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## Profiles of Innovative Rural Vanpool Programs

### Introduction

The current economic downturn has resulted in a disproportionate loss of jobs in rural communities, necessitating longer work commutes for some rural residents when they do return to work. Moreover, to economize, many families in communities nationwide are giving up their cars. In rural communities where public transportation is limited, these developments present challenges to accessing work and training opportunities.

Despite the gains made in rural transportation, rural communities remain at a disadvantage. They are still challenged to build significant mobility options that provide those going to work with the same choices available in communities with more traditional forms of transit. Vanpools offer a perfect solution—one that benefits commuters and businesses alike. Vanpools offer flexibility, can reduce employee time spent on the road when they are able to use high-occupancy vehicle lanes, make employees' commute to work less stressful and save employees money relative to the cost of driving alone. By implementing or supporting vanpool programs, employers can ensure their workers have a dependable ride to work and realize significant tax savings through participation in the Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program under section 132(f) of the Internal Revenue Code. They can also afford riders tax savings and reduce expenses associated with providing employee parking.

Rural communities across the nation have led the way in pioneering vanpool programs. Innovative programs include ones that are owner-operated, programs sponsored by transit agencies or employers and vanpools administered by third-party operators such as VPSI and 2Plus.

Among the nation's most innovative vanpool programs are the ones operating in Washington State. This is due, in part, to the enactment of two key pieces of state legislation. In 1991, Washington incorporated the Commute Trip Reduction Law into its Clean Air Act. The law requires each county with a residential population of more than 150,000 and employers with more than 100 employees, as well as each city within those counties containing a major employer with more than 100 employees who must travel during the peak hours of 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m., to follow certain mandates. The guidelines stipulate that employers meeting these criteria must have an employee transportation coordinator on site, survey employees biennially and provide options to reduce single-occupant commuting; these options may include the 132(f) transit benefit and priority parking for vanpoolers and carpools.

Further action was taken in 2003, when the state implemented a 10-year transportation plan focused on doubling the number of vanpools within that timeframe. The Vanpool Investment Program allocated \$30 million in grant funds for public transit agencies to support vanpool programs. Funds must be used for capital costs associated with putting new vans on the road and employer incentives to increase employee vanpool use.

The state Commute Trip Reduction Board, which establishes program guidelines for the state's Commute Trip Reduction Program, is charged with administering the funds to help transit agencies grow their vanpool programs. Each year the board reviews the size of each agency's vanpool waiting list, the degree of congestion in the corridors these programs serve, the needs of workers for supplemental transit services and other criteria in allocating funds to agencies for purchasing vans,

based on a maximum cost of \$26,000 per van. If, through the state contract with vendors or through a competitive bid process, transit agencies can purchase vehicles for less than \$26,000, they are allowed to amend their agreement with the state to purchase vehicles beyond the funded equivalent number of vans.

Following are examples of successful vanpool programs serving rural communities or commuters that have incorporated creative approaches to meeting the needs of both providers and participants.

Among the elements leading to success are:

- developing innovative partnerships;
- reaching out to and involving area employers;
- understanding the unique needs of individual communities;
- obtaining strong political support from local leaders;
- emphasizing ease of use for businesses by, for example, working with reliable, experienced third-party operators;
- emphasizing ease of use for commuters; and
- ensuring access to a guaranteed ride home.

**Baldwin Rural Area Transit, Baldwin County, Alabama**

Baldwin Rural Area Transit (BRATS) is the public transit provider for Baldwin County, located in rural Alabama. The transit agency overcame several funding and logistical challenges associated with providing transit access from a rural area to an urban area to successfully implement a vanpool program that provides rural workers with access to jobs in the city of Mobile, the county seat and a growing tourist community. Although many county residents routinely travel to jobs in Mobile and need transportation assistance to access employment, implementing a program posed difficulties because program funders wanted to ensure BRATS did not compete with urban transit providers also serving the city. After much negotiation, the transit agency implemented a vanpool program that routinely transports Baldwin County residents to a central location in Mobile, picks up passengers and transports them back to Baldwin.

BRATS owns all the vans and operates three different types of vanpools: those driven by company employees and paid for by riders, those driven by BRATS drivers and billed to employers on a monthly basis and those driven by BRATS drivers with weekly tickets purchased in advance by the passengers. Approximately 10 percent of vanpools are those driven by company employees. Regardless of type, the vanpools have gained employer as well as employee support because of their proven record of getting people to work on time.

In addition to Mobile, service is provided to the county seat, located in the northern part of the county and home to several county employers. BRATS also contracted with larger employers along the east-west corridor of the state, and it currently runs vanpools to those destinations. Another route, serving Gulf Shores, a large tourism area in the extreme southern portion of the county, was recently expanded from summer to year-round service. One of the participating employers in the Gulf Shores area provides transit benefits for vanpool riders via the Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program.

BRATS now run 2,000 passenger trips per month during the morning and evening commute. It works closely with area chambers of commerce, as well as with local human service agencies, to develop services. The transit agency established strong working ties with all 13 municipalities located in Baldwin County and the cities of Mobile, Alabama, and Pensacola, Florida. In addition, BRATS's director of transportation serves on the Envision Coastal Alabama Board for Transit.

For more information, contact Taylor Rider, Director of Transportation, at 251.990.4636 or [btrider@co.baldwin.al.us](mailto:btrider@co.baldwin.al.us) or visit [http://www.co.baldwin.al.us/Pageview.asp?edit\\_id=363](http://www.co.baldwin.al.us/Pageview.asp?edit_id=363).

