Drive Less, Save More

Energy Savers Blog

For someone who works in the Vehicle Technologies Program, I actually don't spend that much time in my automobile. I usually get around using a combination of public transit, my bike, and my own two feet. But I'm an exception. In the U.S., the vehicle miles travelled per person is actually twice as high as it is in Western Europe and three times higher than in Japan. However, alternatives to using your car have a wealth of benefits. In addition to reducing petroleum consumption, they can lower greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, decrease stress, and bring communities together. Fortunately, there are a variety of ways to minimize the distance you drive that can also save time and money.

With May being National Bike Month and Bike to Work Day occurring last Friday, it's a great time to investigate biking in your community. The Drive Less, Save More campaign through the Oregon Department of Transportation provides great resources for bicycle commuters [1], including maintenance tips, safety advice, and theft avoidance. It even has instructional videos that lead you step-by-step through skills like fitting a helmet. Although Bike to Work Day is over, the League of American Bicyclists' website lists a variety of other Bike Month events [2].

Walking to work or local businesses is also a great option. The Environmental Protection Agency's Smart Growth program [3] helps cities plan development so that they can be more walk-able and bike-able in the future. Safe Routes to School [4], run by the Federal Highway Administration, assists communities in planning, developing, and implementing projects that make it safer for students to walk and bicycle to school.

Depending on the infrastructure in your area, public transit may be another effective way to get around. To find public transit resources nearby, check out the American Public Transportation Association's list of agencies organized by geographic area [5]. Clean Cities coalitions, which are locally-based groups that work to decrease petroleum use in transportation, have collaborated with transit agencies across the country to help make buses cleaner and more efficient [6]. Many cities are also investing in commuter rail, expanded subways, and light rail to help their residents get around.

Other options include telecommuting and carpooling. Many employers now allow telecommuting, or working from home. With a good Internet connection, most employees can participate in conference calls, check email, and write documents in their own house. If you have co-workers as neighbors, consider banding together into a carpool. By sharing a vehicle with other drivers, you can cut your weekly fuel costs in half and save wear-and-tear on your car. In addition, many urban areas allow vehicles with multiple passengers to use High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, which are typically less congested. With less traffic, carpooling can significantly shorten your commute time.

No matter what method you choose to reduce the miles you drive, you'll be reducing the stress on your own budget, our economy, and our environment.

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SOURCE [9]

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[1] http://www.drivelesssavemore.com/pages/biking
[2] http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/bikemonth/events.php
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