

Research Report

Clinton County Large Employers' Attitudes and Practices Regarding Public Transportation



Survey Conducted by the Technical Assistance Center at
State University of New York at Plattsburgh
for
The Development Corporation Clinton County New York
and the
Clinton County Economic Collaborative



December 31, 2008



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of this research project was to learn about public transportation attitudes and practices among Clinton County's largest employers. The process of conducting the research survey raised awareness of public transportation issues for the 49 major employers who participated.

The majority of employers who participated in the survey expressed interest in offering a public transportation assistance program to their employees. The number one reason cited is that the employers believe such a program will make it easier for them to retain and attract employees. This is promising for public transportation advocates, given that most employers surveyed indicated that they do not presently encourage their employees to use public transportation. Further details on employee attitudes toward public transportation may be explored in an employee survey.

Summary of Key Findings from Employer Survey Research

- Eighty-five percent of employers are aware of the Clinton County Public Transit system.
- Over 56% of employers indicated that some of their workers use the Clinton County Public Transit system.
- A large majority of employers (82%) do not have a program to encourage employees to use some kind of public transportation.
- Eighteen percent of employers indicated that they encourage their employees to use some form of public transportation.
- Over 60% said they would, or would consider, hosting a public transportation awareness event at their company, at no cost to them.
- Of those employers with interest in offering a public transportation assistance program in their workplace, 67% indicated that they believe it could help to attract and retain employees and 62% said that offering a public transportation assistance program is attractive as a low/no cost employee benefit.
- Over one-third of employers (17 of the 49 respondents) indicated that their employees have asked for public transportation information or assistance related to their commute.
- A third of employers feel that the price of gas makes it harder to retain employees; another third were unsure of the connection.
- A third of employers (13 of 40) indicated that they have difficulty recruiting workers due to transportation issues.
- Half of employers are or are willing to be flexible with employee punctuality if the employee uses public transportation.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Development Corporation Clinton County (TDC) has initiated a new organization, the Clinton County Economic Collaborative (CCEC). One of the first projects undertaken by the CCEC is a study of the interface of public transportation and the workplace in Clinton County.

A Transportation Committee was formed by the collaborative to guide research about major local **employer** attitudes toward public transportation, and related workplace practices and policies. The CCEC plans a second survey that will focus on **employee** attitudes and practices related to public transportation and their workplace.

The Technical Assistance Center at SUNY Plattsburgh (TAC) was commissioned by The Development Corporation to conduct primary research on the attitudes and practices of the largest employers in Clinton County (75 or more employees) with regard to public transportation. TDC also wished to assess awareness of and interest in alternate transportation options that may reduce local job loss and turnover.

III. METHODOLOGY

TDC engaged the Technical Assistance Center (TAC), a regional economic development outreach service based at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, to design and administer the survey instrument and to gather, tabulate, analyze, and report the results.

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes and practices of large (75+ employees) employers' in Clinton County.

A Transportation Committee was formed to provide TAC with input for the survey. TAC worked closely with the Transportation Committee to determine the goal of the research and to create a survey instrument that would gather employer data. Members of the Transportation Committee include:

Maggie Barie, Clinton County Public Transit
Paul Grasso, Workforce Investment Council
Erin Hynes, The Development Corporation
Larry Jeffords, Jeffords Steel
Howard Lowe, Technical Assistance Center
Katharine Mulligan, The Development Corporation
Susan Matton, Plattsburgh-North Country Chamber of Commerce

TAC developed a survey instrument with input from the committee. Committee members' suggestions were used to revise the survey.

TDC staff obtained and updated a list of the largest employers (75+ employees) in Clinton County from the Plattsburgh-North Country Chamber of Commerce. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent by TDC to 114 employers via email and postal letter. An incentive to participate was provided in the form of a chance to win a \$100 gift certificate to Anthony's Restaurant.

Employers were directed to an 18 question survey that TAC posted on the "surveymonkey.com" website. The survey was open to employers from November 13 through December 5, 2008.

The sample size was dictated by the number of employers with 75 or more employees. Forty-nine surveys were completed, representing 43% of those contacted, a response rate that provides a valid sample from which meaningful data may be drawn.

The primary researcher for this report was Howard Lowe, Director of Economic Development at TAC. Victoria Zinser Duley, TAC Economic Development Specialist, and Theresa Bennett, Clerical Specialist, provided assistance.

IV. SURVEY QUESTION RESULTS

(Unless otherwise indicated, all 49 employers responded to the question.)