**Ben Franklin Transit, Benton and Franklin Counties, Washington State**

Ben Franklin Transit (BFT) provides service in a 588-square-mile area located in Benton and Franklin Counties. The population of the service area is approximately 200,000. BFT is funded by voter-approved local sales taxes and grants from the Federal Transit Administration. Revenues are used to provide fixed-route, Americans with Disability Act paratransit, General Public Demand Response and Vanpool transit services throughout the service area.

BFT's regional vanpool program, recognized as one of the most innovative programs in Washington State, has been in operation for 25 years. The vanpool network covers eight counties. The program's longevity and success are due, in part, to the transit agency's belief that meeting customer needs is its top priority.

Riders in BFT's 15-passenger vans share the cost of the commute, fuel, maintenance and insurance by paying a monthly fare. Drivers are fellow commuters, responsible for collecting monthly fees and fueling the vehicle. In return they may choose to ride for free. However, many drivers choose to contribute to the costs as a way of keeping fares lower for all riders. Vanpool drivers' employment and driving histories are checked upon their initial enrollment in the program, and their driving records are rechecked each year. New drivers are required to attend a driver's workshop, which covers defensive driving with hands-on practice, maintenance, accident procedures and more. Veteran drivers are invited to attend a refresher course every three years.

Vanpools provide 295 round trips per day to commuters, with a federal work site 35 miles outside of Richland accounting for the largest proportion of commuter trips. Workers at the facility who have moved on to other jobs have taken the vanpool concept with them and created new vanpools, some that travel 150 to 170 miles daily, including trips to Walla Walla and Yakima. Most riders pay out of pocket to participate; 95 vanpools have half of their commute costs covered, and federal workers who participate in vanpools can receive benefits through the Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program. One employer, Bechtel National, provides a \$300 subsidy for each vanpool of more than eight riders traveling to its facility.

Vanpool Program Investment funds enable BFT to put vans into operation, recovering costs through fares and federal funding. During a five-year period, transit agencies return a 25 percent match to the state, which gives them the option to spend the match in support of their vanpool operations. At the end of five years, the agencies own the vans outright or pay residual capital costs to do so.

For more information, contact Terry DeJuan at 509.734.5108 or [tdejuan@bft.org](mailto:tdejuan@bft.org).

**Coast Transit Authority, Hancock County, Mississippi**

The Coast Transit Authority (CTA) has been providing public transportation services to three coastal Mississippi counties since 1972. CTA's Coast Commuter program is a three-part work commute program consisting of fixed-route bus service, carpooling and vanpooling.

The vanpool program began operations in December 2006, with one vanpool serving the state's largest employer, Northrop Grumman. All currently operating vanpools serve the Northrop Grumman shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and various agencies conducting business at the Stennis Space Center, also located in this rural area. Of the 30 vanpools in operation, 13 originate in rural communities. Vanpools are available to accommodate all work shifts at these facilities with enough interested commuters to start a pool. In February 2009 alone, vanpools provided more than 7,500 passenger trips.

Prior to implementation, CTA's executive director met with the mayor of Pascagoula and Northrop Grumman officials to discuss the need for transportation options in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. VPSI, a national vanpool services provider, surveyed the company, reviewed employee commuting habits, mapped out where all employees live and identified distances and clusters of residents. Based on the information gathered, VPSI determined the number of vans needed to transport all participants, and it recruited and trained the drivers from among the potential commuters.

Currently, CTA contracts with VPSI to provide equipment and management services for the vanpool program. CTA pays all management costs for the program and provides a \$400 monthly subsidy for each vanpool. Costs associated with the rides depend on the number of passengers and the distance traveled. Vanpool participants are eligible for and receive transit benefits through the federal Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program.

Residents from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi currently commute by vanpool to work in Mississippi. CTA is also working with Keesler Air Force Base and the VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System, headquartered in Biloxi, to establish programs at these installations. Although local private-sector employers expressed considerable interest in the program when fuel prices were at their peak, interest has diminished somewhat with the recent reduction in gas prices.

Among the elements leading to the program's success are the ability to contract with an experienced private administrator and Northrop Grumman's cooperation in designing the program and working out all the bugs. CTA has found that marketing and coordination costs can be expensive and that oversight is labor intensive.

For more information, contact Katy Schmidt at 228.896.8080 x 233 or [katy.schmitt@vpsiinc.com](mailto:katy.schmitt@vpsiinc.com).

**Coastal Georgia Regional Development Center, Brunswick, Georgia**

Coastal Georgia Regional Development Center created a regional vanpool program as part of the coordinated public transportation plan. Expected to become operational in mid-2009, the program will provide a low-cost commute option for employees traveling from outlying areas to work. It grew out of a 2005 needs assessment that identified commuter transportation as a major necessity. The study found that many workers travel from second- and third-tier counties to employment, a trend that is expected to increase as the recession worsens. Currently, more than 230,000 workers cross county lines daily to jobs within the region. The average commute distance is nearly 35 miles.

The vanpool program aims to serve residents of a 10-county area covering the east coast of Georgia between the South Carolina and Florida borders. Costs relating to program implementation and administration are shared across the entire region. The program is supported through state and federal financing streams, including Job Access and Reverse Commute funding, with monthly ridership paid for by both riders and employers; participating regional employers also contribute financially by providing local matching funds. Initially, the Georgia Department of Transportation grant will provide the capital funding for the vans, and each group will be responsible for listing schedules and locations for pick-ups and drop-offs.

