

## Cash Incentives for Carpooling to Get a Trial Run in D.C. Area

By Emma Brown

Washington Post, Wednesday, July 8, 2009

Die-hard solo drivers in the Washington area will soon have a new reason to consider carpooling -- cold hard cash.

In a three-month test program starting this fall, commuters along three congested corridors will be eligible to earn \$2 a day by sharing rides to work. If that short-term reward leads to a long-term shift in habits, the offer could be extended to other parts of the region to ease gridlock.

"Are they going to continue carpooling? That's really going to be the key point," said Nicholas Ramfos, director of Commuter Connections, a network of transportation groups coordinated by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, which will administer the pilot program.

To be eligible for the \$1-each-way reward, commuters must currently drive alone along any portion of the three designated routes.

The morning routes are Interstate 395 from the District across the 14th Street Bridge into Northern Virginia; the Capital Beltway from Bethesda to Tysons Corner; and the Beltway from the Baltimore-Washington Parkway to Interstate 270. The routes are reversed in the afternoon.

They are among the region's most crowded highways and because they offer limited van-pool and transit service, Ramfos said, commuters have few options besides driving. And with no HOV lanes, carpooling offers no time-saving reward.

The program will be modeled on similar incentives offered in cities across the country, including Atlanta, Los Angeles and Redmond, Wash.

Atlanta's Cash for Commuters program offers drivers \$3 a day for three months -- up to \$100 -- to shift to alternatives including carpooling, biking, taking public transit and working from home. About 29,000 commuters have participated since the program began in 2002, eliminating an estimated 32.8 million vehicle miles of travel, according to the Clean Air Campaign, which runs the Atlanta program. Nine months to a year after the cash stops flowing, 64 percent of Atlanta participants still use those alternatives at least once a week, according to a survey by the nonprofit Center for Transportation and the Environment.

"People are in their normal habit, and it takes something to dislodge them from that habit," said Kevin Green, director of the Clean Air Campaign. "It may be gas prices or it may be a financial incentive program."

The pilot carpool program will be paid for with federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement funds that were budgeted for 2009 but never used. The projected cost is \$192,000, including \$95,000 in incentive payments for an estimated 700 participants. The rest will pay for administration and advertising. Commuter Connections hopes to begin registration online in October. Ramfos said each participant will get a check with the full amount at the end of the program.

In Atlanta, officials discourage cheating by requiring commuters to provide employer contact information when they register and signatures from supervisors before and after the program. Participants are less likely to try to game the system when their work relationships are at stake, Green said. So far, the program has caught about 25 cheaters.

The Washington area program will take a similar tack to prevent fraud. But in addition to collecting employer signatures and making random phone calls to participants' workplaces, Commuter Connections will require carpool members to vouch for one another's online trip reports.

"We certainly aren't going to have carpool incentive police going out and tracking whether you were in the carpool that day," Ramfos said. "It's going to be on the honor system."

This is not the first financial rewards program for commuters in the Washington area. To relieve congestion during construction on the Woodrow Wilson and Frederick Douglass bridges, regional transportation officials offered drivers \$50 a month from bridge project funds toward public transit and van-pool fees.

## **Climate change bill faces long odds in Senate**

By Jennifer A. Dlouhy, Hearst Washington Bureau  
In the S.F. Chronicle, Wednesday, July 8, 2009

Washington - -- The Senate took up sweeping climate change legislation Tuesday, with four Obama administration officials insisting that the measure is urgently needed to combat global warming, wean the United States off imported oil and revitalize the nation's economy.

Energy Secretary Steven Chu told the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee that the United States "has the opportunity to lead a new industrial revolution of creating sustainable, clean energy."

Chu joined the heads of the Interior Department, Agriculture Department and the Environmental Protection Agency in urging the Senate to advance legislation that would put new limits on greenhouse gas emissions blamed for climate change.

The House passed its own climate change bill in June by a close 219-212 vote. California Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer, chair of the Senate panel, and other supporters face daunting odds reproducing that success in the Senate. A Senate bill is likely to be introduced later this month and is expected to mirror much of the House legislation.

Republicans are nearly united in opposition to what they have characterized as a new national tax on energy.

"Once the American public realizes what this legislation will do to their wallets, they will resoundingly reject it," said Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla.

The House-passed bill would put progressively tighter limits on carbon dioxide emissions, imposing a 17 percent reduction from 2005 levels by 2020. Under the so-called cap-and-trade plan, businesses could meet the emissions limit by cutting their pollution or buying and trading allowances to spew the pollutants. Companies could also "offset" their emissions by investing in farming and forestry projects that trap carbon dioxide.

