



## **Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) Program**

### **What is the program?**

The legislature passed the Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) Law in 1991, incorporating it into the Washington Clean Air Act. The goals of the program are to reduce traffic congestion, air pollution, and petroleum consumption by encouraging employees at the state's largest employment sites to take the bus, vanpool, bicycle, walk, work from home, or use a compressed work week.

Since the law's passage, major employers<sup>1</sup> in the urban areas of the state have implemented commute options programs and demonstrated strong support for the program. The Governor's CTR Board, comprised of representatives from major employers, transit agencies, local governments, regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs), and state agencies, provides policy oversight and establishes the funding priorities for the program. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) distributes program funding and provides policy direction and technical assistance to participating local governments; these local governments work directly with major employers to ensure effective implementation of their programs.

In 2006, the legislature passed the CTR Efficiency Act and made significant changes to the CTR law. These changes focused the program on urban growth areas served by congested highway corridors, introduced a planning role for the state's RTPOs and required local governments to set new goals for reducing drive-alone trips and vehicle miles traveled (VMT). The changes were intended to strengthen the CTR program's tie with the Growth Management Act and local land use and transportation planning.

Approximately 570,000 employees commute to CTR worksites on a daily basis. This is roughly 20 percent of the total number of workers in the state. Commute trips by employees who work at CTR worksites account for 4.6 percent of the statewide VMT.

### **How does the program help reduce VMT?**

The CTR program contributes to emission reductions and has an effect on total transportation demand. While the VMT covered under the CTR program is only a small portion of the state's total VMT, the program's strategies and new policy direction can be a foundation for broader efforts. The CTR planning process provides addresses the transportation and land use connection in local comprehensive planning.

Local governments in the affected urban growth areas of the Central Puget Sound have already set goals to reduce VMT per employee, in line with the Climate Advisory Team recommendations (T-2). The CTR plans can be built upon to develop local, regional, and state VMT reduction goals that are broader than CTR worksites, and the experiences and lessons learned through the CTR planning process can help inform future VMT reduction recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> Major Employers refers to employers with more than 100 full-time employees. Those employees also work throughout the year and are scheduled to arrive at work between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m.

### How is the program performing?

The CTR program achieved record results in 2007. The percentage of people who drove alone to work to CTR worksites declined from 70.9 percent in 1993 to 65.5 percent in 2007 (a decrease of more than five percent). Employees make decisions about how to travel to work based on a variety of factors – cost, convenience, distance, time, etc. CTR provides information and incentives for employees to choose alternatives to driving alone. Employees commuting to CTR worksites made nearly 26,000 fewer vehicle trips each weekday morning in 2007 than they did when they entered the program. The absence of these trips has a significant impact on congestion, reducing delay by approximately 18 percent during the peak period on average mornings in the region.

Statewide, employees' round-trip commutes to CTR worksites accounted for just more than 2.4 billion VMT in 2007. Without the changes in employee travel, the commute VMT to these sites would have been 6.7 percent higher – an estimated difference of nearly 170 million miles.

### **What's happening now?**

After the passage of the CTR Efficiency Act in 2006, local governments and RTPOs developed new CTR plans. All of the state's participating cities, counties and regions have set two goals for their affected urban growth areas (in Clark, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston, Whatcom, and Yakima counties):

- Reduce the number of drive-alone commute trips to CTR worksites by 10 percent by 2011. Achieving this goal would reduce 27,800 more drive-alone commute trips, nearly doubling the number of trips reduced since the program began.
- Reduce the number of VMT per employee to CTR worksites by 13 percent by 2011.

These goals represent a shift in the CTR program; now, individual employer goals are tied to the goals of the city or county. Local governments have greater flexibility to determine which employers to focus on and which strategies to emphasize to meet their goals. Through the planning process in 2007, they identified potential improvements to local plans, policies and strategies that could support employers and meet their CTR goals.

Local governments and regions are now implementing their plans. Progress toward the goals will be measured in 2009 and 2011. However, local agencies face challenges meeting these goals.

They have:

- large unfunded pedestrian and bicycle safety and mobility needs
- transit service improvement needs
- infill demand needs
- fewer funding sources to help meet these needs and demands

### **What can we be doing with existing resources to enhance the program's ability to reduce VMT?**

Through state agency leadership there are short term opportunities to focus on longer commute trips by using vanpooling, express bus service, and telework to yield rapid reductions in VMT and emissions within the present base of employees in the CTR program. Shifting the focus this way will require a change in marketing strategy by employers, to identify and focus on their

more distant employees, and support for transportation services to enable these employees to drive less frequently to work.

**What could we (or should we) be doing with additional resources?  
(i.e. where are the opportunities for growth/enhancement)?**

Local governments and regions have identified numerous strategies and programs that will help them achieve their goals, including incentives, marketing, and capital investments. Many of the needs identified by cities, counties, and towns are currently underfunded. Additional funding resources would allow for expansion of the CTR program and additional state support through measurement and technical assistance.

**Program Contact:**  
**Kathy Johnston**  
**Commute Trip Reduction Program Manager**  
**Washington State Department of Transportation**  
**360-705-7925**  
[johnstk@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:johnstk@wsdot.wa.gov)  
[www.wsdot.wa.gov/tdm/ctr](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/tdm/ctr)