Eligible riders are residents living or working within the service area. Vans will be assigned to each group, and one of the employees will be designated as a driver. The employee/driver will have free use of the van for private travel, and the cost of the ride for that individual is free. VPSI is the contract manager.

Regional employers have shown strong support for the program; 74 percent of them have expressed a willingness to review information on vanpools, and nearly 50 percent of them have expressed an interest in promoting vanpooling at their companies. Staff is currently talking with employers about the provision of transportation benefits in conjunction with the program.

For more information, contact Barbara Hurst at 912.262.2800 or [bfhurst@coastalgeorgiardc.org](mailto:bfhurst@coastalgeorgiardc.org).

### Commuteride, Ada County, Idaho

Commuteride, the oldest multi-employer vanpool program in the nation, was started in 1976 by the Ada County Highway District (ACHD). ACHD encompasses Boise, Eagle, Garden City, Kuna, Meridian and Star as well as the unincorporated areas of Ada County. Currently, more than 900 participants are served by 83 routes. Participation is prearranged, with riders sharing the cost of the vehicle and its operation by paying an equitable monthly fare. Commuteride oversees all maintenance and insurance, and it provides a fuel card to pay for gasoline. Van drivers are members of the vanpool, and many of them ride for free. Vanpool fares, determined by the costs associated with the distance of the particular route, cover the operating costs of the van. These costs include van acquisition, maintenance, insurance, fuel, guaranteed ride home costs, back-up vehicle costs, commute incentives and some administrative fees. Vehicle purchases are financed through vanpool fares and grant opportunities. Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program funds and Section 5309 Earmark transit funds are among the sources used recently to purchase vehicles.

The Commuteride service area includes six counties, but all Commuteride vanpool routes must begin, end or travel through Ada County. Most routes either begin or end in rural communities. New vanpool members ride for free during their first month. Vanpool members are not obligated to continue if they decide not to do so. Those who do are eligible for a \$20 subsidy in the form of a Transi Chek for each of the first three months following the month they ride for free. Transi Cheks are provided by Commuteride to area employers at no cost to encourage them to promote vanpooling by their employees. In addition, full-time monthly riders may qualify for a \$10-per-month rebate that is awarded quarterly. Some participating employers offer preferential vanpool parking and other incentives to encourage their employees to share rides to work.

Commuteride serves employees on two military installations as well as the Veterans Administration Medical Center in downtown Boise. Many employers in the Boise area pay a portion of the vanpool fares for their workers. Participants' monthly fares are fully paid by their employers on approximately half of the currently active routes.

Commuteride's guaranteed ride home program provides vanpool riders with up to six guaranteed rides home per year. Employer assistance representatives work with local employers to encourage their participation in promoting ridesharing.

For more information, contact Cecelia Hockett, Vanpool Operations Coordinator, at 208.387.6164 or [chockett@achd.ada.id.us](mailto:chockett@achd.ada.id.us).

### Easy Street, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island

Easy Street is a regional program operated by Rideshare, a non-profit ridesharing company. Rideshare operates the third largest vanpool network in the nation. Easy Street operates in excess of 300 routes serving 3,000 commuters daily. The program currently serves Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island, with some participants commuting 75 miles each way to work.

The program was initially developed in response to the gas shortages of the 1970s. Early on, program staff discovered that several private employers in the area made company vehicles available for commuter vanpools. However, because participation was limited to company employees, colleagues who lived and/or worked nearby were not able to take advantage of the shared ride opportunity. Rideshare realized that providing vanpool access for commuters living and/or working in close proximity would benefit more people. When the program was first implemented, Rideshare took over many of the company vans. Today, Rideshare purchases vans through other private sources.

Easy Street passengers have the flexibility to design their pick-up schedules and routes to work. Most pick-ups are at park-and-ride lots. Space permitting, vanpools may offer part-time seating. Passenger fares are based on mileage and support vanpool operations.

Drivers are recruited from among the riders. Drivers of full-size vans (12–15 passengers) ride free and enjoy 140 miles of travel free monthly, while drivers of minivans (up to seven passengers) pay the same fare as riders and receive up to 250 miles of travel free each month. All vans are fully insured, and fares cover the costs of fuel and maintenance. Rideshare is responsible for all vehicle upkeep and maintenance. A guaranteed ride home program provides commuters free transportation in case of family emergencies, illness or unscheduled overtime. Up to four free rides per contract year are available.

Over the years, the program has recruited many loyal riders. Some Easy Street riders have commuted together for 15 years, and the camaraderie among passengers encourages ongoing participation. Many passengers have been known to celebrate birthdays and other occasions with their fellow riders.

In light of fluctuating fuel costs and economic concerns, interest in the program remains strong. Rideshare's ongoing marketing to employers has increased the number of companies offering transportation benefits to workers who share rides to work.

According to Nanci Fitzgerald, Rideshare's vice president of business development, the program's turnkey nature enhances its attractiveness to employers. Because Rideshare is responsible for all program operations, employers find the program easy to use. On-site marketing and educating potential participants about the benefits of vanpooling have also contributed to the program's growing success.

For more information, contact Nanci Fitzgerald, Vice President of Business Development, at 860.692.1224, or [nfitzgerald@rideshare.com](mailto:nfitzgerald@rideshare.com).

