

STATE EMPLOYEE TRIP REDUCTION

Description

State agencies nationwide, often those responsible for transportation and environmental quality, have identified their own workforces as potential leaders in implementing employee trip reduction programs. The potential benefits extend well beyond reducing traffic congestion and addressing environmental concerns: reducing auto vehicle trips alone can minimize parking needs and ease energy consumption. In addition, studies have shown that workplace flexibility benefits worker health, retention, and productivity. In this case, trip reduction addresses regular employee commute trip reduction versus travel associated with occasional meetings, conferences, or field work.

Target Market

Locations with a Concentration of State Workers

As of 2010, the State of Texas employs over 260,000 employees statewide, full-time and part-time, in varied agencies and capacities. Large agencies can have a significant impact to the transportation system when they are clustered together, but this is also where trip reduction strategies can have the most noticeable effects.

Agencies with a Direct Interest in Reduced Traffic Congestion

Some of the agencies most motivated to apply trip reduction strategies are those with a direct interest in reduced traffic congestion and air pollution, for example, transportation, environment, energy, and facilities management.

Agencies Interested in These Strategies as Part of an Employee Satisfaction/Retention Initiative

Other agencies might be motivated to participate because their leadership is interested in workplace flexibility as part of a larger employee satisfaction/retention initiative.

Indeed, a 2010 report by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, *Analysis of Alternative Work*



Cost:	●●○○○
Time:	Short
Impact:	Region
Who:	State Agencies
Hurdles:	Policy/Perception

Schedules, considered alternatives to the standard five-day, 40-hour workweek for state employees. The study, which was directed to be conducted by state legislation in 2009, surveyed state agency and institutions of higher education use of alternative work schedules (AWS) including flextime, telecommuting, and compressed workweeks. Approximately 90 percent of Texas agencies already offer some type of AWS. Very few reduce their customer service hours (those that do are primarily educational institutions during summer session). The most commonly cited reason for providing AWS as an option is employee retention.

How Will This Help?

- Employee trip reductions reduce congestion because they decrease trips taken at peak-period commute hours. Since state agencies often have large concentrations of workers, these changes can have measurable improvements to roadway conditions.

- Cost effective through efficient use of existing resources. Trips that are avoided or shifted to non-congested times reduce the need to expand the transportation system. In some instances, teleworking could help save funding by delaying or avoiding space expansions.
- Safety and auto emissions are improved with any of the strategies that reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled or shift travel to less dangerous times than the peak period.

Implementation Examples

Texas has its own unique circumstances which will influence the success of any initiative to reduce state commute employee travel. The size of the state and the varieties of issues confronting different localities are two dimensions illustrating this point. Nonetheless, there are examples from other states which can provide insight into which strategies might work best for Texas state agencies.

Agency-Specific Initiatives

Colorado: The State Attorney General’s Office has implemented a program to incentivize its employees to reduce single occupancy auto vehicle travel. Options include a subsidized EcoPass for transit, bike lockers, a guaranteed ride home, ride sharing matching, as well as allowing flexible schedules and telework on a limited basis.

North Carolina: The Department of Health and Human Services offers programs that serve trip reduction goals, but the motivation has been employee or production management, or as health and wellness strategies, rather than promoted as congestion reduction tools. They offer a free annual “GoPass” for public transportation in Raleigh and flexible schedules and telework (subject to limitations). Flexible work arrangement options include flextime, flex-space or telework, regular part-time work, and job-sharing.

Statewide Educational Strategies

Wisconsin: The State of Wisconsin provides a free carpool and bicycle buddy match program that is estimated to achieve an annual reduction of 57.4 million vehicle miles statewide.

