

Literature review: Transportation options for employers dealing with transit/commuting issues

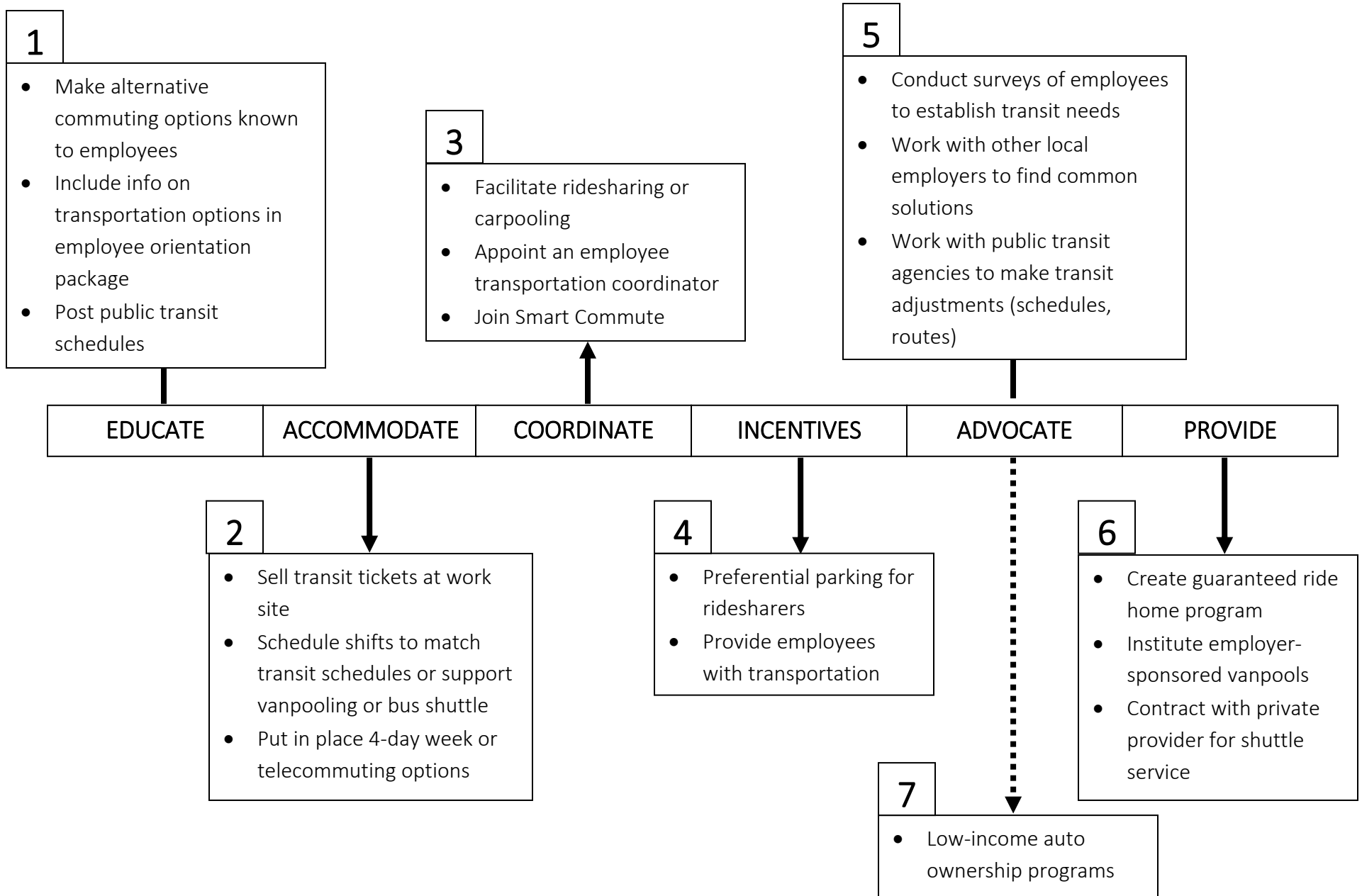
Peel Halton Workforce Development Group

Introduction

This literature review explores best practices responding to the challenge of transportation barriers affecting employers who employ lower-paid workers in locations poorly-served by public transit.

Several years ago, the Peel Halton Workforce Development Group investigated this topic and produced the schema on the following page of potential solutions, placing them along a spectrum from lower-investment to higher-investment responses. This schema provides a framework for the presentation of the findings of this literature review, as follows:

Educate, Accommodate, and Coordinate	Incentivize	Advocate and Provide
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The benefits of more commuting options• Having a transportation coordinator• Providing information on transportation options• Partnering with local transit• Workers with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transportation vouchers and transit passes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vanpooling• Shuttle and route extensions• Private/micro services• Guaranteed Ride Home Program



Educate, Accommodate, and Coordinate

Employers who inform and incentivize their employees to choose alternative transit options will have workers who get to work quicker, cheaper, and more easily, increasing productivity and employee satisfaction.