**George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia**

George Mason University (GMU), located in the Washington, D.C., suburbs, implemented a vanpool program in 2004 to transport employees from Luray, Front Royal, Culpepper, Warrenton and Fredericksburg in Virginia and Indian Head Highway and Fort Washington in Maryland to the campus physical plant. The vans provide low-cost transportation to workers, many of whom travel up to 90 minutes one way to work and cannot afford to live in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The vans also eliminate the need to maintain 50 parking spaces on campus and reduce the number of vehicles on the road.

Currently, eight vanpools transport 57 riders. Vans are parked nightly at various park-and-ride facilities or public lots where employees meet each morning for the drive to work. The vans are owned by the state and operated by GMU, and GMU is responsible for maintenance and insurance-related expenses. Average costs for riders are calculated to keep participants within the \$230 Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program limit.

As the state fleet of vans ages and the cost to replace them is more than the budget allows, some of the vanpools may become private. Currently, one vanpool is privately operated. Commuters using private vanpool vendors are able to use their Commonwealth Choice commuter benefits to cover some if not all of their vanpool costs. The state pays the entire benefit (up to \$230). The only out-of-pocket expense to riders is the costs in excess of the allowable maximum amount.

For more information, contact Bob Tennant, Transportation Coordinator, at 703.993.9530 or [rtennant@gmu.edu](mailto:rtennant@gmu.edu).

### Job Lift, Clallam County, Washington

Olympic Community Action Programs (OlyCAP), in partnership with Clallam Transit System (CTS), administers the Job Lift program. In operation for nearly nine years, Job Lift manages three fixed-route vanpools and provides access to jobs and training for low-wage workers living in the remote community. OlyCAP initiated the program, which was the outgrowth of a collaboration among several agencies brought together by the Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation. OlyCAP partnered with CTS to develop the vanpool network, and it received Job Access and Reverse Commute funds to implement the program. CTS assisted with vehicle purchase and offered to provide driver training. The vans are registered with CTS, and the agency manages and maintains the vehicles. Pierce Transit also provided significant assistance to OlyCAP with program administration, the implementation of various operating systems and the design of forms to capture data needed for reporting.

One vanpool travels to and from the Hoh Reservation, located about 50 miles from Forks, transporting people to and from work in the city. The second vanpool takes workers to and from La Push, about 15 miles from Forks. Both vanpools operate five days per week. The third vanpool travels different routes, including transporting season (summer) youth workers to job sites seven days per week, transporting employment and training program participants to Port Townsend once per month and transporting college students to job skills training classes. In many cases, the vanpools are the only transportation option to work available to riders in the remote location of west Clallam County. Consequently, employers work very closely with OlyCAP to set work schedules that accommodate the riders getting their children to day care and home again.

OlyCAP actively promotes the Job Lift program throughout the community and assists with driver recruitment. Staff members work with employers to promote ridership at the employment sites. In addition, staff members receive and screen all rider applications and conduct the training for each rider once the trip has been established.

The most significant challenge to date has been the establishment of routes serving the West End area of the county because of the needed follow-up with customers. The program's successes are largely due to collaboration among the partners, each of which is willing to provide the support needed to establish new routes. The high quality of available drivers also plays a significant role, as many are willing to act as back-up drivers when needed. Program operators take pride in knowing that the vanpools play a significant part in helping clients who are transitioning from welfare to work achieve long-term employment or needed training.

For more information, contact Rita Houston, Co-Director of Community Support Services, Olympic Community Action Programs, at 360.452.4726, ext. 6216, or [RHouston@olycap.org](mailto:RHouston@olycap.org).

**JobJet, Carroll, Iowa**

JobJet, is a regional vanpool program serving six rural Iowa counties: Audubon, Carroll, Crawford, Greene, Guthrie and Sac. The program grew from a concept suggested by two local employers, Tyson's Food and Farmland Foods, and is marketed as one that supports local economic development in conjunction with providing transportation access to work.

The program, expected to be operational by June 2009, is organized and managed by the Region XII Council of Governments (COG). COG operates the local public transit system and strongly promotes regional economic and workforce development.

JobJet, modeled on similar vanpool programs in Des Moines and other municipalities in the state, is the first vanpool program to serve rural residents. The program coordinates work schedules and locations to arrange workers into groups of 4 to 10 people for each of the six vanpools. Vanpool members live in close proximity to one another, work in the same general location and have similar work hours. Riders meet at a central location and travel to and from work together, or set a route and time schedule. The driver is responsible for collecting fares and seeing that the vanpool runs smoothly. JobJet owns and maintains the vans.

Region XII staff trains drivers from among the participants in each group. Drivers ride free of charge and keep the vans at their home before collecting riders. They are allowed 100 miles of personal vehicle use each month, most likely for side trips in conjunction with their trip to work. If they exceed that limit, they are charged for additional miles on a per-mile basis. Program funding support includes an initial amount of \$146,000 from Iowa's Congestion Management and Air Quality Improvement Program funds and the Iowa Department of Transportation.

Region XII staff notes that the timing of funding cycles significantly affects start-up goals. COG recommends that organizations seeking to develop similar programs closely consider the costs associated with promotional materials, branding and logo design and allocate enough time for outreach and partnership development.

For more information, contact Chris Whitaker, Transportation Planner, at 712.725.7811 or [cwhitaker@region12cog.org](mailto:cwhitaker@region12cog.org).

**Kings Area Rural Transit, Kings County, California**

Kings Area Rural Transit (KART) operates a comprehensive vanpool program with two distinct components. KART is a Joint Powers Agency, composed of Hanford, Lemoore, and Avenal Cities and Kings County. KART provides vanpool opportunities for residents of the southern Joaquin Valley needing to travel to work sites such as correctional facilities and employers located in rural communities throughout the county. These vanpools effectively address the challenges of limited public transit options for work trips, varied work sites and nontraditional work shifts. Currently, more than 300 vanpools operate in eight counties.

