Preparing for the New Year

We don't have to say that 2020 has been a very different year, which included more employees teleworking (working from home) and not working in the office. As an employer, you may be wondering what the “new normal” will look like and may be investigating what 2021 will look like and whether employees will be returning to the office. Charlotte Area Transit System sees this as a wonderful opportunity for our employer partners to take a different look at their commuter benefit programs and more of a reason to encourage alternative modes of transportation to employees.

Here are some considerations as you start to navigate mobility and transportation for your employees:

- **Retain a Telework Policy:** We have seen how many employers has successfully pivoted to allow their employees to telework when many have not considered it before. CATS recognizes this may be out of necessity, but nationally the increase in telework programs has created some important findings:

  1. Employees have proved to be just as or even more productive working from home. Many national studies have seen that employee report that they feel more productive working from home, especially when it comes to creative tasks.
2. Mental and physical health can improve working from home. In a recent study, employees reported improvements in mental health, diet and exercise regimes. Employees also stated they saw mental health improvements through being able to spend more time with family and friends. However, some remote workers experienced issues feeling lonely when working away from the office due to isolation, feeling overworked or underappreciated. With the in mind, you may want to think about ways to ensure your employees feel a sense of team and have opportunities to interact with their coworkers.

3. Communication is often more efficient when employees work from home. Employers have naturally turned to project management solution to ensure everyone is on the same page, such as keeping all communication, files and approvals in one easily accessible place to eliminate time lost sifting through email chains or progress reports. Increased communication often leads to increased productivity and better opportunities for collaboration.

- **Encourage public transportation as a safe mobility option.** In September 2020, the American Public Transportation Association commissioned a study by Sam Schwarts that found that:
  1. There is no direct correlation between public transit use and the transmission of COVID-19.
  2. There will be long-term health consequences if people in large numbers switch from public transit to private cars.
  3. There is no correlation between public transit ridership and the rise or fall of local COVID-19 cases.
  4. Mask wearing has been shown to be effective at reducing person-to-person transmission. It’s important to note that due to the Governor’s Executive Order, CATS requires masks on ALL of our services.
  5. It appears that what you do at the end of a trip affects the probability of contracting the virus far more than the mode of travel.

- **Consider all modes for employees to return to work.** Many transportation professionals suggest that employers create a hybrid return-to-work mobility plan that combines teleworking and working in the office. However, having employees return to work and feel comfortable will take additional planning.
  1. State health department experts advise ensuring that employers provide factual resources of any COVID-19 update to their employees, as well as require and/or provide necessary personal protective equipment.
  2. Remind employees that alternative modes of transportations can be safer and COVID-friendly, as less commuters are using those modes at this time. This means there are more opportunities for social distancing.
  3. Offer resources to your employees about how to stay safe in all modes of transportation. The Association for Commuter Transportation has provided a comprehensive guide to riding all alternative modes safely.

- **Leverage your resources.** As part of CATS’s Employee Transportation Coordinator program, CATS is happy to help you navigate mobility options for your employees as we go into the New Year. Please email ETCInterest@charlottenc.gov for more information and to get started.

Happy New Year!
HAWTHORNE LANE BRIDGE IS NOW OPEN

We are pleased to announce that the Hawthorne Lane bridge is now open for vehicular traffic. Pedestrians will have access to the sidewalks on the north and south sides of the bridge. Bicyclists should use the bike lanes provided. Intermittent sidewalk and lane closures may be required to accommodate lighting, handrail and permanent pavement marking installation and other work.

Residents and businesses in the area will be notified of streetcar testing on Hawthorne Lane, which is anticipated to start in January 2021. Construction activities will continue along the entire alignment, including the Hawthorne Lane area, until project completion in early 2021.

We recognize the inconvenience this bridge closure has created for the residents and businesses that rely on this bridge for commuting and commerce. We are grateful for everyone’s engagement with this project, including your questions, feedback, patience and understanding. We are confident the Gold Line will be a welcome amenity that will enhance the community and create endless opportunity for the area.

Sincerely,
The CityLYNX Gold Line Phase 2 Project Team

Become an ETC Partner

Interested in becoming an ETC partner and learning how your company can earn discounts on CATS passes? Contact ETCinterest@charlottenc.gov.

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