

# Alternative Transportation Incentives

*Improve employee health and cut emissions by encouraging carless commutes*



## The Impact

Cash incentives can encourage employees to walk, bike, take public transportation and carpool to and from work. By reducing the number of employees commuting to work in single-occupancy vehicles, employers can slash transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions and significantly reduce their emissions.

Active forms of transportation such as biking and walking are much healthier than driving and can lead to greater workplace productivity, reduced absenteeism and/or employer health care costs. Transportation incentives also make employees feel valued, which helps employee recruitment and retention. A further benefit is a reduction in parking infrastructure costs if most employees elect to commute without a car.

## Description

Employers can offer alternative transportation incentives to encourage employees to try carless commutes. Incentives can be offered after an employee has commuted for a set number of days in a given time period, and these incentives can be administered through commute tracking platforms such as RideAmigos and Luum. These platforms verify that commuters are actually using alternative transportation modes and also offer insightful data and analytics. Program managers can easily see what modes of transport are the most popular and get a breakdown of the estimated, corresponding environmental impacts and cost savings.

## Where It's Been Implemented

The SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory (SLAC), located in Menlo Park, Calif., is a Stanford-affiliated national lab that conducts cutting-edge scientific research. The roughly 1,600 employees at the lab are mostly scientists and researchers. At SLAC, Jane Davaransky spearheaded the SLAC Active Commuting Healthy Work Environment group to encourage alternative commutes by offering quarterly \$120 incentives to employees who walked, biked, carpooled or rode public transit to work 15 times in that time period (roughly 1.2 times a week).

In its first year, the program prompted participants to collectively log 3,900 alternative trips to and from work, which reduced 16.3 tons of carbon dioxide emissions and saved the participants an

estimated \$24,000. A 2020 analysis showed 45 percent of the logged commutes were bike commutes, with the rest of the commutes evenly split between work-from-home, carpool/vanpool and public transit. Many participants reported less-stressful commutes and appreciated the chance to get to know other commuters in the program.

Commute.org supports employers in San Mateo County in finding ways to encourage employees to switch to more sustainable transportation methods. The organization offers two commuter support services. They provide a free, first-last mile service to transit stations (BART, Caltrain, and SF Bay Ferry), workplaces, hospitals, schools, and residential areas throughout San Mateo County. The shuttle schedule and trip planner are available online. Commute.org has also started its own Rewards program, which allows San Mateo County residents to earn up to \$100 per year in e-gift cards by logging sustainable mode commutes (carpool, vanpool, or bike).

Commute.org is a joint powers agency (JPA) located in San Mateo County, Calif. The JPA comprises 19 cities and towns as well as San Mateo County. Funding for Commute.org programs is provided by the San Mateo County Transportation Authority (TA), C/CAG of San Mateo, Bay Area Air Quality Management District, and public/private sector contributors to the shuttle program.

### **Key Factors for Success**

A group of employees who are already commuting without cars can serve as great “ambassadors” for others who might be interested in trying an alternative commute if given the right incentives.

### **Key Obstacles**

The lack of convenient, reliable and safe alternative transportation modes can severely limit the effectiveness of an incentive program. Reliable and fast public transit, convenient shuttle services and safe bike lanes are just some of the conditions that are fundamentally needed to make alternative commutes viable and a great alternative to solo driving. However, by providing meaningful commute incentives and recognition, employers can help increase demand for such services and lead to greater community investment in alternative transportation options.

### **Timeline to Implementation**

It took Jane Davaransky three years to start the program on her own at SLAC. After conceiving of the idea for the program in 2014, Jane had to get approval from her superiors, the human resources department and the legal department. She managed to secure funding from the Stanford employee health benefits program and launched the initiative in 2017. The timeline to implementation will vary widely for others depending on existing commuter benefit infrastructure and support from high-level executives.

### **References and Resources**

- Jane Davaransky, former leader of SLAC Active Commuting Healthy Work Environment group, [jddavaransky@fb.com](mailto:jddavaransky@fb.com)
- Rohendra Atapattu, cofounder of SLAC Active Commuting Healthy Work Environment group, Sustainability & Energy Program Manager at SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory, [rohendra@slac.stanford.edu](mailto:rohendra@slac.stanford.edu)
- [Video explaining SLAC’s active commuting program](#) (minute 5:27)
- [Commute.org](https://www.commute.org)

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