

The Transporter



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Transportation Information for Business Executives & Elected Officials in Northern New Jersey & Monmouth County

EZ Ride to Receive Three NJHCN Grants

EZ Ride was awarded three grants from the New Jersey Healthy Communities Network (NJHCN) for programs that over two years will promote healthy eating and active living in Long Branch, Plainfield and Fanwood-Scotch Plains. NJHCN awarded 44 grants for 2016 and 2017.

Starting in January, EZ Ride will develop School Travel Plans for all three communities. The goal of these plans is to create safer routes for pedestrian and bike travel by identifying problem areas and proposing solutions. It can also serve as a basis to get funding to improve infrastructure and is a way for communities to encourage safe walking and bicycling.

In Long Branch and Plainfield we will launch a campaign to encourage corner stores near the schools to offer fresh produce and healthier snacks and drinks to their customers.

In Fanwood-Scotch Plains, EZ Ride will help fund the development of two gardens to educate students and residents about the benefits of eating more fresh fruit and vegetables as a way to prevent chronic disease and obesity.

“These grants are an example of how EZ Ride is building on its strength in pedestrian and bicycle programs and offering services in new areas like nutrition,” said Executive Director Krishna Murthy.

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EZ Ride shuttles at Secaucus Junction. We operate 12 minibuses to serve the neighboring communities.

Fifteen New Minibuses to be Added to EZ Ride Fleet

EZ Ride’s shuttle minibuses are generally replaced after four to five years of use. In 2016 we plan to purchase 15 new minibuses and retire 11. Our fleet at the start of 2016 is 29 minibuses, up from just six vans 10 years ago.

Minibuses are not purchased like cars; one doesn’t just stroll into a showroom and pick out a model. We work with a vendor and have the vehicles customized to meet our needs. We select a chassis first and then add the features we want to the minibus. The new vehicles will be built on the latest Ford E450 chassis, which we have been using for a long time.

We are using a new vendor, the Wolfington Body Company of Exton, PA, which has roots stretching back to 1876 when they designed and built stagecoaches. We are working with Wolfington’s Mt. Holly branch to design a minibus to meet the needs of our shuttle passengers. The new buses will feature ADA-compliant access,

in-vehicle cameras, GPS and mobile data terminals.

This time, at the request of several of our shuttle clients, we are exploring purchasing a few minibuses with luxury upgrades. Some of the new buses may have upgraded seats, Wi-Fi and electrical outlets at every seat.

Of course all the buses will have the distinctive EZ Ride colors and logo, one of the most identifiable shuttle logos in our service area.

We expect the new minibuses to start entering service in March. We know that our riders will be thrilled to spend part of their daily commute in these fresh new vehicles.

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Public Transit Commuters Will Save Money from Amended Tax Benefit

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Thanks to the Consolidated Appropriations Act passed by Congress in December 2015, starting in 2016 American workers will be able to use up to \$3,060 in pre-tax dollars annually to pay for public transit commuting costs. Previously this benefit was capped at \$1,560 per year. On a monthly basis the benefit has been increased from \$130 to \$255. The new bill also retroactively raises the 2015 benefit to \$250 a month for transit commuters.

At the end of last year, as part of a \$1.8 trillion spending package, Congress bestowed this benefit on transit commuters. The benefit has existed for nearly 30 years and the amount has fluctuated depending on legislation.

Before the recent legislation passed public transit commuters were allowed to use \$130 in pre-tax dollars to pay for commuting costs and car commuters were capped at \$250 for parking expense. Many transit advocates felt this was unfair and they lobbied for “permanent parity.”

“Expanding and making permanent the transit tax benefit, I’ve long fought for, is a win for New Jersey commuters, who were recently socked with a nine percent fare hike,” said U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), the top Democrat on the Senate Banking subcommittee that oversees mass transit. “It means an additional \$1,000 back in their pockets each year and will encourage more to use mass transit, reducing traffic and helping our environment.”

How it Works

Employers can choose whether or not to offer this benefit to their employees, but many already do since it reduces the amount of payroll taxes a business has to pay. In New York City, a new law went into effect this year mandating that all employers, with some exceptions, offer this benefit.

The benefit allows participants to reduce their taxable income by the amount they spend on commuting costs thereby reducing their overall tax liability. For example, a worker earning \$30,000 annually who uses the maximum benefit of \$3,060 will reduce their taxable income to \$26,940, exclusive of any other tax deductions they may report.