The benefits of more commuting options

Commuter benefit programs help retain lower wage employees who might be struggling to afford the trip to work, whereas the cost of hiring new employees in that labour category may be more difficult. It reduces employee absenteeism and late arrivals and reduces the stress involved in finding their way to work for lower-wage employees. It increases employee retention because it gives them an assured and cheap way to get to work on time. Employers also save on overhead costs associate with maintaining and expanding on-site parking for employees by encouraging shared rides to work. (CTAA Transportation Toolkit, Fact Sheet #1)

Having a transportation coordinator

Some states (Washington and California) and some local governments require large business to have an employee transportation coordinator (ETC) on staff. ETC's perform several tasks, including:

- Providing commuting information to co-workers via newsletters, e-mails, workplace displays, websites, and hiring materials, as well as through orientations and other in-person meetings;
- Facilitating transportation needs of people with disabilities or employees with limited English proficiency;
- Coordinating ridesharing services such as carpools and vanpools or company car-sharing programs;
- Providing information on other commute options, such as walking, biking, or alternative work schedules;
- Updating local transportation providers about how the company can be better served;
- Coordinating with transportation providers to market their services at the work site;
- Facilitating the purchasing and distribution of bus passes, vouchers, and so on.

In 1991, the state of Washington incorporated the Commute Trip Reduction Law into its Clean Air Act. This law requires all employers with more than 100 full-time workers who begin work between 6:00 and 9:00 a.m. at least two days a week to designate an ETC. The law applies to employers in counties with populations of 150,000 or more. To help companies comply with the law, counties impacted by the Commute Trip Reduction Law provided ETC training. The state recognized that the costs of training transportation coordinators was well worth the benefit of

being able to offer employees better commuting options. (CTAA Transportation Toolkit, Fact Sheet #4)

Providing information on transit options

Employers can provide information on transit options to their employees in the following ways:

- Display bus and rail maps, schedules, and phone numbers of transit services in frequently accessed on-site locations;
- Include this information in new employee orientation packets;
- Promote commuting information via company newsletters, e-mails, workplace displays, websites, and hiring materials;
- Suggest that public transportation providers exhibit at job fairs where the business is also exhibiting (this can also be done at temp agencies).

(CTAA Transportation Toolkit, Fact Sheet #2)

Partnering with local transit

To best serve their employees, employers should partner with local transit to help make the commute to work as quick and as stress free as possible. This involves understanding the commuting issues of their workforce. Employers should:

- Survey employees to learn commuting patterns and needs and discuss with local transportation provider/local business community to best provide for local transportation needs;
- Offer employees incentives to join ride-share, carpool, vanpool options;
- Designate a contact person for employees on commuting issues (ETC).

(CTAA Transportation Toolkit, Fact Sheet #2)

Workers with Disabilities

Employers should acknowledge that an increasing number of employees are workers with disabilities. Those with disabilities need transportation accommodations when they either cannot drive themselves or cannot use regularly scheduled transit services.

Solutions:

- Encourage ridesharing via carpool or vanpool for employees with disabilities who may not be able to use public transportation or whose work shift do not correspond with public transportation schedules;

- Provide preferential parking whenever possible;
- Possible need for flexible work hours/shift schedules to correspond with paratransit services.

(CTAA Transportation Toolkit, Fact Sheet #3)

Case Study showing a commuter first program by Apple

Apple Commute Alternatives Program, Apple Inc.: Apple pays \$100 per month of personal bus, train, light rail, vanpool, and other transit costs through its Commute Alternatives Program. Apple supports employees who bicycle, walk, or run to work by providing lockers and showers. Apple maintains a web database of addresses and work schedules for those interested in ridesharing. Apple also connects to regional transit providers: Caltrain, ACE train and VTA light rail with 16 passenger shuttles, further extending the regions transit network. In addition to supporting commuter choice through the Commute Alternatives Program, Apple implemented commuter shuttle service to transport personnel between strategic points in the Bay Area and its Cupertino campus.

Incentivize

Giving employees incentives often increases public transit use, and makes it easier for employees who are struggling to afford the commute to work get to work stress- and cost-free.

