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PARC it Commuter program's worth a try

Of every 10 people in Leon County who leave home for work every day, eight drive vehicles with no one in it but them. In less than a century, we've become a nation that no longer strives for a chicken in every pot, but a person - just one! - for almost every car. At least in Leon.

On one hand, that's evidence of our prosperity. In many parts of the world, owning a car remains a sign of affluence. In this country, three-fourths of poor families own a car - and 30 percent of families living in poverty own two of them.

But with increasing problems with carbon emissions, traffic congestion, urban sprawl and the long-term supply and price of gasoline, it's difficult to imagine sustaining environmentally and economically healthy communities where so many people so frequently drive alone.

For decades, Tallahassee has had a strong environmental self-image. Now, many public and private efforts are under way locally to better match our self-image with measurable progress. Less talk, more action.

One piece of that puzzle is a pilot project called PARC (Park-and-Ride Community), which is designed to encourage more people to get out of their cars and onto Tallahassee's StarMetro bus system. The initial target population is commuters in the North Thomasville Road area: Park-and-ride lots will be located at Premier Health & Fitness, 3521 Maclay Blvd. (30 parking spaces), and the Smith, Thompson, Shaw & Manausa law firm, 3520 Thomasville Road (10 spaces). An express route extending farther north on Thomasville Road, with stops at Wal-Mart and Target, is tentatively scheduled to start Oct. 23. StarMetro officials say they hope park-and-ride projects eventually will begin in other parts of town as well.

The project begins Sept. 4 and running through Dec. 7, but organizers hope to sign up 50 participants by Aug. 30 (see box for details).

The first 50 who sign up will get an individualized route plan from StarMetro, along with a week's worth of free rides and other "goodies."

Participants will be asked to ride the bus an average of twice a week until Dec. 7 and participate in three surveys, results of which will be used by transportation planners.

It's worth considering - especially if your job doesn't require the use of your car during the day. If you live in the North Thomasville Road area, check the PARC Web site (it links to StarMetro routes) to find out if you can make a habit of riding the bus a couple of times a week or more.

What: Park-and-Ride Community, a partnership between StarMetro and Greenovation, a volunteer organization spawned by the Knight Creative Communities Initiative, with help from business partners.

Why: To encourage more people to use mass transit and reduce carbon emissions and other transportation-related pollution.

When: The park-and-ride pilot project for the North Thomasville Road area starts Sept. 4 and runs through Dec. 7.

More information: www.parkandridetallahassee.com. To sign up, send an e-mail with your name, home address, work address and normal travel times to parkandridetallahassee@gmail.com. Enrollment deadline is Aug. 30.