

CLEAN AIR QUARTERLY

Winter 1999

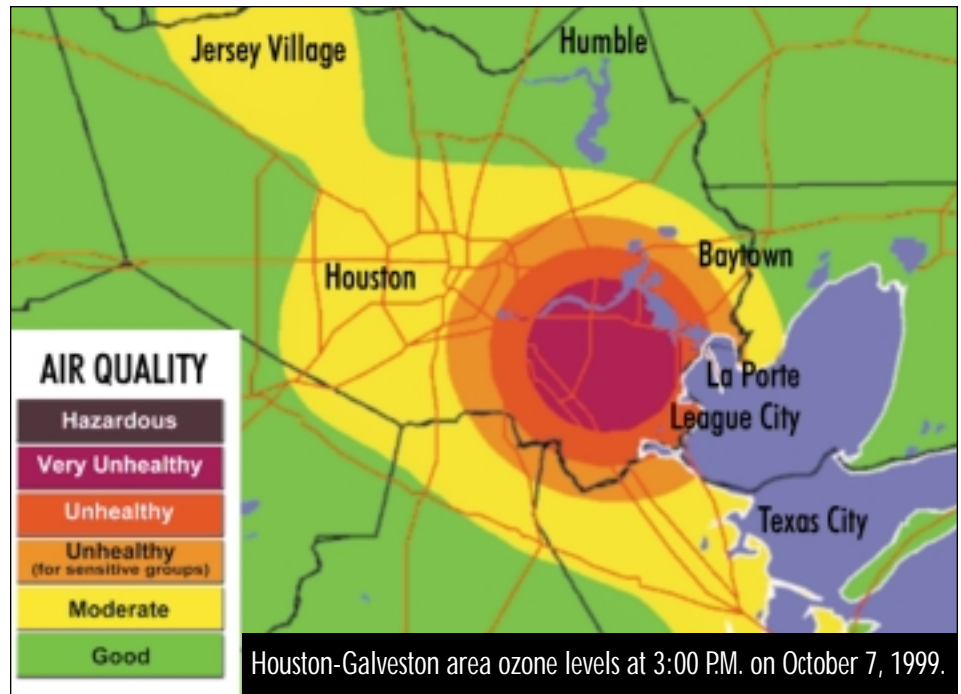
October 7th Ozone Reading Highest in Nation

The highest ozone reading in the nation this year occurred in the Houston area on Thursday, October 7, 1999. Six state and municipal monitoring stations throughout the region recorded readings above the national health standard's maximum of 125 ppb ozone averaged for one-hour.

Ozone levels surpassed the maximum as early as 10:30 A.M., and continued to stay at unhealthy levels until 6:00 P.M. Deer Park's station recorded the peak ozone level at 3:00 P.M., with a reading of 251 ppb, or double the acceptable maximum level.

The eight-county region of the Houston-Galveston area is the first metropolitan area in the United States to surpass Los Angeles for the most days of ozone exceedance. In 1999, Houston had 52 days of ground-level ozone exceedances while Los Angeles had 43. Additionally, Houston has recorded a significant number of ozone smog levels above Los Angeles' 1999 maximum of 170 ppb.

This one-day episode has pushed the Houston-Galveston area's grave need to solve its air quality problem not only into the regional, but also national spotlights. While many regions still exceed the national standard,



Source: TNRCC

ozone levels and the number of violations in Houston have not declined as rapidly as in other major metropolitan areas.

The latest reading of 200 plus ppb, a level often obtained in the world's most polluted city of Mexico City, is a reminder that the eight-county nonattainment area will be required to produce an air quality plan to comply with national standards by 2007. Otherwise, the Houston area will face the immediate suspension of federal funding for transportation, as well as the loss of local entities to finance area projects.

On November 19, the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) indicated that the extreme levels of ozone on October 7 were caused by a combination of factors, particularly an unreported emissions release from the Cedar Bayou Chevron Chemical facility.

TNRCC will initiate enforcement action against Chevron, including fines, corrective action or both, as it continues to analyze just how much the Chevron release contributed to the nation's highest ozone reading of 1999.

Sources: Houston Chronicle, TNRCC

Ozone Exceedances Plague Houston and Other Texas Cities

Although Houston's severe air quality problem has recently made the headlines of both local and national media, many other Texas regions are not far behind in gaining comparable news coverage. Preliminary figures from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) show that the air quality for much of Texas this summer has been the worst in almost a decade.

