

Every workplace can benefit from sustainable commuting habits

Video

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You'd be hard-pressed to find someone whose commute to the office couldn't be improved.

The time and stress associated with a long commute are huge factors in the choices people make about their jobs — some

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studies even suggest it is better to take a job with a shorter commute over one with a higher salary.

Clearly, the advantages for both employees and employers over lessening this burden are numerous: happier employees, greater retention, higher productivity, lower costs. But there is another inescapable factor: the survival of our planet. This may sound dramatic, but nearly 1,000 American companies have signed a pledge reaffirming their commitment to reducing their carbon impact and imploring others to do the same.

A great place to start is by encouraging sustainable commuting habits among employees. Transportation is nearly the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the majority of this comes from single-occupancy vehicles.

Here are four ways companies can help themselves and their employees create a more sustainable future.

- **Provide transit benefits to employees**

This can include subsidizing subway and bus passes, offering free bike share memberships, or making shuttles available to and from train stations. Buildings can help potential lessees achieve these goals by installing bicycle racks or special parking for car share vehicles.


In some cities, this is actually required for buildings of a certain size. Of the 45,000 additional commuters in downtown Seattle over the past six years, 95 percent take transit, walk, bike, or carpool. This is due in no small part to its Transportation Management Program, requiring developers to consider alternative transportation infrastructure early in the process.

- **Stop incentivizing driving**



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Offering benefits for alternative transportation options is a great step, but can be ineffective if not combined with actively disincentivizing driving. If a building offers free or reduced-cost parking for its employees, many are likely to still opt for the drive-alone option. Buildings often do not have control over the amount of parking they provide — at least, not at the moment — but there are still ways to discourage people from using it. Offering employees \$100 to either use for parking or keep in their pockets is just one example of many possible options.

- **Allow for flexible hours**

One type of transit benefit in particular can be helpful for increasing employee satisfaction and decreasing congestion problems in cities overall: alternative work schedules. This can include teleworking once a week or working adjusted hours (11 am – 7 pm) to avoid crowded subways. This makes life easier for the person on the alternative schedule, but also for every other commuter. With fewer people on the subway platform, the experience of using public transit is more enjoyable, making people more likely to continue to do so in the future.

- **Use innovative technology**

There are all kinds of innovations available for buildings that want to encourage sustainable commuting habits. One example is TransitScreen, a Washington DC-based company providing customized digital displays of real-time transit data. This allows everyone in the building to make informed decisions about how to travel, saving time, stress, and resources. Another example is Flexbikes, which Seattle Children's Hospital uses as part of its extremely comprehensive master transportation plan. These smart bikes can be checked out of automated kiosks and are electric-assisted, a perfect bike share program for a company located on a large campus.

Just one of these changes can make a huge difference, but a

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combination of all four can create a forward-thinking workplace with happier employees.

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Article enquiries



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