



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: COUNTY MANAGER: OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY

File #: 19-725

Board Meeting Date: 7/23/2019

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required:None

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Jim Eggemeyer, Director, Office of Sustainability
Subject: Redesign of the Commute Alternatives Program

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept this report and provide guidance on the proposed changes to the Commute Alternatives Program.

BACKGROUND:

The San Mateo County Commute Alternatives Program (CAP) was established in December 1991 to comply with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District requirement that all companies in the Bay Area with 100 or more employees implement measures to reduce the number of employees commuting in single occupancy vehicles. To initially implement the CAP, in 1992, the Board approved a transit subsidy of \$20 per month to encourage employees to use public transit or other means besides single occupancy vehicles when traveling to and from work.

About 20 years ago, the transit subsidy was increased to \$75 a month. Employees who carpool, walk, or bike to work continued to receive the \$20 a month stipend. Over time, additional services were added to the program including Emergency Rides Home, vanpool and carpool-only parking facilities, and bike lockers. Today, an average of 1,100 County employees participate in the CAP every month.

DISCUSSION:

In 2017, the Office of Sustainability, which currently operates the program, contracted with Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates to evaluate the program and recommend changes to improve participation. Nelson/Nygaard gathered input from County employees through workshops, an on-line survey and a booth at the County Benefits fair and researched current best practices for promoting commute alternatives.

Combining the employee input and the best practices research, Nelson/Nygaard developed a list of recommended changes to the CAP. The recommendations incorporate employee interest in a flexible program that promotes and rewards all alternatives to driving to work alone including public

transit, car and vanpools, walking, biking and telework. The recommended changes are summarized below and detailed in Exhibit A.

- Double the current transit and vanpool subsidies from \$75 to \$150 a month
- Provide CalTrain Go Passes for full-time employees working at County Center
- Track the use of designated parking spaces for car and van pools more effectively
- Create a CAP app to provide information and track personal daily commutes and potentially create on-line competitions
- Re-brand CAP and improved marketing to employees
- Provide flexible workplace options and fund technology grants to departments for laptops and portable Wi-Fi for employees that telecommute or work outside of the office

When implemented together, which is the proposed approach, the recommendations have the potential to increase CAP participation by approximately 20 to 35 percent, which means that every day, 220 to 385 additional employees would not commute to work alone in their car.

The projected increase in CAP participation is expected to come from the higher value and more diverse incentives and flexibility of the program. The two examples below highlight benefits of the proposed changes for employees who live in the East Bay.

- Currently, a vanpooler from the East Bay pays about half of their commute costs out of pocket. With the increase in the subsidy, the employees currently riding the seven east bay vanpools will have almost 100 percent of their commute costs covered by CAP subsidies.
- Another example is an East Bay commuter working in County Center who takes BART to CalTrain. Today, that person would receive \$75 toward a train pass but would have to cover 100 percent of their BART fare. With the new program, the transit subsidy would cover a portion the BART fare and the Go Pass would cover the CalTrain costs.

FISCAL IMPACT:

At the projected participation rate, the cost of implementing the new CAP plan is \$3.185 million a year. Funding in this amount for the CAP was approved by your Board in the two-year FY 2019-21 recommended budget. The approved funding includes \$1.2 million in Measure A funds from the sales tax approved in 2004 for transportation related projects. The remaining \$2 million comes from County funds. No additional County funds are being requested at this time, however, if participation in the program exceeds the estimates, additional funds may be requested at a later date.

| Category | Strategy | Description | Annual Cost |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|-------------|
| Increased Transit Subsidy | Increase transit/vanpool subsidy (Public transit systems such as Bart, Muni, VTA, ACE, Caltrain and SamTrans, Vanpool, Uber/Lyft Pool) | Double the existing transit/vanpool subsidy from \$75 to \$150. | \$2,074,000 |
| | Caltrain GoPass | Purchase Caltrain GoPass for full-time employees at County Center. | \$499,000 |
| Parking Demand Reductions | Commute cash | \$2 per day benefit for employees who carpool, bike, walk or telework to work. | \$306,000 |
| | Parking permit and vehicle registration | Parking space tracking to collect occupancy and maximize effectiveness of designated parking spaces. | \$ - |
| Employee Engagement | Online platforms and gamification | A mobile application and/or online dashboard to track employee commute behaviors, provide information, and gamify commuting. | \$ - |
| Marketing and Outreach | New employee orientation materials | Incorporation of all commute-related information as part of the new employee orientation. | \$1,000 |
| | Program marketing | A consistent and user-friendly "branding" effort to raise awareness of program offerings. | \$5,000 |
| Flexible Workplace Strategies | Flexible workspace & schedules | Allow employees to work outside of 9-5 hours; flexible desk space allows employee flexibility on where to work. | \$ - |
| | Work remote with portable Wi-Fi | Provide employees with remote server and internet access to be able to work outside the office | \$600,000 |