

Shuttle Service



A facility that isn't within walking distance of public transportation and other conveniences can have a competitive disadvantage when it comes to attracting and retaining tenants, employees, and customers. Providing shuttle service may be the answer—it effectively brings an office complex, retail center, hospital, corporate campus, or other facility closer to amenities. On-street shuttles enable people to get to and from buildings easily, and intercampus shuttles quickly and safely move people around in large complexes. One way or another, shuttle service can add value to a facility, including those with parking garages or lots.

By Erik Eloe



for Employees and Customers

A PERK THAT PAYS OFF

There are several scenarios in which offering shuttle service might make sense for universities, shopping areas, downtown areas, medical facilities, and individual properties with professionally managed parking.

To or from Public Transportation

In a 2015 poll of millennials, 78 percent said having their workplaces near transit was important.¹ And they aren't the only ones who want to stay out of their cars: Americans took 10.8 billion trips on buses, subways, commuter trains, and other public means in 2014—the highest numbers in 58 years.²

Offering shuttle service to and from public transportation offers several benefits:

- Attracting a wider range of people/businesses to the property.
- More satisfied employees. Employees who save time

and money by using public transit tend to be more satisfied on their jobs. The stress of driving in rush-hour traffic is alleviated, allowing them to be happier and more productive at work. Also, using public transportation saves on the high price of gas and car maintenance. A two-person household can save, on average, more than \$10,000 a year by downsizing to one vehicle.³

- Supporting the environment. The Department of Energy states, "Because transportation accounts for about 69 percent of the more than 18 million barrels per day of U.S. petroleum consumption, reducing our dependence on petroleum-based fuels in this sector supports our economy and our energy security."⁴ Public transportation use in the U.S. saves 4.2 billion gallons of gas per year and reduces our country's carbon emissions by 37 million metric tons.

ALTERNATIVE FUEL VEHICLES FOR SHUTTLE SERVICE

The U.S. Department of Energy offers the Alternative Fuels Data Center, described as “a comprehensive clearinghouse of information about advanced transportation technologies.” It includes:

- Information on alternative fuels—biodiesel, hydrogen, electricity, natural gas, ethanol, and propane.
- A vehicle search feature.
- A cost calculator that compares costs of various vehicles and their greenhouse gas emissions.
- A search feature for federal and state laws and incentives.
- Case studies.
- Contacts for assistance with alternative-fuel programs.

Additionally, the Department of Energy’s Clean Cities program supports “local actions to cut petroleum use in transportation.” Businesses, organizations, and communities can look to Clean Cities for training, workshops, technical assistance, individual consultation, and funding to help with the exploration and deployment of alternative-fuel vehicles.

- Increased property values. When public transportation comes to an area, property values usually increase. Properties that bring people closer to public transport via shuttle service can capture some of these increases.
- Advertising. Shuttle buses can be wrapped with company logos and messaging to get branding “mileage” when they’re out on busy streets.

At the Workplace

Shuttle service can essentially expand a corporate campus, giving employees easy access to restaurants, food trucks, shopping, banks, fitness centers, and more. Those who don’t drive to work can still get out at lunch, and those who drive don’t have to use gas, fight noontime traffic, or find parking on their return.

When employees regularly have to walk or drive between buildings on a corporate campus, a lot of time is wasted. In addition to increasing efficiency and safety, shuttles provide shelter from inclement weather. They also enable employers to hire and accommodate employees who have difficulty walking.

Some companies with suburban headquarters are establishing downtown outposts to draw skilled younger workers who want to live and work in the city.⁵ Shuttle service between these locations can facilitate meetings or other functions that take place at the headquarters.

Temporary Situations

There are times when facilities may need shuttles temporarily (e.g., from offsite parking at a mall during the holidays), during construction (to shuttle people from temporary remote parking or to get them safely around construction zones), or for special events.

To the Front Door

Hospitals, airports, stadiums, universities, and malls are likely users of this service, which is probably the most common use for shuttles.

Case Study: Corporate Campus

At a large corporate campus on the outskirts of Chicago, shuttles run continuously during work hours to move employees between their many buildings. There are eight shuttle stops on campus. Employees can also ride a shuttle off campus at lunch hour (about 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.) to and from a commercial fitness center. Employees appreciate this benefit, and the employer doesn’t have to bear the cost of having an onsite employee fitness facility.

Before contracting with the shuttle provider, the corporate campus was operating its own shuttles. However, it didn’t have a fleet management plan in operation. It worked with its provider to ensure shuttles were put on a management system that tracks mileage, repairs, preventive maintenance, and spending. The system provides advanced warnings—such as oil change or new tire alerts—to prevent breakdowns and minimize costs. By implementing this program, the shuttle provider lowered the cost of repairs and increased the average lifespan of the campus buses from about five years to eight.

Costs

As pointed out above, the cost of shuttle services can often be recouped in competitive advantages for building owners, businesses, and tenants. Alternate-fuel shuttles may qualify for local or federal government subsidies and other incentives. The shuttle provider can assist facilities in determining upfront and ongoing costs and give advice on whether subsidizing or providing free shuttle service makes the most sense.

Safety and Convenience

Mobile apps can track shuttles via GPS so riders will know where the shuttle is and be alerted to actual arrival and departure times. This saves people from wasting time waiting, and enables them to stay inside, out of the elements until the shuttle is near.

Wi-Fi can be made available on shuttle buses for the convenience of riders who want/need to stay connected for work or personal reasons.

Camera/recording systems on board vehicles can capture accidents and behavior issues as well as help train drivers. This technology has been shown to reduce at-fault vehicle collisions by almost 60 percent, which allows the shuttle company to provide services at lower costs. Access to vital accident investigation data also helps save on insurance, maintenance, and repairs. An additional benefit is increased trip comfort and safety for passengers.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing shuttle services may make sense in situations in which buying and operating them first-hand isn't realistic. Look for an experienced company that focuses on serving passengers and giving them a quality experience.

If a facility has provided visitors and employees with this courtesy, then a company that operates with a service mentality is important. When a medical center outsources shuttle services, for example, it's especially important that drivers are sensitive to patient and family needs and have an understanding of the mental and physical stress riders may be under.

A shuttle provider should know how to determine the most efficient routes, hire and train the right people, use top-notch technology, choose the proper vehicles (including alternate-fuel models when appropriate), care for them cost effectively, and wash vehicles according to local environmental regulations.

The right operator will implement best practices at the facility; with experience and knowhow at the wheel, smooth shuttle operation is ensured. P

Footnotes

1. U.S. PRIG, www.uspirg.org/blogs/blog/maf/millennials-want-more-public-transportation.
2. American Public Transportation Association, Public Transportation Benefits, www.apta.com/mediacenter/ptbenefits.
3. Ibid
4. U.S. Department of Energy, Clean Cities Program, <https://cleancities.energy.gov/about>.
5. Crain's Chicago Business, www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20110528/IS-SUE01/305289984/craains-special-report-corporate-campuses-in-twilight.



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