Transportation Vouchers and Transit Passes

Vouchers and Transit Passes can encourage employees who otherwise wouldn't take public transit to do so, and can make it easier on employees who are struggling to afford the commute to work. Some options include:

- Vouchers can be given as tickets or coupons for public transit use, or in the form of incentives to use van or car pool;
- Monthly transit passes (presto credit could be an option);
- Employee IDs as transit passes.

(CTAA Transportation Toolkit, Fact Sheet #9)

Case Study related to incentivizing public transit use:

Transit Tax Benefit Program, Barnes Jewish and St. Louis Children's Hospital, St. Louis Regional Transit: The passes offer unlimited travel for employees commuting to the hospital via MetroBus or MetroLink during the month of purchase. The organization offers a \$20 subsidiary; employees who purchase a monthly metro pass by payroll deduction are eligible to receive a discount. Over

50 percent of hospital employees participate, including many who travel from rural communities outside of the St. Louis and Illinois area. In addition, the hospital operates a shuttle system that travels between local transit stations and the campus. One shuttle is dedicated to transporting patient families to and from the hospital.

Advocate and Provide

The next step for employers is to advocate for the use of programs such as vanpooling (providing the space and information, a service or person to coordinate drivers and riders, helping with costs, etc.) and providing other services, such as shuttle and route extensions, or other micro-transit services.

Vanpooling

Vanpooling is becoming an increasingly efficient and popular way of commuting to work. Vanpool programs split the costs across many stakeholders, help co-workers get to know each other, and remove much of the stress of figuring out the commute to work.

Three types of arrangements:

1. Employer-sponsored and operated
2. Third-party vanpool programs
3. Driver-owned and operated

Encourage Ridesharing:

- On-site matching forum to facilitate the creation of vanpools/carpools. Could include a bulletin board, electronic e-mail, phone app, list-serve communication system, employee transportation coordinator (ETC), third-party rideshare brokerage; (in the GTA, there exists Smart Commute, that serves some of these functions);
- Paying part or all the cost of the vanpool expenses;
- Distribute information on the benefits;
- Financial incentives for those who participate in ridesharing programs;
- Company leaders using ridesharing programs;
- On-site company vehicle.

Steps for putting in place a vanpooling service:

1. Recruit riders
2. Approve and train drivers
3. Determine routes
4. Collect monthly fees
5. Establish:

- The number of passengers, length of trip, insurance, gas, parking fees, and third-party fees, if applicable, which will determine the actual cost per passenger. All costs are split equally among riders; the driver usually travels for free (from Fact Sheet: Strength in Numbers)
6. Develop tools for marketing, monitoring, and maintaining the program.

This is a list of points pulled straight from the fact sheet on vanpooling etiquette:

- Decide beforehand who will drive and when to meet
- Decide on payment policy and amount
- Set up a line of communication. If someone cannot make it on a given day, letting the driver know in advance, if possible. Don't forget to also give notice of vacation, personal leave, or overtime plans
- Have a back-up plan in place for emergency situations. Designate an alternative driver in case of illness or emergencies
- Respect each passenger's time. Establish a rule for latecomers by deciding how long to wait for a passenger
- Choose a mutually convenient meeting place— either someone's home or a central location such as a park-and-ride lot near public transportation
- Decide whether unscheduled stops will be allowed
- Decide ahead of time about smoking, eating, drinking, and other personal preferences
- Check insurance coverage—some auto insurance policies offer rate reductions for ridesharing
- Keep the ridesharing vehicle well serviced, full of gas, and clean
- Establish a method of payment that includes a payment policy if the rider is absent
- Keep little things in mind – for example people are sensitive to certain smells, so consider the proximity of other riders before applying perfume or cologne

Case studies related to Vanpool programs

Ben Franklin Transit, Benton and Franklin counties, South Central Washington State - Vanpool program services Tri-Cities area around Columbia River and a major economic corridor on the border near Oregon. One of the biggest needs for the area was that they needed to move hundreds of workers to the major employment sites located outside of traditional fixed transit routes. Good case study to consider when thinking about a rural vanpooling service. Case study shows the commitment of the State of Washington once the vanpooling service could show that it filled a need. Vanpooling programs extended to other underserved areas.

Baldwin Rural Area Transit, Baldwin County, Alabama: Vanpool program to service commuters traveling from rural county areas to Mobile, Alabama, the county seat. Several types of vanpools to spread out costs. Connected multiple counties over time via vanpool services. Many vanpool

services upgraded to commuter route service after increased use over time. The service contracted with larger employers along another corridor of the state to run vanpools to those destinations.