1. Zip code distribution among survey respondents

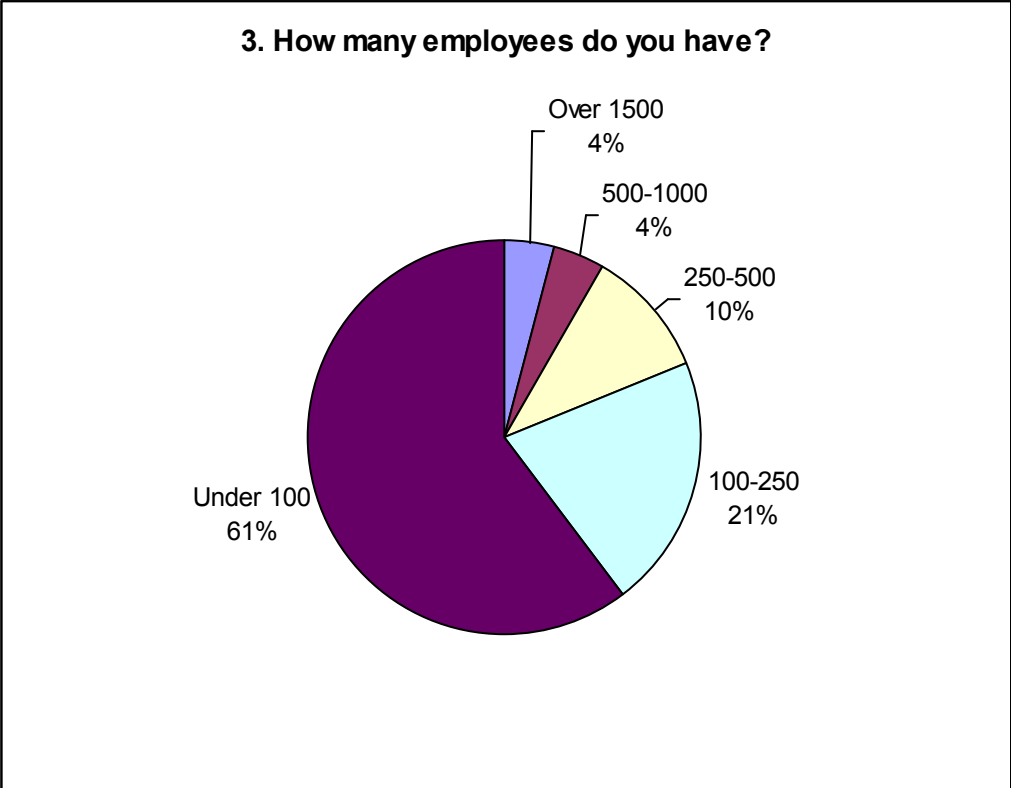
12901	35 respondents
12903:	3
12919:	4
12921:	1
12962:	1
12972:	2
12979:	2

The vast majority of responding employers are located in the Plattsburgh area zip code (including the City and Town of Plattsburgh, and parts of Beekmantown). The next most common location of employers responding is Champlain. One company is located in Chazy, and one in Morrisonville. Two employers each are in Peru and Rouses Point. This provides a good geographic representation of major industries in the County.

2. What kind of business do you operate? (check all that apply)

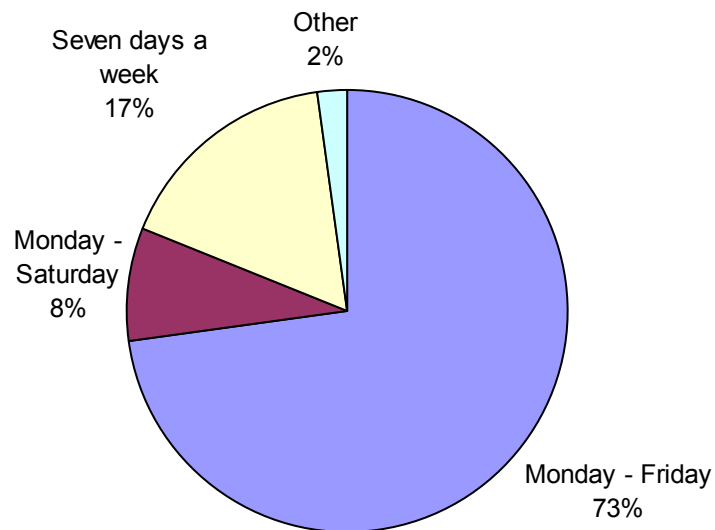
Type of Business	Number
R & D	1
Transportation	1
Wholesale	3
Telecommunications	3
Government	3
Retail	4
Health Care	4
Service	5
Education	5
Other	12
Manufacturing	18

Manufacturing is the largest sector represented. Business represented in the “Other” category include: Staffing, warehouse distribution, employment and training, human services, recruitment and placement, gas and electric utility, repackaging and distribution of chemicals, sales.



A majority of employers who responded to this question indicated that they had fewer than 100 employees. The next largest category is the 100 – 250 category. There were no respondents who indicated having between 1,001 and 1,499 employees.

