

# City asks Totem Lake businesses to trim commutes

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State law mandates that large business in urban areas throughout Washington must reduce the number of workers who commute alone to work by 10 percent over the next four years. The City thinks Totem Lake-area businesses need a bit of a jump start.

At its regular meeting last week, the City Council authorized a resolution that identifies Totem Lake as an area in need of "a more aggressive approach to reducing drive alone commute trips" and travel distance. The largely symbolic resolution should help the City better compete for grants tied to transportation projects.

"Totem Lake has a large number of health care employees and residents, and a number of them commute to and from work," City transportation engineer Thang Nguyen said.

"Our focus is on the employers - to help change existing travel behaviors in their workplace."

The Totem Lake area includes a number of larger employers that fall under the guidelines, including Lake Washington Technical College and Evergreen Hospital.

In 1991, the Washington State Legislature passed the Commuter Trip Reduction (CTR) Law, which it incorporated into the Washington Clean Air Act. The program aims to reduce traffic congestion and reduce air pollution by encouraging people to find more efficient modes of transportation than driving alone.

The CTR Law requires any large business - defined as an employer with more than 100 employees scheduled to work on site between 6 and 9 a.m. - to reduce the number of workers who commute alone to work by more than 10 percent

over the next four years.

The law applies to the state's nine most populated counties and encompasses more than 1,000 work sites and 560,000 commuters. Kirkland currently identifies 10 employers in the program, including City Hall, Evergreen Hospital and Eagle Home Mortgage. Employers that fail to meet CTR standards are charged mandatory fines, though Nguyen said this has yet to happen in Kirkland.

Businesses participating in the CTR program must survey employees and provide information of employment numbers and commute times. From that point, the City staff and King County Metro work with employers to develop programs that encourage alternative commute methods.

Typical recommendations ask employers to provide subsidized bus passes and encourage networking for carpools and vanpools. Ideally, the program leads to a quicker and more environmentally-friendly commute for everyone in the county, Nguyen said.

The City's resolution identified Totem Lake as a Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center (GETC), which essentially names the area as one in need of more transit and vanpool services. According to WSDOT, Washington and Oregon are the only states where



Katherine Ganter/Reporter Newspapers  
Hayley Bates, left, and Tina Paquette wait to board a Sound Transit bus headed to Bellevue at the I-405 Totem Lake Freeway Station last Thursday.

the percentage of people driving alone to work decreased between 1990 and 2000. In Washington, the number of those who drove alone to work decreased slightly from 73.9 percent to 73.3 percent. The national drive-alone commute rate increased 3.4 percent the same decade.