

National Life rewards alternative transportation

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A year ago in May, Tim Shea dreamed up an incentive program to reward National Life Group employees for using alternative transportation.

“It was just an idea I had, and I kind of started it and it stuck,” said insurance company’s second vice president for facilities, purchasing and contracting,

The first month, 4 percent of National Life’s corporate employees signed up.

By last month, 25 percent had joined. The program now is in full swing in the Dallas, New York and Vermont offices.

The program encourages employees to car pool, ride a bus and walk or bike to work by rewarding them with gas cards, bus passes, gift certificates for running shoes and bike tune-ups. To qualify for the rewards, participants keep scorecards, tracking how often they come to work by alternate means. Leaving the car at home an average of once a week – four times a month at a minimum – wins a reward.

The program has nearly 260 participants. The majority, about 190, car pool. More than 40 take public transportation.

Shea, a biker, pedals to work, but said he only lives three miles away. Some employees bike in from Jericho occasionally, he said. The first month participants reported the amount of driving they saved, Shea found they had avoided 85,000 miles of car travel.

National Life has taken other steps to make life easier for employees who use alternative transportation. It provides bike racks, locker rooms and showers – four for men; three for women – and preferred parking for car pools.

Shea said he has met with other businesses to explain how the program works.

“It’s not very onerous to administer,” he says. “It takes a couple of hours a month to handle all the logistics, so it shouldn’t deter people.”

The cost – about \$3,000 a month – is paid for by the company’s recycling program.

An added benefit is the effect on morale.

“People here just love the program,” Shea observes. “There’s a buzz when the incentives come out. I’m sure it’s just from people sharing their stories.”