

Carless Commute Saves Time and Money

Every weekday, in garages and parking lots throughout Houston, thousands of motorists start their cars for the commute to work.

And as they sit, sometimes for hours, on the region's freeways and streets, their engines idle, emitting noxious nitrogen oxide into the air.

Tons and tons of it.

According to the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission motorists in the Houston region will add about 266 tons of nitrogen oxide per day to the atmosphere by 2007 if steps aren't taken to reduce emissions of this gas – a key ingredient of ozone. Our city's air contains enough of this harmful matter to put us in competition with Los Angeles as ozone capital of the country.

It's a title no city wants. Ozone pollution is hazardous to the health of all Houstonians but takes even more of a toll on the elderly, small children and people with lung diseases such as asthma.

Many Houstonians, however, have chosen to stop driving alone. They do it to save money as well as eliminate a stressful commute. Those interviewed below also do it because they want cleaner air and a healthier place to live.

BUS RIDER

Lisa Cleboski is just one of about 200,000 Houstonians who ride a METRO bus each day.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority operates 132 routes from points as far away as Katy and Clear Lake. During rush hour, many buses run on frequencies of 10 minutes or less.

Cleboski rides the 202 Kuykendahl to her office in the Houston Center where she works for Standard Parking.



Many Metro riders catch their bus each workday from the Authority's 25 Park & Ride lots. These lots, including the Kuykendahl Park & Ride lot west of I-45 North, provide some protection from the elements and offer rides that run as often as every 5 minutes during rush hour.



Many of Metro's Park & Ride lots, including the Addicks Park & Ride facility off Highway 6, have direct access to the region's HOV lane system. Metro's commuter ridership from these lots rose 11 percent in fiscal year 2001.

Cleboski says she knows she's helping the environment every time she steps onto her bus. The busy mother of two also catches up on her rest during the 30-minute commute.

"I'm gone [to sleep] before the bus leaves the lot," she said.

An 11-year veteran of METRO, Cleboski is the RideSponsor representative for her company. Through this program, bus riders get discounts on METRO passes through their employer – as much as 100 percent off regular fare.

"I love riding the bus," Cleboski said. "It saves wear and tear on my car and wear and tear on me."

VANPOOLERS

Dale Gould doesn't just ride in a vanpool, he's also a driver.

The federal courthouse employee has logged 18 years as a vanpool participant, 16 years behind the wheel.

Gould and his passengers, 14 women in this case, hail from the La Porte and Pasadena area and work throughout downtown.

"We meet in a movie theater parking lot that lets us leave our cars there," Gould said. "We leave at 7:10 and we're pretty strict about the time."

While he keeps his eye on the road, his passengers play cards, knit and talk. "There's plenty of chatter," Gould said.

Gould's vanpool is just one of 288 vans operated through METRO and the Houston-Galveston Area Council's METROVan program. Each van carries from seven to 15 passengers. Some of the vanpool teams share driving responsibilities, others have a designated driver. Today, about 3,600 people use METRO-contracted vans to commute.

Carmalee Manary is another vanpool veteran with some 11 years on the road, 3 years as a driver.

Manary's vanpool of 13 leaves The Woodlands at about 7 a.m.



A METROVan, one of 288 in METRO's vanpool program, makes its way past congestion on one of the region's High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes - there are nearly 100 miles in the system. Groups of seven to 15 people willing to ride together are eligible for METROVan service and incentives.

and arrives downtown some 35 minutes later.

"Being the driver is not quite as convenient as being a passenger, but the savings is worth it," said Manary, an executive secretary for Cooper Industries downtown.

Because Manary and Gould work as drivers, and are responsible for keeping their vans clean and fueled, they pay no fee to participate. Their vans are owned by VPSI. VPSI and Enterprise Rent-A-Van are two of several companies working with Downtown in Motion to decrease traffic. Manary and Gould's passengers pay \$65 to \$95 a

month. According to METRO the cost varies by the number of miles traveled, number of passengers in the van, and the model of the van. The average cost to ride is about \$50. That includes parking, maintenance and gas.

"It's cheaper, much cheaper than driving a car," Gould said.

BIKE RIDERS

Robert Buchanan has figured out a way to avoid the hassles and expense of parking downtown.

He parks on a side street near downtown and bikes two miles into town.