In some instances, the vanpools provide transit for workers commuting more than 45 miles from the nearest transit center. Depending on the size of each vanpool and the distance of the trip, monthly fees for riders range from \$29 to \$137. Vanpool participants receive insurance coverage for up to \$5,000 in medical costs in case of an accident, at a cost of less than \$900 per van, per year. In addition to vanpool revenue, funding to support the various programs is provided by Measure C funds that promote vanpooling in Fresno County, Congestion Management and Air Quality Improvement Program funds and the Tulare County of Governments. State employees participating in vanpools qualify for a monthly reimbursement of \$65 toward vanpool-related expenses. Other vanpool participants are eligible for and receive tax benefits through the federal Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program.

KART also manages the Agricultural Industries Transportation Services (AITS) program, which was developed in response to farm worker van accidents in 1999 that killed or injured more than 25 people within a two-month period. AITS was initiated in July 2001 with funding from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and U.S. Department of Transportation (Job Access and Reverse Commute funds) to address the persistent absence of safe and viable options for traveling to and from agricultural work sites for thousands of agricultural workers in the state. Two of the counties in the initial pilot program partnered with KART to provide services, while Kern County opted to expand its fixed-route services. The program for Kings, Fresno and Tulare Counties initially hoped to establish a for-profit model, using 15 vans to transport riders. However, because of regulatory issues, the program was redesigned to operate as a nonprofit.

The program began operations with 123 vans in 2002 in Kings, Fresno and Tulare Counties. By summer 2009, 140 vanpools will be in operation. As with other vanpool programs, van drivers are the workers, themselves, and service is designed to meet the unique travel, time, and logistical requirements of this segment of the workforce. The drivers are volunteers, but they are required to have a Class C license, pass a required physical exam and provide proof of a clean driving record. Each van has a Geographic Information System, first aid kit, fire extinguisher and roadside safety items. Each driver is responsible for recruiting passengers and collecting fees from riders. Fees are based on distance traveled and vary from \$25 to \$40 per week. Riders pay a modest fee to participate that covers the cost of maintaining and insuring the vans. At the end of each farming season, some of the vans are returned to AITS, but more than 75 percent remain in operation year-round.

Legislation passed in late 2006 resulted in Caltrans' Agricultural Worker Transportation Program (AWTP), which provides \$20 million in grants for the formation of agriculture-related vanpool programs. As a result, vanpool service has expanded to Kern, Madera, Ventura, Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz Counties. AWTP sunsets January 1, 2011.

Recently, the San Joaquin Control District passed legislation requiring businesses with 100 or more employees to have a ride reduction plan in place by December 2009. KART will work with employers to facilitate the development of vanpools as needed.

For more information, contact Ronald Hughes at 559.582.3211, ext. 696, or [Ron.Hughes@co.kings.ca.us](mailto:Ron.Hughes@co.kings.ca.us).

**Mason County Transportation Authority, Shelton, Washington**

The Mason Transit Authority (MTA) owns, maintains, manages, insures and licenses a fleet of passenger vans assigned to commuter groups and driven by volunteers who share the commute. It is based in Shelton, the western most city on Puget Sound. MTA started the vanpool program in 2003. At that time, 11 vanpool groups commuted to the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard (PSNS).

Mason County is not obligated to meet the mandates of the state's Commuter Reduction Act, which are tied to population size and the number of employers with 100 or more employees, so its residents do not qualify for the same benefits as Commute Trip Reduction-eligible county residents. However, PSNS employees receive a voucher for \$110 each month to cover transportation-related expenses. Passengers are responsible for the balance. New vanpools have up to three months to recruit enough riders to meet minimum travel expenses. If they cannot do so, individuals may be transferred to existing vanpools with available seats or required to cover the cost of any expenses not covered by the voucher allocations. The Washington Department of Corrections, located in Olympia, pays \$40 to \$60 per rider per month to support vanpools traveling to its facility.

Currently, 22 vanpools transport workers from this predominantly rural community to the shipyard and other job sites.

For more information, contact Athena Green, Vanpool Coordinator, at 360.427.5033, ext. 105, or [agreen@masontransit.org](mailto:agreen@masontransit.org).

### **Missoula Ravalli Transportation Management Association, Montana**

The Missoula Ravalli Transportation Management Association (MRTMA) is the only Transport Management Association (TMA) in Montana and is unique because it serves significantly fewer residents than most TMA regions. Working with the Montana Department of Transportation, MRTRA provides transportation choices for citizens of Missoula, Ravalli, Lake, Flathead and Mineral Counties. It now runs three vanpools supported by local employers. MRTMA provides free matching services, and staff works with employers to help coordinate services.

MRTMA has nine, 13-passenger vans in operation on a regular basis. Riders work at 84 different work sites around the region. MRTMA purchased vehicles with federal Section 5309 Bus and 5311 Rural and Small Urban Areas funds. It solicits bids to maintain its vans, but each pool is expected to have its own alternate plan in case of breakdowns or other periods of unavailability. Fuel is purchased at the state rate at commercial service stations using program credit cards. Drivers ride free in exchange for managing the vanpool (e.g., collecting fees and cleaning the vehicle). A guaranteed ride home program provides rides home in case of emergency. MRTMA has a prepaid account with a local taxi company and rural transit providers to provide this service.

