



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Community Services
Department
Department No.: 057
For Agenda Of: May 14, 2019
Placement: Departmental
Estimated Time: 45 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from: N/A
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Department George Chapjian, Community Services Director, (805) 568-2467
Director(s)
Contact Info: Ashley Watkins, Division Chief, Sustainability, (805) 568-3506
Maya Barraza, Manager, Benefits and Wellness, (805) 568-2821

SUBJECT: County Employee Commuter Benefits Options

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: Risk Management, County Human
Resources and General Services

As to form: Yes

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- A. Receive and file this briefing on County Employee Commuter Benefits Options;
- B. Direct Community Services, Human Resources, General Services, Auditor-Controller, and any other applicable departments to pursue recommended commuter benefits selected by the Board for development;
- C. Provide input as appropriate;
- D. Direct Human Resources Director to return in 90 days with recommendations on Commuter Employee Benefits after confirming costs and consulting with County Executive Office, Auditor Controller, General Services, and affected departments; and
- E. Determine that the recommended actions do not constitute a project and are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(b)(4), finding that the actions are the creation of a governmental funding mechanism or

other government fiscal activity, which do not involve any commitment to any specific project which may result in a potentially significant physical impact on the environment.

Summary Text:

At the December 11, 2018 hearing, the Board of Supervisors (“Board”) directed staff to return with actions that could be taken to demonstrate leadership in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from employee commutes. The majority (74%) of County employees surveyed drive to work alone, with carpooling (14%) and taking the bus (9%) also being popular commute options. In a 2018 survey, when asked about potential updates to the County’s commuter benefits, employees most frequently cited a desire for a) increasing and scaling the transportation demand management (TDM) vacation benefit, b) providing laptops for telework eligible employees, c) establishing flex hours to facilitate transit use and reduce time spent in traffic, and d) reduced cost transit passes.

This briefing provides options for Board consideration to enhance and increase employee participation in current County commuter benefits offerings and potential new commuter benefits to reduce GHG emissions from County employee commutes. These commuter benefits aim to increase employee satisfaction and productivity; enhance organizational resiliency; and reduce roadway congestion, parking demand, and air pollutants including GHGs by incentivizing the use of commute options other than driving alone. Increased employee satisfaction can also help reduce costs associated with employee turnover. County Human Resources estimates that the cost of employee turnover ranges from \$34,700 to \$62,600 per position. Costs could be even higher depending on the particular position. These recommendations reflect feedback from the County Sustainability Committee, a County-wide employee survey, department management interviews, Traffic Solutions, and County Human Resources.

Recommendations are grouped as follows:

- Raise visibility of current benefits
- Enhance current benefits
- Consider new benefits

Staff seeks direction from the Board on which options should be further investigated by the Human Resources Department. The Human Resources Director will return to the Board with recommendations after confirming costs and consulting with County Executive Office, Auditor Controller, General Services, and other affected departments.

Background:

At the December 11th Board hearing, staff presented an Energy and Climate Action Plan (ECAP) 2017 Progress Report update that identified that the County is not on track to meet its 2020 GHG reduction goal. The Board directed staff to return with actions that could be taken to demonstrate leadership in reducing transportation-related GHG emissions, the primary emissions source identified in the ECAP. General Services has provided the Board with information on options to reduce GHG emissions from the County vehicle fleet. This Board item presents options for reducing GHG emissions from employee commutes through enhancements and additions to the current employee commuter benefits.

Commuter benefits can incentivize commute options other than driving alone, for example, walking, biking, skating, taking public transit, and participating in a car/vanpool. Commuter benefits can also

promote the use of less-polluting vehicles like electric vehicles and not commuting at all by teleworking or adopting alternative work week schedules (e.g., 9/80s and 4/10s). By eliminating trips and reducing the number of single occupancy vehicles on the road, commuter benefits aim to reduce roadway congestion, parking demand, GHG emissions and other forms of air pollution. Additionally, commuter benefits can increase employer attractiveness and job satisfaction, helping the County to attract and retain employees; enhance workplace and personal wellness through physical fitness and less-stressful commutes. Increased employee satisfaction can also help reduce costs associated with employee turnover. County Human Resources estimates that the cost of employee turnover ranges from \$34,700 to \$62,600 per position. Costs could be even higher depending on the particular position. Finally, commuter benefits can improve organizational resiliency and productivity through increased workplace flexibility during storms and other travel disruptions.

