



Active Commute Support Frequently Asked Questions

Ohio
Department of Health



What is active commute support?

“Active commuting” involves ways of getting to work that result in higher levels of physical activity than driving a car. It includes walking, bicycling, and taking public transit. Active commuting can have a positive impact on employee health, happiness, and productivity and contribute to developing healthy communities. Worksites can create support programs and infrastructure that encourage employees to make active commuting a habit.

Why focus on commutes?

In Ohio:

- » **80% of adults do not meet recommended physical activity guidelines**
- » **27% of adults engage in no leisure time physical activity**
- » **<3% of adults usually bicycle or walk to work**

Adults frequently report “lack of time” as a challenge that prevents them from being physically active. Many people spend a significant amount of their day at work, and over the last 50 years, the percentage of people who work in occupations that require physical activity has progressively decreased, making it difficult for adults to be physically active during work hours. Adults may struggle to be active as they balance the competing demands of work, home, and caring for themselves and others. By making commutes more active, workers can build physical activity into their routines without a big time commitment.

Employers that encourage physical activity during the workday have reported less absenteeism and higher productivity due to lack of illness, obesity, injury, or chronic conditions.

Why should businesses care about supporting active commutes?

Poor health is bad for business. Increasing physical activity for employees can lead to benefits and savings for businesses, including:

- » **Reduced health care costs:** Physical activity helps control weight and reduces the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. It can also help to reduce stress, anxiety, and



Active commutes provide benefits to employers and employees.

depression and lead to increased muscle strength and mobility. Regular physical activity can lead to a savings of 5 to 12 percent in annual medical costs.

» **Increased productivity and punctuality:** Employees who are physically active during the work day show higher rates of productivity and are more satisfied with the quantity and quality of their work. Active commuters are more likely to have a higher rate of productivity than drive-alone commuters due to physical activity and reduced stress.

» **Decreased absenteeism and turnover:** Employers that encourage physical activity during the workday have reported less absenteeism and better productivity due to lack of illness, injury, obesity, or other chronic conditions. Physically fit employees are absent two fewer days per year on average than employees who suffer from health problems. Employees who prioritize physical activity choose to maintain jobs with employers who share the same value.

» **Reduced parking costs and increased accessibility:** It is not unusual for employers to spend over \$60 per employee per month for a parking spot. Ten to 14 bicycles can be parked in one car parking space, and walkers and transit riders require no parking at all. Encouraging staff to commute actively can reduce parking needs and free up space for customers or visitors.¹

¹ See citations for data in Ohio Active Commute Toolkit, p. 6, <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/creating-healthy-communities/resources/ohio-active-commute-worksite-toolkit>

What are the crucial elements of an active commute program?

Cities, counties, health departments, and individual workplaces can collaborate on key elements that support active commutes.

Infrastructure

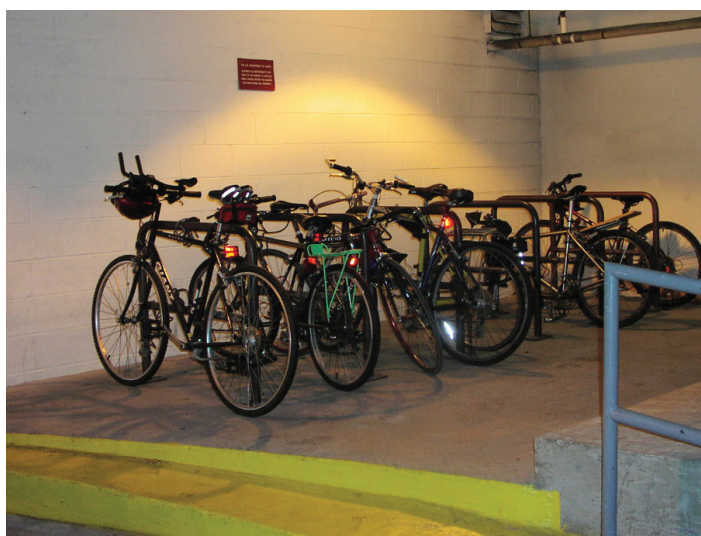
Supportive infrastructure can make active commuting more comfortable and convenient, and increase its visibility as a transportation option. The cost of infrastructure improvements can be offset by the health cost-savings they provide. Important infrastructure includes:

- » Convenient, covered, and secure bicycle parking
- » Bicycle repair stands, tools, and tire pumps
- » Changing rooms, lockers, and showers
- » Sidewalks, pathways, and bicycle routes leading to the worksite
- » Bike share programs, either city-wide or worksite-specific

Supportive work culture

Creating a culture change within a worksite can help shift attitudes and normalize the idea of active commuting. A supportive culture can be built through:

- » Flexible work schedules and dress codes



Indoor bike parking provides security to active commuters.



- » Education on active commute options and safe riding skills
- » Organized walking and bicycling groups, outings and events to get employees more comfortable with walking and bicycling
- » Active commute challenges and events that promote friendly competition among employees
- » Company leadership participation in active commuting
- » Employee recognition and awards
- » Certification by the League of American Bicyclists as a Bicycle Friendly Business



Organized challenges and events can help motivate your workforce.

Financial incentives

Financial incentives can make the switch to active commuting even more attractive. Financial incentives include:

- » Gift cards to cover bicycle maintenance or as a reward for the number of days an employee uses active transportation
- » Free/subsidized transit passes
- » Free/subsidized bike share memberships
- » Tax-free benefits, such as the [Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit](#)
- » Cash equivalents to forgo free parking spots

Active Commute Events

National Walking Day

1st Wednesday in April

National Walk at Lunch Day

Late April

National Bike Month

Every May

Bike to Work Day

3rd Friday in May

World Car Free Day

September 22

Multimodal options

Active commuting becomes a feasible, year-round option when employees have access to a variety of multimodal trip options depending on the weather and circumstances. Local governments should take a holistic approach to provide:

- » Convenient, comfortable public transit with accommodations for taking bicycles on the bus
- » First/last mile coverage for easy access to transit stops and park and rides (i.e. bike shares, ride shares, and shuttles)
- » Guaranteed Ride Home programs that provide limited emergency rides for active commuters



Multimodal options allow for flexibility in commutes.

What is happening in Ohio?

Health departments, regional planning organizations, and local governments are already promoting active commutes. Below are a few examples of initiatives around the state.

Columbus - Neighborhood Coalition

Columbus Public Health began working in the Franklinton neighborhood in 2016 to promote active commutes. The initiative began by supporting five worksites to purchase equipment for local bike share systems and bicycle parking. A local bicycle co-op, Franklinton Cycle Works, got involved to provide its expertise. As the project gained momentum, a local coalition, Bike Friendly Franklinton, formed to continue to expand and promote bicycling in the neighborhood. The coalition has continued to host an annual Bike Fest, organize rides, install additional bicycles racks, and more.

Athens County - Bike to Work Day

Athens County has worked to promote active transportation and commuting through numerous initiatives, including Complete Streets policies, local bike share programs, professional development rides, trails, and other infrastructure. In May 2018 the City of Athens hosted its first - and highly successful - Bike to Work Day, partnering with local employers, bike shops, and other organizations. The event included an organized ride with four stations providing water and snacks, and drew over fifty people to bike to work. The event will happen again in 2019, led by local partners.



Bicycle parking installed for commuters in Franklinton, Columbus

Northeast Ohio - Employer Incentives

The Northeast Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA), Sustainable Cleveland, and the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority partner each year to award local businesses for supporting alternative transportation. The Cleveland Museum of Natural History won a silver medal in 2018 for its active commute incentives. These include providing indoor bicycle parking and shower facilities, and financial incentives for active commutes. Employees who take transit, bike, carpool, walk or vanpool can earn up to \$50 per month.



A mechanic station at Bike to Work Day in Athens, 2018

For more information, visit:

- » Ohio Active Commute Toolkit, <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/creating-healthy-communities/resources/ohio-active-commute-worksites-toolkit>
- » CDC Worksite Health Scorecard, <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/initiatives/healthscorecard/index.html>
- » CDC Work@Health, <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/initiatives/workathealth/index.html>
- » Gohio Commute, <https://gohiocommute.com/#/>