

BEST WORKPLACES FOR COMMUTERS

Best Workplaces for Commuters from the April 19th, 2005 Employer Outreach Ad-Hoc Group Meeting.

The group discussed six central areas in regards to the Employer Outreach effort and the Best Workplaces for Commuters Campaign.

1. Overall perception and satisfaction of the BWC program as it relates to your jurisdiction's employers and your outreach activities.
2. BWC program advantages and disadvantages
3. How the program should be presented to employers and the media on a regional and local level
4. The connection between the BWC levels of program eligibility and the Commuter Connections employer levels of participation (Silver, Gold, and Platinum)
5. The role Commuter Connections should have in this program
6. What assistance to the EPA has your jurisdiction provided for this program

Under the first item the majority of the group felt the BWC program was a good program, helped in getting interest in other alternative commutes for employees. Some of the group felt that due to their geographic location that their local employers were automatically ineligible. Others mentioned that there was a distinct lack of coordination on the EPA's part in pulling all the information and groups together in getting the word out on the program.

Under the second item the advantages were as follows:

- Recognition as "Best" for an employer has a positive effect on interest by employers
- Helpful to include in sales pitch to employers and helps in achieving goals and retention of current client employers.
- Having a national recognition of excellence goes very far in generating interest and prospects

The disadvantages were as follows:

- There needs to be more promotion by the EPA on a national level to get the word out on this idea of Best Workplaces for Commuters
- How employers are tracked in regards to retention and the follow-up procedures leave much to be desired in regards to actual verification
- Skepticism at the actual effect of the program on the "ground level" of those employers who have minimal or no alternative commuting options offered to their employees.
- The group questioned whether they wanted to "own" the program even though it is a EPA initiative.

Under the third area the group felt that EPA needed to step up its efforts on a national promotion of BWC and to have outreach to local business associations beyond an annual awards event.

Under the fourth area the group discussed at length the difficulties of matching criteria for excellence for the BWC program and Commuter Connections levels of participation. An example was given of a large employer who has employee shuttles, a company run vanpool fleet, and offers pre-tax Metrochek. Under the BWC benchmarks, this employer would not be eligible though it has high participation in all three areas. Further, the benchmarks almost automatically disqualify a majority of employers who do not have rapid transit access. The group felt that the criteria needs to be re-evaluated in light of the wealth of information that the group has on employers in the region. In light of the fact that over 40% of the region's employers in Commuter Connections who offer Metrochek offer it as a pre-tax benefit and have no subsidy at all. The stringency of demanding an employer to front cash for all of their employees who use transit is counterproductive in attracting those employers who have good employee participation in a transit benefit program using the pre-tax method.

Under the fifth area the group felt that continuing on with the BWC program would be beneficial but that it would be best to wait a year so that there would be a better opportunity in combining the Commuter Connections Employer Awards Recognition Ceremony with the BWC event.

Under the final area those jurisdictions that had done significant work on promoting the BWC program and recognition events stated that they dedicated a fair amount of staff time and dollars for the previous two events. Both saw the effort as positive, though there was a distinct lack of assistance from the EPA in regards to time and money for the campaign.