not try commuting by bicycle.

Achieving emotional and social comfort as a bicycle commuter on the road.

Just like with everything else in life, if you are new to something, there is an adjustment period to not only your own perceptions, but that of others as well. This is true for employees that are interested in trying bicycle commuting. New bicyclists will potentially worry about what others in the office will think of them. This feeling of self consciousness is enhanced by the lack of initial knowledge associated with bicycle commuting.

D. Addressing Employee Concerns

Promoting the benefits of bicycle commuting.

Beyond first hand experience, a person's perception is formed from information distributed to them from a trusted resource such as their peers. Finding bicycle commuters at your workplace that can act as liaisons to employees interested in bicycle commuting will help you recruit employees to the program and offer support.

Assisting cyclists in finding physical comfort and being safe on the road.

Comfort comes with experience so being able to direct potential bicyclists to a resource to assist them with planning a route, in addition to walking them through the first couple of trips, will help ease anxiety. This type of resource can be you or local bike organizations, such as B.I.K.E.S. Club, Cascade Bicycle Club or bicyclists at your worksite.

Also, for longer trips, combining the bicycle portion of the trip with using transit or vanpooling can help make a daunting trip seem a lot more manageable.

Assisting new bicyclists in finding emotional and social comfort.

In order to promote bicycling at your workplace, it is important that you create a welcoming environment. By leveraging existing worksite bicyclists as well as promoting bicycle commuting you will be able to reduce the potential anxiety associated with bicycle commuting. You will play an important role in creating and fostering an environment that is welcoming and encouraging to new bicyclists.

Setting Up a Bicycle Commute Program

Now that you have thought about the different barriers employers and employees face, it is time to design and launch your bicycle commute program. Just as you spent time thinking about the different challenges to the program, you need to spend time assessing what type of program your worksite can support.

Developing your program should start with these first steps.

- **Assess the area surrounding your worksite.** Is it safe and convenient for bicycling? For example, consider traffic flow, the width of road shoulders, blind curves and hills. Are there sidewalks, cross-walks and overpasses? Is there sufficient lighting?

Tip: Use existing bicycle maps of the area (such as the Snohomish County Area Bike Map) to help you in making the determination on whether or not a bicycle commute is feasible to your worksite.

- **Survey your employees.** A survey takes a snapshot of current bike commuters, including demographics, work departments and work schedules, trip distance, home zip code, and reason for biking. It can also help explain who is not walking or biking and why not. This information can be used to tailor appropriate messages or incentive strategies for encouraging potential bicyclists. A survey also gives you a baseline of how many employees bike already, to compare to future success.

Tip: Before creating a new survey, look at your most recent CTR Survey report and see if you already have some data that will help guide you in creating bicycle program elements that are in line with your employees' preferences.

Here are some suggestions for program elements that meet the needs of your employees.

- **Create a map of your worksite and surrounding area that shows bike paths.** Identify high-quality routes leading to your worksite. Include a clear scale bar or other visual indicator of trip distances and the estimated time it would take to bike those distances. Often people do not realize how close they are to different destinations.
- **Encourage bicyclists to sign up with your CTR program.** Employees who already bike to work may be eligible for subsidies, prize drawings, or even special parking privileges on the days they must drive alone. This group can also serve as a resource for you when employees show interest in trying bicycle commuting.
- **Give special incentives for biking.** Provide unique incentives for bicyclists and employees who recruit coworkers to join them. During public events like Bike to Work Month, give extra recognition to teams who recruit new participants. Many worksites offer some type of subsidy or incentive for using a commute alternative. Be sure that bicycle commuting is included for this type of recognition.
- **Company Bike Share.** Subsidize or provide a free bike to employees who pledge to ride a certain number of times every week.

Also consider these bike programs and facilities.

- **Provide secure, convenient bike parking.** For commuters, bike racks need to be in secure, well-lit spaces, ideally covered and protected from bad weather. Additional types of bike parking include:

Bike cages. Install key-accessed enclosures with bike racks inside, to add an extra level of security.

Indoor “bike garage.” Reserve or designate an unused office, cubicle, or other indoor space for bikes.

Bike lockers. Rent lockers to employees on a monthly basis, but keep a certain number open for on-demand availability.

Bike Station. Provide a full dedicated space for bike storage, repairs, questions and answers, lockers, and access to shower facilities.

