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Editorial

Spurring on commuting improvements

Traffic reduction and clean air efforts in our region are getting a boost from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. We refer to the debut of the New England Best Workplaces for Commuters list.

The EPA intends every year to recognize companies responsible for the best "commuter benefits" programs in New England. It should bring attention to business ingenuity with a public-service flair.

It's no surprise that five Stamford companies — Hyperion Solutions, MetroPool, Pitney Bowes Inc., Purdue Pharma and Time Warner Cable — have made the first list of honorees. Traffic congestion is a significant problem in our area that not only threatens air quality and therefore public health, but also economic prosperity. More and more the specter of long highway commutes for employees is a factor for companies as they consider whether to locate here.

The Issue:

Efforts of local companies given EPA recognition could only be the beginning.

Traffic literally drives some of these businesses away. Commuter benefit programs also are believed to be a factor in employee retention.

The Stamford companies are being recognized for efforts big and small. Purdue Pharma, the privately held pharmaceuticals company, offers \$100 transit checks and \$50 in parking reimbursements — one of the most generous subsidies in New England — for train commuters. It also offers on-site dry cleaning and meals-to-go to help commuters complete personal chores at the office.

Pitney Bowes, the mail systems company, has an employee fitness center and medical clinic. Time Warner Cable offers taxis to commuters who work late and miss their trains. Hyperion, the software company, helps to pay gasoline costs for employees who car-pool, and operates an electronic bulletin board for employees to match riders and drivers. Even MetroPool, the 12-employee firm that operates commuter van shuttles between train stations and businesses, offers parking and transit subsidies.

These are good ideas. Other Stamford companies interested in employee morale and retention would wise to steal them. But these programs also ought to inspire some good-natured corporate competition over the next year in the name of traffic reduction and cleaner air. Which companies will make next year's list, and what can they do to improve on commuter benefits already being offered in Stamford?