

Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Districts: Distinguish your Community

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

Opening Remarks

On July 7, 2004, Best Workplaces for CommutersSM held a Tele-Seminar to educate Network members about Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Districts and their communitywide commitments to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and enhance the quality of life for commuters. Patty Klavon, EPA's national Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Network manager, opened the conversation by providing a brief overview of the concept of Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Districts.

Best Workplaces for CommutersSM recognizes employers that offer commuter benefits that meet the National Standard of Excellence. In some areas, however, the employers themselves do not provide benefits. Instead, organizations such as business districts, developers, property managers, and cities fund commuter benefits programs for employees in their area. To recognize these organizations for their leadership, EPA created the designation "Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District." There are four questions to ask to determine if an area qualifies as a Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District:

- Does the proposed district have distinct boundaries?
- Does someone other than the individual employer pay for all or most of the cost of providing commuter benefits to employees?
- Are the same benefits offered equally to all employers within the area?

- Is there an administrator who serves as a transportation coordinator for the entire area—someone who could be a point of contact for EPA?

Ms. Klavon recommended that those interested in learning more about Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Districts should visit <www.bwc.gov> and click on "Learn More About Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Districts" at the bottom left of the screen.

James Paxson, Hacienda Business Park Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District, Pleasanton, California

Hacienda Business Park is an 865 acre real estate development located in Pleasanton, California. The development comprises about 7 million square feet of office space, 1,500 residential units, 1 million square feet of retail space, and 1 million square feet of research and development property. It is host to a variety of businesses, from small offices with one or two employees to large firms with 3,500 employees. The park's total population is about 17,000 employees and 3,500 residents.

Encouraging commuting alternatives has been a priority for the district since its foundation 20 years ago. Subsidies for transit use have played a key role in the district's benefits offerings, and it once coordinated a shuttle system for employees—which has since evolved into a partnership with a local transit provider that provides subsidized rides to employees within the district. The district offers an emergency ride home system, provided by a local congestion management agency.

Hacienda Business Park also offers a number of free incentives and services that encourage and enable employees to try alternative transit. It acts as a hub for communication between employees and eight transporta-



tion agencies, offers carpool and vanpool matching, and coordinates bicycle and pedestrian programs.

As a result of its efforts, the business district has seen a high number of employees diverted from single-occupant vehicle commuting—an impressive achievement in a suburban region particularly conducive to car travel. Some employers in the district have a 30 percent alternative commuting rate, double the national average.

Mr. Paxson concluded by noting that the Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District designation has allowed his business district to differentiate itself from other areas in which employers might want to locate. It also provides recognition for important efforts that the district has made during the last 20 years. Finally, it allows him to promote commuter benefits more effectively to the park's member employers. These employers often have worksites outside the district and can look to their Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District worksites as models for effective commuter benefits programs.

David Southerland, Perimeter Business Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District, Atlanta, Georgia

Perimeter Business District received recognition as a Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District in January 2004 when its local community improvement district committed to fund commuter programs. The Clean Air Campaign and the Atlanta Regional Commission also provide funding, particularly for carpool, vanpool, and emergency ride home programs. CH2M Hill, a company that was already one of the Best Workplaces for CommutersSM, provided guidance and experience for the district to build upon.

Perimeter Business District is located north of downtown Atlanta. It is the largest Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District in the country, providing commuter benefits to more than 115,000 employees in 26

million square feet of office space. It is home to 4,000 companies, 125 of which have more than 100 employees. Philips Electronics, United Parcel Service, Cox Enterprises, Cingular, Intercontinental Hotel Group, and HomeBanc all have world headquarters located in the district. It is served by four Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit (MARTA) rail stations and seven bus routes. Mr. Southerland explained that the area is growing quickly from a suburban to an urban market.

The Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) program in the district is provided by both the Atlanta Regional Commission (the local metropolitan planning organization, or MPO) and the Perimeter Business District. For employees to have access to the Atlanta Regional Commission's GRH program, their employer must agree to designate an employee responsible for administering the program. Some small companies are unable to spare employee resources to make that commitment, and so cannot have access to GRH through the Atlanta Regional Commission. To fill this coverage gap, the Perimeter Business District itself administers a GRH program for employers unable to administer the program themselves.

Perimeter Business District operates vanpools and transit shuttles to nearby MARTA stations, and the community improvement district is building an infrastructure to support the increased number of employees walking and taking transit to work. Improvements such as crosswalks, widened sidewalks, and more traffic and pedestrian signals make the district a safer place to walk.

Designation as a Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District has helped the Perimeter Business District compete with other business districts in the Atlanta area, distinguishing it from other areas that have fewer commuting options. The district also encourages employers to locate there by allowing them to claim the benefits packages as their own when marketing to employees or potential employees.