Coastal Georgia Regional Development Center, Brunswick, Georgia: Low-cost commute option for employees traveling from outlying areas to work. Many workers traveling from second- and third-tier counties, across county lines, to employment centres. Supported through state and federal financing, costs paid for by both riders and employers, regional employers also contribute by providing local matching funds. Georgia Department of Transportation grant provides capital funding for the vans. Employee/driver has free use of the van for private travel, and the cost of the ride for that individual is free. They drive employees within their area.

Commuteride, Ada County, Idaho: Currently, 83 routes serve more than 900 participants. Participation is prearranged, with riders sharing the cost of the vehicle and its operation by paying an equitable monthly fare. Commuteride oversees all maintenance and insurance, and it provides a fuel card to pay for gasoline. Van drivers are members of the vanpool, and many of them ride for free. Most routes either begin or end in rural communities. New vanpool members ride for free during their first month. Vanpool members are not obligated to continue if they decide not to do so. Those who do are eligible for a \$20 subsidy in the form of a Transi-Chek for each of the first three months following the month they ride for free. Commuteride provides Transi-Cheks to area employers at no cost to encourage them to promote vanpooling by their employees. In addition, full-time monthly riders may qualify for a \$10-per-month rebate that is awarded quarterly. Some participating employers offer preferential vanpool parking and other incentives to encourage their employees to share rides to work.

Easy Street, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island: Over the years, the program has recruited many loyal riders. Some Easy Street riders have commuted together for more than 15 years, and the camaraderie among passengers encourages ongoing participation. Many passengers have been known to celebrate birthdays and other occasions with their fellow riders. Even considering fluctuating fuel costs and economic concerns, interest in the program remains strong. Rideshare's ongoing marketing to employers has increased the number of companies offering transportation benefits to workers who share rides to work. According to Nanci Fitzgerald, Rideshare's vice president of business development, the program's turnkey nature enhances its attractiveness to employers. Because Rideshare is responsible for all program operations, employers find the program easy to use. On-site marketing and educating potential participants about the benefits of vanpooling have also contributed to the program's growing success.

Intercity Transit's Vanpool Programs, Olympia, Washington: In addition to traditional vanpool service, the agency supports two other programs, Connectivity Vans and Village Vans. These programs provide access to employment and community services to populations that may otherwise lack affordable transportation options. Community Vans provides retired vans to human service organizations and government agencies located in the transit service area for use

to transport workers, volunteers, and customers. Village Vans assists low-income citizens with transportation to jobs or job search locations.

Job Lift, Clallam County, Washington: Job Lift manages three fixed-route vanpools and provides access to jobs and training for low-wage workers living in the remote community. One vanpool travels to and from the Hoh Reservation, located about 50 miles from Forks, transporting people to and from work in the city. The second vanpool takes workers to and from La Push, about 15 miles from Forks. Both vanpools operate five days per week. A third vanpool travels different routes, including transporting seasonal (summer) youth workers to job sites seven days per week, transporting employment and training program participants to Port Townsend once per month and transporting college students to job skills training classes. OlyCAP actively promotes the Job Lift program throughout the community and assists with driver recruitment. Staff members work with employers to promote ridership at the employment sites. In addition, staff members receive and screen all rider applications and conduct the training for each rider once the trip has been established.

(CTAA Transportation Toolkit, Fact Sheets, Conrick, “Vanpools: A Viable Option in Rural Regions”, CTAA Fact Sheet, Innovative Vanpool Programs, Friedman, “Vanpooling Comes to Tulsa”, Bogren, “Taking a Closer Look at Commuting”)

Private/Micro services

Started as private sector intra-community mobility for technology companies in the Silicon Valley. Shuttle operation became substantial enough that it required routes and schedules, and connected to the existing public services in the area. Next step was the increasingly specialized services that were more flexible and individual than they were collective and fixed. Uber, Lyft, and then Bridj, an app for on-demand, curb-to-curb service in a mini-bus shared with between five to 12 other riders. Takes advantage of the same tech that powers Uber and Lyft (and who have since incorporated similar services – UberPool and LyftLine). Industry adaptations include connector service to fixed transit routes.

(Sampson, “Micro-Transit: A Bigger Impact Than Its Name Suggests”)

Shuttle and Route Extensions

- Communicate with local transit provider about where workers travel from, the different shifts they work, where workers need to get to.
- Collaborate with other businesses and the local transit agency to provide transit service to a business hub.
 - o Simplifying the bus route to offer an express route to an industrial park/area eliminating the need to make transfers and makes getting to work less stressful

- Facilitate links to Public transit stops via shuttle buses
- Express buses to transport employees in hard to reach areas or at unsupported times – coordinate with local transit
- Employers contributing local matching dollars to launch services like these
- The Swan Island Evening Shuttle program is an example of a shuttle and route extension program:
 - o Swan Island Evening Shuttle program provided connections to public transit for swing and graveyard shift workers. Companies on the island contracted a private company to operate the shuttle when TriMet didn't operate so that they could get their 2nd and 3rd shift workers to work easily. The costs were offset by groups of employers coming together to arrange for these programs and worked with public transit providers to arrange times/logistics.

