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FEATURE

Coming in April – the Commuter Challenge!

We're gearing up for this year's Commuter Challenge. It's a fun way to encourage your employees to try smarter ways of getting to work.



Starting in April, your employees can visit dontlosethechallenge.com and pledge to take the bus or train, carpool, vanpool, telecommute, bike or walk – anything except drive alone to work. The Commuter Challenge ends June 30.

We'll help you get started

We're planning several kick-off meetings to help companies get ready for the 2009 Commuter Challenge. At the meetings, we'll provide information on how you can get involved. This year, we are creating an enhanced website where your employees can set up their own teams and make wagers against others for a little friendly competition.

We'll also provide updates on other exciting transit and transportation projects, including transit improvements on I-35 and a new program offering employers assistance in creating a telework program.

Thursday, March 12

11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
US Bank Plaza (31st floor)
200 South 6th Street, Minneapolis
Host: Downtown Minneapolis TMO
RSVP at this [website](#).

Wednesday, March 18

11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Landmark Center
75 West 5th Street, St. Paul
Host: St. Paul Smart Trips
RSVP to Damian Goebel, damian@smart-trips.org

Tuesday, April 7

11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
HealthPartners Corporate Offices
8170 33rd Avenue South, Bloomington
Host: 494 Commuter Services
RSVP to Melissa Madison, melissa@494corridor.org, or call (952) 848-4947

If you can't make it to any of these events in your

area, [contact us](#) and let us know that your company is interested in participating in the Commuter Challenge. Thanks!

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Commuters can save even more on cost of taking transit

Workers who participate in employer-sponsored commuter benefits can save even more money on the cost of taking transit, thanks to the Emergency Economic Recovery Act signed into law in February.

The law raises the amount of pretax income – from \$120 per month to a maximum of \$230 per month – that employees can use to pay for transit or vanpool expenses.

Tax-free commuter benefits can be structured as an employee-funded, tax-free payroll deduction; as an employer-funded benefit; or the costs can be shared by employer and employee.

The federal program also allows employees to deduct up to \$230 per month for eligible commuter parking expenses.

Federal commuter tax benefits are available through Section 132 (f) of the federal tax code. Contact your corporate counsel or tax adviser for more details.

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Is your company interested in creating a telework program?

If your company is interested in establishing a telework program, you could get assistance this spring through a federal-state program aimed at improving transit and easing traffic congestion in the Twin Cities.

Minnesota received a \$133 million Urban Partnership Agreement (UPA) grant from the federal government, with \$50.2 million in matching funds from the Minnesota Legislature.

Under the UPA program, project partners agree to use a combination of four strategies to reduce traffic congestion: tolling, transit, telecommuting and technology. The UPA telecommuting component received \$3.5 million in state funding.

Metro Transit and the region's transportation management organizations will be recruiting employers interested in expanding or establishing a telework program for their employees. Watch for more details later this spring or contact your [representative](#) for information.

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GE Capital Solutions Fleet Services



Employees at GE Capital Solutions Fleet Services in Eden Prairie enjoy a robust commuter benefits program, including carpool matching, telework options, flexible work schedules, vanpool parking and a subsidy for vanpoolers that covers nearly all their commuting costs.

The company's commuter program already has earned a national reputation. In 2008, GE Capital Solutions Fleet Services was named one of the nation's Best Workplaces for Commuters (BWC), meeting a national standard of excellence.

GE Capital Solutions Fleet Services is stepping up its efforts to get even more employees to share the ride to work. Starting April 1, the company will offer a monthly \$100-\$150 fuel card to each carpool that has at least three employees participating. In addition, the company will offer preferred parking for carpools.

"We have employees who want to save money and reduce emissions but are unable to participate in our vanpool or telecommuting programs," said Dan Kratz, truck operations manager. "Our new carpool initiative with 494 Commuter Services is an ideal option for those folks."

The company first launched a commuter program in August 2006, working closely with 494 Commuter Services to sponsor commuter fairs, employee meetings, information displays and other strategies intended to attract employee participation.

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