Unlike most vanpool programs, MRTMA's accepts occasional riders if space is available. The fare structure is designed to accommodate this service, with fees for full participation as well as fees for one, two or three rides per week. Commuters needing a ride a given day will be referred to a vanpool driver if space is available.

MRTMA partnered with two local employers to design vanpool options specifically geared to each company's needs. One vanpool program serves GlaxoSmithKline shift work employees who are scheduled on rotating days during a two-week period. The 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. shift shares a one 13-passenger van; in addition, several employees participate in another vanpool. Recently workers approached management about sponsoring a vanpool for the 12-hour shift workers who were carpooling. As a result, GlaxoSmithKline added two vanpools, bringing the total vanpools to 3: one for the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. workforce and two for the 12-hour shift workers. Funding for the latter two vanpools is 80% from Congestion Management and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ)/Section 5311 funds, with 73% of the 20% required match provided by GlaxoSmithKline, so riders pay a much reduced fare. During 2007, the company implemented an aggressive marketing campaign and succeeded in adding 300 workers to the vanpool program. TMA staff worked with GlaxoSmithKline management on discerning the benefits of the vanpool program to the employees and employer. However, during the economic downturn one route has been discontinued because of employee layoffs. Due to the success of the first vanpool, remaining employees have requested the second route be restarted. However, due to a lack of rolling stock MRTMA has not been able to accommodate the request.

A second vanpool program serves Smurfit Stone Container Corporation employees. Workers approached management about providing a vanpool as an employee benefit. A member of the management team serves on the local Health Air Quality Board and was very supportive of the idea. Smurfit Stone Container agreed to assign vanpoolers to the same shifts. A second vanpool was added in 2006. Employees who participate in the vanpools live up to 50 miles from their worksite. The vanpools are funded through 80% CMAQ money with 85% of 20% match provided by Smurfit Stone Container Corporation, so riders pay a much reduced fare.

A third employer sponsored vanpool was started in the fall of 2006. Again, employees approached management about providing this benefit to them. The first vanpool was for workers living north of the Yellow Bay Biological Center located on Flathead Lake. A second vanpool was started for employees living south of the center. The vanpools are funded through 80% CMAQ money with 100% of the 20% match provided by the University of Montana Foundation, so riders pay no fares.

For more information, contact Lyn Hellegaard, Executive Director, at [mrtma2@montana.com](mailto:mrtma2@montana.com).

**NJ TRANSIT Vanpool Sponsorship Program, New Jersey**

NJ TRANSIT offers a statewide vanpool sponsorship program, which provides a financial incentive for vanpooling in areas where public transportation is neither available nor feasible. The program has been in operation since January 2008 and grew out of the transit agency's desire to provide transit support for commuters along with incentives to cut dependency on single-occupant vehicles. As of April 2009, 185 vanpools carry more than 1,600 passengers. Fluctuating fuel costs have peaked commuter interest in the program.

Each vanpool group is eligible for \$175 per month of sponsorship support. Support increases to \$325 per month if the vanpool travels on New Jersey's high-occupancy vehicle lanes on the New Jersey Turnpike. New Jersey's vanpool program requires applicants to work through a local Transportation Management Association to complete funding requests.

NJ TRANSIT sets sponsorship amounts and requires reapplication annually. The application process, along with other minimal reporting requirements, ensures each vanpool meets eligibility requirements. It also provides summary data that helps New Jersey quantify the travel, congestion and air pollution benefits that vanpools are providing.

All vanpools are required to operate as a voluntary commuter rideshare arrangement, providing transportation to passengers traveling directly from home to the same geographical area. Each vanpool has the flexibility to incorporate activities that best meet the needs of its participants. For example, some accommodate riders who drive to a central location and meet. Others depart from locations routinely served by public transit. In one instance, the vanpool also transported children to an employer-sponsored day care program.

Vans must be obtained from a participating vanpool provider on a month-to-month driver agreement basis, with the provider being responsible for vehicle maintenance and insurance. Vans cannot exceed five years of age or 120,000 miles of operation and cannot duplicate existing public transit service routes. VPSI, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and Archbald VP are the three current participating vendors. Vanpools generally have one dedicated driver in the group, usually with one or two volunteer back-ups. Passengers share the monthly cost of the van, which is based on travel distance and van luxury. Participants may qualify for and receive benefits under the Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program.

In some instances, if the vanpools lose riders, Transportation Management Associations offer temporary empty-seat subsidies to support vanpool continuation until new riders are recruited. Others offer incentives such as a guaranteed ride home. NJDOT has a statewide ride-matching service available to help create the vanpools and find replacement riders. A factor contributing to the program's success, to date, is its flexibility in the design of vanpools.

For more information, contact Sally Stocker, at 973.491.7774 or [sstocker@njtransit.com](mailto:sstocker@njtransit.com).

**Rabbittransit, York, Pennsylvania**

Rabbittransit is located in York County, Pennsylvania, in the south central part of the state, about 120 miles from Philadelphia. The county of about 900 square miles is predominantly rural. In February 2008, rabbittransit, Commuter Services of Pennsylvania and VPSI formed two vanpools that travel daily from York County to Fort Meade, Maryland. Interest in creating the vanpools peaked after a proposed express bus route, which did not travel the entire route, was introduced. Area residents contacted Commuter Services and proposed the idea.

Commuter Services is a non-profit organization committed to reducing traffic congestion by helping commuters find alternatives to driving alone to work and by working with employers to identify viable options that reduce costs for commuters and help employers attract qualified employees. Commuter Services partnered with rabbittransit—one of its board members—to create the vanpools. Vehicles are leased through VPSI.