In spring 2018, the County Sustainability Committee (“Committee”) initiated a review of the County’s commuter benefits and determined that updates were necessary to better incentivize and support County employees, reduce traffic impacts, and lower emissions. Committee members consulted with Santa Barbara County Association of Government’s [Traffic Solutions](#) staff. Traffic Solutions helps area employers design and implement feasible commuter benefits programs. Traffic Solutions staff reviewed the benefits programs that other local governments offer their employees and recommended several updates that could be implemented with minimal fiscal impact. County Human Resources staff also helped assess the feasibility of commuter benefit recommendations based on current employee participation, logistical considerations, and fiscal impact.

To gather greater employee feedback, Sustainability Division and Traffic Solutions staff designed a survey that was distributed via email to all County employees in September 2018. The survey collected information on employee commute patterns, motivations, and barriers and sought feedback on potential updates to the County’s commuter benefits program.

The survey reinforced that driving alone is motivated by factors such as being able to reach loved ones in the event of an emergency, having a car to run errands, and arranging children’s trips to school or other activities. For sustainable transportation users, economic factors, location, convenience, and reduced stress were major considerations. When asked about potential updates to the County’s commuter benefits, employees most frequently cited a desire for a) increasing and scaling the transportation demand management (TDM) vacation benefit, b) providing laptops for telework eligible employees, c) establishing flex hours to facilitate transit use and reduce time spent in traffic, and d) reduced cost transit passes. A summary of the survey findings is provided in Attachment A.

The commute survey also indicated high employee interest in greater schedule flexibility and telework capabilities. The Sustainability Division conducted interviews with supervisors from several County departments to better understand the unique challenges and opportunities when offering alternative work week schedules (e.g., 4/10s, 9/80s), flex hours (i.e., allowing employees to select work hours outside the traditional 8 am-5 pm window), and teleworking (i.e., working remotely) to employees. Telework and alternative work week schedules were identified as a low-cost strategy to reduce commute-related GHG emissions because County policies supporting [telework](#) and [alternative work week schedules](#) exist. Employees simply need to be empowered to use them through supervisor support, appropriate technology

(e.g., laptops, remote access software), and consideration of meeting times. A summary of the interview findings is provided in Attachment B.

This current research follows similar investigations from 2005 to 2006 ([See January 2006 Highway 101 Operational Improvements/Transportation Demand Management Report](#)) and from 2008 to 2012 (see [September 2012 Teleworking/Flex Schedule Report](#)). No updated reporting has been found for the period from 2012 to present.

County Employee Commute Overview

The majority (74%) of County employees surveyed drive to work alone, with carpooling (14%) and taking the bus (9%) also being popular commute options. However, commute type varies by work location and commute distance. Employee use of traditional or alternative work week schedules does not appear to significantly affect how employees get to/from work.

Commute Mode by Work Location

Staff working in downtown Santa Barbara have the lowest drive alone rates (56%), while Calle Real and Santa Maria campuses had higher rates (73% and 93%, respectively). Factors such as parking availability, transit service connectivity, and walk/bike safety can influence whether people choose to drive alone or utilize more sustainable transportation options. For example, it is likely that drive alone rates are lower in downtown Santa Barbara due to limited availability and expense of parking combined with more transit options and more supportive active transportation conditions (e.g., walkable streets, bike lanes). In Santa Maria, on the other hand, high driving rates may be influenced by greater parking availability and lack of non-driving options.

These variations in commute type indicate the opportunity for site-specific resources to incentivize employees to try other transportation options. For example, at the Calle Real campus, where drive alone rates are high, there may be an opportunity to make taking the bus or train easier or connect more employees with other carpoolers. In Santa Maria, since transit and active transportation seem to be limited, helping people carpool may be an effective strategy.

