

INCREASING THE RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT OF
EMPLOYER-PROVIDED COMMUTE BENEFITS VIA BEST
WORKPLACES FOR COMMUTERS

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16. Abstract This project focused on increasing the desirability, effectiveness, and efficiency of employer-provided commute benefits (e.g., transit subsidies, telework, etc.) by providing national recognition in a membership-based program – Best Workplaces for Commuters (BWC) within NCTR – when these organizations meet the National Standard of Excellence (NSE). The project deployed a mix of outreach and communication strategies to successfully build a network of local partners to leverage the limited NCTR resources to grow the number of employers offering commute-friendly programs to employees. There was a 10% increase in BWC members, over 30 partners, more than 3,300 subscribers to its peer-to-peer listservs, and about 1,600 participants in BWC webinars. The results show that there are numerous examples of successful employer-based programs from local businesses to international conglomerates to universities. While BWC began as a simple national recognition program, it has evolved into a nationally recognized resource for information on programs to encourage the integration of commute-friendly programs and policies at the workplace that, in turn, should increase use in all forms of public transportation.			
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Background

The theme of the National Center for Transit Research (NCTR) is to make public transportation and all other travel choices, safe, effective, efficient, desirable, and secure. This project focused on increasing the desirability, effectiveness, and efficiency of employer-provided commute benefits (e.g., transit subsidies, telework, etc.) by providing national recognition in a membership-based program – Best Workplaces for Commuters (BWC) within NCTR – when these organizations meet the National Standard of Excellence (NSE).

The NSE focuses on actions workplaces can take to improve the desirability and effectiveness of travel choices such as transit and vanpool by recognizing employers that provide tax-free qualified transportation fringe benefits. For example, TCRP Report 107 *Analyzing the Effectiveness of Commuter Benefits Programs* (Transit Cooperative Research Board, 2005) found that lowering the cost of transit via employer-provided commute subsidies increases transit ridership and attracts commuters who drive alone. The same report found that "Transit benefits programs can make up a substantial portion of systemwide ridership and revenues. Employer transit benefits programs can make up a substantial portion of total transit agency ridership and revenues. Among the agencies interviewed, employer programs contributed 5 to 25 percent of total transit riders and 5 to 40 percent of customer revenues."

While the impacts can be significant, access to these benefits is very limited. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 7% of civilian workers have access to subsidized commuting (transit) benefits. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017) Increasing the number of employers that provide transit and vanpool subsidies and/or provide commute friendly services such emergency ride home, bicycle lockers, etc. is an effective strategy for increasing use of transit, ridesharing, etc.

Helping the employers and the agencies that promote transit and all other travel choices is what the BWC is all about. We do this by providing technical assistance and recognition to those BWC employers-members such as Florida Hospital, IBM, Seattle Children's Hospital, U.S. Geological Survey, Fairfax County, and Yale University. Through webinars, case studies, and listservs, we seek to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the transportation demand management (TDM) and transit industries' outreach efforts as well as support continuing growth among employer commute programs.

Finally, this project set a goal to raise \$40,000 in program generated income from the BWC workplaces and related activities. Most of this income is from membership dues at \$230 per year from employers that meet the National Standard of Excellence.

Project Objectives

The project's objectives were to (1) increase the number of employers providing commute-friendly workplaces as measured by membership (and revenue) in BWC from 232 by 10%; (2) increase the

number of local supporting agencies actively promoting BWC and (3) increase media mentions via an annual list release to bring more media attention to NCTR, CUTR and BWC workplaces.

National Standard of Excellence

The following outlines the requirements for meeting the National Standard of Excellence to be designated either one of the “Best Workplaces for Commuters” or a “Best SITE.”