Riders meet at a central location, usually a park-and-ride facility. Passengers who are federal government employees can participate in the Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program. Some participating federal agencies provide riders with subsidies in addition to those offered through the fringe benefit program. In addition, rabbittransit provides a \$200 per month subsidy per vanpool for vans that originate from York County, and Commuter Services provides reimbursements for the related emergency ride home program and ride-matching assistance.

Payment is based on a 30-day, flexible “pay-as-you-go” agreement, which covers the cost of a van, a comprehensive insurance and maintenance package, 24-hour roadside assistance, access to loaner vans, an optional fuel card program and emergency rides home. Drivers are recruited from among the passengers and trained by VPSI. At present, no plans exist to increase the number of vans traveling to Fort Meade; however, if a group of commuters did express interest, the program partners would work with them to provide vanpool services.

Brandy Heilman, director of Commuter Services, attributes the success of vanpools to the cost savings generated for riders and the ease of program implementation. Commuter Services hopes to further increase interest in vanpools by implementing targeted marketing campaigns later this year.

For more information, contact Brandy Heilman, Director, at 717.718.0015 or [brandy\\_heilman@PaCommuterServices.com](mailto:brandy_heilman@PaCommuterServices.com) or call 1.866.579.RIDE.

**RideFinders, Richmond, Virginia**

RideFinders is a division of the GRTC Transit system. The program, initially established in 1981 as Compool, began operating as RideFinders in 1985, and it was officially renamed RideFinders in July 1998 through a merger with GRTC Transit. RideFinders provides financial and marketing support for transit services and programs, vanpool formation and carpool matching and maintenance services, telework consulting and support services, an emergency ride home program, park-and-ride lot information, employee trip reduction program development assistance, employer relocation and site analysis and bike and pedestrian commuter services. It also participates in a regional planning process, operates a commuter store and conducts ongoing Clean Air Act campaigns.

The program works with potential participants and employers to develop and market vanpools. Currently, six vanpools provide services from outlying areas to the city of Richmond. Program operations are supported with Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program funds, some of which are allocated to the Virginia VanStart and VanSave programs. RideFinders is also supported with small grants from local jurisdictions.

Two third-party vendors, VPSI and K&K, lease the vehicles, recruit and train vanpool drivers from among the passengers and provide insurance and maintenance. Individual vanpools set their own routes and schedules, based on member needs. Although most riders meet their rides at park-and-ride lots, some vanpools may have several pick-up points. The price to participate covers the cost of the vehicle, maintenance, insurance, gas, parking, applicable sales tax and tolls. Costs vary depending on the size of each group and the distance of the commute.

Riders are required to make a 30-day commitment and must give a month's notice before leaving the vanpool. Companies that participate as employee transportation coordinators or provide commuter benefits routinely receive recruitment notices. RideFinders may also subsidize seats to get the vanpool up and running. RideFinders attributes its longevity to strong customer service commitments; hands-on, personalized treatment; and excellent working relationships with vendors.

For more information, contact Von Tisdale, Executive Director, at 804.643.7433 or [vtisdale@ridefinders.com](mailto:vtisdale@ridefinders.com).

**RideShare, Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority, Des Moines, Iowa**

The Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART) offers a complete family of transportation services to fulfill its commitment to providing access to jobs, schools and the greater Des Moines community. It is the largest transit system in the state, providing more than 15,000 trips per day. DART's service area includes all of Polk County.

The transit agency has independent tax levying authority within the entire county and the city boundaries of all 19 communities in the area, and the revenue helps support its various transit services. Vanpool services are available for Des Moines area employees commuting into and out of the DART service area, and a carpool matching service is provided for all of central Iowa.

DART's RideShare assists commuters in organizing groups, providing vans and maintaining vanpools. The program began in 1995, with five vanpools. Most of the 97 vanpools currently in operation travel from rural areas of Iowa to the urban Des Moines metropolitan area, transporting nearly 900 commuters daily. DART owns and maintains all the vehicles.

In response to increased fuel prices, many employers now subsidize workers who travel to work via vanpools. For example, the Principal Financial Group Inc., provides a monthly subsidy for the nearly 300 participants in its vanpool program. Wells Fargo participates in the Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program, enabling employees to pay for public transportation using pretax dollars, and internally promotes the use of DART's RideShare. Other participating employers include Blue Cross Blue Shield. Many participating employers routinely post information about RideShare on company intranet sites or invite transit agency staff to discuss the program with new hires during orientations.

DART attributes much of the program's success to a strong customer focus. In the past, local political support for the vanpool program has been limited, but changing economic times and heightening environmental concerns have resulted in growing recognition of the program's benefits to the community.

For more information, contact Rebecca Lovig, RideShare Program Manager, at 515.283.5000 or [rlovig@ridedart.com](mailto:rlovig@ridedart.com).

### Rideshare Program/MassRides Vanpool Alliance, Massachusetts

More than 30 years ago, the Massachusetts Highway Department—which is now known as the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation (MEOT)—implemented the Rideshare program, a statewide air quality regulation that is part of the commonwealth’s efforts to reduce air pollution by encouraging a reduction in drive-alone commute trips. The program encourages all businesses to promote commuting options such as carpooling, vanpooling, public transit, bicycling and walking. Businesses with 250 or more employees that have an air operating permit—or businesses and educational facilities with 1,000 or more students and employees or “applicable commuters” combined—are required to develop plans and set goals for reducing the number of times commuters drive alone to work or school by 25 percent. Applicable commuters are defined under the Massachusetts Rideshare Regulation 310 CMR 7.16 as employees who work 17 hours or more per week for 20 or more weeks per year and who commute to work between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. and use their vehicle for work purposes during work hours fewer than five times per month.