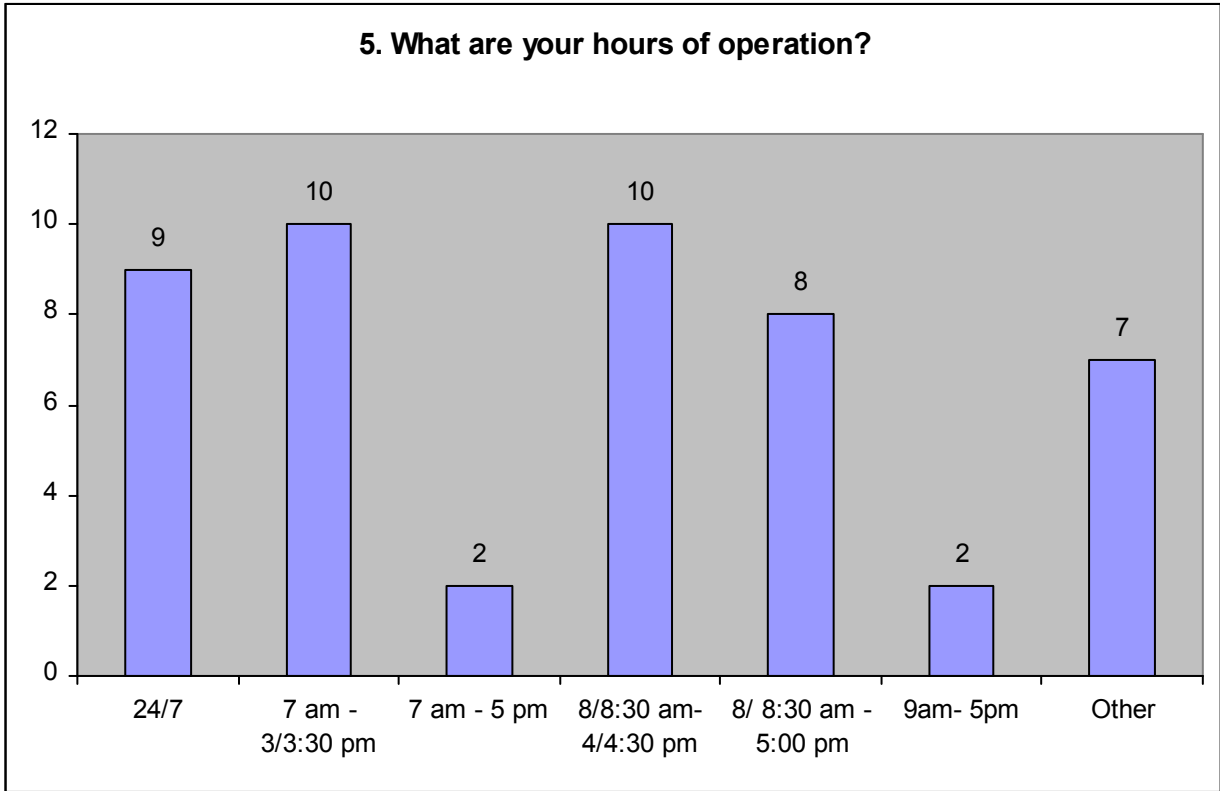
4. What days of the week do you operate?



Nearly three-quarters of responders indicated that their operating week is Monday through Friday. About one third of respondents operate seven days a week. Nearly one in five operate Monday - Saturday.

There was one comment in "Other":

"Normal hours are 8-4:30 M-F, however we respond to emergencies 24/7/365"

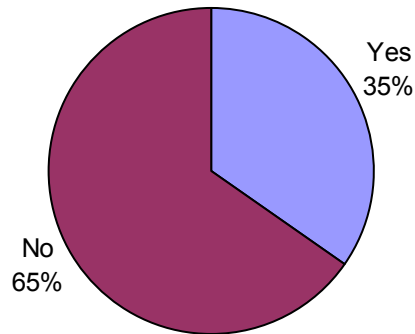


Hours of operation varied widely among the respondents. The most common working hours are 24/7 and 8 or 8:30 am to 4:00/4:30 pm.