Best Workplaces for Commuters

In order to qualify as one of the Best Workplaces for Commuters, an organization must offer at least one (1) of the following Primary Benefits:

- At least \$30 per month towards a transit pass.
- At least \$30 per month for vanpool pass (or the full cost of a pass if it is less than \$30) to each employee who commutes using transit or a vanpool.
- Provide a pre-tax option for employees to purchase a transit pass and/or vanpool pass with at least 30% of employees purchasing such fare media of at least \$30 per month.
- A significant telework program that reduces by at least 6% the number of commuting trips employees make per week.
- A significant compressed work week program with employees working longer hours on fewer days that reduces by at least 6% the number of vehicle trips our employees make per week.
- A parking cash out option to employees. Parking cash out is a program that allows employees to opt out of having an employer-subsidized parking space and instead, receive compensation. Offer to pay employees at least \$30 per month (in lieu of providing a parking spot) to each employee who leaves their car at home and commutes another way.
- Fully or partially fund one or more employee shuttles from rail stations and/or park and ride lots. The shuttles can either be directly operated by the employer or purchased transportation through a local TMA or service provider.
- A significant bicycle commuting program with at least 6% reduction in the number of vehicle trips employees make by bicycle.
- Pay at least \$30 per month to employees to carpool to work that reduces by at least 6% the number of vehicle trips employees make per week.
- An equivalent benefit that provides similar value to employees, reduces traffic and air pollution, and is agreed to by Best Workplaces for Commuters.

An organization must also offer employees access to an Emergency Ride Home program and three supporting benefits, such as carpool matching, electric vehicle recharging stations, and on-site amenities (e.g., cafeteria, dry cleaners). If the organization has fewer than 20 employees, they need only provide one supporting benefit. An organization must agree to work towards a goal of 14% or more of employees NOT driving to work alone, and agree to pay annual membership dues of \$230 per worksite

(2018-19 rate). Multiple worksite discounts are available. All the proceeds are used to support the Best Workplaces for Commuters program managed by the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida. Best Workplaces for Commuters depends on support from members, partnering organizations, the National Center for Transit Research at USF and the Florida Department of Transportation. The membership dues for Florida employers is sponsored by the Florida Department of Transportation.

Best SITE

This designation was created for commercial and retail developers, shopping malls, business campuses and other multi-employer developments. To receive this designation for the SITE location, the BWC “Best SITE” Standard of Excellence must be met.

With this designation, “Best SITES” maintain an active partnership with BWC through designation of a Property Transportation Coordinator (PTC). They must agree to promote their site as a Best SITE for Commuters and pay the \$250 annual membership fee. A Best SITE must have 2 of 5 types of transit and bicycling facilities and amenities, 3 of 6 parking management strategies, and 5 of 9 promotions/services /policies that support commuter and resident use of options that decrease vehicle trips. More information on the specific Best SITE requirements may be found at <https://www.bestworkplaces.org/join/best-sites-application-2021/>

Results

The following tasks were undertaken to help achieve the objectives.

Task 1: Workplace Outreach and Communications

BWC provided a variety of methods to reach out to employers and other stakeholders to identify and recruit employers that meet the National Standard of Excellence that make them a commuter-friendly workplace. One method is to secure partners – typically local commuter assistance programs to help promote and recruit the program. As a result, we have 32 partners including Fairfax County, Commuter Services of Pennsylvania, Movability (Austin), and WeDriveU to help reach employers in their communities.

Website is another form of outreach that we continued to enhance. The BWC website, www.bestworkplaces.org, has served as a portal to transit-supportive workplaces throughout the country. This site provides employers, policymakers, TDM professionals, and media with featured information on innovative programs, available resources, and successes in promoting transit and other travel options. As evidence of BWC’s growing reach, the number of website users more than doubled when compared to the previous period (

Table 1).

Table 1 - Bestworkplaces.org Activity

Year	Number of Users This Period	Change in Number of Users from Previous Period	Number of Page Views This Period	Change in Page Views from Previous Period
2018-2019*	48,992	+106.30%	180,652	+63.19%

*comparing February 1, 2018 to August 31, 2019 to July 4, 2016 to January 31, 2018.

The website was also updated with frequently asked questions regarding qualified transportation fringe (QTF) benefits, a summary table and data on the current level of access to such benefits. The popularity of these pages is evidenced by the page views (**Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference..**)

Table 2 – Page Views of Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit Resources

	Number of Page Views This Period	Change in Page Views from Previous Period
Summary table on QTF	68,386	+265.66%
FAQ on QTF (added 8/11/2016)	2,710	+3,465.79%
Access to Subsidized Commuting for Civilian Workers 2014 to 2018 (added 11/8/2018)	570	NA

*comparing February 1, 2018 to August 31, 2019 to July 4, 2016 to January 31, 2018.