Dallas - Fort Worth

Along with the eastern portion of the state, Dallas-Fort Worth also moves up the ranks of the smoggiest metropolitan areas in the United States for 1999. Dallas recorded its five highest one-hour ozone levels from 1996-1999 this year as air monitors attained readings from 154 ppbs to 164 ppbs. Additionally, four of its five highest ozone readings made the nation's top 30 one-hour ozone smog levels of 1999.

The latest preliminary statistics come just a year after the EPA moved Dallas from "moderate" to "serious" air quality status as a result of ongoing violations. EPA officials recently notified TNRCC Commissioner Ralph Marquez that continual violations occurring in the 1999 ozone season might bump Dallas into the next classification, from "serious" to "severe." If Dallas continues to experience poor air quality readings, it could shortly be joining Beaumont-Port Arthur as the second worst region for smog in the state.

San Antonio

Meanwhile, for the first time ever, San Antonio has failed to meet clean air quality compliance, as area monitors recorded eleven exceedances between August 5 and September 20



Number of exceedance days based on the new eight hour standard of 85 parts per billion to exceed the standard in attainment areas.

under the new, more-restricted eight-hour standard. In the past, San Antonio met the national standard of 125 ppb for one-hour. However, the new standard, mandated by the EPA in 1997, reduces the permissible maximum to 85 ppb ozone averaged for eight-hours in attainment areas.

Under the new mandate, a region is only permitted four exceedances in three years, or risk federal declaration as a nonattainment area. As of now, San Antonio might be able to retain its clean air status because a U.S. District Circuit Court suspended the eight-hour mandate in April of 1999. If the EPA successfully appeals the court's decision, San Antonio will be in violation of the national air quality standards and will be recognized as a nonattainment region in July 2000.

Austin

Like San Antonio, it appears that Austin, too, has fallen out of conformity. Monitors in the Austin metro-

politan area recorded at least four eight-hour exceedances of the 85 ppb eight-hour standard in 1999, with readings of 86 ppb, 89 ppb, 97 ppb, and 103 ppb. Its peak recording of 103 ppb resulted in the highest ozone reading that Austin has experienced in four years.

El Paso

Unlike the rest of Texas, one region that has been able to improve its air quality is El Paso. For the third year in a row, El Paso has met federal ground-level ozone regulations, recording no ozone exceedance days for the one-hour standard.

El Paso's air quality today is a far change from a decade ago, when El Paso had many ozone days with levels as high as Houston. Today, while El Paso is still considered a "moderate" nonattainment area, it is now just one year away from being eligible to be removed from the list of bad ozone cities.

Sources: Houston Chronicle, TNRCC, and Wall Street Journal

Ozone New Ozone Alert Notification System Introduced

notice system 

A new, more comprehensive ozone notification system is being activated for the Houston area. The smog alert plan, known as the Ozone Alert Notification System, has been implemented by the Harris County Office of Emergency Management (OEM).

Using electronic mail addresses, the new system is designed to inform area schools and residents of predicted high ozone levels. With this information, school officials and notified Houstonians will be able to make informed decisions to limit outdoor activity.

Recent Ozone Alert Systems

In recent years, state and municipal officials have introduced various ozone alert systems for the Houston region. However, many local business leaders complained that a public smog forecast would tarnish Houston's image and deter tourists and businesses away from the region.

In 1996, the Houston-Galveston Area Council's Clean Air Action Program initiated a region-wide ozone watch fax broadcast. For the past three years, through a fax-contract service provider, Clean Air Action has notified individuals, schools and organizations of ozone watch forecasts. Ozone watches are faxed out when the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) declares that conditions are favorable for producing high levels of ground-level ozone pollution.

Development of the Ozone Alert Notification System

The most recent effort to develop a more comprehensive notification system came about quickly after extremely unhealthy levels of ozone were recorded on October 7th. High ozone readings began in the middle

of the morning, and steadily increased as the day progressed. Despite these occurrences, school officials and other organizations received no ozone watch or warning announcement.

On this date, the TNRCC website was down. Schools throughout the area did not receive notification of the severity of the exceedance until the smog impacted City of Houston monitors, nearly three hours after the ground-level ozone surpassed the health standard.

