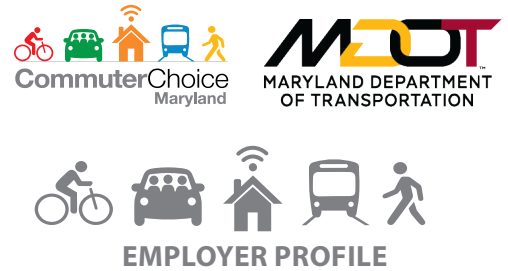




Pictured Above: Kari Swenson launching the SmartBenefits program with her team at the McDonald's in the Westfield Montgomery Mall in Bethesda, Maryland.



HORIZON THINKS SMARTER ABOUT TRANSIT

Want to think smarter, not harder, about making your business more accessible for your staff? Horizon has done just that! Read on to learn about the easy, smart steps the restaurant management group has taken to help their employees use transit to commute to work at locations across Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D. C.

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE COMMUTES

Kari Swenson, the co-owner of Horizon, started offering transit benefits to her employees shortly after getting into the McDonald's franchise business and learning from the North Bethesda Transportation Management District about programs offered by Montgomery County Commuter Services. Taking advantage of the Maryland Commuter Tax Credit, she is able to provide free SmarTrip transit cards to her employees at half of the cost to the business. Dedicated to ensuring staff can maximize that benefit, Kari's restaurants also adjust employees' work schedules to align with bus service times.

According to Kari, offering transit benefits to all 325 of her employees was "a program that was super easy to implement." It allows employees to easily commute to work using Metrobus, local bus options, and Metrorail. Kari's restaurant locations are spread throughout the region, including several in Montgomery County, Maryland, and about two-thirds of her staff, 178 full-time and 28 part-time, commute using the transit benefits Horizon offers. Each month, Horizon automatically "tops up" the cards for employees to use to get to work, meaning the company only pays for the trips their employees actually take.

LEADING THE PEOPLE EXPERIENCE

In order to facilitate an engaged and connected workplace across all her McDonald's locations, Kari has implemented a position known as a "People Experience Lead" (PEL). Horizon's PEL, Claribel, is not a typical human resources and benefits manager, as she visits the restaurants and interacts with all employees face-to-face.

Although Kari administers many of the employee benefits to Horizon staff, the PEL specifically handles their SmartBenefits. Kari and her team have found it helpful to have a specific team member that employees can go to if they have any SmarTrip-related questions or issues, like reactivating their card, which usually just takes a quick call to the SmartBenefits program. Claribel's on-the-ground coordination of Horizon's transit benefits, although a small part of her job, has made the program even easier for her employees, Kari says.

MORE THAN JUST THE MONEY

Kari notes that "transit benefits are more than just the money" because they are "such a livable benefit that the staff see every day." She also suggests that employers can meet retention goals having these transit benefits in place: "When I ask people what keeps them here, it's paid time off and it's SmartBenefits."

Kari describes starting a SmartBenefits program as very straightforward; she began by purchasing SmarTrip cards in bulk and distributing them to her employees. Kari encourages any organization interested in trying this out to do the same and, after a couple of years, evaluate the return on investment. However, Kari assures that "you will find that it's worthwhile."

Contact Commuter Choice Maryland today to learn more about the commuter benefits you can offer your staff. It's very likely your organization will realize the benefits too!

"When you hand someone a transit card and say, 'there's \$50 on it,' it's pretty easy to understand the benefit."

-Kari Swenson

Co-owner, Horizon