Another key outreach strategy was the development of an annual list release of current Best Workplaces for Commuters as an earned media strategy for reaching more employers nationally. Many employers like to be able to claim the “Best of” designations and the public relations value it brings. Over the past couple years, BWC introduced the annual list release to grow interest from non-members and commuter assistance program partners in BWC. We will oversee the annual list release promoting the workplaces that have offered commute-friendly programs and services. In 2017, there were over 230 workplaces on this annual list release. This step also included the building of a targeted list of transportation and TDM industry/trade publications to receive future press releases. We created a BWC media kit for employers including a press release template, logo, fact sheet and approved talking points for media, under BWC’s guidance. For the employers, a BWC social media kit for employers was created to use on their social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and Blog). The kit included messaging examples; photos/images; relevant hashtags, usernames and handles; and links for BWC employers to use on social media platforms.

The 2019 Best Workplaces for Commuters List was released on January 31, 2019 with over 300 workplaces meeting the program’s National Standard of Excellence, an increase of 10% over the previous year. These employers were recognized as providing comprehensive commuter benefits and collectively changing how more than 1 million employees commute to and from work each day. View

the complete list of 2020 Best Workplaces for Commuters at: <https://www.bestworkplaces.org/list/members-2020/>

A press release was issued through Newswire and the content was viewed 1,336 times by one of the media outlets. The press release was published by 158 outlets and 32 Google links.

The following materials were developed to help employers promote their designation.

2019 Template Press Release – As a Best Workplaces for Commuters’ designee, employers are encouraged to distribute a press release to the media in their local market. This [sample press release](#) was created for use by officially recognized Best Workplaces for Commuters. This sample/template press release was designed for employers to customize with name, specific commuter benefits and a quote from their leadership.

2019 Fast Facts – This document provides employers with additional information they may want to use in their communications to employees, customers, industry publications or the media.

2019 Communications and Social Media Tool Kit –This communications and social media tool-kit contains tips to help you make the most of the news. It includes talking points, quotes, and content to use on your social media pages, internal communications channels, external newsletters, etc.

Webinars are a natural extension of outreach that supports commuter assistance programs, transit agencies, and transportation management associations’ efforts to provide a range of travel choices to workers and provide access to jobs. BWC developed a series of webinars featuring case studies of members and prepared summaries of key topics such as qualified transportation fringe benefits. BWC organized and hosted eight webinars over a 19-month period for existing and prospective members to communicate information on “best practices,” innovative program strategies, and other relevant topics. In addition, the sessions were recorded and available for on-demand viewing. The table below summarizes the number of attendees at the live event and the number of recording views for each of the webinars.

Table 3 - Attendance and Recording Views of Best Workplaces for Commuters' Webinars

Date	Title	Number of Live Attendees	Number of Recording Views
08/29/2019	Keep Austin Moving – Showcasing Two Best Workplaces for Commuters	88	198
08/21/2019	Vanpooling’s 3 R’s: Recruitment, Retention, and Reinvention	96	170
04/11/2019	A Dockless Future – Bikeshare and eScooters in Suburban Communities	76	194

Date	Title	Number of Live Attendees	Number of Recording Views
04/04/2019	Make Way for Young Commuters: Insight into a Successful Safe Routes to School Statewide Program	52	53
02/19/2019	A Parking Tax? How New IRS Rules Impact Employers	84	237
10/30/2018	Spotlight on Florida Best Workplaces for Commuters: Engaging Large and Small Employers	40	76
08/23/2018	Moving Beyond Trip Planning: Technology Innovations for Your Campus or Workplace	61	537
07/26/2018	Spotlight on ACHD Commuteride Programs	57	108
	Totals	554	1,573

Summary with links to recordings and copies of the presentations are shown below.