Respondents indicated the following operating hours in the “Other” category, in addition to the above specific operating hour categories:

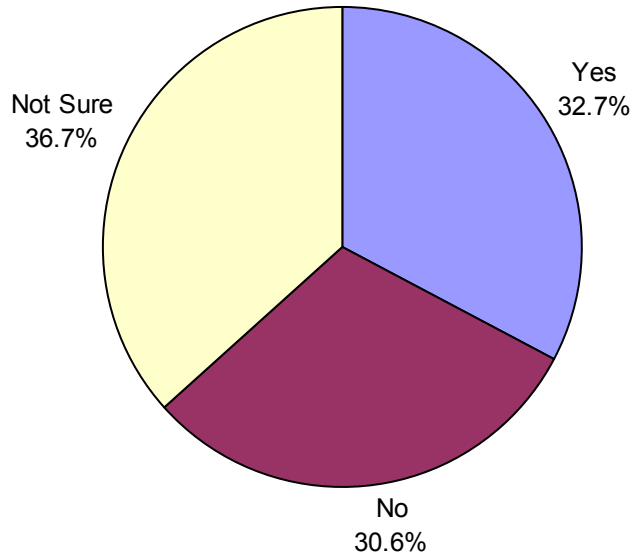
- 5:30am - 6pm
- 9am-5:30 pm
- 6am- 2:30 pm, 3pm-11pm, 8am-5pm (shifts)
- 7:45 am- 5:30 pm
- 6am-11pm
- 9:30 am-9pm (Monday-Saturday), 11am-6pm (Sunday)

6. Have any of your employees ever requested public transportation information or assistance related to their commute?



Over one-third of employers (17 of the 49 respondents) indicated that their employees have asked for public transportation information or assistance related to their commute.

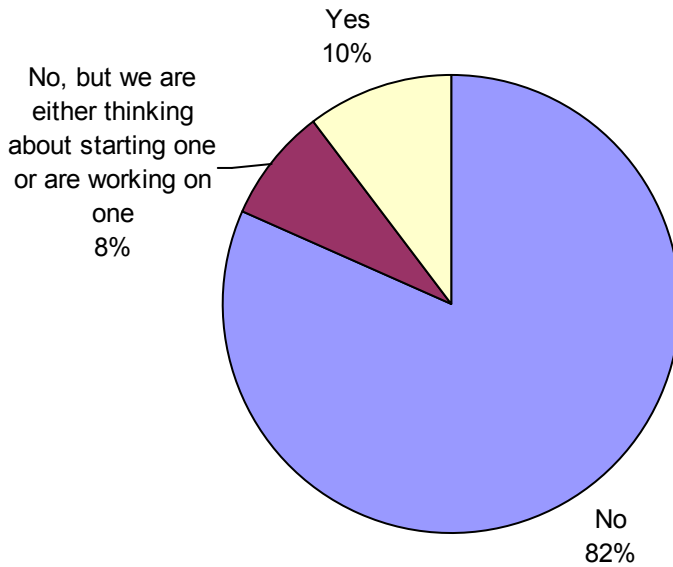
7. Does the price of gas make it harder to retain employees?



Employers indicated that the price of gas is not necessarily making it harder to retain employees, as 37% indicated “not sure”, and 30% “no”, while 33% said “yes”.

It should be noted that respondents took this survey at a time in late autumn 2008 when gasoline prices were falling, after having reached historic highs during the summer of 2008.

8. Does your company have a program that encourages your employees to take public transportation, carpool, or vanpool?

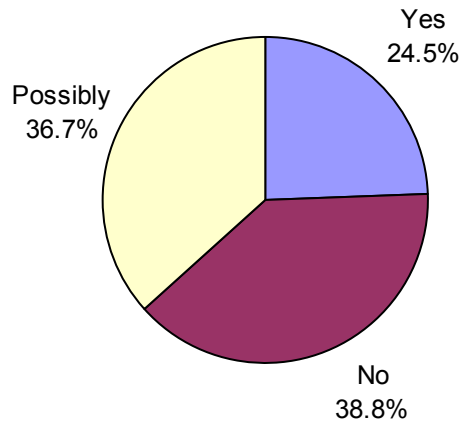


Eighteen percent of respondents, representing nine employers, either have a program to encourage their employees to use public transportation, carpool or vanpool, or are considering starting one. Comments provided by respondents include:

- “Have heightened awareness through task force at CVPH”
- “Yes we drive our employees and use the cart bus”
- “For travel to training outside of the office or other parts of the state.”
- “Have a couple that carpool”

It is a significant finding that the overwhelming majority of employers do not have a program to encourage employees to use some kind of public transportation.

