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## Green commuting needs upstairs boost

The most successful alternative commuting programs thrive for two key reasons:

A CEO - be it a company or university president, mayor or governor - leads by example and doesn't just ask employees to occasionally commute somehow other than driving to work alone.

Even more important, a leader implements strong incentives to increase "green" commuting - for example, conveniently located free parking spaces for carpoolers or free or reduced-rate passes for public transportation.

Public officials and some business people in Tallahassee, as part of Commuter Choices Week, are promoting commuting alternatives as less harmful to the environment, easier on the budget and good for physical fitness.

For example, the promotional campaign by City Hall and Commuter Services of North Florida includes a daily "featured commuter." Today's is public-relations executive Steve Vancore, who bicycles or rides a bus to his office downtown from his Killlearn Estates home four days a week.

To kick off Commuter Choices Week on Monday morning, Mayor John Marks and StarMetro chief Ron Garrison spoke at Kleman Plaza on the advantages of using alternatives, even occasionally.

In addition, Mr. Garrison read a proclamation from Gov. Charlie Crist praising choices other than driving alone, including telecommuting.

But if leaders realistically expect commuters to significantly change their habits, they have to be bolder.

Mr. Crist, who has already garnered well-deserved kudos for targeted greenhouse gas reductions statewide, could do even more to encourage 40,000 state employees in the capital to do something other than drive to work alone five days a week. As traffic worsens and parking becomes more scarce, especially downtown, alternative commuting methods will become increasingly urgent.

Among the possibilities: The state could partner with the city of Tallahassee and other employers to provide meaningful financial and quality-of-life benefits for employees who make different commuting choices. Benefits could include a compressed workweek, transit subsidies and bonuses.

The California Public Employees' Retirement System substantially increased bus ridership among its workers in Sacramento by offering, among other things, 75-percent transit subsidies.

Mr. Crist also could use his bully pulpit to promote closer coordination between local governments and state universities, which are major employers and significant magnets for traffic.

Tallahassee and Florida State University, in particular, find themselves on different pages at times. The city is eager for FSU to more aggressively discourage students from driving on or near campus, while FSU has for years nagged city officials to substantially improve StarMetro routes that serve students.

There's precedent for that kind of cooperation - in Gainesville, no less. Last year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency named the University of Florida one of 72 campuses nationally that were "best workplaces for commuters."

Several initiatives were responsible for that recognition, including free regional bus service for all UF employees. In collaboration with the city of Gainesville, UF also helped pay for construction of off-campus sidewalks to make it easier to walk to campus.

Clearly, there's no single incentive that will substantially reduce our love for driving alone, the daily routine of 80 percent of Leon County commuters. But if leaders in the public and private sectors here in the capital are as serious as they say they are about promoting other commuting options, they have to put more of their words into deeds.