

Ray Allen: 'Commute to Careers' program connects talent with opportunity

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When you commute to work, do you put much thought into what you would do if you didn't have access to reliable transportation? If the bus line or other public transit options weren't available, or if you lacked the means to own or operate a motor vehicle? Transportation to and from a job is a concern for a large segment of our population, and to grow our workforce we must help individuals overcome their specific barriers to employment. Governor Walker's Commute to Careers initiative aims to help individuals overcome the transportation barrier by putting them on the road to a rewarding career or helping them access much needed training programs that will result in meaningful employment. By implementing and expanding regional transportation solutions, individuals will find themselves cruising toward family-sustaining employment. Helping individuals overcome their barriers to employment isn't just good public policy, it is a common-sense workforce solution.

Our unemployment rate is at a near-record low after achieving an all-time low unemployment rate of 2.8 percent in April and May. For the first time in our state's history, our unemployment rate has remained under 3 percent for five consecutive months. We have more people employed today than ever before, and we currently have more available jobs on the state's JobCenterofWisconsin.com website than we do unemployed workers. The Wisconsin economy is producing opportunities for workers every day, and Commute to Careers will connect Wisconsin's talented workers with those opportunities and allow more individuals to enter the labor force.

The Commute to Careers initiative will be implemented in two phases:

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\$8 million will be invested in the current biennium – \$3 million from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) for transportation equipment and \$5 million in grants from the Department of Workforce Development (DWD). The DWD grants will target the transportation needs of low-income workers, with at least \$1 million allocated to address the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities.

An additional \$8 million in funding will be requested in the 2019-2021 budget – \$3 million in WisDOT funding for additional transportation equipment and \$5 million in DWD funding for continuation of the grant program.

Commute to Careers will help expand our labor force, help meet the demand for skilled workers and improve the overall lives of countless Wisconsinites. All individuals should be able to experience the dignity that comes from a hard days' work, and if individuals want to skill-up and skill-in to a new position, they should have access to reliable transportation to do so. We must remove barriers to employment and training services, and Commute to Careers will help remove the transportation barrier and put more individuals on the highway to career success.

— *Allen is secretary of the Department of Workforce Development.*