Enhanced System to be Complete by Next Ozone Season, Spring 2000

The new e-mail notification system was initially intended to notify schools. However, elected officials realized that the Harris County e-mail announcements could be incorporated into a recently state planned web-based notification system that issues

information about manmade and natural hazards, such as toxic chemical releases and hurricanes.

This online system is especially useful for those who are easily effected by ozone smog's adverse health effects, including asthmatics, seniors, children, and anyone who works or exercises outdoors.

Phase I of the Ozone Alert Notification System is now available to anyone who would like to receive the announcements. As TNRCC enters data onto its website, the provided information is forwarded to all e-mail addresses on the database.

Phase II of the Ozone Alert Notification System will be complete by April 2000. The TNRCC is currently in the process of bringing all municipal and state monitoring sites into the TNRCC real time monitoring system. With the sites directly registered onto the TNRCC website, the Phase II System will be able to scan the entire website, and automatically alert users when unhealthy levels of ozone are recorded at monitoring sites.

To Receive the New Ozone Alert Notification System...

Individuals can now sign up for the electronic-mail Ozone Alert Notification System by visiting Harris County's Office of Emergency Management website at www.hcoem.org, or by visiting H-GAC's Clean Air Action website at www.cleanairaction.org and clicking on the icon shown below.



New York Adopts California Vehicle Emission Program



Graphic: H-GAC, Model: 3Dcafe.com

On Friday, November 5, New York Governor George E. Pataki adopted a measure that will put New York well ahead of all but one state in the country. The Empire State will soon follow California in becoming the second state to adopt new vehicle emission standards that are more stringent than current federal requirements.

The California Vehicle Program California's vehicle program requires the automobile industry to develop vehicles for participating states that emit less than half of the pollution than cars on the road pollute today. The program will take effect in 2004, with emission controls becoming more stringent with each year until 2010. Furthermore, the automobile industry is required to achieve and retain a rate of ten percent for zero emission vehicles sold in participating states.

The California vehicle program, enacted in the early 1990s and adopted by California a year ago, is divided into "fleet" standard categories, requiring manufacturers to meet standards in road weight classes, rather than individual models. A manufacturer will be allowed

to exceed the standards in some vehicles as long as it goes below it in others, and the average meets the requirements for that particular class. Passenger cars, light trucks, and some minivans and sports utility vehicles will be included in the main category of vehicles, known as light-duty vehicles. These vehicles will be required to reduce their nonmethane organic gas emissions to .035 grams per mile by 2010. Currently, the standard emission regulation for a '95 model car is .231 grams per mile.

The California vehicle program imposes even tougher standards for heavier vehicles weighing more than 3750 pounds, such as trucks, large sports utility vehicles and vans. Furthermore, the program includes the heaviest of vehicles, trucks weighing more than 6000 pounds. To date, these heavy weight vehicles are exempt from emission reductions under the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) emission standards known as Tier I.

Federal Tier 2 Program

The EPA has also proposed new national standards to curb vehicle emission pollution in 2004. The program, known as Tier 2, would

impose a fleet maximum over the next decade as well. However, the proposed standards to be applied to cars and trucks would permit twice as many emissions per fleet category as the California standards. Nevertheless, if implemented, Tier 2 would include emission restrictions for heavy weight vehicles.

Other States Joining the Bandwagon?

Even if the Tier 2 program is passed, federal law permits states to impose the California program. New York's move to join California in tougher standards only increases the drive to reduce national emission standards, as both states are the two largest vehicle markets in the United States.

Furthermore, New York's commitment to the California standard appears to be having a bandwagon effect in the Northeast. Vermont, Massachusetts and Maine are also likely to adopt the program. The California manufactured car may soon become the norm, not the exception, on the American road.

NEW! Air Quality Index

On October 1, 1999, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) implemented its latest national uniform index for the reporting of air quality. The new Air Quality Index (AQI), previously known as the Pollutant Standards Index (PSI), will enhance the public's understanding about air pollution by providing general information about air quality, as well as its associated health effects.

The revised Index adds an additional air quality category to its values that standardizes pollutants based on a scale of 0-500. Previously, the AQI consisted of four categories, where the value of 100 represented the level of health protection. In extensive coordination with health,

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 air and public information specialists, the EPA created a new category just above the level of the standard. A value of 101-150 will now be classified as “unhealthy for sensitive groups,” while 151-200 will be considered “unhealthy.”