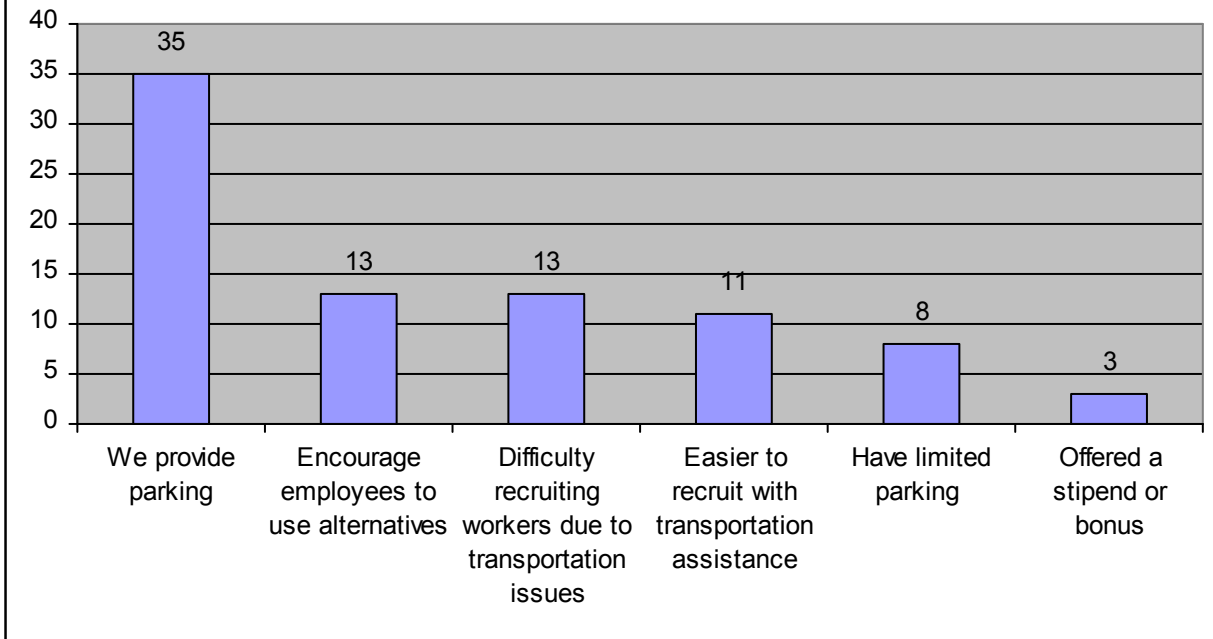
9. Would your company be willing to host a transportation awareness event at your business, at no cost to you, which would explain transportation options to your employees?



Over 24% of respondents indicated they would be willing to host a transportation awareness event, and 39% said that they would not. However, 37% said they would *consider* hosting such an event. Therefore, over 60% of respondents said they would or would consider hosting such an event (30 of 49). This provides a strong basis for developing an awareness event for interested employers.

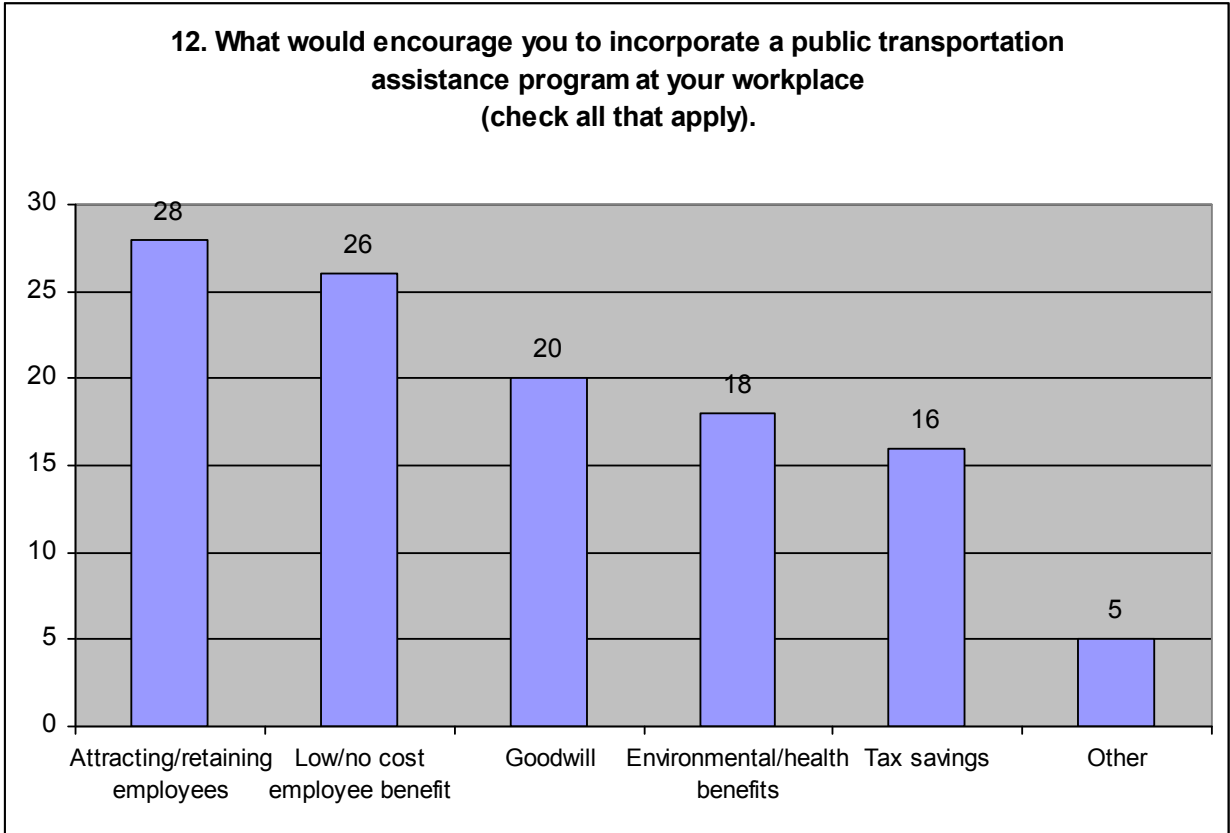
Question 10 of the survey asked for contact information if the employer would or would consider hosting a transportation awareness event. Thirty of 49 responded to this request. The contact information is found in Appendix C.