On August 29, 2019, Best Workplaces for Commuters and [Movability](#) co-hosted a webinar, “**Keep Austin Moving – Showcasing Two Best Workplaces for Commuters**”, in which Merck and Cirrus Logic were featured discussing their commute program ideas and stories. Through a partnership with [Movability](#), the City of Austin metro area had the highest number of new Best Workplaces for Commuters named during 2019. Austin employers receiving recognition for their high-level programs include Athenahealth, CAMPO, CMTA, Car2Go, Cirrus Logic, City of Austin, Downtown Austin Alliance, Google, IBM, Merck & Company, Silicon Labs, Texas Mutual Insurance Company, The Thrival Company, The University of Texas at Austin, Travis County, University Federal Credit Union and Whole Foods Market. In 2017, Merck established its fourth global IT office in Austin. Even before the first employee was on the ground, Merck began integrating sustainable commute options into its culture in an effort to be a good community partner. The presenter discussed how Merck leveraged partnerships to build their successful commute program. Cirrus Logic is one of the largest employers in congested downtown Austin. Through a comprehensive commute program, Cirrus Logic turned its central location into one of its greatest assets, with an employee retention rate 11% higher than the national average. Attendees heard why Cirrus Logic believes the commute matters as the company continues to grow. Movability is the only transportation management association in Central Texas; they are the connective tissue between employers, transportation services providers, and the public sector. Movability partnered with the City of Austin to quadruple the number of Austin-area employers receiving the BWC designation in 2019. On this webinar, Movability announces its plans to grow that number even more in 2020. [View Recording](#)

Speakers:

- Alix Scarborough | Movability, Membership & Professional Services Director ([copy of presentation](#))
- Bill Schnell | Cirrus Logic, Public Relations ([copy of presentation](#) and [YouTube video](#) about Cirrus Logic's Transportation Programs)
- Diana Pittman | Merck & Co., Chief of Staff & Workplace Experience Lead ([copy of presentation](#))

On August 21, 2019, Best Workplaces for Commuters and the Association for Commuter Transportation sponsored “**Vanpooling’s 3 R’s: Recruitment, Retention, and Reinvention**” webinar in which three transportation professionals shared information about vanpooling, including tips for growth and retention of passengers and drivers. Vanpooling continues to fill an important niche to providing public transportation as it continues to be the fastest, most cost-effective and safest form of public transportation options available today. According to the National Transit Database in 2017, vanpooling has the lowest cost per passenger mile of all public transportation modes. Over 13,000 vanpools are operated daily and experienced more than tripling of the number of unlinked passenger trips since 2002 to 2012. Nationally, this growth has stabilized over the past several years. This webinar featured three experienced vanpool professionals who provided tips for retaining as well as recruiting drivers and riders to growing their vanpool. They discussed how they see vanpooling reinventing itself going forward as new travel options serve the first/last mile of the trip and technology advances impact travel choices. [View Recording](#)

Speakers:

- Lisa Smith, CommuteSmart, Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham ([copy of presentation](#))
- Peter Williamson, Employer Outreach Coordinator, San Luis Obispo Council of Governments ([copy of presentation](#))
- Lisa Kay Schweyer, Program Manager, Carnegie Mellon University ([copy of presentation](#))

On April 11, 2019, the [Southern Alameda County Spare the Air Team](#) and [Best Workplaces for Commuters](#) at the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) hosted a webinar, “**A Dockless Future – Bikeshare and eScooters in Suburban Communities,**” highlighting the explosion of dockless micro-mobility. The webinar featured Frank Douma and Austin Hauf, Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, and Kerby Olsen, Shared Mobility Coordinator with the City of Oakland, California, who shared their insights on the trend, and share from experience how to implement a dockless system in suburban environments. [View Recording](#)

Speakers:

- Frank Douma and Austin Hauf, Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, ([copy of presentation](#))
- Kerby Olsen, Shared Mobility Coordinator with the City of Oakland, California, ([copy of presentation](#))

On April 4, 2019, Best Workplaces for Commuters hosted the webinar **“Make Way for Young Commuters: Insight into a Successful Safe Routes to School Statewide Program.”** The Program Director and Outreach Supervisor for Massachusetts Safe Routes to School (SRTS) gave an overview of their successful statewide program. Massachusetts statewide Safe Routes to School program supports more than 800 elementary and middle schools and delivers relevant and equitable content. Through flagship days, pedestrian and bike safety training, parent surveys and more, their team works to keep kids safe and healthy throughout the Commonwealth. [View Recording.](#)

Speaker:

- Diane Hanson, Program Director and Outreach Supervisor for Massachusetts Safe Routes to School ([Copy of presentation](#))

On February 19, 2019, the Coalition for Smarter Transportation (CoaST) and Best Workplaces for Commuters (BWC) hosted a webinar, **“A Parking Tax? How New IRS Rules Impact Employers.”** During the webinar, staff from CoaST and BWC reviewed how the Department of Treasury’s recent guidance on parking will impact employers.

