



Commuter Friendly Employer



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Dear employer partners,

The Wilmington urban area – including New Hanover County and portions of Brunswick and Pender counties – is home to about 300,000 people. Since 2010, the population has grown by nearly 44,000. This growth, has increased traffic congestion on our roadways, which affects air quality, health, and wellbeing. Employers can play a critical role in mitigating roadway congestion by utilizing Transportation Demand Management strategies.

What is TDM? Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies include policies and programs to support the use of transportation options other than just driving alone. TDM strategies encourage bicycling, walking, public transportation, telework and alternative work schedules, and carpooling, for example. These commuter-friendly choices made by area employers can help make offset traffic congestion and provide employers the following benefits:

- ▶ Increased employee recruitment and retention
- ▶ Enhanced workplace culture and employee work/life balance
- ▶ Advancement for organizational goals regarding sustainability, health, and social responsibility
- ▶ Reduction in payroll taxes with employee pre-tax benefit transportation incentive

Commuter Friendly Strategies: Go Coast, a program of the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) which encourages and supports alternative transportation options, has developed this toolkit for employers on commuter solutions.

Thank you for considering alternative transportation and the implementation of TDM strategies at your organization. For any questions, please reach out to gocoast@wilmingtonnc.gov. The Go Coast team is happy to assist you with your commuting needs!

Thank you,

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Attachments

All files below are included in the toolkit folder.

Attachment 1: Model Telework / Alternative Work Schedule Policy

Attachment 2: Sample Carpool Matching Spreadsheet

Attachment 3: Sample Email

Attachment 4: Sample PowerPoint Slides

Attachment 5: Go Coast Commuter Friendly Employer - Recognition Program Criteria

The Benefits of Being Commuter Friendly

Your organization can observe many benefits by supporting employee transportation options with policies, internal communications, and other programs. By encouraging and supporting the use of alternative transportation, your organization can:

▶ **Save money for the organization and employees.**

Car ownership costs including gas and maintenance from regular wear-and-tear can add up quickly. Using alternative transportation or teleworking even one day a week can save employees some money.

Additionally, under federal law (26 U.S. Code § 132), an employer may provide (or withhold) up to \$300/month (2023) and increasing to \$315/month in 2024 for qualified transit and vanpool expenses. This reduces payroll taxes, and provides tax incentives to provide employee savings.

▶ **Advance organizational goals.**

Does your organization have a commitment to sustainability, social responsibility, safety, or wellness? Supporting alternative transportation can tie into action steps for many of these goals.

▶ **Improve regional environmental quality.**

Using alternative transportation can help take cars off the road, improving everybody's commute time. This reduces idling in traffic, and saves greenhouse gases from entering our atmosphere. When our air quality improves, we can all breathe a little easier, and feel good about doing something for the planet.

▶ **Improve employee work/life balance.**

The average commute time in the Wilmington urban area is 20 minutes each way. Many people's commutes might be even longer.

There are several options employees can take to get some time back in their day: eliminating the commute altogether by teleworking; commuting at off-peak times for a quicker commute with alternative work schedules; or riding the bus/carpooling to spend time doing other activities like responding to emails, reading, socializing, or napping.

Employees who use active commutes such as biking or walking can leverage their commute time as exercise time, improving health and wellness.

▶ **Increased employee recruitment and retention**

By utilizing TDM strategies, your organization can help improve employee satisfaction to decrease turnover, or attract new candidates.

Transportation Fringe Benefits

Commuter benefits, or Transportation Fringe Benefits, refer to pre-tax payroll contributions to fund eligible commuting activities, including the purchase of transit passes, or in employee vanpooling.

Under federal law (26 U.S. Code § 132), an employer may provide (or withhold) up to \$300/month (2023) and increasing to \$315/month in 2024 for qualified transit and vanpool expenses.

Employers incur no cost in offering the pre-tax benefit, and programs can be very easy to set up and administer. This option is similar to flexible spending accounts that many employers utilize. Benefits may be provided to employees directly or via reimbursement. For more information, please read:

<https://www.irs.gov/publications/p15b>.

Employers may be interested supporting employee transit usage by providing benefits to cover the cost of passes for Wave Transit. For example, a 10-ride pass costs \$20 and a 31-day pass costs \$80. Employers may consider purchasing monthly passes for employees who may ride the bus daily, or reimbursing for purchases of 10-ride passes for those who may ride less frequently. Please note these multi-ride passes are not valid as RideMICRO one-way passes; RideMICRO fares are paid separately.

Additional fare and pass information for Wave Transit can be found at: www.wavetransit.com/fare-pass-information.

More options may be available for developing transportation benefit programs, please email Go Coast at gocoast@wilmingtonnc.gov.

Transportation Options

Teleworking

Teleworking (or telecommuting) is working remotely from a location other than the regular worksite, such as working from home. About 50% of the U.S. full-time workforce report that their current job can be done working from home, at least part of the time, according to a [2022 Gallup poll](#).

