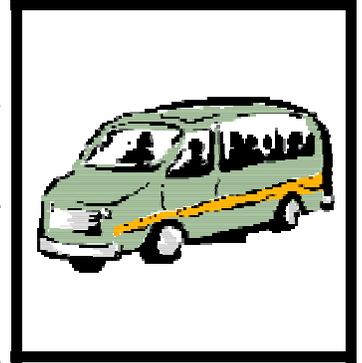




SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT for QUALITY of LIFE



CARPOOL/VANPOOL

What is it?

Vanpooling/carpooling is an arrangement by a group of commuters to ride together from home or a prearranged meeting place in a van or a car to their destinations in a single round trip, with the driver as a fellow commuter. Vanpools/carpools usually consist of individuals who live near each other and are employees of the same company, or are employees of different companies located only a short distance apart, and have the same work hours. The great advantage of vanpools and carpools is that it reduces vehicle trips, reduces vehicle miles traveled, and therefore reduces auto emissions that result in poor air quality.

Costs

Usually vanpoolers/carpoolers will share the costs of gasoline, maintenance, and/or leasing the vehicles. By offering commuter benefits, including carpooling and vanpooling, a company with 1,000 employees can lower its annual parking expenses by more than \$70,000 and save participating employees \$13,000 each year in taxes and \$160,000 each year in gasoline, parking, and vehicle costs.



This Action Item can be implemented as a

- POLICY
- ORDINANCE
- PROGRAM

Shared Impact and Benefits

- Car- and van-pooling reduces overall auto emissions by reducing vehicle miles traveled, and by doing so, improve air quality. Ground-level ozone formation is reduced through the reduced levels of oxides of nitrogen from auto exhaust.
- The American Lung Association reports that low levels of ground-level ozone adversely affect nearly one-third of our population. So improvements in air quality result in improvements in public health.
- Peak hour traffic congestion (and resulting gasoline consumption) are reduced. Nine billion gallons of fuel are wasted in traffic congestion each year—800 times the amount of oil spilled by the Exxon Valdez.
- Employers will be able to offer employees a value-added benefit and take a tax-write-off. Eight of 10 U.S. workers believe commuter benefits are valuable to employees. Furthermore, employers that pay for employee parking costs can save money.
- Vanpool/carpool participants save money by sharing commuting costs.
- Vanpool/carpool riders have lower stress commutes to work. Employers will also have more productive employees with higher morale.

How long does this take to implement?

A vanpooling/carpooling program can be implemented within a few months. Once the program is established, individual pools can be set up in less than a few weeks.

The Bottom Line

Carpooling and vanpooling commuters get to work in ways that reduce air pollution and traffic congestion, save employers and employees money, reduce the environmental impacts associated with driving single-passenger vehicles, reduce parking space demand and expenses, and relieve commuter stress.

Interested? Read on!



Who needs to be involved in implementation?

- ☞ Governing board and/or management (to endorse a vanpool/carpool policy and support a program that provides incentives for employees who participate in a vanpool or carpool)
- ☞ Transit providers and/or private vanpool leasing companies
- ☞ Businesses and their human resource or fiscal office staff
- ☞ Private parking deck and lot owners
- ☞ Employees willing to start up their own vanpool or carpool

Action Steps

The following is geared towards starting a vanpool, however, these same principles can be used as a helpful guide to carpooling:

1. Set a start date and time line for when you expect to have the vanpool on the road. Allow about three weeks to complete the preparation steps.
2. Determine the basic route and times.
3. Estimate fares. If you are planning to lease a van, compare rates and shop around.
4. Advertise the route and sign-on riders. Be sure to describe the general route.
5. Draft a rider agreement containing ground rules to be signed by your riders. Rules should address topics such as: How long will you wait for tardy riders? Is smoking allowed? See "carpool rules" in the **Basic Information** section for further examples.
6. Set policies for fare and payment, such as when fares are due and paying for days not present.
7. Meet with potential riders to review the vanpool arrangement and answer questions. Collect information of potential riders and any signed rider agreements.
8. Fulfill requirements for driving a vanpool listed in **Resources** section below.
9. Confirm route, start date and riders, and collect payments.
10. Get in the van and go! Start a little early the first few days until you get the schedule down.
11. Celebrate your Employees' Participation – During National Try Transit Week (annually held the first full week after Labor Day), partner with your local transit authority to acknowledge your Best Workplaces for Commuters employees.

