

Solution to Traffic and Pollution

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Does this scenario sound familiar: suburbs on the fringe of a national center of government. Suburbs that have prospered to such an extent that people who moved there to pursue a better life for their families have created an unwanted consequence: traffic and air stagnation?

A recent court case - *Sierra Club vs the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)* - has put planned road construction at risk by threatening to take away the region's Federal Highway Construction funding if we do not reduce air pollution. It happened in Atlanta. It can happen here.

So what's to be done? How about driving more slowly in longer rush hours to reduce levels of nitrogen oxides (NOx), as the region's air quality model suggests be done to reduce air pollution sufficiently by 2005? The region planned many years ago to build new roads and bridges, but political inertia stopped too many of them being built.

One solution is Telecommuting. NVTC, as part of its mission to find multiple solutions to the region's transportation problems, is promoting the eCommute program to persuade employers to implement telecommuting programs. The eCommute program is a federally funded pilot to test if pollution-reduction policy can effectively move from the "Big Stick" style of the past, to a "Big Carrot" policy by using market-driven incentives to reduce emissions from "mobile" sources, i.e., moving things that cause pollution: cars, trucks and vans.

Current federal and state regulatory measures focus on stationery sources (power stations & factories) of air pollution and CO2 (a Green House Gas or GHG). The U.S. Department of Energy cites that "Transportation accounts for 65 percent of U.S. oil consumption and is

the predominant source of air pollution..., " of which transportation accounts for 33 percent of total U.S. GHG emissions.

The eCommute program promotes increased use of telecommuting by providing financial incentives for businesses to encourage employees to work from home at least one day a week. By calculating the reduced vehicle miles traveled (VMTs) by these employees, using Web-based telecommuting program reporting software (TeleTrips), employers earn pollution and CO2 reduction credits. These can then be traded to utilities or manufacturers, or given to non-profits to trade or "retire," as an environmental association might prefer to do.

A utility could buy credits to bring a new generator online in an area where the pollution limits, agreed to between the state and the EPA, had been reached or were about to be reached. The VMTs saved because of additional telecommuting would help in four ways:

- Overall pollution would not increase;
- The community would avoid the risk of planned and/or unplanned power cuts;
- Industry can demonstrate voluntary solutions for emission management; and,
- The reduced VMTs will have a significant positive impact upon traffic congestion and so the community's quality of life.

Corporations often overlook that GHG emissions are a valuable tradable commodity, once tracked and quantified. Quite simply, if a company creates or expands a telework program, and does not benchmark and measure it with appropriate methodologies, it has lost a potential asset - the missed opportunity can be financially significant.

For instance, there are 83 employers registered with TeleTrips, representing 531 telecommuters. Assuming that each employee telecommutes 2 days/week, avoiding a 35-mile commute over 48 workweeks, this translates to 712 tons of CO2 (the primary GHG) and 2.95 tons of NOx. Leading market consultants predict a price for NOx of around \$5000/ton over the next two years due to federal and state regulatory pressures. As for CO2, trading among Kyoto Protocol nations has forecasted a price of around \$100/ton.

This group of telecommuters could be worth \$86,000 in tradable credits over one year. The magic is in the aggregation of telecommuter numbers, whether by a large employer, by the membership of a Chamber of Commerce, or a trade association or charity.

So, what does this mean for you? First, in order not to lose potential future credits, you should benchmark your current activity as a baseline from which you can demonstrate increased telecommuting activity. Secondly, if you are in Northern Virginia, or have a presence in one of the other pilot cities (Denver, Los Angeles, Houston and Philadelphia), get signed up for the eCommute program: go to www.nvtc.org and click on the eCommute logo .

Finally, show leadership by becoming a champion in your organizations for telecommuting and so help your employers demonstrate that they are responsible citizens. Start by attending or sending decisionmakers (up to 3 per employer welcome) to the next NVTC eCommute Boot Camp Workshop on September 20. You will leave with all the tools, policies, procedures, documentation and checklists you need to set up a telecommuting program.

We can alleviate our stagnant traffic and air by telecommuting. Our future well-being is in our hands now! ■