

CommuteSmart news

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Dealing With High Gas Prices

The ballooning price of gas means that more than ever before employees are seeking ways to save on commuting costs. How can you help? Here, we offer some "**dos & don'ts**" for steering your employees toward ridesharing as a solution for those high prices at the pumps. **Full story**

Get more money saving tips from Huell Howser 

Get Ready for Rideshare Week

California Rideshare Week – a statewide event that promotes alternatives to driving alone – is Oct. 6-10. Now is the time to start making plans for ways to roll out the campaign at your work site. Your local rideshare agencies offer plenty of support, including promotional materials, prizes and more. Here are five steps for getting started on your Rideshare Week plans. **Full story**



In Brief



- New car label tells consumers which cars are cleanest
- What's the worst day for traffic?
- Nine in 10 see rising gas prices causing family hardship
- How long do you have to work for a tank of gas?
- Get past issues of *CommuteSmart News*

CALENDAR of EVENTS

- Metro marketing meeting - Aug. 19
- Inland Empire Rideshare Week kickoff - Aug. 19
- ACT Conference - Aug. 24-27

More Events

TIPS & IDEAS



How to get **free prizes** for your rideshare program. **Full story**

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Reducing employee trips through **flexible schedules and compressed workweek programs** **Full story**



CommuteSmart News for Employees

Get news geared to commuters that you can forward to employees or incorporate into your own rideshare newsletter.



Dealing With High Gas Prices

The ballooning price of gas means that more than ever before employees are seeking ways to save on commuting costs. How can you help? Here, we offer some "**dos & don'ts**" for steering your employees toward ridesharing as a solution for those high prices at the pumps.

DO promote ridesharing as a way to use less gas. It may seem obvious to you, but some people simply don't make the connection. Let them know through emails, posters, flyers and other outreach that driving less is one of the easiest and most effective ways to cut the rising cost of commuting.



DON'T give employees time to adjust to higher gas prices. Right now, they're reeling from the shock of prices at the pumps, which makes it the ideal time to reach them with alternatives to driving alone. The more accustomed they get to shelling out more than \$4 a gallon, the less likely they are to consider giving up the solo drive.

DO help them see how much they can save by ridesharing. One ETC makes it a point to remind employees that carpooling with just one other person can cut commute gas prices in half, describing it like "suddenly finding a station that sells gas for \$2 a gallon." That really hits home! A great tool for showing the cash savings from carpooling is the [Commuter Cost Calculator](#) at CommuteSmart.info

DON'T let money-savings be your *only* selling point. Yes, cost is a growing factor in how people choose to get to work, but make sure you continue to promote ridesharing's other benefits as well, such as saving time, reducing stress and contributing to cleaner air.

DO consider offering telecommuting or compressed work schedules so employees can drive in to the office less often. With gas prices at record-breaking levels, even if your management has turned down the idea before, they may be willing to reconsider offering these options, at least on an informal basis.

DON'T focus only on short-term strategies. It appears \$4-plus gas prices are here to stay, at least for a year or so. According to the US Energy Department, we can expect the average price of gas in the US to peak this month, and then not go down much after that. Some companies are instituting "emergency" measures such as allowing employees to telecommute during summer months – which is terrific in the short-term to help employees cope – but keep in mind that they need ways to save on gas costs for the long-term, too.

DO contact the rideshare representative at your county's rideshare agency for more ideas. For contact information, see the [Calendar](#) section.



Get Ready for Rideshare Week

California Rideshare Week – a statewide event that promotes alternatives to driving alone – is Oct. 6-10. Now is the time to start making plans for ways to roll out the campaign at your work site. Here are five steps for getting started on your Rideshare Week plans.

1. Mark it on your calendar.

Start by making the commitment to participate in the campaign. "There are so many tasks competing for an ETC's time these days that it may be hard to think about squeezing in one more thing, but Rideshare Week is the one time of year where everybody pulls together to really make the idea of ridesharing fun," says Tara Pueschel with Inland Empire Commuter Services (IECS). "We try to make it as easy as possible for employers to participate...and rewarding for their employees, too."