Extensive case study related to creating shuttle and route extensions

NJ Transit and Amazon:

The challenges that the industrial area faced:

- The mismatch between labor market origins, public transportation and job destinations
- Travel to the facility was not seamless
- Travel to the facility was expensive
- Informal carpools are often not dependable
- Long, difficult commutes caused difficulties in arranging for child care

Designing Customer-Responsive Solutions

While conducting research relevant to their project, team members met with industrial park employers human resource staff to learn about the challenges they faced in recruiting and retaining workers. Concurrently, the Mercer County One-Stop Career Center worked to connect those interested in working at the facility with jobs.

Following the Institute, Amazon became one of the major employers housed at the newly constructed Matrix Business Park. Recognizing the need for dependable transportation access to the site, NJ Transit, Mercer County, and Amazon partnered to design a shuttle service which now picks up riders at an existing [NJ Transit](#) stop and transports them to the industrial park. Amazon contributed a substantial financial amount to support shuttle operations and matching funds from a NJ Transit Job Access and Reverse Commute ensured its operation for two years.

In addition, NJ Transit adjusted specific bus schedules to improve connectivity with the free shuttle, providing a more cost effective round trip for anyone who can access the stop. Expanded services include early morning and more frequent weekend service to meet the commuting

needs of shift workers. Expanded services also provide additional access to Hamilton Square, where many large retailers are located.

The shuttle operates 7 days a week, in the morning and evening hours. The shuttle makes three runs each way, 35 to 50 minutes apart. As Amazon continued its hiring, ridership on the line continued to expand. A second line was added to accommodate increased ridership.

Prior to the ZLine, workers relied on informal carpools or cabs to transport them from Hamilton Square to the industrial park. Cab fare for the five-mile ride averaged \$20-\$25. The ride is now free, a significant savings to workers earning less than \$15 per hour.

Case Study related to shuttle and route extension

Bluegrass Industrial Park Transportation Options, Louisville, Kentucky: Establishing the bus route eliminated the necessity for commuters to make three bus transfers to reach the area from the city. Brochures publicizing the routes were distributed to employers, and TARC held meetings with community agencies, workforce board members and employers in the industrial park to encourage referrals. The express route now operates during peak hours, making 10 runs from the central business district to the park. Approximately 200 commuters daily use the service to access the park. In addition, one local circulator operates within the industrial park and workers can use a free transfer from the express route to ride it. The circulator operates about 6 hours a day, traveling from one central location to multiple stops within the park.

(CTAA Transportation Toolkit, Fact Sheet; Friedman, “Meeting complex job access solutions with community partnerships”)

Guaranteed Ride Home Program

A guaranteed ride home program can ensure that in the event of an emergency, employees who carpooled or used public transportation to work would be able to travel to where they needed to go. It is also available for people who have unexpectedly needed to stay late at work and have missed their ride home.

GRH Programs:

7. Require employees to commute other than by driving their car alone a minimum number of times per week to qualify
8. Use taxi or rental car, costs covered by the employer. Employee pays and is reimbursed or the sponsoring agency/employer covers the cost
9. Employers could also pay a small annual base to the transit provider to allow their employees to participate in a GRH program
10. Vouchers to cover the cost of the ride home or small cash on hand to pay for the ride

(CTAA Transportation Toolkit, Fact Sheet #13)

Further Reading/Sources cited

CTAA (2012), “Transportation Toolkit for the Business Community” A series of fact sheets on commuting solutions for businesses.

<http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles//anmviewer.asp?a=1442&z=5>

Fact sheets used in this document: Fact Sheet #1, Employee Commuter Benefits; Fact Sheet #2, The Power of Partnerships; Fact Sheet #3, Workers with Disabilities; Fact Sheet #4, Transportation Coordinators; Fact Sheet #9, Transportation Vouchers and Transit Passes; Fact Sheet #13, Guaranteed Ride Home Programs; Fact Sheet, Shuttles and Route Extensions; Fact Sheet, Strength in Numbers: Why Employers Should Encourage Vanpooling; Fact Sheet, Investing in Vanpools; and Fact Sheet, Vanpooling Etiquette; Fact Sheet, Innovative Vanpool Programs; Fact Sheet, Success Stories.

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