Benefits

Telecommuting reduces transportation expenses for employees, provides more convenience, and can increase productivity and job satisfaction. Offering telecommuting options can also help increase staff recruitment or retention. [80 percent](#) of those able to work from home want to do so at least one day per week. This also eliminates a daily commute to keep a car off the road, contributing to environmental benefits of reduced traffic congestion and improved air quality. In 2018, US workers spent an average [54 minutes](#) per day commuting to and from work, so teleworking can give employees time back in their day for additional work-life balance.

Potential Challenges

Telecommuting can create additional technical and administrative responsibilities, or some employees may find telecommuting to be isolating when staff coverage and interaction are reduced.

Potential Solutions

Many employers offer a *hybrid* system of working, where employees may request a schedule that is composed of some days of remote work and some in-office. This way employees can still benefit from teleworking while being plugged into the office and company environment. A model policy is attached as Attachment 1 in the toolkit folder.

Transportation Options

Alternative Work Schedules

Alternative work schedules allow employees to work a schedule other than the traditional 8am-5pm Monday-Friday schedule. This way, demand for roadways may be spread a little thinner than across the “peak” travel times of 8am and 5pm, and distribute traffic more evenly outside of those peak travel hours. This can in turn reduce vehicle idle time to improve traffic and air quality.

For job positions where teleworking is not an option, alternative work schedules are a great way to offer more flexibility to increase employee recruitment and retention.

Types of Alternative Work Schedules

This could look like **flextime**, when employees may flex their work hours within a day, such as working 7:30-4, or 9-5:30. Employers may use this scheduling for staggered shifts to ensure that staff coverage needs are met with these varying schedules.

Alternatively, some employees may opt for a **compressed work week**, working fewer but longer days, such as four 10-hour days per week, or 9-hour days with one day off every two weeks.

Benefits

Alternative work schedules could provide greater work-life balance for employees, particularly those who may have childcare responsibilities, are transit-reliant and must schedule around bus arrival times, have a long commuting distance, or other needs.

Potential Challenges

Working longer days may be tiring to an employee and slow their productivity at the end of a long day, and may result in reduced staff coverage, for example, on Fridays. Additionally, alternative work schedules could offer challenges with scheduling meetings.

Potential Solutions

Employers may choose to offer **staggered shifts** where some shifts begin at one time, then others begin an hour later, for example. By staggering employee arrival time, employers can mitigate impacts of traffic-related pressures and delays and ensure coverage of responsibilities around the clock. A model policy is attached as Attachment 1 in the toolkit folder.

Transportation Options

Public Transportation

Public transportation in the Wilmington urban area is provided by Wave Transit, also known as the Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority. Wave Transit offers services to the public including fixed-route buses, RideMICRO on-demand vans, and accessible paratransit. Generally, buses run Monday through Friday from 6:00am-8:00pm, Saturdays 8:00am-6:00pm, and Sundays 9:00am-5:00pm. For information including maps, schedules, and fares, visit Wave's website at: www.wavetransit.com.

Fixed-Route Bus Service

Wave Transit operates fixed-route bus service, meaning that buses stay along a marked route and serve designated stops at scheduled times, within the city of Wilmington and the Monkey Junction area. There are 12 routes open to the public with service provided at least hourly; some buses run every 30 minutes. Each fixed-route vehicle is equipped with bike racks on the front for riders bringing their bicycles. All buses are wheelchair accessible with audible announcements for major stops.

RideMICRO

RideMICRO is Wave Transit's microtransit system, meaning that on-demand passenger vans in specified zones can bring riders to their destination. There are pickup/dropoff points in northern Brunswick County, southern Pender County, and southern and northern New Hanover County. RideMICRO is intended to bring riders from these four zones into the fixed-route service area, to extend the range of bus service.

Dial-A-Ride Transportation (DART)

DART is Wave Transit's paratransit program, meaning that accessible vans provide service to eligible riders with disabilities who are unable to utilize fixed-route service. DART provides curb-to-curb, origin to destination service within 3/4 of a mile of any fixed bus route.

How Employers Can Support Public Transportation Usage

Employers can accommodate transit riders by allowing for alternative work schedules responsive to a bus schedule. If your workplace is served by a transit route, you can check bus arrival times and allow employees flexibility within reason for if their bus is late or there is a missed trip. Check for Wave Transit's bus maps and schedules at: www.wavetransit.com/fixed-route-bus-schedule.

Employers may also be interested in subsidizing transit passes for their employees to offset transit costs (similar to how parking permit costs are often covered by employers). If interested, please email Go Coast at gocoast@wilmingtonnc.gov.

Transportation Options

Carpooling

To help reduce traffic congestion, share a car when possible with friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers. Carpoolers can split transportation costs, save wear and tear on personal vehicles, and use time not driving to socialize, work, or relax.

