Message from the President

Dear TransitCenter Customers,

As we continue to serve more customers throughout the country, we are seeing just how popular transit benefits have become.

What used to be a program that few companies knew about, is now one that more employees expect as part of a complete benefits package.

It’s clear that companies are seeing the positive impact of providing a way to lower commuting costs for employees. They’re also experiencing substantial savings for themselves from reduced payroll taxes.

And by making transit a better choice for commuters, businesses like yours know that they are helping to ease traffic congestion, reduce air pollution and improve the quality of life where their employees work and live.

The value that transit benefits offer continues to grow. In this issue of TransitCenter News, you’ll read about extreme commuters who travel 90 minutes or more, each way, between work and home. It’s a growing trend that not only shows the impact recent economic changes have had on the way we commute, it also shows the need for transit benefits to provide relief for employees who pay the high costs associated with extreme commutes.

As one of the companies who are already aware of the value of transit benefits, you are providing a valuable service for all commuters.

Sincerely,
Larry Filler
President and CEO

Legislative Update:

Senate Moves to Raise Tax-Free Cap for Mass Transit to $155 in 2006

On May 17, 2005, the US Senate passed a massive transportation reauthorization bill which included a provision to raise the monthly cap for transit and vanpool expenses from $105-a-month to $155-a-month beginning in 2006.

Since the transportation bill passed by the House of Representatives earlier this year did not contain the $155 provision, a conference committee comprised of Senate and House members will meet to negotiate a compromise bill.

In addition to the cap increase, the Senate bill includes an important policy provision that will change federal law to achieve equality between the transit benefit and the parking benefit, which is currently $200 a month. According to the Senate provision, in 2010, the benefit limits for transit and parking will be required by law to be the same.

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TransitCenter Honors Sesame Workshop with “TransitChek Leadership Award”

On April 22, 2005, TransitCenter handed out its first TransitChek Leadership Award to Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit educational organization behind Sesame Street in recognition for their long-standing commitment to providing transit benefits to their employees. Sesame Workshop, joined the TransitChek Program in 1991, early in the program’s history.

Trish Callahan, Vice President, Human Resources of Sesame Workshop, accepted the award from President and CEO of TransitCenter, Larry Filler, during a ceremony which took place as part of Earth Day 2005.

“It was a great honor to receive this award from TransitCenter,” said Ms. Callahan. “We’ve been offering TransitChek to our employees for the past fourteen years because we believe in its value not only for the savings, but also as a way to improve the quality of life in the areas where we work and live.”

“Increasing the cap adds more value to transit benefits for both employers and employees by increasing their savings by fifty percent or more,” says Larry Filler, President and CEO of TransitCenter, Inc.

“Senator Charles Schumer’s amendment to the bill, which specifically addresses the need to increase the transit cap, gives us an important means to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and improve on everyone’s quality of life.”

Efforts are underway through the National Transit Benefits Association, of which TransitCenter is a member, to encourage House conferees to support the Senate provision and keep the $155 cap increase intact.

Earth Day Roundup

This year, Earth Day celebrated its 35th Anniversary. TransitCenter participated as cosponsors of the event. We want to thank everyone who stopped by our exhibition booth during Earth Day 2005. TransitCenter employees volunteered for the day to explain how transit benefit programs work and how they help to decrease traffic congestion and air pollution by encouraging transit use.

If you didn’t get a chance to meet us this year, we’ll make sure to let you know of future events we will be attending.

When the Heat Is On, Ozone Pollution Is Up

Ground Level Ozone Pollution is a summertime condition created when chemicals in the air interact with seasonally high temperatures and sunlight. In many urban areas, exhaust from motor vehicles is the single largest contributor to this problem.

Transportation agencies have responded to the problem of ozone pollution by encouraging commuters to ride transit during the summer months. NJ TRANSIT offers an “OzonePass” which is a special discounted ticket available on ozone alert days, when high levels of ground ozone pollution are predicted. The special ticket is valid during the ozone season and allows employees to travel to and from work using transit for only $2.00 round trip.

(The OzonePass is only available to employees of companies that are members of the New Jersey Ozone Action Partnership, visit their website at http://www.ridewise.org to find out more.)

Another way to help reduce ground level ozone pollution is to encourage your employees to take advantage of the savings offered by transit benefits. By offering TransitCenter’s TransitChek benefit programs to your employees, not only are you keeping costs down, you’re also encouraging the use of transit which helps keep more cars off the road.

Tips To Help Deal With Ground Level Ozone Pollution

To help lessen ground level ozone pollution:

- Carpool, vanpool or take mass transit
- Refuel your car after dark
- Avoid using gas-powered lawn equipment
- Mow lawns on cooler days
- Use propane for barbecues instead of charcoal and lighter fluid
- Conserve electricity by setting your cooling thermostat to 78˚ F
- Avoid using oil-based paints or schedule painting projects during cooler weather
- Keep cars tuned and tires properly inflated to maintain fuel efficiency
- Don’t leave cars idling when making short stops on errands

People who might be affected should:

- Be aware of high pollution days and limit physical activity
- Exercise in the early hours and not in the evenings
- Check local air pollution levels at www.ozoneny.org and www.cpub.epa.gov/airnow/
- Avoid congested areas where pollution sits
Make a Clean Getaway To Great Weekend Destinations By Transit

Pop Quiz! Which one of the following destinations is reachable by mass transit?

