

# When travelling on two wheels is better than four

## Business or Pleasure

COMMUTING ALTERNATIVES

Employees are being encouraged to swap cars for bicycles, writes Rhymer Rigby

At David Evans and Associates, a Portland-based architectural and engineering company, staff are paid not to take the easy commuting option. "Here at our head office, we pay people \$1.50 per trip for any commute method that isn't a single occupancy vehicle," says Tami Boardman, director of communications. Cyclists, bus users, walkers and even skateboarders can all collect their \$3 per diem.

The thinking behind this, she explains, is twofold. It's part of an overall strategy to reduce the company's carbon footprint (to which commuting is a big contributor) and it also results in a healthier workforce.

"I cycle seven miles each way," says Ms Boardman, adding that about 10-20 per cent of employees participate in the scheme depending on the season.

Vodafone, in the UK, operates a similar

programme at its Newbury headquarters. Those who opt into the company's Green Travel Incentive receive £85 per month. Nicola Woodhead, head of corporate responsibility, says this is for anyone who doesn't have a carparking space. "We're putting a lot of emphasis on getting employees fitter," she explains. "There's also an environmental element – and the pressure on car spaces."

Currently 812 people collect green travel incentive payments with a further 189 collecting lighter green payments – the amount is dependent on the number of people in the vehicle.

Companies are encouraging employees to seek alternative forms of commuting for a variety of reasons. Environmental issues are key to helping companies on everything from selling products to recruitment. Staff fitness is an important motivator, too, as well as

combating stress. Studies have shown that for many, commuting is the most stressful thing they do and that commuters can suffer stress levels greater than fighter pilots or riot police. By contrast

activities such as cycling and walking are likely to reduce stress and may even be enjoyable.

Some companies choose a voucher system – GSK, the pharmaceutical company, offers stickers worth £1 for each commute which can be redeemed for bikes or equipment.

For British non-drivers, however, there are some limits. The tax-free allowance for cyclists, for instance, is currently capped at 20p per mile. And employees who have who have already participated in the tax-efficient bike purchase Cycle to Work scheme cannot also be paid to use it per mile.

Jessica Colling, product director at VieLife, the

corporate wellbeing consultancy, says she thinks that offering allowances for those who power their own journeys to work is a "wonderful idea". For those who live in big cities, she says there are already plenty of incentives, both positive in the form of public transport and speedier journeys and negative in terms of limited parking and traffic.

Tom Bogdanowicz of the London Cycling Campaign, an organisation that encourages cycling, takes a similar line: "We think all companies should be offering the full 20p-a-mile allowance. It's common sense for businesses to take advantage of the tax situation and encourage staff to be healthier. Also, in cities like London, you can get around much more quickly."

However, companies that want to get staff out of their cars need to think beyond simply

offering financial incentives for alternative commutes. Providing decent changing facilities and showers is just as important although some go further. GSK offers biking staff everything from drying racks for cycle clothing to ironing boards and shoe racks. And there some other, less obvious considerations. Ms Boardman says that DEA provides a company-wide "guaranteed lift 'guaranteed ride home' scheme in case of emergencies.

In some ways, though, Ms Boardman believes that incentivising staff to green their commutes is simply a prudent way of preparing for a future where the choices may be rather starker.

"At the moment, we're offering carrots not sticks, but I'm sure sticks are coming. It's just a matter of time," she explains.



**Pedal pushers: employees paid to commute by bike**