More than a dozen Senate Democrats have expressed deep concerns about how the legislation will affect farmers, coal-reliant power utilities and manufacturers in their states.

Sen. Arlen Specter, D-Pa., said he was concerned about the ramifications for coal. "As a senator from a coal-producing state, that is a factor that I must take into account," Specter said.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., said she wanted to ensure that any new market for trading carbon offsets and allowances is subjected to "proper oversight."

For Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., a key issue is finding a way to encourage efforts to glean energy-rich woody material rotting on the floor of public forestland.

Supporters of the bill could try to win support by adding provisions to expand offshore drilling and give a boost to nuclear power.

"There may be some ways there we can bridge some differences," Interior Secretary Ken Salazar told reporters Tuesday.

But any changes to the bill to lure votes risk undermining the measure's environmental goals and alienating nuclear energy foes in the Senate.

Environmental activists have been urging the Senate to tighten the House bill by selling more emissions allowances - rather than giving most of them away initially.

Boxer said she hopes to get a measure approved by her Environment and Public Works Committee before the Senate begins a monthlong recess Aug. 7.

## **G8, poor nations fail to agree on climate goal**

By Nicole Winfield, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle and other papers, Wednesday, July 8, 2009

L'AQUILA, Italy (AP) -- The Group of Eight industrialized economies failed to reach agreement with developing nations Wednesday over the goal of halving levels of heat-trapping carbon emissions in four decades, according to officials following the talks.

Negotiators were trying instead to reach agreement on the more modest goal of keeping the world's average temperature from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), the officials said.

The White House declined to comment on whether it would sign on a statement referring to the 2-degree threshold. The G-8 has previously refused to adopt that temperature limit as a political goal.

Climate change experts say the 2-degree threshold, which has been embraced by the European Union and some developing countries, wouldn't eliminate the risk of runaway climate change but would minimize it. Even a slight increase in average temperatures will wreak havoc on farmers around the globe, as seasons shift, crops fail and storms and droughts ravage fields, most scientists agree.

The G-8 summit opened Wednesday with the leaders of the United States, Britain France, Italy, Germany and Japan discussing a host of issues, from climate change to North Korean nuclear nonproliferation.

They will be joined Thursday for a deeper discussion on climate change with the 17-member Major Economies Forum, which includes China, which has overtaken the U.S. as the world's biggest polluter, and India, which is close behind. Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Australia, South Korea and the European Union also are in that club of the world's major polluters.

The climate discussions at L'Aquila come ahead of a crucial December summit in Copenhagen, Denmark, where the United Nations aims to conclude a new, worldwide climate pact.

German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel told ARD radio that the forum countries, which met Tuesday night, had said "we accept the two-degree limit."

But Alden Meyer, of the Union of Concerned Scientists who is following the negotiations, said early drafts of the forum statements had included language pledging a 50 percent global reduction in emissions by 2050 and 80 percent reduction by industrialized countries. That language has since been stripped out, he said, replaced by aims to reach agreement before the Copenhagen summit.

The emerging countries have been upset that the industrialized G-8 hasn't been forthcoming on pledges of financing and transferring technology to the developing world, and are refusing to commit to specific targets until financing commitments are made by the G-8, said Meyer and Phil Radford, executive director of Greenpeace USA.

A panel of U.N. scientists has said industrial countries must together cut carbon emissions by 25 to 40 percent from 1990 levels by 2020 to keep average global temperatures from rising more than 2 degrees above preindustrial levels 150 years ago. Any rise beyond that would increase the risks of catastrophic climate changes affecting millions of predominantly poor people.

At their last summit in Japan a year ago, the G-8 committed to reducing carbon emissions 50 percent by 2050. But the vague statement did not specify which year it would take as a base line. U.N. scientists have used 1990 as the starting point, but the United States and Japan are using 2005 levels.

The difference is significant: Since 1990, U.S. emissions have risen 23 percent. Disagreement over which start date persists, G-8 delegation members said Wednesday.

Last month, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill imposing the first U.S. limits on greenhouse gases, eventually leading to an 80 percent reduction by mid-century by putting a price on each ton of climate-altering pollution. The Senate is to discuss similar action, but compromises in the bill are expected.

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs declined to comment when asked whether President Barack Obama would support a statement limiting temperature increases to 2 degrees Celsius. Instead, he stressed the administration's commitment to fighting climate change by pointing to the bill's passage by the House.