2. Attend a kick-off event.

Get posters, pledge cards, giveaways and more. Check out the [Calendar](#) section for information on employer kick-off events in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

3. Secure prizes, if possible.

Your county rideshare agency offers your employees chance to win prizes when they pledge to share the ride during Rideshare Week. Many employers like to hold in-house prize drawings as well. Don't have the budget for prizes? You can often get them donated –for advice on how, see [Tips & Ideas](#) in this newsletter.

4. Go with a theme.

If you're planning a contest, party or other employee outreach, why not tie it to the campaign theme in the county where your work site is located? If you're in Los Angeles County, the theme for Rideshare Week 2008 is "opposites"—showcasing the positive (ridesharing) vs. the negative (traffic). In Riverside and San Bernardino counties, it's "The Amazing Rideshare Challenge" based on the popular TV show *The Amazing Race*. Orange and Ventura counties will also have specific themes—we'll feature them in September *CommuteSmart News*, or contact your representative for more information.

5. Make a plan.

Determine your budget, establish goals, and decide how you'll celebrate Rideshare Week at your work site. Create a checklist that includes everything from hanging posters and putting an article in your employee newsletter to holding a party, contest or rideshare fair.

Look for more information in next month's *CommuteSmart News*.



How to Get Campaign Materials for Your Work Site

Los Angeles County: Pick up a Rideshare Week kit that includes t-shirts, tote bags, balloons, posters, flyers and a photocopyable pledge card at an Aug. 19 kickoff. Can't make the kickoff? Request a kit by emailing blanchardd@metro.net (after Aug. 20 and while supplies last) or download print materials at metro.net

Orange County: Pick up materials at a kick-off event to be held in September – Orange County Transportation Authority will email specific date/location information to employers. After the kickoff, campaign materials will be available for download at octa.net/rideshare

Riverside/San Bernardino counties: IECS has sent participation forms to Inland Empire employers, so if you've returned yours, you'll receive a customized Rideshare Week kit in the mail. Plus get tips, ideas and extra giveaways at a kickoff on Aug. 19. For more information, call 1.866.IECS4HELP.

Ventura County: Ventura County Transportation Commission will send Rideshare Week packets to employers via email and US mail in early September. Materials will also be available for download at goventura.org

In Brief

• New car label tells consumers which cars are cleanest

Beginning Jan. 1, 2009, all new cars sold in California will carry a label that informs consumers of the state's assessment of the vehicle's environmental impact, according to the California Air Resources Board. Labels will provide two scores on a 1-10 scale: a smog score and a global warming score. The average new car will score a five on both scales—the higher the score, the less impact the car has on the environment.



• What's the worst day for traffic?

According to a national survey by a firm in Kirkland, WA (which studied traffic times via a GPS system):

- Worst traffic day: Friday
- Worst weekday commute: Friday evening
- Worst commuting hour: Friday, 5 to 6 p.m.
- Worst morning commute: Wednesday
- Weekday with least traffic: Monday
- Best weekday commuting hour: Friday, 6 to 7 a.m.
- Best weekday afternoon: Monday

• Nine in 10 see rising gas prices causing family hardship

A recent Associated Press-Yahoo! news poll showed that 90% of those surveyed are expecting soaring gas prices to squeeze them financially over the next six months. Nearly half think that the hardship will be serious. To cope, most are driving less and finding ways to save money elsewhere, according to the poll. Half are cutting back on vacation plans; nearly as many are considering buying cars that burn less gas. Two-thirds say they consider gas prices an extremely important issue, almost as much as the economy and more than health care and Iraq as the country's most distressing problem. The poll has tracked the same 2,000 people since last fall to see how their views change during the presidential campaign.



