

Network Tele-Seminar

How Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Can Work for You

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 (BWC) brand. Moderated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), these seminars feature experts on key topic areas.

On April 7, 2004, Best Workplaces for CommutersSM held a Tele-Seminar to educate Network members about the benefits of a partnership with BWC. Some Network members offer BWC qualification as an incentive for employer participation in their regional commuter choice programs; others incorporate BWC criteria into their own membership requirements. Patty Klavon, EPA's national BWC Network manager, provided opening remarks and introduced the featured speakers.

Featured Participants

Douglas Franklin, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG)

Douglas Franklin, transportation demand management marketing specialist for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, described Commuter Connections, a regional network of transportation organizations that assists employers in establishing and expanding commuter benefits programs.

The Greater Washington DC Region's Best Workplaces for Commuters Coalition formed by Commuter Connections is comprised of:

- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
- Greater Washington Board of Trade
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
- U.S. Department of Transportation
- U.S. General Services Administration
- National Capital Planning Commission

Mr. Franklin believes it is important that coalition members are well known and respected in the community and bring credibility to the program—he noted that when the coalition distributes outreach materials, it includes all member logos. Having an active and enthusiastic coalition is also very important, because a regional program becomes more difficult to administer as its membership grows. This difficulty can be mitigated by distributing a balance of responsibility for the program through all the coalition members.

Commuter Connections has coordinated an employer awards program for the past six years. 2003 was the first year that it incorporated Best Workplaces for CommutersSM, recruiting 75 employers for the program between February and June. Mr. Franklin found that the most effective recruiting method was one-on-one telephone contact, supplemented by direct mailings. With its experience and a longer time frame in which to recruit, this year the coalition hopes to significantly expand the list.

Last year, Best Workplaces for CommutersSM fig-

Network Tele-Seminar

ured prominently into the coalition's June commuting awards event. The presentation featured an enlarged list of new Best Workplaces for CommutersSM, an oversized Best Workplaces for CommutersSM certificate of achievement, and an opportunity for a group photo of all new Best Workplaces for CommutersSM employers. In addition, several special guests spoke regarding the importance of the Best Workplaces for CommutersSM program for the region, including the president of the Greater Washington Board of Trade.

The event itself received newspaper coverage, and several days after the ceremony, EPA representative Stephan Sylvan was interviewed live on FOX-5 Morning News. The interview took place at the corporate offices of GEICO Insurance, a high profile Best Workplaces for CommutersSM member. This year, to provide greater recognition for the Best Workplaces for CommutersSM initiative, an expanded coalition group will hold a separate event in the fall and use the June Commuter Connections awards event as a kick-off for the campaign. All Best Workplaces for CommutersSM employers will be invited to the fall event and individually recognized for achieving the program's National Standard of Excellence.

Christine Maley-Grubl, Peninsula Traffic Congestion Relief Alliance

Christine Maley-Grubl, executive director of the Peninsula Traffic Congestion Relief Alliance, manages a much smaller coalition. Her organization is countywide, with a mission to improve air quality and reduce traffic in San Mateo, California. The Alliance offers an emergency ride home program, incentives for carpooling and vanpooling, and a bicycle safety program. It also coordinates a Bike-to-

Work Day and encourages employers to offer commuter benefits.

Best Workplaces for CommutersSM and the Alliance share their criteria for employer recognition. The alliance offers three tiers of recognition for commuter-friendly employers—bronze, silver, and gold. At the bronze level, employers need to provide a point of contact for the Alliance, provide information on public transportation, and hold a company meeting in which a representative from the Alliance can speak to employees about alternative commuting modes. At the silver level, employers are asked to do more—provide incentives for carpools or vanpools, offer bike parking, lockers, and showers, lunchtime shuttles, or onsite amenities. At this level, the Alliance provides employers with media coverage, free public transit tickets, or other benefits. Finally, at the gold level of membership, employers meet all the criteria to become Best Workplaces for CommutersSM. At that level, the Alliance will work with each employer and nearby taxi companies to establish an emergency ride home service.

Betsy Turner, Valley Metro/Regional Public Transit Authority

Betsy Turner, employer services and training coordinator at Valley Metro, coordinates programs to get Phoenix area employees out of their cars and into public transit. These programs include online ride-matching, vanpool service, a clean air campaign, and a Bike-to-Work week.

A government mandate specifies that employers of more than 50 people in Maricopa County must designate an employee transportation coordinator (ETC). The ETC submits a trip reduction plan to the county, specifying what kind of incentives the company uses to encourage employees to pursue

Network Tele-Seminar

alternative modes of transit. Valley Metro's staff includes five account managers who assist ETCs in developing their commuter programs.