- **Offer personalized bike trip planning.** Meet with employees to help them map biking routes. Provide tailored information and resources one-on-one to new employees, when they are developing a new commuting routine. If you are not able to meet with employees, get them in touch with current bicyclists at your work place.
- **Provide locker rooms and showers.** If your building does not already include these amenities, ask for them to be included in facilities budgets or apply for grant programs to build facilities. Contract with nearby fitness centers for employees to use their facilities or purchase ‘shower only’ memberships.
- **Build supportive infrastructure.** Provide excellent biking paths that lead directly to the main doors of your worksite. Contribute to the cost of improvements to public facilities, or participate in public planning processes to support bike-friendly projects.
- **Show employees that everyone can bicycle.** Eliminate the intimidation factor by avoiding using images of athlete bicyclists wearing spandex and jerseys. Make employees feel like anyone can bike to work with basic supplies like a helmet and lock and that expensive gear and special clothing is not necessary.

Qualified Bicycle Commuting Expenses

On January 1, 2009, the qualified bicycle commuting reimbursement was added to the list of qualified transportation fringe benefits covered in section 132 (f) of the Internal Revenue Service Code.

Employers, who wish to do so, may provide a reimbursement of up to \$20 per month for reasonable expenses incurred by the employee in conjunction with their commute to work by bike. The maximum exclusion is \$20 times the number of months the employee uses a bicycle for commuting to work. Allowable expenses include the purchase, maintenance, repair of bicycles and storage expenses related to bicycle commuting. *IRC 132(f)(1)(D)*

The bicycle commuting expense exclusion cannot be claimed for any period in which the exclusion for public transit passes or qualified parking is claimed. *IRC 132(f)(1)(F)(iii)(II)*

In other words, if an employee receives \$20 for bike expenses, they cannot accept another subsidy for a vanpool, bus, train or ferry in the same time period (month).

For more information visit the IRS Website at: www.irs.gov or, for more information about Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefits see IRS Taxable Fringe Benefit Guide at: http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/fringe_benefit_fslg.pdf (Section 132(f)).

For guidelines regarding the Qualified Bicycle Commuting benefit, visit the League of American Bicyclists at: <http://www.bikeleague.org/news/100708faq.php>.

Please Note: Questions regarding interpretation or administration of tax codes should be directed to your company's tax attorney, legal counsel or accountant.

Section 4: How Do I Market a Bicycle Program at My Worksite?

In order to support your bicycle commute program and maximize its influence, you will need to develop promotional materials. In addition to creating information that is specific to your worksite, there are additional opportunities for you to promote your program by tying it into local and regional bicycle events. Most of these promotions will require little financial support, if any, in order to participate.

Here are some suggested worksite specific promotion ideas.

- **Collect employee testimonies.** Ask bicyclists to tell their stories. Write up articles or schedule “studio” time to record the most compelling. Play the recordings during a staff event or post on the internet. Use the photos and quotes for advertising or other promotional materials.
- **Post a map of bicycle projects online.** If there are bicycle or walking facilities being constructed in your area, create an interactive website where employees can comment on proposed projects or conditions.
- **Hold a competition.** Encourage departments or teams to compete for the most riders or for the greatest number of miles traveled during a designated period.
- **Tie bicycling promotional messages to company values.** If your company promotes green, health-conscious, or community-minded values, highlight those in newsletters, outreach, and events. If your CEO walks or bicycles, whether for transportation or recreation, emphasize this highly visible and high-status example as much as possible.

Don't forget about these promotional opportunities.

- **Bike to Work Day.** Community Transit along with additional community partners help host an annual Bike to Work Day event. This annual event takes place the third Friday of May to celebrate and promote bicycle commuting. This event is free to the public and is an outstanding opportunity to promote your bicycle commute program by getting your employees involved. It is also the official kick off to the Bike Commute Challenge.
- **Bike Commute Challenge.** The Bike Commute Challenge is an annual event that offers an opportunity for experienced riders to encourage new bicyclists to join them. You could end up winning a great prize, and loving a new way to get to around. Take it one step (or one pedal stroke) at a time by first finding or organizing a team and committing to bicycle to work just one day a week.

Section 5: Additional Resources

Links

Bicycle Alliance of Washington

Bicycle commuting resources, including links to local bike clubs across the state.

<http://www.bicyclealliance.org/commute/index.html>

B.I.K.E.S. Club of Snohomish County

Snohomish County's Bicycle Advocacy group that promotes bicycling for fun and exercise.

<http://www.bikesclub.org>

Community Transit Bike To Work Page

Information on bike commuting in Snohomish County and Bothell.

<http://www.communitytransit.org/Programs/BikeToWork.cfm>

Environmental Protection Agency

Information regarding the positive environmental affects of bicycle travel.

<http://www.epa.gov>

Interational Bicycle Fund

Providing information and resources promoting sustainable transport through bicycling.

<http://www.ibike.org>

League of American Bicyclists

National bicycling advocacy and education.

<http://www.bikeleague.org>

Transportation Choices Coalition

Advocacy group for the promotion of commute alternatives.

<http://www.transportationchoices.org>