Utah: The Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) developed TravelWise – a set of strategies that encourage residents to use alternatives to driving alone. It is a voluntary program with a website, tools to track progress and success, and strategies for getting started with different travel alternatives. When a business officially partners, a TravelWise representative helps the business to complete a TravelWise Integration Plan (TRIP) with strategies that best fit the agency/company. The most rural of UDOT’s four regions, Region 4, has led the way with videoconferencing, teleworking, and otherwise employing technology to address long travel distances.

Formalized Trip Reduction Programs

Maricopa County, Arizona: A state 1988 Air Quality Bill requires all major employers in Maricopa County to develop, implement, and maintain a Travel Reduction Program. Services include implementing the Maricopa County plan, assisting state agencies in reducing travel, and educating and motivating all 23,000 State employees to reduce their travel, using tools such as:

- Agency Travel Reduction Coordinator.
- Online annual Travel Reduction Survey (mandated by law).
- Emergency Ride Home program.
- Online program to find people with matching commutes.
- Commuter Club – free incentive program.
- Platinum Pass Subsidy Program (public transportation).
- Vanpool program.
- Bicyclists are eligible for Commuter Club.
- Telework option.

Washington State: WSDOT sets the standard in implementation and performance measurement for a state trip reduction program. The state's Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) program was first put into state law in 1991, requiring public and private employers in the nine most populous counties that have 100 or more employees in a single worksite to implement a program designed to reduce drive-alone commuter trips to that worksite. The law also requires that all state agencies aggressively develop substantive programs to reduce commute trips by state employees. A 2006 law refined the definition of affected employers to include all worksites with 100 or more state employees, regardless of their being employed by the same state agency. In doing so, the legislature acknowledged the "state's crucial leadership role in establishing and implementing effective commute trip reduction programs."

The CTR program's goals are to reduce the drive-alone rate by 10 percent and vehicle miles traveled per employee by 13 percent at CTR workplaces between 2007 and 2012; for the 2009–2010 period, the CTR program documented reductions of 4.8 percent and 5.6 percent, respectively (2011 CTR Report to the Washington State Legislature). The CTR program includes provisions for:

- Each state agency is required to have an employee designated as Employee Transportation Coordinator, who provides transportation information on topics such as transit options, and conducts a yearly survey concerning employee commutes.
- Focus on nine most congested counties, including areas around Puget Sound, Olympia, Vancouver, and Spokane.
- WSDOT's internal employee program is strategically aggressive, since it serves as an example for other state agencies. It includes:

- Compressed workweek, flex-time, or telework.
- Emergency Ride Home (Thurston County only).
- Non-taxable transit subsidy such as a monthly transit pass or taxable cash subsidy for commuting by carpool, walking, or bicycling.
- STAR Pass (Thurston County only).
- RideshareOnline.com for carpool and vanpool matching.

Application Techniques and Principles

As discussed above, some of the most important issues concern not the strategies chosen but their implementation and support by state leadership, both agency leaders and decision-makers. Public perception that customer service is not being affected is critical, as demonstrated in the 2010 Texas State Comptroller report. Measurement of program benefits—in terms of trips avoided, fuel saved, and improved employee productivity—is a key strategy for program success.

Measuring Trip Reduction and Other Benefits

Not all Texas agencies monitor their alternative work schedule (AWS) employees. Among those that do, 32 percent of employees reduced their commute time and 20 percent reduced their fuel expenses (Texas Comptroller, 2010). Expanding upon this type of measurement will be critical if Texas moves forward into state employee trip reduction programs, because these measures provide decision makers and the public information on the return in investment made in these programs.

Measuring Employee Performance

Monitoring performance is an issue of concern to both employers and employees. Performance

Innovative Alternatives

Proximate Commuting matches eligible employees of a multi-site employer to a workplace closer to home, reducing commute time and distance (Rodriguez 2002).

Parking Cash-Out reduces driving demand by providing an incentive not to drive a car to work: return the free parking subsidy into a stipend (Hill 2002).

monitoring tools vary according to the travel option, but examples include:

- Setting measurable performance goals and deadlines.
- Video-check in and communication tools.
- Using technological tools to monitor employee productivity, including computer activity, keystrokes, and website usage.
- Off-worksites supervisor visits.

