

Science for Environment Policy

Greening the commute to work: best practices from company mobility policies identified

Many workplaces have developed mobility policies to reduce the number of staff commuting to work using single occupant vehicles (SOVs). A new study from Belgium reveals how companies can influence their employees' choice of transport to work and looks at the best ways to promote alternative means of commuting.

Traffic congestion can threaten the economic competitiveness of cities and create significant air pollution problems, whereas a successful mobility policy can reduce the financial and environmental costs linked to employee commuting. A variety of such initiatives has been developed by workplaces in recent years.

Previous studies into commuter behaviour reveal that monetary and time costs, as well as convenience, are the key factors in an individual's choice of transport. Data were examined from a large-scale Belgian survey, into commuter practices, conducted under the home-to-work-travel (HTWT) programme in 2005 and 2008, led by the Belgian Federal Public Service for Mobility and Transport. HTWT focused on the mobility measures taken by companies and on the commuting behaviour of their staff, providing two databases which contain information on 7460 and 9455 workplaces, in 2005 and 2008 respectively. This represents the commuting behaviour of about a third of all workers in Belgium.

The results of the surveys show that the typical Belgian commuter is still highly reliant on SOVs, with alternative modes of transport used in only a minority of workplaces. The researchers suggest this may be as mobility policies are mainly based on the implementation of measures promoting only one specific alternative mode of transport, which may not suit every commuter. Out of 7460 workplaces, 4093 had employees that predominantly used cars, whereas staff at 1368 workplaces predominantly used public transport to commute. Bicycles were an important form of transport at 1345 workplaces, whilst walking was found to be a 'minority' mode of transport.

Strategies that promoted carpooling appear to have been unsuccessful, suggesting that it is difficult to convince workers to take up this form of transport. The analysis interestingly revealed that workplaces with a small number of employees are more likely to have workers commuting by bicycle, whereas employees at larger workplaces, located in built-up areas or in the city centres, are more likely to travel to work by public transport.

In accordance with the research literature, financial incentives and the provision of facilities both appear to be good practice in promoting mobility policies. Incentives that increase the probability of staff cycling to work were found to be additional payment, whereby employees receive extra money with their monthly salary as an incentive for adopting 'greener' methods of transport, and the loan of bicycles by the company to staff members. Bicycle racks, sheltered bicycle sheds and information about cycling routes also increased the likelihood of staff cycling to work. To encourage use of public transport, the most effective measures were additional payment and information about timetables. A shortage of car parking spaces also increases the likelihood of workers using bicycles and public transport to commute, indicating the potential of parking management to influence transport choices.

Mobility policies tend to promote only one specific alternative mode of transport to SOVs. According to the researchers, mobility policies would therefore benefit from an integrated vision which promotes several modes of transport.



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