Commute Mode by Travel Distance

In early 2018, the Human Resources Department compiled the most frequent home-work locations and distances from 1,778 employees, shown in Figures 1 and 2 below. Figure 1 provides data for employees commuting from North County and San Luis Obispo County to work locations south. Figure 2 shows data for employees commuting from South County and Ventura County to work locations north. Overall, there are more southbound than northbound commuters:

- 811 employees (46%) commute from San Luis Obispo County and North County to Santa Barbara.
- 304 employees (17%) commute from Ventura County to Santa Barbara.
- 136 employees (8%) commute from Mid County (Buellton, Solvang and Lompoc) and South County to Santa Maria.

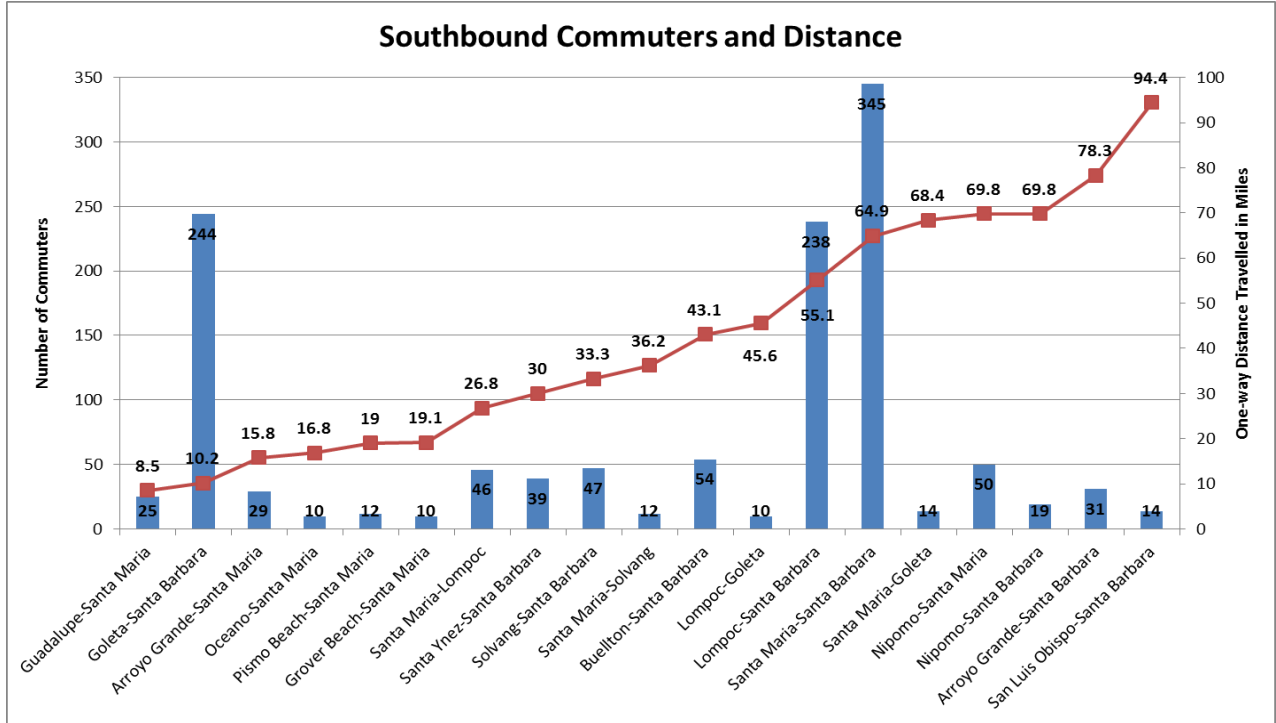


Figure 1. Southbound Commute Distances