11. Please check all statements below that apply to your company/work site:



Forty employers responded to this question.

A large majority of responding employers provide free parking (88%). Employers indicated that transportation costs are an issue in recruiting qualified workers. A few have offered a stipend or bonus to attract employees who commute significant distances (7.5%). Nearly one third (13 of 40) of respondents further indicated that they encourage employees to use alternative transportation in some way.



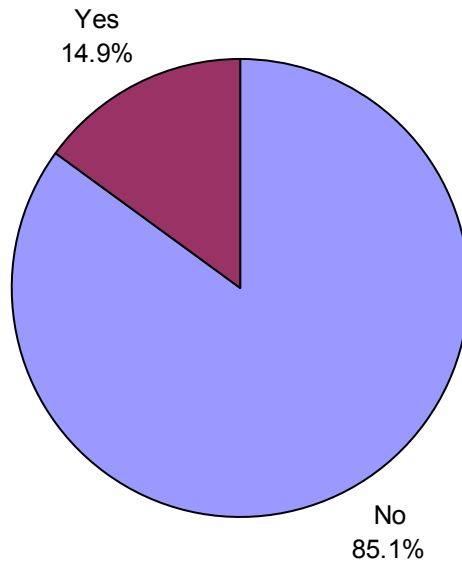
Forty-two employers responded to this question.

The motivations cited most by employers that would encourage them to provide a transportation assistance program at their workplace were “attracting/retaining employees”, followed closely by providing a “low/no cost employee benefit”. Community goodwill, environmental/health benefits, and tax savings appear to be secondary reasons.

Responses in the “Other” category included:

- “Ability to offer as a no cost benefit”
- “Employee interest”
- “Convenience, cost savings”
- “Price of gas at or near \$4.00/gal”
- “If I had more employees”

13. Does your company do anything to help employees with their transportation costs?

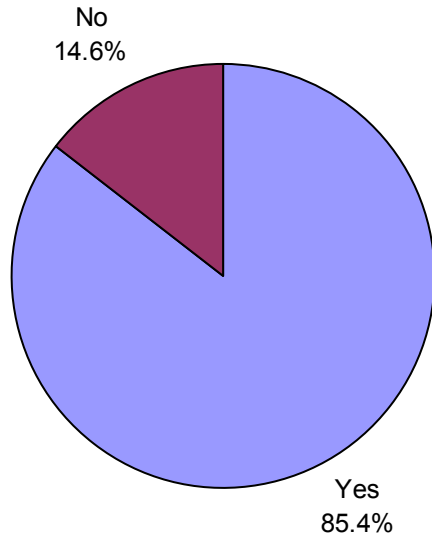


Forty-seven employers responded to this question.

The vast majority of employers, 40 of 47 respondents, indicated that they do not help their employees with transportation costs. The seven who indicated that they do help their employees with transportation costs provided these comments:

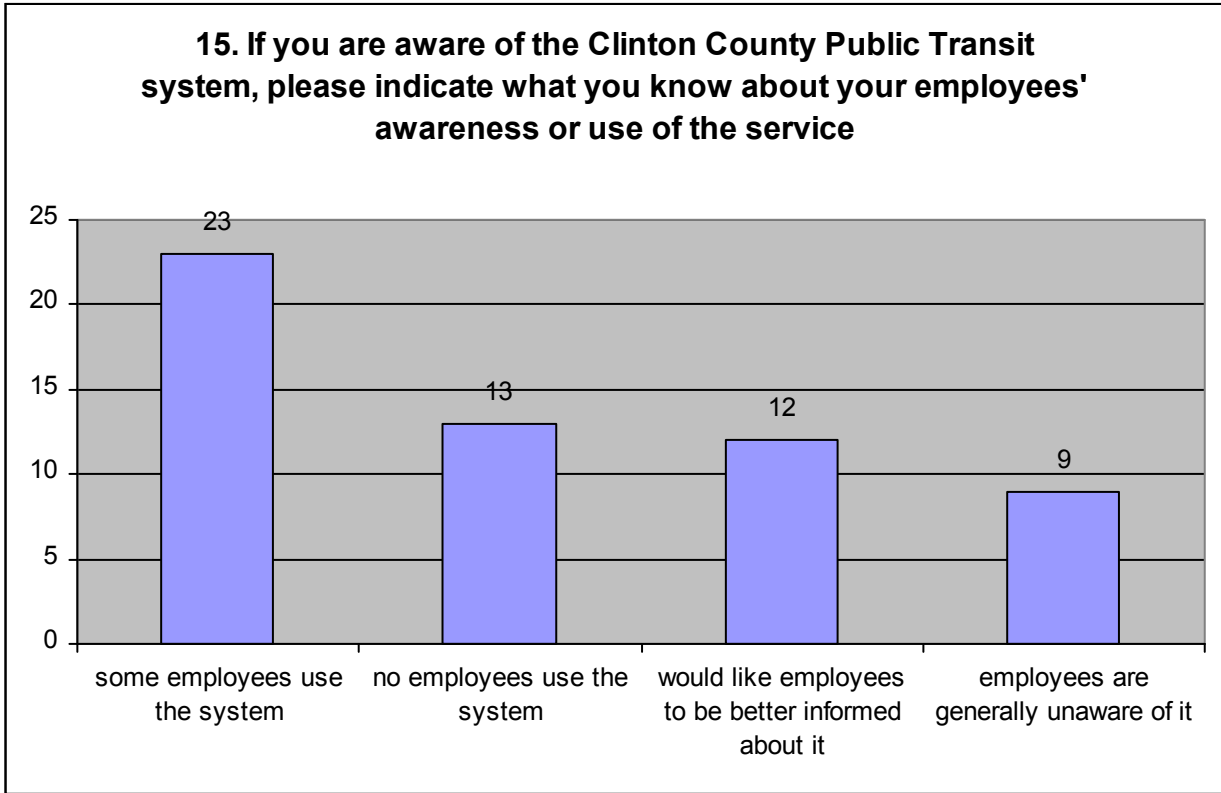
- “Limited 4 day work weeks and 12 hour shifts as appropriate”
- “Flex time”
- “If a job is far we give gas money or car pool”
- “We have a handful of office technicians that work at home two days a week.”
- “We have discussed 4 day work weeks, flex time, and telecommuting.”
- “We allow 3 to 4 day work weeks plus we are working on implementing a work at home program.”

14. Are you aware of the Clinton County Public Transit system?



Forty-eight employers responded to this question.

There was a high awareness found among employers of the Clinton County Public Transit system (85.4%).

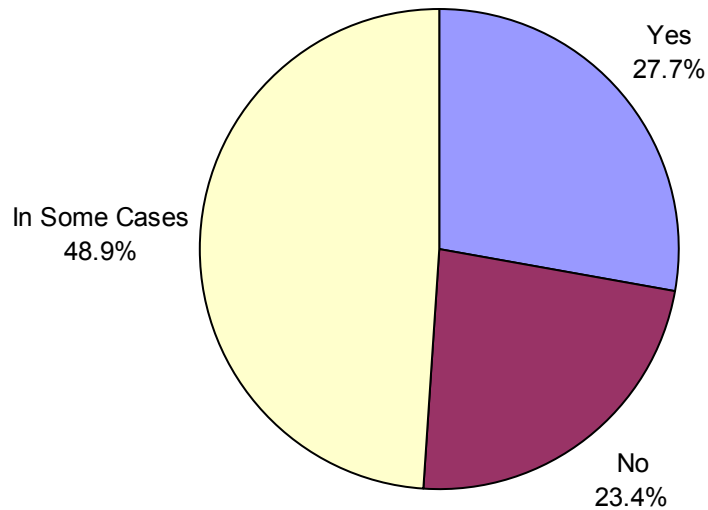


Forty-one employers responded to this question.

Over half (56%) of employers indicated that some of their workers use the Clinton County Public Transit system, and nearly one third (30%) indicated that they would like their employees to be better informed about the County transportation system.