• How long do you have to work for a tank of gas?

You may think about how much you have to drive to get to work—but how much do you have to *work* in order to *drive*? CNN offers a new online calculator that shows you how many hours you have to put in at the office to make enough money to pay for a tank of gas. Try it at cnn.com (or link from metrolinktrains.com).

• Get past issues of CommuteSmart News

CommuteSmart News regularly brings you new ideas for running your rideshare program—catch up on any issues you may have missed by clicking on the "Previous Issues" icon at the top of the newsletter's home page.



Tips & Ideas—How to get free prizes for your rideshare program

During Rideshare Week, Oct. 6-10, when your employees pledge to rideshare at least one day during the week, they'll qualify to win prizes from your local county rideshare agency. All you need to do is distribute pledge cards and turn in any that employees fill in (for details, see [Get Ready for Rideshare Week](#)). As an added incentive, many ETCs like to do an in-house drawing first for prizes that they have provided before sending in the pledge cards for the larger drawing.

"It gives people a double chance to win – once at the office and again in a larger prize drawing," says Judy Leon with Orange County Transportation Authority. "Employees are more likely to turn in a pledge card if they believe they have a good chance of winning something, so work site-sponsored prize drawings really help boost Rideshare Week participation."

Don't worry if you don't have a big budget. Prizes don't have to be lavish to draw employees' attention – and some are even free. Check with management to see if there are any special "perks" you can offer as a prize, like a day off with pay, a better parking spot or leftover company merchandise.

You may also be able to get prizes donated. Here, we offer some tips on how:

- 1. Ask!** No one is going to give you anything unless you ask for it.
- 2. Think locally.** Go to vendors near your work site, such as places employees go for lunch or coffee. The snack shop in your lobby may donate a free lunch. The gift shop in the mini-mall down the street may give a goody basket. Be sure to mention that this is a great way to introduce your employees to their establishment. Emphasize the potential for *repeat business*. Also, let them know that it may be a tax-deductible expense.
- 3. Adjust your mindset.** "You're not begging for something free, you're giving them a chance to promote their business to your employees," says Metro's Donna Blanchard. "Especially if a lot of your employees frequent their place of business, it's their chance to give you something in return."
- 4. Be prepared.** Have a letter available so that when you do ask, you can hand it to them – in marketing, this is the "leave behind," and it's an important step in turning a "maybe" into a "yes." Your letter should include brief information about your Rideshare Week campaign and what they'll get when they contribute, such as "a thank you in our company newsletter that reaches 250 employees at this work site," or "listing of your prize on all flyers." The more you're willing to give them in terms of exposure, the more likely they are to give prizes.
- 5. Follow up.** When you get a prize, be sure to follow through with the exposure you promised—then send them proof along with a letter of thanks. It's a great way to make sure they'll donate again!



Spotlight On... *Reducing employee trips through flexible schedules and compressed workweek programs*

Want to put more muscle into your rideshare program? Flex it! By offering a variable work hours program, you can reduce employee commute trips, ease traffic congestion and improve your average vehicle ridership (AVR) rate.

Unlike most rideshare strategies, variable work hours aren't so much about *how* employees get to work but rather *when*.

Here, we take a look at the two types of these arrangements – flextime and compressed workweeks – and how they can help your rideshare program.

Flextime

Flextime allows employees to flex their work hours so they can avoid traveling at peak traffic times. Employees love it because they can beat traffic and better balance work with their home life. Your rideshare program will benefit because flextime means employees can more easily set up ridesharing arrangements – adjusting their work hours so they can catch a commuter bus or train, meet up with a vanpool or coordinate with other carpoolers, including people who may work different shifts or at neighboring companies. People that can't rideshare with a typical schedule often can with flextime.

