



## **Commuter Connect refreshes brand, expands program**

*Residents encouraged to “Dump the Pump” and try transit on June 21*

INDIANAPOLIS (June 18, 2012) – Central Indiana commuters and employers are getting more resources to help them find carpools, vanpools and other alternative transportation options. As it rolls out more services, the program known as Central Indiana Commuter Services is getting a new name, Commuter Connect.

Commuter Connect, a service of Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority (CIRTA), serves as a connection point between commuters and various commuting alternatives – carpooling, vanpooling, riding the bus, biking and walking. It is part of a federally funded service designed to reduce air pollution and traffic congestion.

Commuter Connect provides everything from matchmaking services that link would-be carpools and vanpools to tips for employers wanting to ease the impact commuting has on their workers.

“Frankly, we felt like ‘Central Indiana Commuter Services’ sounded a little too governmental and not as consumer-friendly as we want our services to be,” said CIRTA Executive Director Ehren Bingaman. “Our team is passionate about helping people find better ways of getting to work, and we wanted a name and identity that better reflects that mission.”

Created in 2004 through a federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Act (CMAQ) grant, the program has been a broad partnership that’s worked primarily by offering employers with resources to help them provide better commuting options for their workers and helping match commuters for ride sharing.

One of the region’s most commuter-friendly employers is OneAmerica Financial Partners. OneAmerica supports their employees’ transit needs in a variety of ways including partially subsidized passes for IndyGo and Indy Express Bus, flex scheduling, providing bike racks and helping connect employees who want to carpool.

OneAmerica Chairman, President and CEO Dayton Molendorp said, “We’re always striving to attract and retain the best talent in our industry and in the Indianapolis area, and we know that doing that requires offering the most competitive benefits package possible. We know that more and more of today’s professionals value having options for how they get to and from work.”

In a recent survey, one of six OneAmerica employees reported that at least once a week they take some sort of alternate mode of transportation other than driving alone in a car by themselves.

“But more than simply providing benefits, we try to offer employees options that truly enhance their lives and we believe that transit benefits fit that description,” said Molendorp.

Commuter Connect has a database including nearly 6,000 individuals who have registered as Central Indiana commuters. Of those, more than 3,000 people are already carpooling, vanpooling, riding bikes, walking or taking public transportation to work; however, about 3,500 are still looking to connect with other commuters.

The Commuter Connect team is excited about having a broader impact.

“Over the last few years, interest in alternative commuting in Central Indiana has increased exponentially,” said Commuter Connect manager Andrew McGee. “We want to make sure area workers see us as a resource that helps them make that choice, whether they plan to ride the bus, carpool, bike or whatever. We want to be more of a resource for consumers, as well as employers.”

As part of the new name, Commuter Connect is sporting a new identity, complete with a commuter icon. A human figure with a different kind of wheel at the end of each leg, the icon named “Wheel-E” is a multi-modal commuter representing the diverse commuting options in Central Indiana.

“‘Wheel-E’ sends a more upbeat message about commuting,” McGee says. “The fact is, a lot of the options commuters have today do take some pain out of commuting.”

That’s why Commuter Connect wants to make sure everyone knows all their options.

In this effort, Commuter Connect will continue to work directly with commuters and with employers, but it’s expanding its services.

Commuter Connect will offer employers a range of services, from a free commuter-friendly workplace assessment to onsite Commuter Connect information fairs. In addition, it can help business owners understand how they can reap tax savings by helping their workers choose alternative forms of transit for their commutes.

Commuter Connect will continue to provide commuters with links to information about everything from finding the right bus to starting a vanpool.

The Hilton Indianapolis Hotel & Suites also applauded the Commuter Connect announcement. Recently named a “top workplace” by the Indianapolis Star, the Hilton has 160 employees, about a third of whom take advantage of the transit subsidy it offers.

The hotel pays 30% of the cost of a monthly IndyGo bus pass, so team members pay \$41.50, rather than the full \$60 price for a 31-day pass. Plus, the cost is payroll-deducted, so it’s not an immediate out-of-pocket expense.

“Offering these kinds of benefits and resources for our team members not only helps us to attract quality job applicants, but also allows us to retain our team members and avoid the excessively high turnover costs that are sometimes indicative of the hospitality industry,” said Denise Weathersbe, human resources director for the Hilton.

“But, most importantly, it fits perfectly within our philosophy of taking care of our team members by providing all of the support and resources we can so that they can focus on the business of taking care of our guests.”

One of Commuter Connect’s most popular services is the Emergency Ride Home service, which provides registered commuters with free taxicab rides if they’re called home unexpectedly (if they meet certain conditions).

“This helps take some of the ‘what happens if my kid gets sick?’ or ‘what if I have to work late?’ fear out of sharing a ride to work,” McGee says.

In the coming months, Commuter Connect will support its new brand with a marketing campaign that includes social media, billboards and more, as well as attendance at a number of fairs and festivals – all to get the word out that area workers have options for their daily commute.

There is no charge for employers or employees to use Commuter Connect’s services. To learn more, visit [CommuterConnect.us](http://CommuterConnect.us).

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