The EPA has included updated health effects information to coincide with the air quality categories. Additionally, when the air quality level reaches the “unhealthy for sensitive groups” category, a corresponding statement will indicate which specific groups are at the greatest risk.

Transportation Funding Suspended Temporarily

In November, the eight-county region of the Houston-Galveston area experienced its first-ever cut on highway funds as it fell out of “conformity” on its long-range transportation plan. Although the region’s Vision 2020 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is consistent with the state’s previous air quality plan, or SIP, revisions made to the plan in May of 1998 did not contain the required conformity findings needed for the SIP to be federally approved by mid-November 1999.

Why Did This Happen?

Whenever a change is made to a transportation plan in a nonattainment area, federal rules state that the revisions must adhere to the region’s air quality plan. For the Houston-Galveston area, this means that in order for a new or revised transportation plan to get federal approval, the plan must show exactly how much pollution will be added to or subtracted from the region. Once these changes are measured, the new SIP must be recertified by the EPA within an eighteen-month period, or conformity will lapse.

The NEW Air Quality Scale		
	0-51	Good
	51-100	Moderate
	101-150	Unhealthy (for sensitive groups)
	151-200	Unhealthy
	201-300	Very Unhealthy
	301+	Hazardous

In the past, the federal government has permitted several conformity regulations which give states, the EPA and the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT), needed flexibility in meeting conformity requirements under the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and the Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA).

However, in March of 1999, a federal court ruled that lack of conformity in nonattainment regions would result in an immediate cut-off of federal funding for engineering, construction, and most transportation improvement plans (TIPS). In addition, the court declared that only contracts with final federal approval will be able to begin construction until conformity is found and reinstated.

Without the needed flexibility to meet the eighteen-month conformity period, Houston could not submit

a complete, updated transportation plan, and fell out of conformity on November 17, 1999. H-GAC expects to finish the necessary emissions analysis and modeling in January, and be recertified by February or March of 2000.

How Will This Effect Houston?

While current construction work at the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), as well as future engineering work funded by the state will not be affected, at least two highway construction projects scheduled to begin in December 1999 and January 2000 will be delayed.

Once the SIP is recertified, federal action will be lifted so that workers can proceed with the construction of an \$11 million project to widen SH 6 in Brazoria County and make improvements to a one-mile section on SH 330 in Baytown.

State Implementation Plan (SIP) Timeline

1999 SIP submitted to EPA.....	11/15/99
Post receipt of SIP on EPA web page.....	11/25/99
Propose conditional approval/disapproval of May '98 SIP.....	11/30/99
TNRCC proposes commitment measures to cover shortfall.....	12/15/99
Post receipt of additional information on EPA web page.....	12/25/99
TNRCC public hearing on SIP (H-GAC, Room A, Floor 2, 7:00PM).....	1/31/00
EPA supplements November 30 proposal.....	3/00
TNRCC submits final commitments and gap measures.....	4/15/00
EPA action: proposal disapproval or adequacy finding for budget of gap measures.....	5/30/00
EPA finalizes conditional approval.....	7/00
TNRCC submits SIP with measures.....	12/31/00
TNRCC submits adopted rules to cover shortfall.....	6/00-7/01
EPA must approve SIP or propose FIP (Federal Implementation Plan).....	10/15/01

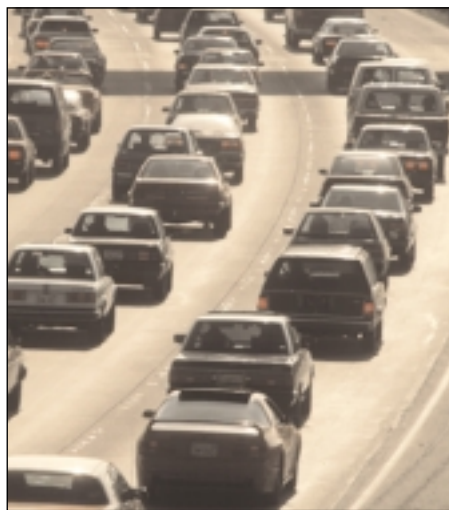
Fuel-Cap Tests to begin January 1, 2000

Effective January 1, 2000, inspection stations throughout the State of Texas will be required to verify fuel cap presence and type using a state-approved fuel cap-testing device. Currently, inspection stations only check for the presence of a gas cap. Starting with the coming new year, however, stations will be required not only to inspect vehicles for gas caps, but for gas cap leaks as well.

