Is filling your gas tank emptying your wallet?

Try some commuting alternatives

Leaving your car at home – even a few days a week – can save money and reduce stress. Options and resources available from 494 Commuter Services include:

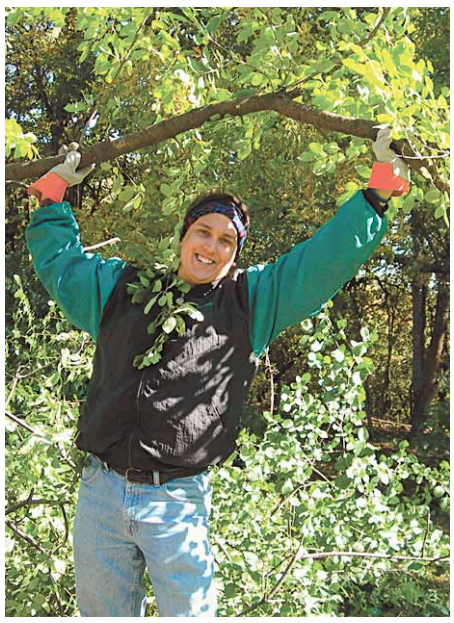
- **Bike.** Get a workout on the way to work. Request a free Hennepin County bicycle trail map with bicycle commuting tips.
- **Take the bus.** A personalized itinerary shows you how to get from home to work with bus schedules and free bus passes.
- **Ride the train.** For LRT routes and schedules, visit www.metrotransit.org.
- **Carpool.** Thousands of business professionals in the metropolitan area are looking for a carpool partner to split the cost of gas and reduce vehicle wear and tear. A free ride-match list of people who have a similar schedule and live or work near you is available.

For more information, visit www.494corridor.org or call 952-848-4947.

Great job, Bloomington employees and businesses

Commuter Challenge results

Whether they carpooled, rode the bus or train, bicycled or walked to work, 600 Bloomington commuters pledged to try an alternative to driving alone during the 2005 Commuter Challenge. Of the more than 4,000 individuals who participated in the challenge, more than half work near the I-494 corridor. Based on Bloomington employee pledges alone, the Commuter Challenge led to a decrease of more than 75,000 miles of travel. Great job, residents, workers and businesses!



Buckthorn Across Borders

Community tackles invasive species

More than 200 volunteers hit the trails to help rid three sites along the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge of buckthorn in October. The City of Bloomington, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Friends of the Minnesota Valley and the Department of Natural Resources hosted the 2005 Buckthorn Across Borders event.

About 35 volunteers tackled the invasive plant at Parker's Picnic area near Park Avenue and Columbus Road. Fifteen one-ton truckloads of buckthorn were hauled from the site. Bloomington Park Maintenance Manager Paul Edwardson said volunteers maximize the community's resources and are key to undertaking these types of projects.

"You can't measure in dollars and cents the value of people getting out and helping with concerns like these," Edwardson said. "So much can be accomplished."

Holiday tips

'Tis the season to reduce, reuse and recycle

The holidays offer many opportunities for recycling and resource conservation. Try these tips that can also preserve the resources in your pocketbook.

Gift ideas

- Use a canvas bag when shopping.
- Share homemade presents, including baked goods, jams or crafts.
- Give tickets to entertainment and cultural events or passes for public transportation.
- Make your own holiday cards using old cards.

Wrapping gifts

- Wrap gifts in backpacks, fabric hatboxes, maps, newspaper, scarves or cloth napkins.
- Make gift tags from old cards or decorate cardboard.
- When shipping gifts, pack boxes with newspaper or scrap paper.

Source: City of Millbrae, California

Earth Action Hero

The No-Waste Warrior

Earth Action Heroes protect the planet. Whether it's saving energy or guarding Bloomington's precious natural resources, these individuals are making a difference. Here are your neighbors in action ...

When the recycling trucks come by George Fisher's Bloomington home, they don't find much to pick up at the curb. Rarely are newspapers, cans or glass bottles in Fisher's recycling bin because he doesn't create waste, or the need to recycle, in the first place.

Fisher carefully chooses what he consumes. He eliminates unnecessary packaging by buying grocery items in bulk and drinking tap water instead of purchasing individual plastic bottles.

"There is very little I buy in metal cans, or plastic or glass bottles and jars," Fisher said. "I make soup from dry-packaged beans and buy spaghetti in clear plastic wrappers."

Newspapers don't pile up at his home because Fisher doesn't subscribe to them; he reads them online.

"The magazines I receive, I save for future reference or bring to work to share with co-workers once I have read them," Fisher said.

Fisher also reuses what he can. Glass jars that once held spaghetti sauce are the perfect size to hold the juice from fresh fruits and vegetables that he extracts from his juicer. All junk mail is shredded and used as packaging for shipping the electronic and ham radio equipment he sells; he never buys shipping boxes, but reuses the boxes that have been mailed to him.

Recycling is important, but waste prevention is an even better practice because creating less waste uses fewer resources. Fisher adopted his minimalist lifestyle in 1978 while living in California and continues the practice in Minnesota.

"I loved the big redwood trees and the ocean," Fisher said. "It made so much sense to me to do what I could to conserve and protect the environment."

George Fisher's recycling bin is almost empty on pick-up day.

What can you do to prevent waste?

The first step is to think about what you buy, the type of packaging it is in and what your alternatives may be. Do you have items that could be reused instead of purchased new? Fisher suggests taking that first step to prevent waste and then add another step each year.

"One person can make a difference," Fisher said. "Don't feel guilty – just do what you can. If everyone did one thing, there would be a huge effect."