"I have better things to do with my money than spending it on parking," Buchanan said. "It's fast, fun and free."

"Since 1993, the city of Houston has been developing a comprehensive plan to build 365 miles of on-street and off-street bike lanes for bicyclists like Buchanan," says Lilibeth Andre, bicycle-pedestrian coordinator for the city of Houston's Bikeway Program. Some 207 miles are already in place.

Right now, the city is testing a pilot program on two miles of West Dallas that promotes joint use of the street by bicyclists and motorists. The city is also installing bike racks at all public facilities and is working to identify shower facilities.

Buchanan, a computer consultant who works for the City of Houston, has been biking to work since October and hasn't had to face Houston's sultry weather. But he's managed to deal with the cold without much problem thanks to hat and gloves.

"We'll see what it's like in August," Buchanan said.

For more information on the city's Bikeway Program call 713-837-0003 or visit the web site at www.houstonbikeways.com.

DID YOU KNOW?

- A commuter who drives his or her car to work will spend an average of \$8,680 per year. (This average assumes a 30-mile one-way commute and 23 miles per gallon. This includes cost of fuel, oil, maintenance and tires and depreciation.)
- The average cost for a commuter riding a METROVan to work is \$761.64 per year. (This includes what the commuter pays to participate in the METROVan vanpool.)
- The cost of a METRO 365 Day Pass for an adult is \$315.00 (local) and \$459 to \$990 on a Park & Ride bus depending on the distance (or zone) of the passenger's commute.
- A bus with 44 passengers uses much less fuel than 11 automobiles with four passengers each.
- Emissions from one poorly maintained vehicle can equal those from 28 properly functioning vehicles.
- Regular tune-ups can improve fuel efficiency by 15 percent.
- Every 100 pounds of unnecessary weight in a car reduces fuel efficiency by half-a-mile per gallon.

FREE Transportation Fair

The eight-county Houston region has a federal mandate under the Clean Air Act to reduce smog-forming nitrogen oxides by 75 percent by 2007. If it doesn't, the region stands to lose millions of dollars in federal highway funds and limits on industrial growth.

The next time your company hosts an employee event, why not use it as an opportunity to provide workers with innovative ways they can help to meet this clean air goal?

Downtown in Motion is a Transportation Management Organization established to help solve transportation problems in downtown Houston. Representatives host transportation fairs for employees, providing information on the alternate forms of transportation including vanpooling and park and ride opportunities. Most fairs are held during the lunch hour.

To set up a fair, call 713-650-1470.

For more information please call 713-650-1470 or visit our website at www.centralhouston.org.



Downtown is a constantly changing landscape of street improvements and building construction. To get the latest on street closures visit www.downtownstreets.com.

Transportation Options Tailor Made for YOU

Employers and their employees can make for a powerful partnership in the fight against traffic and pollution when they participate in one or more of several local commuter programs.

The menu of options is long and includes mass transit, vanpooling, carpooling, flexible work schedules and teleworking.

Commute Solutions — a program operated through a partnership of several local organizations including the Houston-Galveston Area Council, Central Houston, Inc., METRO, and the Texas Department of Transportation — provides employers and commuters in the eight-county region with transportation plans custom-made to fit their business needs.

Through the programs promoted by Commute Solutions, employees save money on their transportation costs and arrive at work relaxed, refreshed and on time. Employers who provide employees with transportation benefits pay reduced taxes, need fewer parking spaces, and have more productive employees. Everyone benefits when we don't drive alone!

For more information visit the website www.commutesolutions-hou.com.



IMPORTANT NUMBERS

To learn more about alternative transportation programs in the Houston-Galveston area contact:

The Metropolitan
Transit Authority
713-635-4000
www.ridemetro.org

Commute Solutions
1-888-606-RIDE
www.commutesolutions-hou.com

Texas Department of
Transportation
713-802-5315
www.dot.state.tx.us

Houston-Galveston
Area Council
713-627-3200
www.hgac.cog.tx.us

Houston Downtown
Management District
713-650-3022
www.downtowndistrict.org

Central Houston
"Downtown in Motion"
For more information please call
713-650-1470
or visit our website at
www.centralhouston.org



Central Houston, Inc.
Downtown in Motion
Two Houston Center
909 Fannin, Suite 1650
Houston, TX 77010