In nonattainment counties that presently require emission testing, a state-approved electronic model that is electronically connected to an analyzer will conduct the gas cap leak test. In nonattainment counties that do not require emission testing, and in near nonattainment counties, hand held gas cap pressure test equipment will be permissible. However, it is highly recommended by the Department of Public Safety (DPS) that electronic apparatuses be purchased sooner rather than later, for emission testing in these counties may be required in the near future.

New inspection procedures will be conducted on all gasoline-powered vehicles two through twenty-four years old. Exceptions will be made for antique vehicles, circus vehicles, slow-moving vehicles, motorcycles, vehicles operated exclusively by an alternative fuel, and vehicles newer than two years and older than 24 years. Furthermore, certain exemptions will be permitted for commercial and fleet stations that do not inspect gasoline-powered vehicles.

In hopes of encouraging inspection stations to purchase the \$600-\$700 electronic model, an increased rate of two dollars has been added to emission tests beginning September 30, 1999. Stations in nonattainment areas will have until the end of the year to decide which model to purchase if they wish to continue to offer emission testing. Stations that will offer emission testing services must be in working compliance by January 1, 2000.



ASM Emissions Test May be a Possible SIP Measurement

On Wednesday, October 27, 1999, Texas' environmental commissioners (TNRCC) approved the state's outline for the air quality plan of the Houston-Galveston region. The document, known as the State Implementation Plan (SIP), sets forth control strategies for the degree of emission reductions needed to meet and maintain national air quality standards by 2007 in the eight-county region.

The newly revised SIP contains stringent controls for nitrogen oxides (NOx), a key component of smog forming pollutants. A 90 percent reduction in all industrial emissions, as well as several additional pollution cuts for private vehicles, construction equipment, and other emission sources are suggested as selected measures to be chosen to meet federal air quality guidelines.

Although actual measures for the plan will not be identified until next year, agency officials are looking for additional measures to add to the outline, as the current initiatives do not eliminate enough nitrogen oxide to meet standards. One consideration is a more stringent Inspection & Maintenance (I/M) program, including a new type of tailpipe emissions test.

Texas' current emission test, called the Texas Motorist Choice Program (TMCP), conducts an annual two-idle test which measures volatile organic compounds (VOCs), but not nitrogen oxides (NOx). Adoption of a new test, such as the Acceleration Simulation Mode (ASM), would not only be more accurate, but would also be a more complete emission measuring tool, as it records both VOCs and NOx emissions.

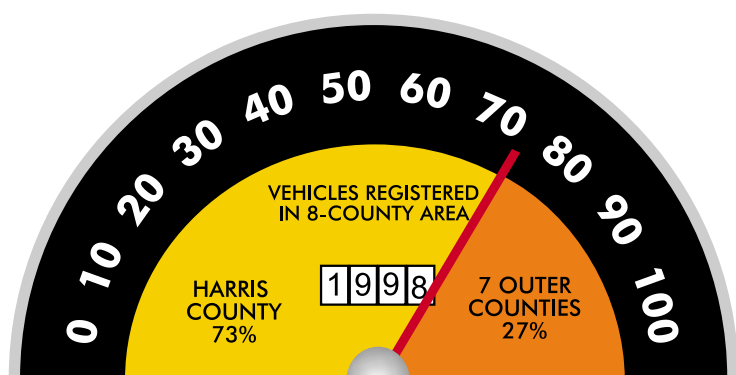
Although the ASM test is more expensive and more complicated to run, the ASM can be adapted to service stations presently using the TMCP. Currently, the ASM is used in California, New York, New Jersey, and Georgia.

If approved in the Houston-Galveston area, the new test will most likely be required for Harris County only. Currently, Harris County, which accounts for 73% of the eight-county registered vehicles, is the only county to use TMCP tests. The expansion of any type of emission test to different counties would require the request of county and city officials of the current non-emission testing counties.

Source: TNRCC

Vehicles Registered in the Eight County Area in 1998

Total Vehicles = 3,170,414



Graphic: H-GAC

Source: TNRCC



Girl Scouts and Houston Astros Strike Out Air Pollution

Local San Jacinto Girl Scouts and the Houston Astros are a winning team when it comes to striking out air pollution in our region. These two exemplary groups united together at “Clean Air Night” on July 22 in the Astrodome, in an effort to increase public awareness of the ground-level ozone pollution that exists in the Houston-Galveston area.