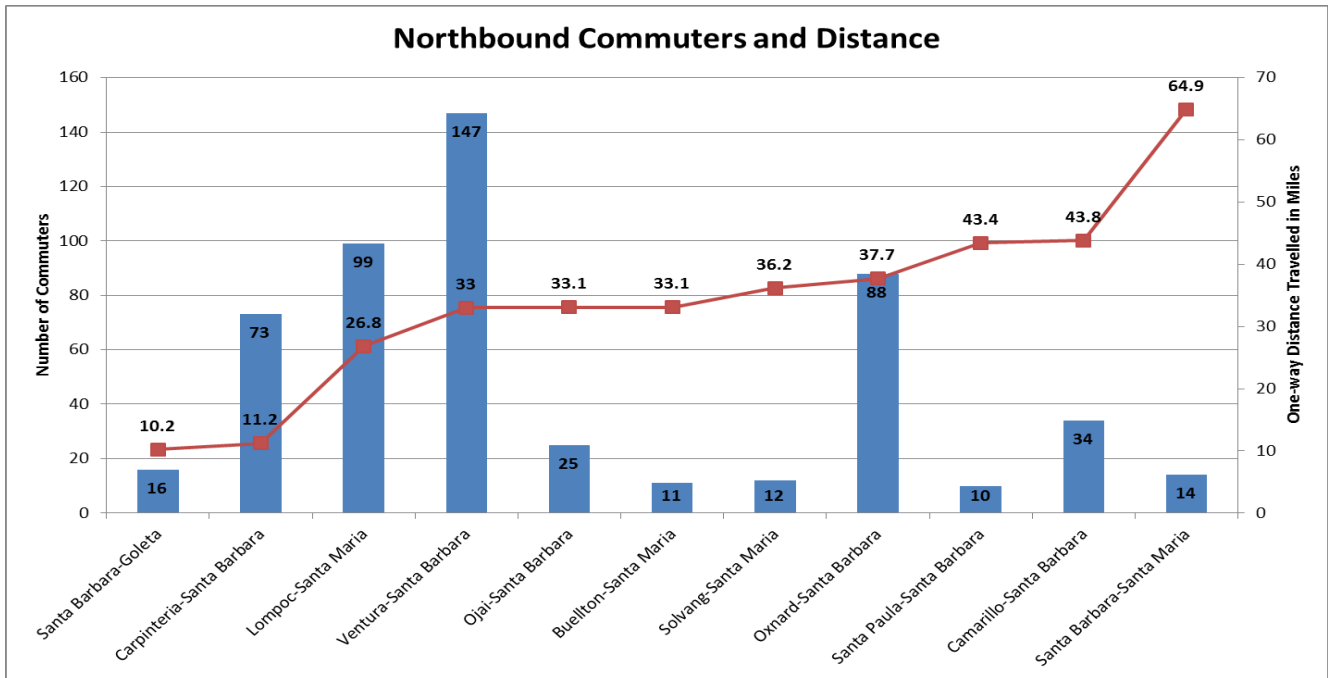


Figure 2. Northbound Commute Distances

Understanding where employees come from and how far they travel is key to recommending services, resources, and commuter benefits that can help ease commute stress and encourage sustainable transportation. The employee commute survey found that long-distance commuters from Ventura County or Lompoc are more likely to use transit or carpool. Short-distance commuters were more likely to drive alone to their respective worksites. These findings are consistent with those reported by Traffic Solutions, suggesting that long-distance commuters may be motivated to try options other than driving alone to save on fuel costs and reduce the stress of navigating traffic.

Current Employee Commuter Benefits

The County currently offers employees several commuter benefits including:

- **TDM Vacation Bonus:** Allows employees to earn up to two extra vacation days each year if a qualifying commute type is used at least 80% of the days worked in a pay period. Qualifying commutes currently include: car/vanpool, local or Clean Air Express bus, walk, bike, motorcycle, telework. Employees must submit a [TDM application form](#) and obtain supervisor approval to participate.
 - **Participation:** LOW (11% of employees)
 - **Barriers:** Limits participation from employees who use sustainable transportation but not enough to meet the 80% threshold. New options such as the train or zero emission vehicles are not currently eligible.
- **\$10 Pre-Tax County Contribution to Bus Fare:** Employees can have money deducted from their paycheck for pre-tax contribution towards the cost of bus fare. The County matches up to \$10 per month for employees who contribute a minimum of \$10 per month. The pre-tax dollars apply only to bus fare, including local service such as [MTD](#) (Santa Barbara) and [SMAT](#) (Santa Maria) and regional service such as the [Clean Air Express](#) (North County-South County), [Coastal Express](#) (South County-Ventura County), and [BreezeBus](#) (North County).
 - **Participation:** LOW (2% of employees)
 - **Barriers:** Employees may not find the \$10 contribution significant enough to claim or incentivize transit use when bus fares cost \$50-150 per month. Some employees find the enrollment process burdensome. County contribution is not applicable to modes such as train and vanpool.
- **Free Parking for Ridesharing:** Carpoolers and vanpoolers are eligible to apply for a [parking pass](#) for the Administration Building lot or the Garden Street lot in Santa Barbara. All employees with regular permanent employment status with the County are eligible to apply for a permit. This permit is only valid when the permit holder and at least one other County employee within the carpool group come to work together. Parking is on a first-come, first-served basis. Passes can be obtained by submitting an [application](#) to General Services.
 - **Participation:** LOW (5% of downtown parking passes are carpool permits)
 - **Barriers:** Limited employee awareness of the program or how to apply.
- **Guaranteed Ride-Home Program:** County employees who use an alternative method of transportation to commute to work and then have an unexpected emergency may utilize—with supervisor approval—a [County motor pool vehicle](#) to commute home. Traffic Solutions also offers an Emergency Ride Home service that offers reimbursement for a taxi, Lyft/Uber, or car rental for further trips. It is available up to 4 times per year, maximum \$220 in a year.

- **Participation:** Unavailable. Tracked at Department level.
- **Barriers:** Limited employee awareness of the program.
- **Alternative Work Week Schedules:** Board-adopted policies subject to department head approval offer employees the option of alternative schedules (e.g. 4/10s, 9/80s, and flex hours). Alternative schedules allow employees to work longer hours each workday with an extra day off every week or every other week. Flex hours allow employees to adjust their shift start and end time to use transit or avoid idling in traffic. Alternative schedules are subject to department and position requirements, employee performance, and manager approval.
 - **Participation:** HIGH (35% of employees).
 - **Barriers:** Alternative work week schedule support is high, although there is room to expand to all eligible employees.
- **Teleworking:** Teleworking eliminates the need for trips to a worksite altogether by allowing the employee to work from an approved alternate worksite or home location. Teleworking is subject to department and position requirements, employee performance, and manager approval.
 - **Participation:** LOW (5%).
 - **Barriers:** IT resources to support teleworking (e.g. access to laptops). Employees and supervisors may need clarity on the telework policy, process, and help crafting strong employee proposals. Teleworking may be currently underreported.

Possible Commuter Benefit Enhancement Options for Board Consideration

Options are organized by high-level goals with individual actions listed to help reach each goal. Estimated budget impacts are categorized as: LOW (\$0-\$50,000), MEDIUM (\$50,000-\$100,000) and; HIGH (>\$100,000). The possible options are organized in chart format in Attachment C.

Raise Visibility of Existing Benefits

- Make commuter benefit information easier to access by (1) consolidating all commuter information on a single County intranet and public-facing internet page, (2) updating and streamlining forms and policies for clarity and ease of use, (3) integrating commuter benefits information into new employee orientation materials, and (4) offering an annual commuter fair at main campuses.
 - Estimated Budget Impact: LOW (\$0-\$50,000)
- Enhance reporting and monitoring by (1) conducting annual employee commute survey and (2) receiving bi-ennial Board updates on commuter benefit participation.
 - Estimated Budget Impact: LOW (\$0-\$50,000)

Enhance Current Benefits

- Enhance IT support for remote work by (1) defaulting to laptops when replacing desktop computers after their four year lifecycle and (2) investigating effectiveness of NetMotion compared to other remote access options.
 - Expected Budget Impact: LOW to MEDIUM (\$1000 - \$2000 per laptop)
- Assign dedicated car/vanpool and zero emission vehicle parking spots at all County campuses.
 - Estimated Budget Impact: LOW (\$900/one-time)