Businesses generally like the benefit since it saves them money on payroll taxes and gives them the discretion to spend that money in other ways. Some economists believe that the reduction in payroll taxes can have a beneficial impact on the overall economy. Others have noted that this action will add hundreds of billions of dollars to the federal deficit since there are no spending cuts to offset the reduction in taxes collected.

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Employers on the Move ...



EZ Ride Promotes Carpooling, Van Pooling to Port Authority

On January 14, EZ Ride held the first of several transportation fairs for the Port Authority employees this year to provide information about carpooling and vanpooling. Twenty-seven employees located at the corporate offices in Jersey City signed up to be enrolled in the database that matches up people with similar commutes for potential ride-sharing opportunities.

The Port Authority has responsibility for much of the transportation infrastructure in the New Jersey/New York area including the airports, the bridges and tunnels that link the two states and the PATH train system. It's no surprise that many of the staffers at the Jersey City office use public transportation given the easy access to it in that municipality.

But for many in New Jersey, public transit is not always an option, like the employee who lives in Frenchtown near the Delaware River and commutes by himself by car. He was among those hoping for some relief from the stress of commuting by sharing a ride to work with colleagues.

Sharing a ride is a proven way to cut down on traffic congestion and harmful exhaust emissions. It's also a way to save money on commuting and turn a solitary ride into a social activity.

To schedule an event, please contact:
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Essex College Students Get Lesson in Benefits of Ride Sharing

Essex County College was established in 1966 as the public, two-year, open access community college of Essex County. The school's campus is in the University Heights district of Newark.

Like many organizations based in a bustling urban area, the school is coping with parking issues. In order to help ease this dilemma, Essex County College asked EZ Ride to host a commuter fair on January 28 to increase awareness of the benefits of carpooling.

One hundred students registered with EZ Ride and their information and commuting needs will be entered into the statewide Rideshare database. The database facilitates setting up carpools for

tens of thousands of New Jersey residents. Some students already in carpools are now eligible for the Emergency Ride Home program, which entitles them to up to three rides home per year in case of an emergency.

Although most of the students live in Essex County and many use public transit, it's clear from the number of them who signed up that the proven benefits of carpooling are quite attractive to college students.

For more information about Commute Fairs please contact:

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VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Michael Vieira of NJCOST presenting the "Volunteer of the Year" award to Joanne Condon

Long time EZ Ride volunteer Joanne Condon was honored with the "Volunteer of the Year" award by the New Jersey Council on Special Transportation (NJCOST), an association that advocates for transportation services for senior citizens, individuals with disabilities and low-income people.

Joanne started driving for EZ Ride about five years ago and devotes every Thursday to taking seniors where they need to go. Her approach to volunteering is simple and direct, "I'm retired, I have the time and I enjoy helping people. And I like that *Community Cars* gives a level of independence to people who no longer drive. It lets them get a little bit of their lives back."

Joanne is retired from two careers in finance and is an avid volunteer. She cooks for Meals with a Mission and volunteers for the Hackensack University Medical Center's Hospital Elder Life Program where she makes bedside visits to older patients.

Love to Drive? Contact:

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Comments? Suggestions?

Feel free to forward
your thoughts on
improving the

The Transporter

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Service Updates

Striving to Improve: EZ Ride to Survey Customers

As part of our ongoing effort to understand the needs of our customers and continually improve our services, EZ Ride will be conducting surveys of passengers who ride on our commuter shuttles and members of *Community Cars*. These surveys are conducted every few years and have resulted in some fine-tuning of our services to continually serve our customers well.

The survey of *Community Cars* members will be conducted by phone by EZ Ride staff. The conversation will take about ten minutes delving fairly deep into their choice of transportation and how often they use them. We will also ask about their satisfaction with *Community Cars* and how we can make it better.

In addition, we are interested in our members' familiarity with the cutting edge developments in transportation, so there are questions about Uber, Lyft and smartphone use.

Our shuttle customers will be asked to fill out surveys during their rides. Therefore, the survey will be shorter and focuses on what they like or dislike about the shuttles and their ideas for improvement. To encourage shuttle passengers to participate, we will be raffling five \$100 gift cards to those who voluntarily supply their name and contact information.

EZ Ride takes the concerns of its riders seriously since we want to ensure that we meet their needs. We are looking forward to hearing from them and will continue to strive to give them the best transportation possible.

For more information please contact:

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Freebies galore...

Protect Your Noggin

To reinforce the importance of safety when riding a bike, EZ Ride is giving away free bicycle helmets to children who participate in its Safe Routes to School program.

All schools and townships that host "bike rodeos" can request free helmets for the participants as part of the program. Supplies are limited and will be offered on a first-come first-serve basis.

If you are interested in learning more, please contact:

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