"Success for us is going to be getting something through Congress and to his desk that puts in place a system, market-based system, that lessens the amount of greenhouse gases in the air. That's going to be the true of measure of things," Gibbs said.

## **G-8 Nations Fail to Agree on Climate Change Plan**

By Peter Baker,

N.Y. Times, Wed, July 8, 2009

L'AQUILA, Italy — The world's major industrial nations and emerging powers failed to agree Wednesday on significant cuts in heat-trapping gases by 2050, unraveling an effort to build a global consensus to fight climate change, according to people following the talks.

As President Obama arrived for three days of meetings with other international leaders, negotiators dropped a proposal that would have committed the world to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by midcentury and industrialized countries to slashing their emissions by 80 percent.

The discussion of climate change was among the top priorities as world leaders gathered here for the annual summit meeting of the Group of 8 powers. The leaders were also grappling with the sagging global economy, development in Africa, turmoil in Iran, nuclear nonproliferation and other issues.

Mr. Obama, who arrived Wednesday morning from Moscow after a two-day visit there, has succeeded in persuading other Group of 8 leaders to contribute another \$12 billion over the next three years for a food security initiative, aides said. The program, to be announced Friday, will provide emergency anti-hunger aid to poor countries and also help build sustainable, productive agriculture and food delivery systems.

The breakdown on climate change underscored the difficulty in bridging divisions between the most developed countries like the United States and developing nations like China and India. In the end, people close to the talks said, the emerging powers refused to agree to the limits because they wanted industrial countries to commit to midterm goals in 2020 and to follow through on promises of financial and technological help in reducing emissions.

“They’re saying, ‘We just don’t trust you guys,’ ” said Alden Meyer of the Union of Concerned Scientists, an advocacy group based in the United States. “It’s the same gridlock we had last year when Bush was president.”

European leaders and environmental activists had hoped that Mr. Obama would become a leader in the struggle against climate change after succeeding President George W. Bush, who resisted more aggressive measures.

But breakthrough eluded Mr. Obama and the other leaders of the Group of 8 who had invited counterparts from China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Mexico and others to join them here. The president will host a parallel meeting on Thursday bringing the various leaders together, but since President Hu Jintao of China abruptly left to deal with unrest at home, the chances of reversing the stalemate appeared slim.

“Europe wants avant-garde legislation but China is putting up resistance, which I sampled yesterday during my one-on-one with the Chinese president,” Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi of Italy, the host of the summit meeting, said Tuesday evening of the climate change negotiations.

American and European officials still hope to commit the Group of 8 to a goal of preventing world temperatures from rising from preindustrial levels by more than 2 degrees Celsius. Mr. Meyer said temperatures have already risen by 0.8 degrees and will likely rise by another 0.6 degrees based on pollution already in the air, meaning that major steps would have to be taken to meet the goal.

Michael Froman, Mr. Obama’s deputy national security adviser and chief Group of 8 negotiator, declined to provide further details about that target resolution but said it would signal important progress heading toward a United Nations conference in Copenhagen in December to craft a worldwide climate change treaty.

“Our view is that it represents a significant step forward in terms of adding political momentum on the key issues to be dealt with in the U.N. process,” Mr. Froman said. “But that there is still a lot of work to be done, and these are difficult issues and the negotiators will be meeting going forward to try and resolve them.”

At a previous Group of 8 meeting, Mr. Bush agreed to a 50-percent cut in global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 but not to an 80 percent reduction in those produced by industrial countries like the United States. With Mr. Obama’s support, the House recently passed legislation intended to curb emissions, although not by nearly as much as the Europeans want.

China, India and the other developing nations are upset that commitments to provide financial and technological help made during a United Nations conference in Bali, Indonesia, in 2007 have not translated into anything more tangible.

Mr. Meyer estimated that the United States, Europe and other industrial nations need to come up with \$150 billion a year in assistance by 2020 to help develop clean energy technology for developing countries, reduce deforestation that contributes to rising temperatures, and help vulnerable nations adapt to changes attributed to greenhouse gases.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Wed., July 8, 2009:](#)

**A common-sense solution**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has finally given California the green light to impose its own standards on greenhouse gas emissions [story July 1]. To many, this seems to be a predictable outcome of last November's presidential election.

More importantly, it goes beyond the usual politics; it answers the question of whether scientific research and common-sense reasoning are given the proper consideration over special interests and provincial politics in making policy decisions.

I wish that we could do the same when dealing with our current water crisis.

*John Suen, Fresno*