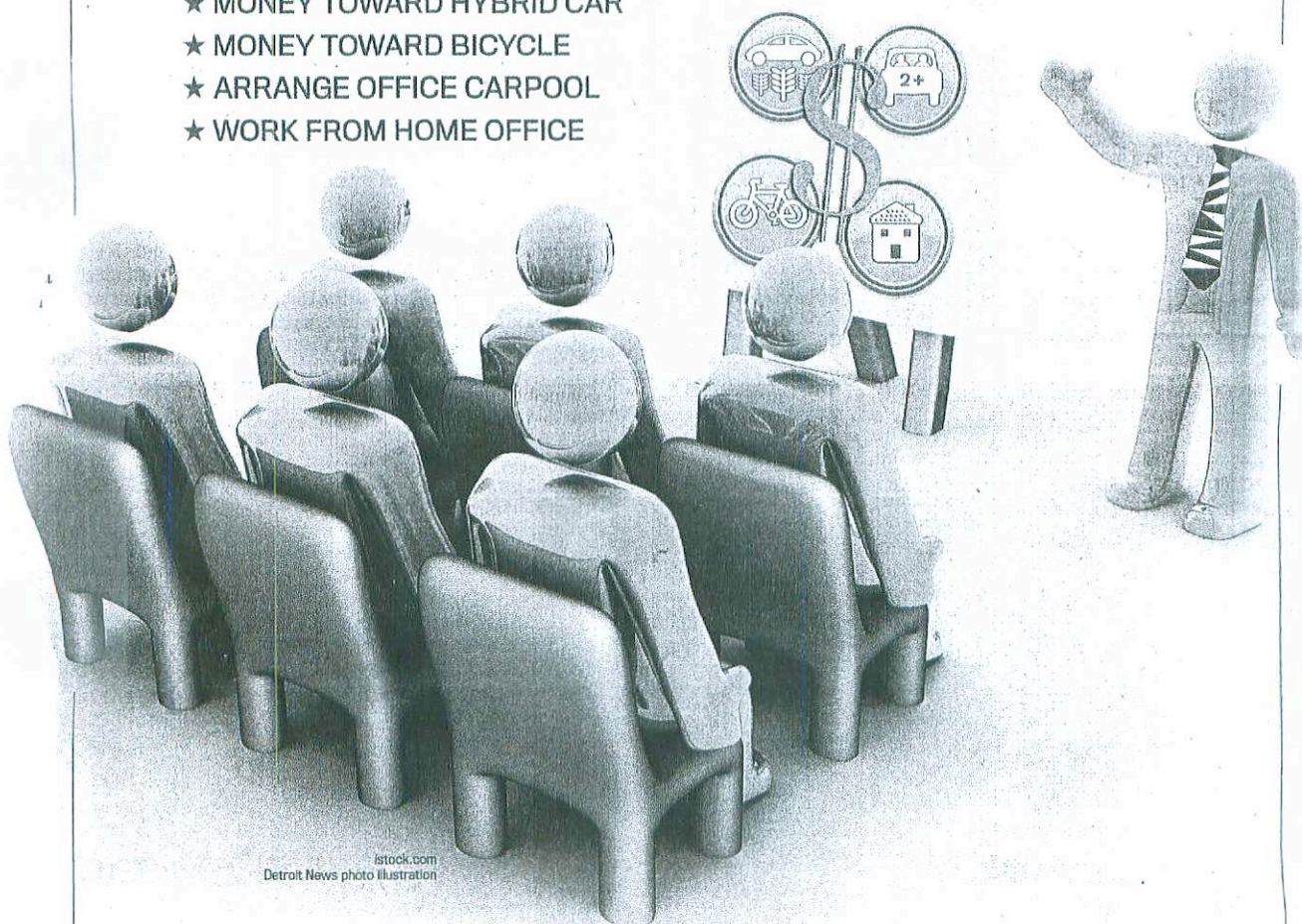


Business

CUTTING THE COST OF COMMUTING

- ★ MONEY TOWARD HYBRID CAR
- ★ MONEY TOWARD BICYCLE
- ★ ARRANGE OFFICE CARPOOL
- ★ WORK FROM HOME OFFICE



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Detroit News photo illustration

Employers take steps to lower workers' fuel expenses

By JACLYN TROP
The Detroit News

With gas prices jacking up the cost of the daily commute, some Michigan employers are helping workers cut their burdensome fuel bills.

The state's major companies are doing everything from allowing employees to work from home, to arranging car pools, to defraying the cost of bicycles and hybrid cars — all in the name of conserving gas.

"For us, it's all about productivity, not about how much

face-time you put in at the office," said Andy Gutman, CFO of Farbman Group, a real estate firm in Southfield.

Between 10 percent and 15 percent of Farbman's 200 employees work from home at least part of the week to save on daycare and gasoline costs, he said.

Though supervisors were skeptical when the company announced the option earlier this year, Gutman said, they embraced the idea when they found that they could track employees' pro-

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Fuel costs

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gress online. Gutman noticed an additional benefit once the program got underway — lower employee turnover.

Flex-time helps save gas

Many companies, among them Dearborn-based clothier Carhartt and Livonia marketing firm Valassis, are developing programs that will give workers flexibility over their schedules. Flex-time lets commuters adjust their schedules to avoid rush hour, which saves the gas burned waiting in traffic backups, according to Federal-Mogul spokesperson Paula Silver.

Working from home, however, can require major technology upgrades to keep servers, software and laptops in sync. Bassett & Bassett Inc., a communications management firm in Detroit, overhauled its infrastructure in a “meaningful five-figure investment” last month, according to CEO Leland Bassett. Employees also received two days of training on the new equipment.

Cyclists join bike pools

When getting to the office is a necessity, carpooling can slash energy consumption. Quicken Loans in Livonia created a “Di-

Off to work you go

Here's a sampling of Web sites that offer commute-related tools and resources:

- Calculate the cost of your commute: commuter-page.com/Userweb/Cost-Commuting/CostCommuting.htm
- Find a vanpool: www.van-poolusa.com
- Learn the basics of carpooling: www.lcarpool.com/en/CarpoolEtiquette.htm
- Compare gas prices at stations near you: www.gasbuddy.com
- Pick up bike safety tips: commutebybike.com

Source: Detroit News Research

vide the Ride” program that helps like-minded employees coordinate travel by zip code and work schedule through the company's Intranet, according to spokesperson Michael Dunklee. The page includes links to nearby carpool lots, a list of nearby stations and their fuel prices, and articles on improving gas mileage and carpool etiquette.

Google's Ann Arbor office donates \$5 per day to a charity of

choice for those who walk or bike, according to spokesman Patrick McLaughlin. About half the workforce take public transportation, walk, bike, or carpool.

Brian Walker, CEO of Zeeland-based furniture manufacturer Herman Miller and an avid bicyclist, decided to discourage the use of cars altogether when he implemented a “bike pooling” system that matches other cyclists by location and schedule.

Rather than offer stipends to buy gas, the company provides one-time reimbursements of \$100 for bicycles, \$50 for helmets, and \$500 for hybrid cars.

“Giving them money to consume more fuel isn't really the answer,” said Michael Ramirez, Herman Miller's director of corporate social responsibility. “Obviously this situation is not going to change, so we need to change our behavior.”

Fuel prices are influencing more than a company's commuting behavior.

The pinch at the pump pervades the celebratory spirit as well, Gutman said, including Farbmans Group's annual summer party and raffle.

This year's prize? Gas cards.

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