Ms. Turner has found two influences that affect an organization's choice to offer commuter benefits. First, per the mandate, an employer can be fined up to \$300 per day (fines to date have ranged from \$2,000-\$27,000) for failing to provide an acceptable trip-reduction program. Second, high gas prices in Phoenix—third highest in the nation—are straining employees' wallets. Employers are pressed to find alternative ways for their employees to get to work.

The most effective way that Ms. Turner has found to reach employers has been through the ETC association meetings that Valley Metro holds each month. At these meetings, she can promote the Best Workplaces for CommutersSM program to ETCs, keep them apprised of alternative commute news, and solicit their feedback.

Because Maricopa County employers are required by law to offer some commuter benefits, they often do not receive the recognition they deserve for their environmental responsibility. Best Workplaces for CommutersSM can provide that recognition, so Ms. Turner sells the program to employers as a "feather in the hat" to employers who provide excellent commuter benefits and should be recognized for it.

Open Discussion

Patty Klavon asked Mr. Franklin why Commuter Connections offers an emergency ride home program. He explained that some commuters do not take public transit because they are afraid that they will not be able to get home quickly in an emergency. An effective emergency ride home program can eliminate that fear and increase the number of public transit riders. He added that the service is

rarely overused—most Commuter Connections members do not use more than the four free emergency trips guaranteed by the program.

Mary Stasiak asked the speakers what benefits employers receive, other than recognition by Best Workplaces for CommutersSM, when they sign up for alternative commuting programs. Ms. Maley-Grubl responded that employers are provided with a variety of benefits, all of which are paid for by the alternative commuting program. For example, Peninsula Traffic Congestion Relief Alliance provides incentives for employees to carpool, vanpool, or take public transit. They also provide ridematching services to make it easier for employees to find other car-poolers or vanpoolers.

Closing

Ms. Klavon concluded by asking for feedback and encouraging Network members to participate in next month's seminar, which will focus on finding innovative funding mechanisms for commuter programs. She thanked everyone for participation in the Best Workplaces for CommutersSM Network.

Network Tele-Seminar

Attendees

Name

Beloso, Jason
Clarke, Sandy
Couts, Gwen
Denning, Jill
Feit, Roland
Franklin, Doug
Franzeen, Stan
Germer, Debbie
Grzesiakowski, Tim
Halex, Karen
Hilderbrandt, Rita
Hoberman, Brooke
Klavon, Patty
Lewenberg Jones, Lynn
Lewinson, Sharon
Maffei, Marcia
Maley-Grubl, Chris
McDavid, Kathy
Miklos, Scott
Mysek, Shamos
Offutt, Steve
Reinman, Ruth
Shaffer, Michelle
Stasiak, Mary
Tolwinska, Anna
Turner, Betsy
Watt, Donald
West, Paige
Winters, Shelly
Woosley, Julie
Zammit, Grant
Zatkowski, Catherine

Organization

Commute Alternatives
Anchorage Share-a-Ride
EPA

VPSI, Inc.
MWCOG
Junction TMO
Pierce County, WA
Hewitt Associates
Greater Vancouver Regional District
PIMA Association of Governments
Rideworks of Greater New Haven, Inc.
EPA
San Diego Association of Governments
Nortel Networks Real Estate-Ontario
Commuter Solutions
Peninsula Alliance
AATA

UIC/UTC
EPA
Indianapolis Public Transportation Corp
Wood River Ridershare
Ann Arbor Transportation Authority
MassRIDES
Valley Metro
TransOptions
Rouge Valley, OR
NH Rideshare Program
Research Triangle Foundation
FHWA Resource Center
Rideworks of Greater New Haven, Inc.

E-mail address

jbeloso@ambag.org
clarksk@muni.org
couts.gwen@epa.gov

roland.feit@rideone.com
dfranklin@mwkog.org
sfranzeen@wyeth.com
dgermer@co.pierce.wa.us
tim.grzesiakowski@hewitt.com
karen_halex@translink.bc.ca
rhildebrand@pagnet.org
bhoberman@rideworks.com
klavon.patty@epa.gov
lle@sandag.org
lewinson@nortelnetworks.com
marcia.maffei@ltd.org
christine@commute.org
kmc david@theride.org

sham@uic.edu
offutt.stephen@epa.gov
reimanr@pbworld.com
michelle@wrrs.org
mstasiak@theride.org
anna.tolska@state.ma.us
bturner@valleymetro.or
dwatt@transoptions.org
p.west@rvtd.org
swinters@dot.state.nh.us
woosley@rtp.org
grant.zammit@fhwa.dot.gov
czatkowski@rideworks.com