



How to Encourage Your Employees to Bike to Work

By Brenda Porter-Rockwell | Apr 26, 2010



Encouraging your employees to bike to work can be part of your company's overall "green" strategy or simply a way for your employees to stay fit.

There may be several reasons to encourage your employees to seek alternate transportation to work. Whether it's carpooling, taking public transportation, walking or biking, the benefits of not driving a car everyday are substantial. The most notable benefit is the reduced strain on the environment. Cutting back on driving not only reduces our countries dependence on crude oil, but also reduces our carbon footprint. However, by taking an extra step—and asking your employees to ride a bike to work—your company will have pride knowing that its also contributing to the physical health and well-being of the employees that participate.

How to Encourage Your Employees to Bike to Work: Getting Started

Marilyn Bryant, executive director of the non-profit Sacramento Transportation Management Association (STMA) in Sacramento, California, suggests writing down a general idea of what you would like your bike program to look like.

A large part of the program must center around making biking more convenient for participants. So offering a secure place for bike storage, or a place for workers to shower and change and store clothing goes a long way.

The Association, which supports cycling as a method to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution, offers Sacramento-based businesses a survey to determine their level of bicycle friendliness. If you score high enough, the association encourages you to apply for certification as a Sacramento Region Bicycle-Friendly Business. If not, you can contact the group to learn how to become more bicycle friendly. Below are several of the questions from the STMA survey. Ask yourself the following question in order to build a picture in your mind of the program you'd like to have:

Which of the following transportation-related benefits are provided to your employees? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Commuter tax benefit for bicycle commuters
- ☐ Other cash incentives for bicycle commuters
- ☐ Free secure bicycle parking
- ☐ Guaranteed ride home (e.g., due to bad weather, employee illness)

Does your business promote May is Bike Month? Y N If yes, please describe.

Does your business promote Bike to Work Day? Y N If yes, please describe.

Does your business provide assistance toward an employee's purchase of a bicycle or bicycling-related equipment? Y N If yes, please describe.

Does your business provide either of the following?

- A fleet of bicycles for employees to use for short errands or trips?
- Bike-sharing or bike loan program?
- How many bicycles?
- Do you track use?
- If yes, what percentage of employees use them per month?

Does your business have a bicycle user's group or club? Y N If yes, how many members? Please describe its activities and their frequency.

Does your business use any of the following means to promote bicycling? If yes, please describe.

- Sponsor a local riding club or bike racing team (e.g., employee, local, youth, professional)
- Use local bicycle couriers
- Organize bike rides or other bike-related events for employees
- Sponsor individual employees who participate in local charity rides, races or other bike events (e.g., Breathe California Emigrant Trails Bike Trek, MS 150, Tour de Cure, etc.)
- Provide free secure bike parking for customers or clients
- Provide other incentives for customers or clients who ride bicycles (e.g., special discounts or promotions)

Does your business sponsor or partner with any local, state and/or national bicycle advocacy groups? Y N If yes, please describe.

Does your business work with local advocates to improve bicyclist conditions for the community? Y N

Does your business provide any of the following types of bicycle parking? Check all that apply.

- ☐ For employees
- ☐ For customers, clients or guests
- ☐ Covered
- ☐ Uncovered
- ☐ Secured area (e.g., fenced enclosure)
- ☐ Bicycle lockers
- ☐ Bring bikes indoors (e.g., lobby, employee workplace)

Does your business provide any of the following amenities for employees who commute by bicycle?

- ☐ Locker room
- ☐ Showers
- ☐ Bicycle repair station

- ☐ Maintenance supplies such as tools, pumps and tubes
- ☐ Dedicated bike maintenance person

Does your business provide employees with any of the following types of bicycle-related training?

- ☐ Safe riding skills
- ☐ Maintenance
- ☐ Driver training on how to share the road with bicyclists
- ☐ Other (please describe)

Does your business provide any of the following educational tools to employees outside of classes or clinics?

- ☐ Information on safe bicycling
- ☐ Help finding bike routes to work
- ☐ Information on proper bicycle equipment
- ☐ Information on safe driving and how to share the road with bicyclists
- ☐ Other (please describe)

How many of your employees commute to work by bike more than twice a week?

Does anyone in your top management regularly commute to work by bicycle? Y N

Does your business have an action plan for promoting bicycle use? Y N If yes, please describe.

What has been your business's most significant investment for bicycling in the past year?

List your business's current community activities that encourage/promote bicycling.

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How to Encourage Your Employees to Bike to Work: Offer Financial Incentives

Offering employees a cash incentive to get behind your mission is another way to increase participation. Organic beverage maker Honest Tea in Bethesda, Maryland, gives its employees who either bike or walk to work \$27.50 extra in their paychecks monthly to offset whatever equipment they need to bike or walk to work. In addition, in the summer of 2007, the company bought all 52 employees who were there at the time Jamis bikes. Since then Honest Tea has made the bikes available for purchase at cost to any of the 105 people they employ across the nation. Similarly, SunRidge Farms, a Pajaro, California-based company offering natural bulk trail mixes, dried fruits, confections and snack blends, gives its employees a \$5 cash contribution in their paychecks.

Another option is exploring partnerships with other small businesses in your area to get employees discounts on gear from local bike shops that can be expensive.