This past summer, Girl Scout brownies, juniors and cadets participated in an environmental patch course sponsored by Clean Air Action and the Houston-Galveston Area Council. The Girl Scouts spent a week learning about the harmful effects of ozone pollution, and signed a pledge endorsing their active role in supporting the regional strategy for the attainment of national ozone health standards.

The “Ways to Help Clean Our Air” environmental poster contest provided a means for the Girl Scouts to illustrate actions that everyone can take to prevent pollution. Winners of the poster contest enjoyed a trip to an Astros’ game, an award certificate by star Infielder #4 Carlos Hernandez and an autographed baseball from starting Pitcher Jose Lima.

The Girl Scouts are joining over 75 other regional organizations and governments in working for cleaner air. They look forward to working with H-GAC in implementing this class into future Girl Scout programs and activities.

Clean Air Month Reaches Record High for METRO

For the third consecutive year, the Houston-Galveston Area Council’s Clean Air Action Program and the Houston Metropolitan Transit Authority (METRO) teamed up to offer half-price fares for the month of August. And for the third year in a row, both agencies deemed the program a huge success as METRO set an all-time monthly record of 9.1 million fixed route boardings, a 5.3 percent increase over last year’s August record ridership.

METRO has seen a steady increase of new riders ever since it teamed up with H-GAC to offer the special discounted fare. Over the past four years, August ridership has grown approximately 35 percent. Recent results indicate that METRO retains about half of its new riders who are introduced to METRO’s services during the half-price fare promotion. The half-price fare program is one of the many activities that promotes Clean Air Month.

Clean Air Month not only increases public awareness of the region’s ground-ozone problem, but also encourages Houston area residents to be proactive, and take the initiative to reduce ground ozone’s presence. People who participated in the 1999 August ridership contributed to the estimated annual reduction of over 50 tons of air pollutants into our environment.

TNRCC Public Hearing
on the SIP
January 31, at 7:00 PM
H-GAC Conference Room A

For more information on
the SIP visit
www.tnrcc.texas.gov

What you can do daily to reduce air pollution

- Keep your tires properly inflated
- Keep your vehicle tuned-up
- Combine errands for fewer trips
- Buy gas late in the day
- Don’t top off your tank
- Shop by phone, mail or internet
- Avoid idling in drive-thrus
- Use a push or electric lawn mower
- Carpool
- Ride public transit
- Telecommute to work
- Report smoking vehicles
1-800-END-SMOG or
#SMOG on cellular phones
- Avoid using leaf-blowers, try using
a broom or rake
- Walk or ride your bike
- Accelerate gradually
- Use a natural gas barbecue
- Stay informed
- Write your local paper and elected
representatives - let them know you
support action for cleaner air

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Every day is another opportunity to clean up the air.

Commute Solutions Tips for the New Millennium

For all of those special occasions in your life, choosing the right gift can prove difficult. So why not let clean air be your guide? These are just a few suggestions that help reduce emissions and make it easy to do your share for cleaner air.

Give your friends or family members the gift of alternative commuting and reduce the number of vehicle trips through Commute Solutions. Knowledgeable professionals can help with a METRO bus pass, provide METRO transit maps and bus schedules, or find carpool or vanpool partners using computerized RideShare matching. Plus, your first month using METROVan is free.

A bicycle or new pair of athletic shoes are excellent presents for upcoming springtime birthdays. Commute Solutions can assist by providing bicycle and pedestrian commuting tips and trail maps, as well as information on the Bikes on Buses Program and bike storage facilities in the region.

Car care is important at any time of the year. Educate the new driver or pamper the new car owner in your family by giving a gift certificate for a car tune-up, oil change or new tires. Good vehicle maintenance reduces NOx emissions and other pollutants, increases fuel economy and protects your investments.

Give yourself the gifts of time, money and cleaner air by teleworking. It allows you to enjoy being at home, avoid traffic and parking problems, and work without distractions.

Companies - Do YOUR share for cleaner air by allowing Commute Solutions to provide assistance and advice on commuting options and employee transportation programs and our region's air.

For Commute Solutions information, contact **1-888-606-RIDE**.