For a complete, detailed, easy-to-read guide through the process, check out the handy online booklet: *Ten Steps for Starting a Vanpool* at: <http://www.socalcommute.org/P2-9+Bcwr.pdf>

Who's doing this?

- The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) has a vanpool program available to commuters throughout the region in both North and South Carolina. CATS also oversees a ride sharing database that can assist you in the development of a carpool. For more information see: <http://www.charmeck.org/Departments/CATS/Home.htm>
- Mecklenburg County has recently become a "Best Workplaces for Commuters" employer.
- Triangle Transit Authority (TTA): <http://www.ridetta.org/vanpool.html> & <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/eaac/home.htm#carpool>
- Southern California Rideshare, the nation's first and largest commute assistance agency: <http://www.socalcommute.org>
- To find a carpool operating in your area, try the search tool at: <http://www.carpoolconnect.com/>



Resources

Different categories of commuter ride-sharing groups qualify for vehicle tax exemptions if they meet certain legal requirements. Employers have four options:

1. Benefits in addition to salary— Employers may provide up to \$100 per month to employees who commute to work by transit or vanpools. The employer pays for the benefit and receives the equivalent deduction from business income taxes. Employees receive the benefit completely free of all payroll and income taxes, in addition to their current salary.
2. Benefits Instead of Salary— Employers may permit their employees to set aside up to \$100 per month of their pretax income to pay for transit or vanpools.
3. Combination— Employers may share the cost of commuting with their employees. Employers

can give their employees part of the share in addition to salary and allow their employees to set aside part of their pre-tax income to pay the remaining amount.

4. Parking Cash Out— Employers may offer employees the option of cashing out the value of employer provided parking. Employees forego the parking and either receive the taxable cash value of the parking space, or a tax-free transit or vanpool benefit of up to \$100 per month.
 - For a more complete explanation of tax exemptions, refer to the **Tax-free Commuting Benefits** SEQL document.
 - For more information about costs and benefits associated with vanpooling, see the Do-It-Yourself Vanpool Guide at: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/mobility/tdm/DoVanpool/diyvg.html>

Basic Information

- Vanpools can be operated or sponsored by an employer, be contracted through an outside leasing company that independently charges a monthly fare for a group of co-workers, or can be operated and administered through a public transit provider.
- Vanpools typically require 9-14 participants and sometimes require two to three dedicated drivers.
- If available, use an existing vanpool coordinator that can match up people with similar origins and destinations.
- Similarly, utilize any existing centralized commuter registration programs that may exist in your region. These help you more easily identify potential carpool buddies.

Guaranteed rides home are important. By offering a guaranteed ride home, employers remove a major barrier to alternative commute methods—employee fears of being "stranded" at work due to unforeseen circumstances. This type of program provides employees who commute via transit, carpool, or vanpool with transportation home in the event of a personal emergency or unscheduled overtime. Although some employers run their own programs, others participate in programs administered by rideshare organiza-

tions, transportation management associations, and transit agencies.

Benefits to Employees:

- Allows flexibility for occasional users of transit and vanpools
- Reduces personal income taxes

Benefits to Employer:

- Enhances your benefits package at little to no cost
- Requires minimal paperwork
- Reduces payroll and business income taxes

Just So You Know...

- Benefits in addition to salary are treated as a regular business expense similar to medical insurance premiums.
- Transportation benefits are excluded from cafeteria plans. IRC Section 125 covers cafeteria plans and flexible spending accounts. Section 132(f) covers transportation benefits.
- Section 132(f) benefits are exempt from anti-discriminatory requirements. The employer decides who receives the benefits.
- There is no "use it or lose it" rule. Any amount not used by the employee at the end of the year is returned to the employee the following year as taxable income.

