

## **2008 Arlington Commercial Building Study**

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### **OVERALL STUDY PURPOSE:**

- ☞ This study explored the relative roles of site features, public transit, parking, and other transportation services on commercial location decisions in Arlington County and on the choices employees make in how they travel to work. This study was designed to assess the value of ACCS' services to employers and employees and to define the role of ACCS' services relative to site location and transportation infrastructure factors that also might influence employees' travel choices

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:**

The primary objective of the Commercial Building Study was to explore the relative roles of four factors in influencing employers' business location decisions and employees' travel mode choices for their trip to work:

- ☞ Characteristics of the location – e.g., "urban-ness"
- ☞ Availability of transit and other transportation services
- ☞ Availability and cost of parking
- ☞ Availability of commuter assistance services

Secondary objectives included assessing: availability of employer-sponsored commuter assistance services, employers' perceptions of potential benefits of offering commuter assistance services, and employees' awareness and use of employer-sponsored commuter assistance services and other transportation-assistance services offered in Arlington County by local and regional groups.

## **METHODOLOGY:**

Mode of Data Collection	Three data collection activities: 1) Interviews with commercial building property managers; 2) survey of employer tenants; and 3) survey of employees working in the buildings. Property managers provided contact information for employer tenants and employers with 15 or more employees in the building were asked to send an email to their employees alerting them to the employee survey and encouraging them to respond. Employees were offered \$5 Starbucks cards as an incentive to participate.
Completed Surveys	- Completed interviews with 19 commercial building property managers - 125 employer interviews (57% of eligible employers and 78% of employers that could be reached by phone) - 1,520 employee surveys (31% of employees whose employers sent an email with a link to the survey)
Survey Instrument	In-person interviews with property managers; telephone survey for employers; and online survey for employees
Criteria for Participation	Buildings selected for characteristics of their location and transit access. All employers and employees located in these buildings were eligible to participate.

## **KEY FINDINGS:**

### Transportation and Location Choices

- Transportation factors influenced employers' choice of a business neighborhood; 79% of the employers surveyed said *ease of access for customers* was an important consideration, 79% said the *variety of commute options available to employees*, and 77% cited *ease of commute for employees*.
- 90% of employers surveyed said Arlington's transportation system had a positive impact on their business operations, especially on *employees' ability to travel for work-related meetings*, *clients' ability to reach the business location*, and *employee recruitment*.
- Commute factors also were important considerations for employees when deciding where to work; 42% said *ease of commute* was an important factor in deciding to move to the current location and 34% cited *availability of commute options*. A quarter of employees said commute factors were "more important" even than income and job satisfaction and 42% said commute factors were "as important."

### Availability of Employee Commute Services

- Most of the building owners/managers in the study offered only limited commute assistance to tenants or employees. About half offered bicycle racks or lockers, but only a few buildings offered other commute assistance, typically limited to information about commute options such as transit schedules and bicycle route information.
- By contrast, 95% of employers surveyed said they offered at least one commute assistance services and many offered more than one. The most common services were *telework / work at home*, *flextime*, and *transit subsidies*, offered by 69%, 69%, and

58%, respectively of employers. About four in ten offered pre-tax accounts that employees could use to pay commute expenses.

- Employers that offered employee commute services, such as transit subsidies and commute information, said they achieved business benefits from offering these services, including *enhanced morale* (64%), *enhanced recruitment* (60%), and *increased productivity* (57%).
- A third of employers that offered commute services said they received assistance to plan or implement the services. Among employers that had used the free services of Arlington Transportation Partners (ATP), 93% said the services were useful and 73% said they would be likely to recommend ATP's services to another employer.
- Some employees did not realize they had access to all of the commute assistance services that employers and building management offered to them. Only two-thirds of employees whose employers offered transit subsidies new this service was available. This suggests the employers and building managements might not be realizing the full impact of their investment in the services.

#### Location, Transit Access, and Employees' Travel Choices

- Employees who worked close to Metrorail used bus and train more often and drove alone less often than did employees who worked farther away. Employees who worked within five blocks of a Metrorail station made 42% of their work trips by transit, compared with 19% of trips for employees who worked more than five blocks from Metrorail.
- Being closer than 5 blocks to Metrorail did not appear to increase use of transit; the transit percentage for employees who worked 3 to 5 blocks from Metrorail was statistically the same as the percentage for employees who worked 0 to 2 blocks away.

#### Parking and Commute Assistance Services and Employees' Travel Choices

- Parking fees had an influence on employees' travel choice, but only when the fee reached \$100 per month. Employees who paid between \$100 and \$124 per month made half of their work trips by driving alone, compared to about two-thirds of trips for those who paid \$100 or less. Driving alone was even less common when employees paid \$125 per month for parking; these employees made only 30% of their weekly trips by driving alone.
- Employees who had access to commute assistance services, such as transit subsidies, commute information, preferential carpool parking, bike racks, and other services, were more likely to use bus and train and less likely to drive alone to work.
- The drive alone rate was most influenced by financial incentives, but drive alone rates fell further when additional services were offered. The drive alone rate was 62% when no financial incentives were offered, 47% when an incentive was offered alone, and 40% when an incentive and at least three additional assistance services were offered.
- A quarter of employees who had received commute information or services to start transit, carpool, bike, or walk said they were not likely or only somewhat likely to have started using these forms of transportation without the service.

### Regression Analysis of Transit Mode Share

- Regression analysis was conducted to explore the relative influence of factors influencing transit mode share. The analysis examined variables related to site / location characteristics, availability and use of commute services, parking availability and parking fees, travel patterns (e.g., distance, time), and residential location and demographics.
- Regression analysis of the relative influence of factors on transit mode share indicated that a higher transit share was associated with parking fees and with employees' use of commute assistance services, their awareness of local/regional commute services, and availability of a transit financial incentive.
- High transit share also was associated with long commute distance and employees' use of transit before moving to the current work location, suggesting a familiarity with transit encouraged employees to seek new transit options when their travel patterns changed.
- Lower transit mode share was associated with: longer distance from work location to Metrorail station and longer distance from home location to Metrorail station. The coefficient for the work to Metrorail distance variable was highly significant but only moderately strong, suggesting a gradual impact of distance – e.g., a threshold of 5 blocks rather than the 2 blocks originally expected.
- An interesting finding was that the availability of parking from one's employer (parking spaces per employee) was not a significant variable in the transit mode share regression. This suggests that transit use is as much a choice as an imperative for employees whose employers did not provide parking. Parking was available in the neighborhoods around the buildings surveyed, so employees who could not obtain on-site parking but wanted to drive could obtain parking at a near-by commercial garage or lot.

### **OTHER RELATED STUDIES AND REPORTS:**

2006 Arlington County Residents' Satisfaction Telephone Study  
2007 Arlington Transportation Partners (ATP) Client Study

### **AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS:**

Final Report Employer questionnaire Employee questionnaire
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### **KEY WORDS:**

Arlington County, transportation, commuter services, parking, transit-oriented living, Metrorail access