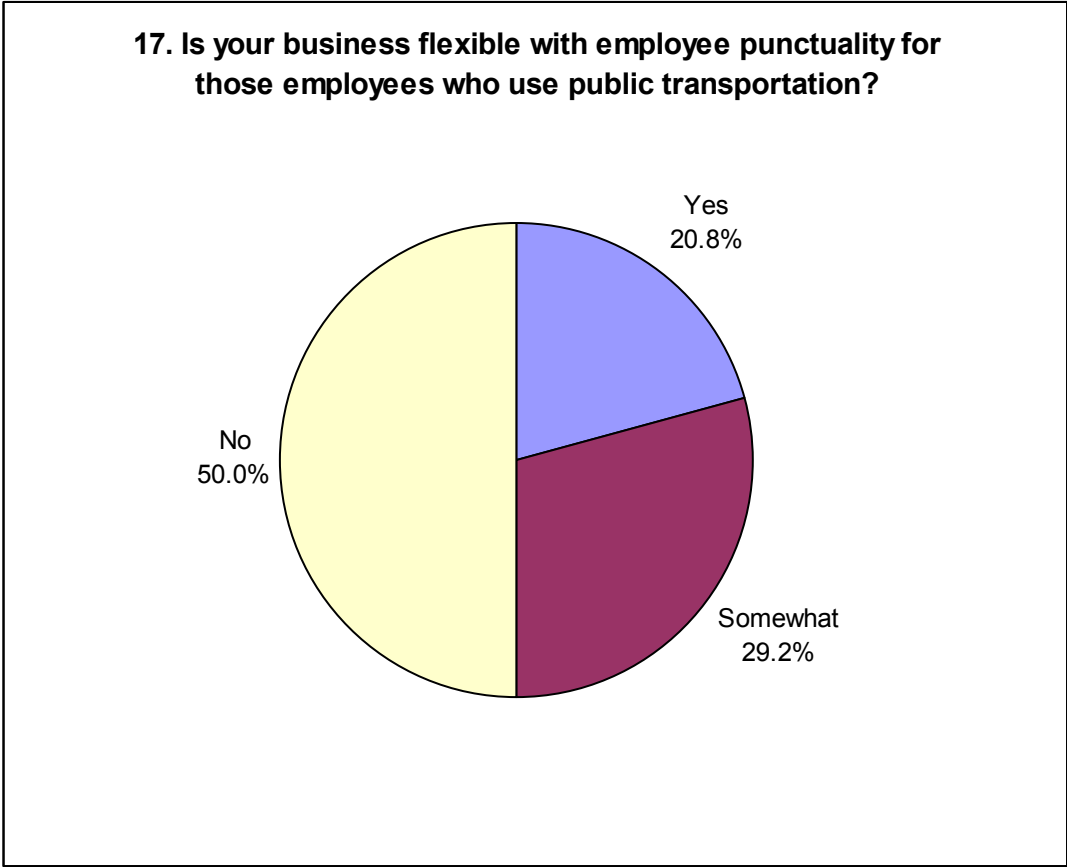
This indicates that there exists among a majority of those employers responding, both support for their employee’s use of public transportation and a desire that employees be better informed about public transportation options.

16. To encourage your employees to use public transportation, will your business provide a guaranteed ride home in the event of a family emergency?



Forty-seven employers responded to this question.

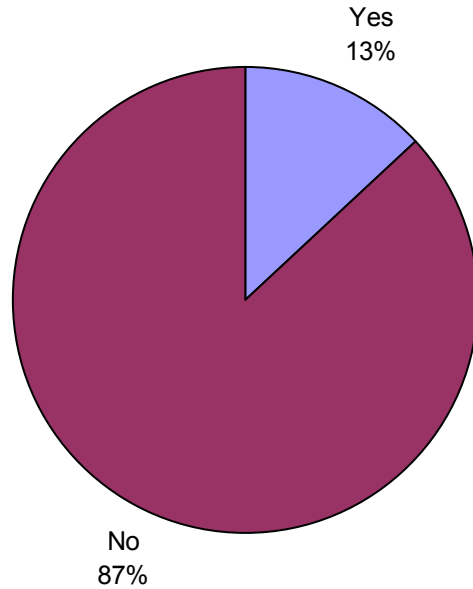
In order to encourage their employees to use public transportation, most employers (77%) offer some flexibility in assisting employees with a ride home in the event of an emergency, at least in some cases. This shows a pretty strong level of support among these employers to encourage their employees to use public transportation.



Forty-eight employers responded to this question.

Half of employers indicate that they are flexible, or are somewhat flexible with their employees' punctuality if they use public transportation. Half of the employers are **not** flexible with employees who use public transportation. This could be a significant issue impacting employers' support of their employee's use of public transportation.

18. Does your company offer a "cafeteria" benefit plan to your employees?



Forty-six employers responded to this question.

The vast majority of employers (87%) indicated that they do **not** offer a cafeteria benefit plan. Such a plan could help encourage employees to use public transportation if the plan allowed public transportation expenses.