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Vol. 1, Issue 2, February 2013



Mercer & Ocean In Motion

Getting You from Here to There

Get Off Your Spud!

Sitting -- whether it's on the couch or in your car -- leads to all kinds of negative health effects. Will you get off your spud and join the Tater Family as they journey from **Car Potato to Active Spud** in celebration of National Heart Month? Be sure to [subscribe to our blog](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to keep up with the active transportation adventures of the Spud Family all month long!



Celebrate American Heart Month: Get Moving

February is American Heart Month. Did you know that the health of your heart can be directly linked to how you get around? Studies show that in addition to being [a real downer](#), long commutes can be linked [to bad health](#).

But many people can turn their commutes into heart-healthy ones. Many studies have found that people who walk or bike to work are not only [happier](#), but also healthier. People who ride a bike or walk to work are more fit, less overweight, and have healthier triglyceride levels, blood pressure, and insulin levels, according to a recent study in the [Archives of Internal Medicine](#).

Additionally, a recent [Governing review](#) of census and CDC data found that communities where more residents walk or bike to work boast significantly healthier weights. The analysis of 2010 statistics for 126 metropolitan areas finds these communities are strongly correlated with higher numbers of residents who are neither obese nor overweight.

Other perks of walking and biking to work include:

- When you go car-free, you save on fuel, maintenance, parking fees, gym memberships, and traffic tickets.
- People who bike or walk to work arrive invigorated and work off the day's stress on the way home.
- When you travel by bicycle or walking, you don't have to make extra time for exercise.
- Cycling or walking to work means less traffic congestion and air pollution in your region.

If you live within five miles of your job, try an "active commute". Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Stay Safe.** Obey all traffic laws. Wear reflective gear and/or lights if it's dark. Walkers should use sidewalks and cross in crosswalks. Cyclists should bike in the same direction as traffic, obey all traffic signals, and wear a helmet.
- **Talk to Your Employer.** Ask where to store your bike, see if there are any nearby shower facilities to use, and find out if any incentives are offered for transit riders and/or active commuters.
- **Plan Ahead.** Map out your route in advance so you know exactly where to go and how long it will take.
- **Find a Buddy.** "Carpool" with another bicyclist or walker if you can.
- **Ease Into It.** Start by trying just one day a week (try it on "casual Friday" or some other day when you don't have a lot of meetings).
- **Walk/Bike Part of the Way.** If you live far from work, try bicycling to the nearest transit station or drive part of the way and bike the rest.
- **Ask GMTMA.** For more tips and information on bicycling, please visit our [website](#).

Even if you can't commute by foot or bike -- there **are** ways to get healthy by moving more and, where possible, tweaking your commute. If you use public transportation, you can get off a stop or two early and walk or bike the rest of the way. This might also save you a little

money. Or you can try to fit in physical activity in other parts of your day. Instead of sitting at your desk at lunch, go for a 30-minute walk. Keep sneakers in your car at all times so you're always ready for a brisk walk!

Want to learn more about how to change the way you get around, but don't know where to start? [GMTMA](#) is here to help. Check out our [Employer Services](#) to learn about how we can help employers encourage their workforce to leave the cars at home; learn about our [programs for commuters](#), including carpooling and vanpooling; check out our [Community Programs](#) and learn about how GMTMA can help your community implement a wide variety of policies and programs that improve safety, mobility and sustainability; get involved in our [Safe Routes to School program](#), which helps kids and their parents get to school safely without driving; learn how to [ride your bike](#) more; or figure out ways to ride the [bus or train](#) more often. [Contact GMTMA](#) — we can help you, your office, or your school figure out alternative ways to get around.

Commuter Tax Benefits Help Employers and Employees Alike

The new year brought a nice new gift for mass transit commuters now that the commuter tax benefit has been restored — and then some — for 2013. Included as a provision in the “fiscal cliff” agreement, the pre-tax benefit for transit commuters was increased to \$240 a month, retroactive to Jan. 1, 2012. And the Internal Revenue Service has just announced that the 2013 limit was bumped up another \$5 a month for inflation, to \$245, meaning that transit riders will be able to set aside \$245 a month in tax-free dollars for commuting.

According to an analysis done by NJ Transit, about one in five customers take advantage of federal pre-tax transit programs such as TransitChek. The numbers are much higher for rail customers (35 percent) than bus and light rail customers (12 percent each).

The tax benefit can be done in three ways:

- Direct Contribution - tax free for employee, tax deductible for employer
- Pre-tax Payroll Deduction- reducing tax payments for employee and employer (the most popular benefit option)
- A combination of the above

The funds are excluded in the following tax calculations:

- Employee - Federal Income Tax
- Employee - Social Security and Medicare Payroll Taxes
- Employer - Matching Social Security and Medicare Taxes

Commuter Tax Benefit Example

Assume that the employees's transit or vanpool commutation cost is equal to the present cap of \$245 monthly (\$2940 annually). In the most common federal income tax bracket of 25%, an employee's income tax savings is \$735 a year. In addition, the employee and employer both avoid paying the 7.65% tax for Social Security and Medicare on the same amount, so both save \$225 annually. The employee saves a total of \$940 annually, which otherwise would have gone to federal taxes. The employer saves \$225 for each such participating employee.

For more information on this benefit, contact us at tma@gmtma.org.

Community Transit Services Shine in Hurricane Sandy's Wake

Hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc on our region's transportation system; New Jersey Transit alone lost \$100 million in trains and equipment during the storm, which includes damage to all 12 rail lines, which suffered flooding and some 630 downed trees. Among the hardest hit communities were those along the Jersey Shore, including the Ocean County communities in GMTMA's region.

But in spite of the transportation chaos after the storm, in some places, community transit systems played an important role by helping out people without access to an automobile or traditional bus and rail services.

[This article](#) tells the stories of four county transportation agencies as they deal with evacuation and emergency transports in the week following the storm. Monmouth SCAT, Ocean RIDE, Atlantic County Transportation (ACT) and Cape May Fare Free transportation faced challenges unlike those presented by any previous storm, but they got the job done!

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