Additionally, the Federal Government offers an employee incentive. Business owners looking to encourage their employees to bike to work should look at providing the employee with a

qualified bicycle commuting reimbursement. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for some time has offered a transit subsidy to employers to pass on to employees to offset the cost of using alternative transportation to work, such as public transportation. Last year, the IRS extended that same non-taxable benefit to employers to offset the cost of a bicycle to commute to work, explains Bryant.

"The [IRS] doesn't tax the transit subsidy. Employers should check with IRS regulations to determine the amount that can be given per month," says Bryant.

But all of the benefits are not just for employees. Employers should check with their individual municipalities which may encourage biking to work as a way to save on parking spaces and to help employees stay in top physical shape so they take less time off and are more productive at work.

[Dig Deeper: Facing a Tight Labor Market, Employers Dish Out the Perks](#)

How to Encourage Your Employees to Bike to Work: Plan Around an Existing Theme

One very simple way to promote the idea of bike riding to work is to launch your program around a pre-existing theme like Bike Month or Earth Day. The idea is that employees will take the challenge and overcome any obstacles and will, hopefully, want to incorporate bike riding as part of their routine commute to work.

In advance of Earth Day 2009, Integrated Marketing Group (IMG) in Salt Lake City, Utah, asked its employees to consider alternative forms of transportation to get to work. Jeff Hilton, co-founder and managing partner of this natural products marketing firm, said all 15 employees participated, of which five rode bikes, including Hilton.

IMG, Hilton says, was "Just trying to 'walk our talk' about environmental responsibility [and] wanting to show that we care." One year later there are still a few employees riding bikes to work and their Earth Day activity has now become an Earth Week activity for IMG where all employees used alternative transportation for the entire week.

Again, check out what your state or local municipality is doing to encourage riding to work during certain monthly events. In Rhode Island a Bike to Work Day event has been held in downtown Providence on the third Friday in May since 2001. The state's Department of Transportation (RIDOT) has been proactively promoting bicycling as a viable transportation option since the department's construction of the state's first major bikeway, the East Bay Bicycle Path, in the mid-1980's. RIDOT, according to Steve Church, its bicycle program coordinator, has worked with the state's largest bicycle organization, Narragansett Bay Wheelmen on the development of a statewide bike map, "A Guide to Cycling in the Ocean State," which is available for commuting and recreational cyclists on the [Bike RI website](#).

Similarly, May 13th is Bike to Work Day in Bethesda, Maryland. Honest Tea brings employees out to help man one of the routes rest stops by passing samples of the company's beverages.

[Dig Deeper: 10 Ways to Mark Earth Day at Your Company](#)

How to Encourage Your Employees to Bike to Work: Make It a Part of the Corporate Culture

Why not make bicycling to work part of your company's overall strategy to become "greener?" About five years ago, SunRidge Farms introduced the concept of biking to work to its employees as it began improvements to the business infrastructure toward being more eco-friendly. Biking to work, says, SunRidge's CEO Morty Cohen, really presented itself as part of an overall opportunity to enable the staff to participate in the company's philosophy and vision to be part of the solution in "making the world a better place." About 20 of the 200 employees currently bike to work.

It also helps if the CEO is willing to set the example for the rest of the staff. Seth Goldman, president and TeaEO of Honest Tea, rides his bike about a mile each way to and from work nearly every day.

"He saw the need to encourage and help other employees who live close enough to ride their bikes to work," recalls Debra Schwartz, director of human resources for Honest Tea. In 2007, when Honest Tea built their current office building, one of the most important things [Goldman] thought to do was have a bathroom with a shower installed.

"Honest Tea is about health and wellness and being environmentally friendly. It's embedded in who we are. When you apply to work at Honest Tea we're not just looking for a skill set, we're looking for that right personality to blend with the office and the culture," explains Schwartz.

Peace Coffee, a Minneapolis, Minnesota-based organic coffee company, takes this idea to the next level, says Melanee Meegan, the company's marketing manager. "Our bike delivery program is something memorable that sets us apart from many other companies... something that definitely improves our business every day," she says. Since 1997, Peace Coffee has delivered coffee beans by bike to their accounts in Minneapolis and St. Paul by bike, year round. In 2007, they added a second full-time bike courier to expand their bike delivery service territory. Each bike logs roughly 100 miles per week and delivers anywhere from 300 to 400 pounds of roasted coffee per day, says Meegan. Many employees also bike to and from work.

Adds Meegan, "Peace Coffee's relationship with bikes started with just a few employees who were really passionate about riding their bikes way back in the days when we only had a very few employees. That passion has been contagious over the years and, while none of those people work here anymore, the bikes live on."

About 12 to 15 employees, out of the 19, ride their bikes to work every single day of the year. And on nice days in the summer, Meegan says, it can be hard to find a staffer with a car.

[Dig Deeper: How to Create a Company Philosophy](#)

How to Encourage Your Employees to Bike to Work: Resources

[Sacramento Transportation Management Association](#) provides a quiz to determine how bicycle friendly your company is.

Bike Iowa, "[An Employer's Bike to Work Guide](#)," shares more about the benefits of encouraging your employees to bike to work no matter what state your business is based.

Rhode Island Department of Transportation also provides a guide to bicycling in that state called "[A Guide to Cycling in the Ocean State](#)."

US Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood has been a prime supporter of bicycling as transportation. [Check out his blog](#).

Learn more about the Internal Revenue Service's [transit subsidy](#).

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