Basic Information

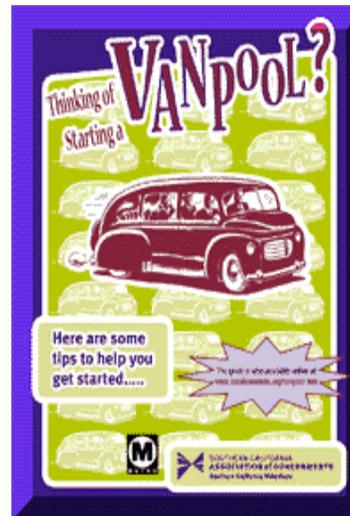
- Compare statistics of the different modes of shared commuter transport options:

MODE	VANPOOL	MOTORBUS	HEAVY RAIL	LIGHT RAIL	COMMUTER RAIL
AVERAGE DISTANCE (MILES)	33	4	5	4	23
AVERAGE SPEED (MPH)	36	13	21	14	34
FATALITIES PER 100 MILLION MILES	0.0	2.4	3.2	1.2	25.4
PASSENGERS SERVED (MILLIONS)	8	4554	2430	259	311
VEHICLES MILES (MILLIONS)	33	1719	558	41	2165

Source: National Transportation Statistics, 1999 (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2000)

- When planning for carpooling, set “carpool rules” (from *Southern California Rideshare*). The more you discuss in advance, the fewer problems you’ll encounter once you’re carpooling. Some of the ground you should cover:

- ☞ Who drives, and when.
- ☞ How often will you carpool. Every day? Once a week?
- ☞ Arrangements for pick-ups and drop-offs. For example, will you meet at a Park & Ride lot, a childcare center, or at one person’s home?
- ☞ What you should do on days when you can’t carpool - especially if it’s your turn to drive.
- ☞ What you should do if you have to work late or must go home during the day because of an emergency. (Many companies now offer free taxi or rental car rides home to carpoolers under some circumstances – the “guaranteed ride”.)
- ☞ How long the carpool will wait if someone is late.
- ☞ What sort of music will be allowed, if any.
- ☞ Whether smoking is allowed.
- ☞ Types of stops you are willing to make on the way, if any.
- ☞ Duties of the driver, such as filling up the gas tank before



For a complete, detailed, easy-to-read guide through the process, check out the handy online booklet: *Ten Steps for Starting a Vanpool at:* <http://www.socalcommute.org/P2-9+Bcvr.pdf>
 Or call the vanpool helpline, (213)630-1551.

- You may also want to set up a probation period. That way, if you’re not comfortable with the arrangement, you can easily bow out and find another carpool.

Tracking Progress

- **Let Centralina Council of Governments know when you’ve implemented this action by contacting Carol Lewis at 704-348-2730 or clewis@centralina.org.**
- Track the number of people in your organization participating, by mode, in commuting alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles. Also note the number of miles for each person’s commute so that reductions in vehicle miles traveled can be calculated.
- Figure out your costs and potential savings for carpooling or vanpooling with a commuter cost calculator, located at: <http://www.socalcommute.org/costsav.html>



FAQ'S

Q: Why promote commuter benefits?

A: Commuting to and from work is a primary cause of increased traffic congestion and air quality problems in many areas across the United States. Reducing the number of cars commuting during rush hour can reduce traffic and improve air quality. In fact, if half of all employees worked for “Best Workplace for Commuters” employers, 15 million cars would be removed from the road daily.

Q: Are there any government incentives offered to businesses for starting a carpool or vanpool program?

A: Yes. Through the Best Workplaces for Commuters program, the EPA and DOT provide a number of benefits, including:

1. Public recognition and employee recruiting—EPA and the US Department of Transportation (DOT) provide credible, third-party public recognition to employers meeting the National Standard of Excellence, helping these employers gain recognition as commuter friendly and environmentally responsible.
2. Commuter Benefits Seminar—the American Management Association, in cooperation with the EPA, DOT, and the Association for Commuter Transportation, developed a one-day seminar designed to help employee benefit managers create, implement, and integrate a commuter benefits program into their organization.
3. Technical briefs and assistance—EPA and DOT are developing commuter benefit briefs that answer commuter benefit implementation and management questions. DOT offers expertise in transportation choices and advanced transportation information systems and services using its network of relationships with state transportation offices and transit companies.
4. Comparative benchmarking—as employers report their results, EPA will compile this information and give it back to those companies in very useful ways. EPA will provide information that allows an employer to see how they are doing compared to others in their region or industry or the program as a whole.

