Commute Options Week Drives Home Ideas on Conserving Energy, Environment

by K_Guice

Oregonians drive more than 31 billion miles a year. That is 27 percent of Oregonâ€™s energy use. As gas prices rise and consumers become more frustrated, the upcoming annual Commute Options Week is a reminder that there are alternative options.

At the center of the weeklong celebration emphasizing transportation choices for a more livable community, is the 2nd annual Commute Options Fair on Sunday, June 4 at the Les Schwab Amphitheater.

The fair runs in conjunction with the Summer Sundays Free Concert and is expected to attract over 2000 people. Monday June 5th kicks off the 16th Annual Corporate Challenge.

Kim Curley, community outreach coordinator for Commute Options for Central Oregon says this is also a celebration of the organizationâ€™s sweet 16. â€œInstead of getting our drivers license we are putting on our walking shoes,â€• she said. Curley is hoping others will do the same, especially area companies and their employees.

However, there are several big hurdles the organization has to overcome to get more people to consider alternative modes of transportation. According to Curley, Americans love their cars, they are convenient and while gas prices are rising, fuel is still relatively cheap. â€œSo asking someone to give that up is perceived to be more complicated,â€• she said.

The Corporate Challenge program is an important launch vehicle for organizations to institute an overall program and encourage responsible commute practices year-round. It is also key to raising awareness about the impact of daily choices that commuters make.

It is vitally important to the program for companies to encourage employees to utilize something other than

single-occupant transportation. Curley adds, â€œWhen someone tries carpooling, biking or walking they will see the benefits outweigh the small time commitment it takes in arranging an alternative mode of transportation.â€•

Thus far, Curley reports the corporate response has been nothing but enthusiastic. Transportation is actually becoming an issue for many companies who are both hiring and trying to retain employees.

â€œPeople are quitting because they canâ€™t afford the gas to drive to work and seek something closer to home,â€• she said. In addition, many companies are now reporting when hiring new employees; the job is being refused due to the cost of fuel to get to work. â€œSo, itâ€™s great to be able to offer employees a company van pool,â€• she advises.

The choices are limitless. It is just a matter of learning what they are. At the Commute Options Fair there will be a array of interactive exhibits demonstrating the wide variety of transportation, telecommunications and other options available in Central Oregon.

In addition, there will be musical entertainment from the Jeannette Williams Band. The fair also features the "Tour de Twins" bike tour with local radio personalities from Classic Rock 98.3. The Twins leading the bike ride will be handing out fun prizes and one participant will receive a new mountain bike.

Commute Options for Central Oregon is a nonprofit organization serving the Central Oregon region. It promotes choices that reduce the impact of driving alone. Ultimately, the organizationâ€™s goal is to get 10 to 15 percent to choose an alternative commute option.

Curley states for many there have to be disincentives before people will change. â€œIn our area parking is generally free,â€• she said. But in cities like Seattle, there are 1800 van pools because the parking is horrendous.

Often times it takes bad traffic, expensive gas, pricey parking and dirty air to consider other options. However, Curley says it shouldnâ€™t have to reach that point. By making better choices now, the organization is hoping to help avoid some of those problems before they happen.

One baby step everyone can take is to drive less miles. Curley says, â€œSpend five minutes on what your schedule will be for the day and is try to chain your trip.â€• Rather than making three separate trips to the school, the grocery store and the dry cleaners; drive in a circle taking care of all three utilizing the shortest route.

â€œIf people just drive a little bit less everyday, our resources will go farther,â€• said Curley. â€œEvery mile helps.â€•

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