Park and Ride Lots

Park and ride lots are intended for commuters who carpool, vanpool, or utilize public transportation. These are designated parking spaces where you can park your car during your work hours while sharing a ride with others to your work location.

Carpoolers are encouraged to get permission to utilize safe and convenient parking locations such as shopping centers and public office spaces.

Vanpooling

Vanpooling is an organized effort eligible for groups of 5-15 commuters. The employer or employees pay a monthly fare for the service, in which approved drivers operate 7- to 15-passenger vans for the group; drivers may take turns to share driving responsibilities.

If your organization would like to implement a vanpool for you and your co-workers, please email Go Coast at gocoast@wilmingtonnc.gov to be added to an interest list.

How Employers Can Support Carpooling

HR departments can be utilized for facilitating ridematching among employees who live close together or along a similar corridor. See attached sample spreadsheet, Attachment 2, that can be used for collecting interested parties' information. Employers may also be interested in providing priority parking spots (such as those closest to the building) for carpoolers.

Transportation Options

Bicycling and Walking

Bicycling and walking are free/low-cost options for those who live close enough to work to do so. There are many miles of multi-use paths, sidewalks, and bike lanes within the WMPO boundary, including the Gary Shell Cross City Trail, Central College Road Trail, and Island Greenway. The WMPO provides maps of bicycle and pedestrian facilities at: wmpo.org/maps.

Encouraging bicycle and pedestrian safety is a top priority for our region, which is constantly ranked as one of the most dangerous in North Carolina. Go Coast promotes the [Be A Looker](#) campaign, which has safety tips for drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians on keeping those who bike and walk safe.

How Employers Can Support Bicycling and Walking

Employers can provide or publicize access to onsite bike racks, or allow employees to store their bicycles inside of work buildings. Active commuters may need access to shower facilities, so if your worksite has showers, consider allowing access to those who bike and walk to work.

Additionally, employers may consider incentivizing bicycling and walking with financial incentives, credits towards HRA/HSA accounts, or a reduction of medical healthcare premiums. For example, at the City of Wilmington, employees and their spouses covered by a City medical plan who report quarterly completion of wellness activities can earn up to \$200/year each, and children can earn \$25/year each. Incentives are paid into the employee's Health Reimbursement Account or Health Savings Account at the first quarter of the following fiscal year.

Email / Presentation Templates

Sample Email

HR, communications, sustainability departments, or others may be interested in sending out email messages to employees regarding their transportation options. Below is sample text which may be used to draft such messages. This text shown below is included as an editable Word document within this toolkit's folder, Attachment 3.

Dear employees,

Fighting traffic can be draining. Fortunately, there are solutions. If you'd like to consider switching up your commute to beat traffic, read on about what [ORGANIZATION] supports:

- **Teleworking** - See [POLICY] for more information about working from home.
- **Alternative work schedules** - Change start/end times to commute at off-peak times when traffic is lower, with supervisor approval. See [POLICY].
- **Public transportation** - Leave the driving to someone else and ride Wave Transit. Our worksite is served by [ROUTE]. For more information, visit wavetransit.com. You can even request customized commuter training. Fares are \$2 each way.
- **Carpooling** - share driving costs with someone going your direction. Contact HR to be added to the carpool ride-matching interest list.
- **Bicycling/walking** - If you live close enough, take advantage of [FACILITY] to get to work and get some exercise and fresh air at the same time.

For questions about your commute options, respond to this email. We're happy to connect you to someone who can help you get the most out of your commute.

Sample PowerPoint Slides

New employee orientations may benefit from having commuter information included. Feel free to utilize information from the slides in this toolkit folder during orientations, staff meetings, or at other times to provide transportation information to employees. Sample slides are included in the toolkit folder as Attachment 4.

Go Coast staff create customized commuter plans and are happy to provide customized information about alternative transportation to your worksite(s), including relevant bus routes, nearby bicycle and pedestrian facilities, applicable Park and Ride locations, and other information. Contact us via email at gocoast@wilmingtonnc.gov to request a customized commuter plan.

Employer Recognition

Go Coast's Commuter Friendly Employer Program

If your organization is offering transportation benefits to employees, apply for Go Coast's recognition program today!

The Commuter Friendly Employer official designation demonstrates an employer's commitment to improving employee culture, regional traffic congestion, and local air and water quality. Go Coast recognizes designees on the Go Coast website, publications and newsletters, and on social media. Receiving a designation can be a useful opportunity to attract and retain employees, to demonstrate work towards internal goals for sustainability and health, and to show commitment to employee work-life balance.

Go Coast's Commuter Friendly Employer program recognizes employers who support alternative transportation commutes with a three-tier recognition program. Review the attached criteria, Attachment 5, and apply for Gold, Silver, or Bronze status.

Feel free to use the criteria as inspiration for employing commuter friendly strategies at your workplace!