Q: What are the requirements to become a Best Workplaces for Commuters® Employer?

A: To qualify as a Best Workplaces for Commuters employer, a company must offer one primary benefit such as tax-free transit or vanpool passes, telecommuting, or parking cash-out (enabling workers to trade free parking for its cash equivalent). Most organizations must also offer three secondary benefits, choosing from options such as shuttles to and from transit stations (provided directly by the employer or contracted through a service), ridesharing or carpool matching, preferred or reduced-cost parking for carpools and vanpools, and compressed work schedules. Finally, Best Workplaces for Commuters employers must offer a guaranteed ride home, which provides participants with a ride at no charge if they need emergency transport home due to special circumstances.

Q: Why work for a Best Workplaces for Commuters Employer?

A: Best Workplaces for Commuters employers are among a select group that provides their employees with an excellent package of commuter benefits. The package of benefits they agree to provide represents the National Standard of Excellence for commuter benefits. The benefits can include a wide variety of commuting choices, choices that make commuting less stressful and less costly for employees. For example, many employers offer benefits packages that are the equivalent of receiving more than \$1,000 in additional salary at significantly less than that in actual cost to the employee. Best Workplaces for Commuters employers demonstrate that they care about the welfare of their employees, not only on the job, but getting to and from it as well.

Intersecting Interests



AIR AWARENESS

Considering the negative effects of auto combustion, incentives to provide carpools and vanpools should be strongly considered to promote cleaner air.



CLEAN AIR POLICY

An effective clean air policy should address prime sources of air pollution and identify positive, feasible actions for improving air quality. Carpools and vanpools are perfect examples to include.



ENHANCED OZONE AWARENESS

Carpooling and vanpooling reduces the number of cars on the road during peak commuter times, which helps keep ozone concentrations from rising to dangerous levels.



TRANSIT CONNECTIVITY

Carpools and vanpools give commuters more choice, and can be incorporated as part of the commute path with other modes of transport such as buses, biking, or walking.



EFFICIENT PARKING

Space needed to meet parking requirements is obviously reduced significantly with the use of carpools and vanpools.



TAX-FREE COMMUTER BENEFITS

Employers and employees can both save money through commuter tax benefits applied to vanpool program participation.

For More Information

- Charlotte Area Transit System
 - ♦ Vanpools: <http://www.charmeck.org/Departments/CATS/Virtual+Transit/Vanpool+-+Start.htm>
 - ♦ Carpools: support:http://www.charmeck.org/Departments/CATS/Virtual+Transit/Carpool+.htm
- Triangle Transit Authority, P.O. Box 13787, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709, Ph: (919)549-9999, <http://www.ridetta.org/vanpool.html>
- Best Workplaces for Commuters -
 - ♦ A Getting started checklist: *America's Way to Work* <http://www.fta.dot.gov/library/policy/cc/gs.htm>
 - ♦ benefits by employers to employees: <http://www.fta.dot.gov/library/policy/cc/cc.htm>
- In South Carolina, look into the "Take A Break From The Exhaust" program. Concentrates on SC Department of Health and Environmental Control employees but is an evolving program open to anyone. Contact Jack Porter, Environmental Health Manager, at 803-898-3829 or porterje@dhec.sc.gov.
- The TDM Resource Center (WSDOT) - *The Do-It-Yourself Vanpool Guide*: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/mobility/tdm/DoVanpool/diyvg.html>
- NIEHS Environmental Awareness Advisory Committee (EAAC) <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/eaac/home.htm>

Prepared by Centralina Council of Governments
in collaboration with
Catawba Regional Council of Governments,
August, 2003.