To spread the word about its commuter benefits packages, Perimeter Business District employs traditional methods such as paid advertisements and newspaper articles. It also works with property management companies to coordinate education sessions, plan meetings, draft newsletter articles, and write letters to tenants. This multifaceted approach ensures that employers and employees are aware of the superior commuter benefits to which they have access.

In years to come, the local community improvement district will continue to fund Perimeter Business District, paying for its operating costs and supporting its vanpool programs. The Clean Air Campaign and the Atlanta Regional Commission will also continue their support of commuting programs in the area. To evaluate the effectiveness of the investment in commuting programs, the district has partnered with the Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE). CTE will study employees' commuting habits and provide the Perimeter Business District with reports on their findings and recommendations for improvement.

Angie Rivera-Malpiede, Stapleton Area TMA Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District, Denver, Colorado

Stapleton International Airport closed when Denver International Airport opened in 1995, leaving 4,700 acres of usable land vacant. Later that year, the mayor of Denver and a committee of community leaders determined how that land would best be developed and formulated a master plan called the "Green Book." The committee decided that for the new community to set a positive example for planned developments elsewhere in the country, it would need to effectively manage traffic congestion. To that end, the committee organized a transportation management association (TMA). Ms. Rivera-Malpiede explained that this was a unique situa-

tion—the TMA was created before any buildings went up.

Now, the Stapleton Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District covers the 4,700 acres left by the closed Stapleton Airport. Located 10 minutes from downtown Denver, the district comprises 1100 acres of parkland, 3 million square feet of retail space, 10 million square feet of office space, and 10,000 homes and apartments. When the project is complete in 20 years, it will house 30,000 residents and 35,000 employees.

The TMA was established in July 2002 and began surveying employers and employees to determine their needs. In the early stages of development, the main businesses in the area were retail outlets and hotels. Employees were primarily minimum wage earners who received no benefits, and their major mode of transportation to and from work was rapid transit. Based on that information, the TMA decided that a transit subsidy would best serve the community.

The TMA now offers a comprehensive Eco Pass program, which allows any employee in the Stapleton Area Business District free rides on any of the mass transit options in the Denver area. The Eco Pass subsidy is funded by the Stapleton Foundation, Park Creek Metro District (the tax district of homeowners in the area), Regional Transportation District of Denver (RTD), and Forest City (the district's major developer).

When the program began in 2002, the district spent \$70,000 to provide Eco Passes to roughly 1,500 employees. At that time, employees who wanted to obtain passes had to go to downtown Denver in the middle of the day to have their photos taken. This was inconvenient for a large number of employees, so the TMA requested that RTD visit the Stapleton Area and take ID photos there. RTD did, and Eco Pass membership skyrocketed. Now, for example, 67 percent of Wal-Mart employees in the Stapleton District have an Eco Pass. From this experience Ms. Rivera-Malpiede learned that to have a thriving Best





Workplaces for CommutersSM District, it is important to know the employees the TMA is serving and to tune the program to meet their needs.

Open Discussion

Shamus Misek, from the University of Illinois, Chicago, asked Jeffra Rockwell, Best Workplaces for CommutersSM representative, if the qualification criteria for Best Workplaces for CommutersSM are different for individual worksites and business districts. Ms. Rockwell explained that the qualifying benefits are the same; the only difference is the provider. In a Best Workplaces for CommutersSM District, the TMA, regional planning district, or other third party provides benefits to all employees in an area. In a Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Worksite, the employer provides benefits only to its employees.

Clark Miller, from SmartTrips in Knoxville, Tennessee, asked if there are any workshops or training sessions around the country for interested Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Network members. Ms. Klavon explained that several members of the Best Workplaces for CommutersSM team will be at the Association for Commuter Transportation conference in New Orleans this year and will be holding a discussion about the Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Network. She encouraged all Network members to attend the conference, which will be held from September 16 to 19, 2004. Additionally, for Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Network members interested in coordinating their own campaigns, Best Workplaces for CommutersSM offers a series of four hour-long teleconference training sessions.

Edna Sussman, from Action for Tomorrow's Environment in Westchester, New York, asked how to approach cities with a proposal for districtwide commuter benefits. Ms. Rivera-Malpiede responded, citing her TMA's close relationships with RTD's senior planner and Denver's city councilperson for her TMA's access to

resources provided by those groups. She explained that it is important for partners who have a significant investment in a project to be represented during decision making processes. Mr. Paxson also responded, adding that a GRH program, while sometimes difficult to coordinate on a small scale, is very cost-effective in an area as large as a county, city, or district, and is a good place to start when pitching commuter benefits to local governments.

Closing

Ms. Klavon concluded by asking for feedback at <www.bwc.gov> and encouraging Network members to participate in the next seminar. It will be held on September 1, and its topic will be advertisements and public service announcements. She thanked everyone for participation in the Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Network.

If you have questions for any of the speakers, please refer to the contact information below:

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