IRS had issued interim guidance for taxpayers to determine the amount of parking expenses for qualified transportation fringe benefits that is nondeductible under Section 274(a)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code and for tax-exempt organizations to determine the corresponding increase in the amount of unrelated business taxable income (UBTI) under Section 512(a)(7) attributable to the nondeductible parking expenses. During the webinar, presenters provided a brief overview of the Treasury/IRS Guidance, including examples on how the guidance would apply to employers. The panel offered recommendations on how employers can minimize their impact and provided information on policy questions and actions being taken to address concerns. [View Recording](#)

Speakers:

- Jason Pavluchuk, Policy Director, Coalition of Smarter Transportation
- Philip L. Winters, Director, TDM Program, Center for Urban Transportation Research
- David Judd, Transportation Consultant

[Download pdf copy of the slides](#)

On October 30, 2018, Best Workplaces for Commuters hosted a Spotlight web conference, **“Spotlight on Florida Best Workplaces for Commuters: Engaging Large and Small Employers”** The webinar spotlighted Florida Best Workplaces for Commuters as part of Florida Department of

Transportation's Mobility Week, 2018. Stephen Alianiello, reThink's Senior Outreach Specialist, discussed how they utilize the Best Workplaces for Commuters program to engage employers. reThink Your Commute promotes smart transportation solutions for Central Florida's workforce covering nine counties. They bring together businesses and employees to explore the shared benefits of carpooling, vanpooling, transit, biking, walking and telecommuting. David Hoppes discussed how Dix.Hite + Partners, a Best Workplaces for Commuters worksite, offers their employees exceptional commuter benefits with great results. At their suburban worksite in Longwood, Florida, 11 out of 25 employees commute via bike and on foot to take SunRail. Dix.Hite subsidizes half the price of a monthly transit pass, plus offers other benefits. [View Recording](#)

Speakers:

- Stephen Alianiello, Senior Outreach Specialist, reThink Your Commute. [reThink presentation](#) and [reThink Your Commute Buildingwide Survey](#)
- David Hoppes, PLA, Vice President, Dix.Hite + Partners [DixHite presentation](#)

On August 23, 2018, Best Workplaces for Commuters and WeDriveU co-sponsored the webinar "**Moving Beyond Trip Planning: Technology Innovations for Your Campus or Workplace**". The webinar featured Jamie Jarvis, Director, Sustainable Transportation Programs at [Stanford Research Park](#) (SRP) and Kevin Mathy, Managing Director of Customer Success with [WeDriveU](#). They discussed how advances in technology are changing how universities, employers and managed properties shape commuter programs today. They focused on how they are applying technology to move beyond planning trips to assessing demand, streamlining mobility, boosting sustainability and transforming the passenger experience. [View recording](#)

Speakers:

- Jamie Jarvis, [SRP \(copy of slides\)](#)
- Kevin Mathy, [WeDriveU \(copy of slides\)](#).

On July 26, 2018, Best Workplaces for Commuters hosted a Spotlight web conference, "**Spotlight on ACHD Commuteride Programs**." [Commuteride](#) is the primary resource for Transportation Demand Management (TDM) initiatives in Boise, Idaho. Their signature campaign, May in Motion, is designed for organizations to become Transportation Champions and gain recognition for their employee participation and business transportation benefits. Webinar attendees learned how Commuteride is making an impact through this successful marketing campaign, how it fits with the various programs Commuteride manages, as well as new programs they have incorporated with area partners.