A. The Montauk Lighthouse  B. The Bronx Zoo
C. The Long Island Oyster Festival  D. Asbury Park

The answer is…all of the above!

Getaway programs are also good for the communities where the destinations are located, according to Danny Brucker, spokesperson for MTA Metro-North Railroad. The towns who receive our getaway visitors enjoy the program because it brings more tourism without the extra traffic and parking problems.”

Getaway destinations on Metro-North, include Rye Playland, the New York Botanical Garden and the Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk. For museum-goers, trips include the Dia:Beacon and the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art. Packages will also take you to casinos, golf courses, and historic sites.

Thanks to its increasingly popular summer beach packages, NJ TRANSIT recorded a significant increase in weekend ridership on its North Jersey Coast Line. There were 22,000 more passengers each weekend of last summer, seven percent higher than the previous summer and roughly 20 percent higher than in the off season.

“Unquestionably, New Jersey is full of wonderful sights and activities that bring million of tourists to the states each summer, and the best way to access these attractions is to ride NJ TRANSIT,” says Executive Director, George D. Warrington.

Here are the links to find more information on summer getaway programs for you to share with your employees:

- For Metro-North Railroad and Long Island Rail Road Getaways and Packages, visit http://www.mta.info/ and click on the “Summer Of Fun” banner
- For NJTRANSIT Deals and Destinations: http://www.njtransit.com/nn_sp.html

Who Are Your Extreme Commuters?

You’ve heard of extreme sports and extreme makeovers... but extreme commuting?

According to a study by the United States Census Bureau, there are over 3.4 million Americans who travel 90 minutes or more, each way, between work and home. Because of the extended amount of time, they have become known as extreme commuters and they represent the fastest growing segment of commuters in the nation.

People have chosen to become extreme commuters because of economic changes, such as booming real estate activity, that have made it a necessity.

For many, fast-rising real estate prices have pushed affordable homes further away from higher-paying jobs in the city. This has also had an impact on families in search of homes in neighborhoods with better schools. Others have accepted the commute because they prefer having the best of both worlds--a more relaxing rural home life and the jobs in the city that they enjoy.

Along with the amount of time spent traveling, the costs associated with these commutes can also be considered extreme. Hopefully, extreme commuters at your organization know about the savings that transit benefits offer and have enrolled in the TransitChek program.

Top Twelve Extreme Commuter Counties

- Staten Island, NY 11.8%
- Orange County, NY 10.0%
- Queens County, NY 7.1%
- Bronx County, NY 6.9%
- McHenry County, IL 6.7%
- Nassau County, NY 6.6%
- Brooklyn, NY 5.0%
- Contra Costa County, CA 4.6%
- Prince William County, MD 4.5%
- Prince George’s County, MD 3.8%
- Montgomery County, MD 2.2%
- Will County, IL 2.0%

This ranking shows the percent of workers in each county, 16 years of age and over, who traveled 90 minutes or more as part of their commute.

*Source: American Community Survey, United States Census Bureau
New Premium TransitChek Program Takes Off

Since the last issue of TransitCenter News, more than a hundred companies have joined TransitCenter’s New Premium TransitChek Program which was designed specifically for medium and large-sized organizations with one hundred or more employees.

Companies have been quick to join the program because it allows employees in office locations around the country to join in on the savings, as well.

Our New Premium TransitChek Program includes the TransitChek QuickPay Card, a Visa debit card issued by Bank of America, which has been uniquely designed for purchasing transit tickets and monthly passes using tax-free transit benefit dollars wherever Visa is accepted.

The QuickPay Card can be used to pay for commuter parking expenses through a proprietary system that assures employers that transit and parking benefits are being used to meet all IRS regulations.

Our QuickPay Card is offered across the country in places like Philadelphia, San Francisco, Houston, Boston, Los Angeles and Portland.

To find out more, you can email us at tcnews@transitcenter.com.

Customer Service Corner: Returning Unused TransitChek MetroCards for Credit

There may be times when you order too many TransitChek® MetroCards®, or experience changes in benefit membership before the products arrive. In any case, our Customer Service department routinely handles situations in which customers find themselves with extra Unlimited Ride and Bonus Value TransitChek MetroCards.

The good news is that these cards can be returned to TransitCenter for credit. However, returned cards must still be in the original unopened, plastic packaging. Also, if the MetroCards are expired, the expiration date cannot be more than a year-old by the time TransitCenter receives them. Just call our Customer Service Department at (800) 945-2435 and we’ll help you do the rest.

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