- Modify \$10 Pre-Tax Contribution to (1) expand eligibility to include train and vanpool and (2) increase County contribution.
 - Estimated Budget Impact: HIGH (Incremental costs are estimated at \$109,800/yr. with total costs estimated at \$117,000/yr.) Assumes a 5 percent employee participation and an increase in County contribution from \$10 to \$50 per month.
- Modify TDM Vacation Bonus to (1) expand eligibility to include train and zero emission vehicle trips; (2) replace participation threshold that currently requires employees to use a qualifying commute for 80% of days in a pay period with a sliding scale that allows employees to earn a fixed number of vacation hours per day that they use a qualifying commute; and (3) allow employees to earn up to three vacation days per year. Changes will require the development of a more comprehensive TDM Vacation Bonus policy than currently exists.
 - Estimated Budget Impact: MEDIUM to HIGH (Incremental costs are estimated at \$52,000-\$245,000/yr. with total costs estimated at \$384,000 - \$576,000/yr.)

Consider New Benefits

- Utilize subsidized vanpool program through Traffic Solutions. The pilot vanpool program offers a free first year upon agreement to a modest employer subsidy for the second year. This can expand vanpool service to new employees and worksites at a low cost.
 - Estimated Budget Impact: LOW. Ongoing costs after the first year would be captured through the Pre-Tax Contribution benefit if expanded to vanpools.
- Create hoteling work stations at County and/or partner organizations' work sites. Hoteling allows employees who travel frequently or work flexible hours to reserve desk space on specific days or as needed. This would provide additional remote work options for employees who are unable to work from home or prefer an office environment and also want to reduce their commute. More information is needed about available space at County offices, billing arrangements, and the feasibility of shared spaces with other organizations.
 - Estimated Budget Impact: MEDIUM to HIGH (\$50,000- >\$100,000)
- Increase adoption of teleworking and alternative work week schedules. County policies currently exist to support [telework](#) and [alternative work week schedules](#). Increasing awareness of these existing policies and helping managers identify specific positions and employees that are well suited to teleworking or alternative work week schedules could help increase participation. The Board could also consider implementing a 9/80 schedule for all eligible employees. For example, the City of Santa Barbara implemented a citywide 9/80 schedule in 2007. The City of Santa Barbara reports that the schedule has demonstrated increased employee morale, recruitment, and retention while providing longer customer service hours and receiving minimal negative reactions to Friday closures. Staff and department coordination would be necessary as well as employee input on considerations like childcare.
 - Estimated Budget Impact: MEDIUM-HIGH (\$50,000- >\$100,000)
- Enhance bike parking and add bike repair station at downtown Santa Barbara campus. This is part of a collaborative effort among several County departments to renovate the Engineering Building courtyard to provide a Water Wise demonstration garden with the option to replace the existing bike cage with upgraded bike parking that can accommodate more bikes with bike repair equipment.

- Estimated Budget Impact: LOW (\$20,000, one-time cost to already budgeted demonstration garden in Engineering Building courtyard)
- Provide Zero Emission Vehicle bulk purchasing benefit to employees. The Board has directed General Services to purchase only electric vehicles to replace non-emergency sedans scheduled for replacement. As part of the procurement process, General Services could request that dealers extend the negotiated discount to employees.
 - Expected Budget Impact: LOW (\$0-\$50,000)

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: No

Fiscal Analysis:

The Human Resources Director will return to the Board to confirm costs after consulting with County Executive Office, Auditor Controller, General Services, and other affected departments.

Staffing Impacts:

None.

Special Instructions:

Please send one copy of the minute order to Ashley Watkins.

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Employee Commute Survey Summary
- Attachment B: Alternative Work Week Schedule and Telework Interview Summary
- Attachment C: Options by Priority Classification
- Attachment D: PowerPoint Presentation

Authored by:

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