Speakers:

- Maureen Gresham, Manager, [ACHD Commuteride](#)
- Nicole Stern, Outreach Coordinator, [ACHD Commuteride](#)

[View Recording](#) | Presentations: [ACHD Commuteride Programs](#) and [May In Motion](#)

Finally, another element under this task is focused on building and sharing knowledge to increase productivity and effectiveness in the use of BWC's resources. BWC staff participated in transportation-related trade associations and professional societies in leadership capacities (e.g., Association for Commuter Transportation (member of the Public Policy Committee, Certification Task Force), Transportation Research Board (emeritus member of the Committee on TDM), Transportation Demand Management Institute (vice president) and Institute of Transportation Engineers (executive committee of the Transportation Planning Council)). Staff attended conferences and webinars with such groups to facilitate technology transfer, share best practices, and exchange ideas to improve products and services to benefit member workplaces.

Task 2: Provide Technical Assistance Support to BWC members and the TDM Professional Community

BWC provided technical assistance to workplaces and supporting organizations such as TDM agencies or TMAs using a range of methods from fostering self-service problem solving to short-term support as described below.

This task focused on providing assistance and support to employers, commuter assistance programs, state departments of transportation, local city or county commissions, commuter assistance program boards or advisory committees, transportation management associations, transit agencies, and metropolitan planning organizations on TDM-related subjects as requested. These include responding to telephone and email inquiries. This quick response technical support includes compiling data and preparing reports on TDM-related issues. This period we focused on updating the Employer Benchmark Survey and providing mode share information at the county and MSA level.

BWC manages several listservs to foster nearly instantaneous peer-to-peer interactions among BWC members and TDM professionals across the world. Support is provided for these BWC-related listservs: TRANSP-TDM, telework, Best Workplaces for Commuters, BWC champions, and parking management. The listservs help agencies help themselves. The archives of the listservs provide a valuable knowledge base for accessing examples and sharing experiences. The listservs provide the means to leverage limited staff availability and reduce the total number of basic inquiries that require personal attention.

Table 4 – Listserv Activities

LISTSERV	ADD	AUTODEL	CHANGE	DELETE	POST	SET	SIGN-OFF	TOTAL ACTIVE
TRANSP-TDM	557	300	30	10	1,140	132	209	2,029
Best Workplaces for Commuters	12	28	1	0	16	3	9	420
BWC Champions	2	17	1	0	12	1	1	82
Telework	7	24	0	0	6	0	7	388
Parking Management	5	22	0	3	4	0	5	412
Totals	583	391	32	13	1178	136	231	3,331

ADD - Those who are manually approved added by the list owner

AUTODEL – These records track users who have been autodeleted from the list (e.g., too many bounces)

CHANGE - These records track users who have made change (e.g., updated email address)

DELETE - Those who are manually deleted by the list owner, but not those who unsubscribe themselves from the list.

SET - These records track the use of the SET command, including what options were set (e.g., select digest mode)

SIGNOFF - Those who unsubscribe themselves from the list, but not those who are manually deleted by the list owner

TOTAL ACTIVE – Those who are current subscribers as of July 7, 2020

Summary

Based on the project objectives, this project was very successful. It has yielded numerous achievements with over 300 BWC workplaces identified as meeting the National Standard of Excellence. We collected over \$50,000 in membership fees and other income for this period to leverage the NCTR funding in support of the program activities. A press release for the annual BWC List Release resulted in 1,336 views by media outlets. It was published by 158 outlets and had 32 Google links. The introduction of the BWC Media kit and social media kit makes it easier for employers to use to promote their BWC designation and attract more inquiries. BWC conducted 8 webinars featuring 17 speakers that had over 2,000 people attend the live events or view the recordings. These webinars focused on employer and commuter assistance program case studies and related topics. The listservs had about 1,200 posts and over 3,300 active subscribers. The fact that the BWC website experienced a doubling in the number of users compared to the prior period and the other indicators show many of these approaches are working. BWC found numerous examples of successful employer-based programs from local businesses to international conglomerates to universities. While BWC began as a simple national recognition program, it has evolved into a nationally recognized resource for information on programs to encourage the integration of commute-friendly programs and policies at the workplace that, in turn, should increase use in all forms of public transportation.

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