To keep all these varied schedules from being disruptive to handling business, most companies that offer flextime set "core hours" – designated hours that all employees must be present at the work site. This makes it possible for meetings to be easily scheduled and staff functions to be planned, regardless of whether employees are flexing their hours. Core hours for a typical "nine to five" company might be 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. As long as employees are there during that time, they're free to choose what time they come in and leave, provided they complete their required number of daily or weekly hours.

How much leeway you give employees to flex their hours is...well...flexible!

Compressed Work Schedules

In compressed workweeks, employees work longer hours, fewer days, therefore reducing the number of trips to the office. Some companies offer it as an option for employees; others have a mandatory compressed schedule (such as the South Coast AQMD where employees work 10-hour days Tuesday through Friday and the office is closed on Mondays).

According to the *State of the Commute Report*, 7% - 10% of employees in Southern California say their companies offer some type of compressed work schedule.

There are three types of compressed schedules:

- 4/40 – employees work four 10-hour days (to equal a 40-hour workweek) with one day off a week
- 9/80 – employees work nine nine-hour days, getting a day off every other week
- 3/36 – employees work three 12-hour days (to equal a 40-hour workweek)

Getting Started

If you're interested in offering flextime or compressed workweek scheduling to employees, experts recommend that you introduce it on a trial basis. Keep in mind that not every job lends itself to flextime or compressed workweeks – it's perfectly acceptable to allow some but not all employees to participate.

For more information, contact your rideshare representative (see [Calendar](#) for contact information).



Calendar of Events

EVENTS



Metro Marketing Meeting and Rideshare Week Kickoff is Aug. 19, 9 a.m. to noon. Get a Rideshare Week campaign kit that includes t-shirts, tote bags, posters, pledge cards and more. In addition, learn about Los Angeles's proposed congestion pricing plan, which would convert some carpool lanes to toll lanes. To RSVP, email Donna Blanchard at blancharddd@metro.net

Inland Empire Commuter Services' Rideshare Week kickoff is Aug. 19, from 11 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. at Victoria Gardens Cultural Center. The theme is "The Amazing Rideshare Challenge," and ETCs will have fun competing in exciting rideshare-themed games and contests. For more information and to RSVP, call 1.866.IECS4HELP.

Orange County Transportation Authority will hold a Rideshare Week kick-off event for employers in September —OCTA will email employers with details, or look for more information in next month's *CommuterSmart News* or contact Judy Leon at OCTA at jleon@octa.net

Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT) International Conference is August 24-27 in Atlanta, GA. For details and registration information, go to actweb.org



Rideshare Week is Oct. 6-10.



NETWORK MEETINGS

Coachella Valley ETC Network meets bi-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.
Glendale TMA meets regularly; call 818.543.7641.

Orange County Network meets regularly; call 714.560.5358 or email commuterconnection@octa.net

Pasadena TMA meets Aug 12; call John Miranda at 818.354.7433.

Riverside County ETC Network meets tri-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.

San Bernardino County ETC Network meets tri-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.

Santa Monica ETC Network meets regularly; call 310.458.8956.

South Bay/Westside TMA meets monthly; contact Christina Corrales at 310.642.0066, email christina_corrales@equityoffice.com

Torrance Transportation Network meets regularly; call Kim Fuentes at 310.784.7902.

Warner Center TMO meets monthly; call 818.716.5520.

TRAINING



• **Metro Commute Services** requires employers to attend a briefing 60 days prior to their AQMD submittal date. Upcoming briefings are Aug. 13 from 1-3 p.m. and Sept. 10 from 9:30 - 11:30 a.m. For more information or to reserve a space, email blancharddd@metro.net

• **South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD)** offers one-day ETC training for \$61.70. Upcoming sessions are Aug. 6 and Sept. 4 at AQMD offices in Diamond Bar, Aug. 21 in Los Angeles and Sept. 17 in Riverside. Contact Lisa Van Sornsen, vansornsen@aqmd.gov or the AQMD's training program at etctraining@aqmd.gov or visit AQMD at aqmd.gov

COMMUTESMART NEWS

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