The 2010 Texas Comptroller report on AWS noted that 23 percent of Texas agencies indicate supervision of employees as one challenge of AWS; however, just under half of Texas agencies do not provide AWS training for managers or supervisors. This type of training will be critical to successful implementation of any AWS component of a trip reduction program.

Issues

Trip reduction strategies require consistent and equitable follow-through. Any perceived or real benefit to participation by state employees needs to be monitored to be considered fair. Agency leadership may perceive their resources are already spread thin, and any new initiative requires a time investment to make it work.

Who Is Responsible?

Although many Texas agencies have AWS policies in place as an employee benefit, and certain supervisors and managers may facilitate this activity, the examples above demonstrate that the most effective employee trip reduction programs nationwide are those that are

required, either by state statute, or to comply with a federal environmental requirement.

Many states have a single state agency that sets policies for state workers. In Texas, policies affecting state workers are set by statute and implemented by individual agencies. This may actually be an advantage if trip reduction targets are set, but Texas agencies are allowed the flexibility in how to best meet those goals.

Project Timeframe

Many Texas agencies already have the policies in place, but participation may not be actively encouraged agency-wide. With the policies already in place, a ramp-up implementation may be fairly short-term, a matter of educating agency leadership that AWS is a priority strategy for addressing congestion and has other measurable benefits.

A longer-term strategy with the potential for greater success, based upon examples from other states, is a statutorily mandated program following the Public Agency Trip Reduction Best Practices listed below.

Cost

A trip reduction program does involve upfront costs, as the examples from elsewhere in the nation demonstrate. For AWS alone, the 2010 Texas Comptroller report on AWS found that cost savings were minimal. Nonetheless, the Texas Comptroller found that the retention benefits for Texas worker participating in existing AWS were demonstrable.

Data Needs

Successful programs such as Washington state's requires quantifiable goal setting and performance monitoring. Online surveys can be used to aggregate statistics by departments to monitor progress toward goals. Teleworking programs are sometimes tracked through time billing: unique codes are entered for time spent at home, which does not require any additional data to report.

State Employee Trip Reduction Best Practices

- Type of Location: Regions with concentrated levels of state or other governmental employees.
- Agency Practices: Train supervisors and managers on implementing AWS options and a commitment to support trip reduction programs. Program implementation through a single state agency (typically transportation or environment), responsible for statewide program education campaign including public website about the program, events, resource for agencies, aggregating annual reporting to state leadership.
- Frequency of Reanalysis: Annually.
- Supporting Policies or Actions Needed: Allow agencies to set and measure their own goals for statewide and agency employee trip reduction and other benefits or cost savings that result (employee trip logs, annual survey, each reported to coordinating agency). Designate a trip reduction coordinator designated for each agency responsible for internal employee education on that agency's trip reduction policy, options, requirements, and performance measurement.
- Complementary Strategies: Emergency ride home programs, an online matching program to enable people to find other state employees with similar commutes, incentive programs, carpooling, vanpooling, transit, flextime, telecommuting, and compressed work weeks.

For More Information

1. *2011 CTR Report to the Washington State Legislature*, Washington State Commute Trip Reduction Board, at <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Transit/CTR/>, accessed on June 14, 2012.
2. *Analysis of Alternative Work Schedules*, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, August 2010. Also located at http://www.window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/altschedule/Alternative_Wrk_Sched.pdf.
3. Hill, E. G. 2002, "A Commuter's Dilemma: Extra Cash or Free Parking?" California Legislative Analyst's Office. <http://www.lao.ca.gov/laoapp/main.aspx>.
4. Rodríguez D. A., 2002, "Examining Individuals' Desire for Shorter Commute: The Case of Proximate Commuting" *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design* 29(6) 867 – 881.