

## City of Knoxville Energy & Sustainability Initiative – Smart Trips Program

### Program Overview

The Smart Trips program aims to improve air quality and reduce consumption of fossil fuels by increasing the number of people who carpool, take transit, bike and walk to work or telecommute instead of driving alone. This also reduces the amount of money a household spends on transportation.

A full-time employer outreach coordinator works with area employers to develop trip reduction programs custom designed for a specific worksite. There is also a marketing campaign component designed to reach the general public, and thus promote alternative transportation to a wider audience than would be reached through the employer outreach alone. A website maintained by the TPO provides information on Smart Trips and links to public transportation services, as well as a free ridematching database, and an online database so that participation can be tracked. The employer trip reduction programs reduce traffic congestion and vehicle miles traveled through a variety of strategies including promotion, employee incentives, and parking management. Various events and promotions are held each year. These events are open to all workers in the air quality non-attainment area, and are a way to identify additional worksites to target for year-round programs.

The Smart Trips program has been in existence since 2003 with a part-time coordinator, but greatly expanded in 2005 with the hiring of a full-time coordinator. Currently, 31 employers are participating in Smart Trips programs. Participation varies greatly, from providing free transit passes to just distributing information about the program to employees. The Smart Trips program is funded through CMAQ, Knox County and ALCOA Foundation grants. Emission reductions and cost savings are quantified through an online logging system. Not everyone who uses alternative transportation is able to or wants to log their commutes online, so the benefits Smart Trips can quantify are not complete. During the spring and summer of 2007, Smart Trips held a six-month Commuter Challenge asking motorists to give up their solo commutes to work in exchange for a chance to win one of many prizes. Throughout the Commuter Challenge, participants logged their commutes on our website. Over the six month period, about 350 participants reduced 163 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, 345 kilograms of NO<sub>x</sub>, 413 kilograms of VOCs, and removed 400,000 miles from our area roads.

A comprehensive commute trip reduction program can typically reduce peak-period automobile travel by 10-30% at a worksite. The more incentives a program includes, the more successful it is likely to be. Financial incentives tend to be the most effective, including parking cash outs and free bus passes. Proximity to transit service, shops and public services tends to increase program effectiveness. Some of the benefits of worksite commute trip reduction programs include increased worker productivity, lowered worker stress levels, employee retention, and reduced parking costs for employers.

## City of Knoxville Opportunities

To increase the effectiveness of the Smart Trips program, the City of Knoxville could take several steps. First, as an employer, the City of Knoxville could expand their current participation in the Smart Trips program by offering its employees additional incentives for using alternative transportation, such as reduced rate or free transit passes and financial incentives for participating in carpools, vanpools, or commuting to work by bike or on foot, and being aggressive in promoting the program to employees. (One approach is what Knox County does—participants in the wellness program get 10 points each month for using alternative transportation, and the county pays half the cost of bus passes. MPC pays for the entire bus pass. Another approach would be the Cash for Commuters-type program, where employees get a certain amount of money each day they use alternative transportation. These have been very successful in other communities.)

Second, as a local government, the City of Knoxville could implement city-wide Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies and requirements for employers. TDM requirements and ordinances are in place in many metropolitan areas across the United States including areas such as the County of Durham, NC; state of Arizona; State of Colorado; State of Massachusetts; State of Oregon; Washington, D.C.; New Castle County, DE; Boca Raton, Orlando, and Ft. Lauderdale, FL; Marietta, GA; Hoffman Estates, IL; Montgomery County and North Bethesda, MD; Minneapolis and 494 suburbs, MN; Florham Park, NJ; Austin, TX; Arlington County, Alexandria, and Reston, VA; Sherwood Hills, WI; and ten cities in California. Many of these areas are also non-attainment for air quality. In an effort to improve air quality and regional mobility, these local governments enacted TDM or trip reduction ordinances whereby companies with over a certain amount of employees are required to actively participate in local TDM or trip reduction programs similar to Smart Trips. These ordinances vary by area, but have been proven to be very effective in helping to combat poor air quality and traffic congestion by providing employees with commute option programs and resources. Some of the key components of trip reduction ordinances include mandatory participation in trip reduction programs, such as Smart Trips, for employers who have more than 50 (or 100) employees at one location. The requirements for employer participation vary greatly from program to program. We believe an attainable goal for most companies in the City of Knoxville would be to have 10-15% of their employees participating in the Smart Trips program by using an alternative mode commute two or more days per week. Smart Trips would be able to assist in structuring and implementing programs.

The costs for implementing either strategy would be minimal in comparison to the benefits received by the community: improved air quality, reduced traffic congestion and a better quality of life. Current Smart Trips funding can handle a relative increase in both employer and commuter participation. If the City of Knoxville were to implement some type of trip reduction ordinance, additional funding from the City would be needed to assist the Smart Trips program in helping those employers who are not current participants to implement new programs.