MEOT has provided vanpooling and other travel option services for more than 30 years. Its current program is known as *MassRIDES*. A primary program component is employer outreach. Supporting services include administering a statewide rideshare database and the *MassRIDES* Emergency Ride Home program. *MassRIDES* also reaches out to Transit Management Associations and other organizations that provide ridesharing and vanpooling services throughout the state to coordinate programs.

*MassRIDES* established a Vanpool Alliance, an agreement between *MassRIDES* and vanpool vendors across the state that promotes vanpooling to employers. The fleet’s average round-trip distance exceeds 100 miles. Currently, 7 of the 60 *MassRIDES* vanpools travel from communities characterized as rural in the 2000 census.

The alliance, which includes five vendors, offers travelers a choice in vehicle size, type, insurance, maintenance policies and pricing. Each vendor provides leased vehicles and manages the fleet. Drivers are chosen from among the passengers and must meet certain requirements before being approved to drive. *MassRIDES* conducts employer and traveler outreach to form new routes and refer riders to available seats in existing vanpools.

*MassRIDES* provides all employers and interested commuters with a one-page description of the various services offered by vanpool vendors. Periodic incentive programs have included financial support for newly forming groups as well as for filling empty seats in existing vanpools. All vanpoolers are eligible for the state’s Emergency Ride Home (ERH) program. The *MassRIDES* vanpool coordinator administers ERH and other vanpool benefits. Each vanpool sets its own route and schedule based on the needs of its members. In most cases, vanpoolers meet their rides at a central location, such as park-and-ride lots.

Donna Smallwood, *MassRIDES* program operations manager, attributes the popularity of vanpools as a commute alternative to their cost-effectiveness. Other key elements of success include taking a proactive approach to employer outreach, strong support from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation and the ongoing collaboration with the vanpool vendors.

For more information on MEOT, contact Gail Costelas, at 617.292.5663 or [gail.costelas@state.ma.us](mailto:gail.costelas@state.ma.us). For more information on *Mass RIDES*, contact Donna Smallwood, Program Operations Manager, at 617.892.6087 or [Donna.Smallwood@eot.state.ma.us](mailto:Donna.Smallwood@eot.state.ma.us).

**Right to Ride VanPool, Sportworks Northwest, Inc., Woodinville, Washington**

Sportworks Northwest, Inc., located in Woodinville, Washington, manufactures bike racks that are found on thousands of transit agency buses throughout North America, providing bicycle access to public transit and increasing multi-modal trips and transit ridership. The company implemented its Right to Ride VanPool program in 2006 and currently sponsors three vanpools with 19 participants; the number of vanpools is significant given the company employs fewer than 70 employees. The program promotes the company's culture and desire to participate in comprehensive transportation programs to reduce single-occupant vehicle commute trips and provide a cost-effective commuting benefit to its employees.

The vanpools are operated under a Flex-Pass Agreement with King County Metro Transit and Sound Transit located in Seattle. As a Flex-Pass holder, vanpool participants receive a subsidy of \$75 per month, which is applied to a monthly fare schedule based on the number of round-trip commute miles driven. In addition to the monthly vanpool subsidy, Flex-Pass holders benefit from the use of all other modes of public transportation offered by King County Metro and Sound Transit.

For more information, visit [www.sportworks.com](http://www.sportworks.com) or contact John Nelson, Vice President/Finance/Human Resources, at 425.483.7000, ext. 39, or [johnn@sportworks.com](mailto:johnn@sportworks.com) or Beatea Zayas, Customer Service/VanPool Coordinator, at 425.483.7000, ext. 12, or [beataz@sportworks.com](mailto:beataz@sportworks.com). For more information on the Metro VanPool Program, King County, see <http://transit.metrokc.gov/tops/van-car/vanpool.html>.

**Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments, Sumter, South Carolina**

The Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments (SLRCOG), the designated Regional Transit Management Agency (RTMA) for Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee and Sumter Counties, provides planning, management services, projects and technical assistance for improving transportation coordination in the region. SLRCOG, in partnership with the Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority, AlterNetRides, VPSI, and local employers, recently implemented a rideshare program that serves rural commuters traveling within and outside the region. SLRCOG was able to develop and implement the program in less than a year for a start-up cost of only \$2,500. Funds were provided by the local transit provider. The program is hosted through AlterNetRides, an online matching system. Santee Wateree Regional Transportation pays for access to AlterNetRides. Employers who participate in the online matching system pay fees to the Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority, which helps offset administrative expenses for the rideshare program. VPSI will administer the vanpools, conduct geographic analyses to determine which areas work best for vanpools, supply the vans and recruit and train the drivers.

A number of variables precipitated the programs' development. Thirty per cent of residents in three counties served by SLRCOG do not have access to an automobile, limiting their ability to access employment. SLRCOG and its partners understood the importance of the Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit to both commuters, many of whom are low-wage earners, and to local employers and wanted to encourage its use. The agencies were inspired by similar programs currently operating in North Carolina, and local employers supported vanpools because they reduced traffic congestion and encouraged environmental conservation.

The SLRCOG took a proactive role in recruiting local employers by partnering with the local development board. With the board's endorsement, letters of introduction were distributed to local industry representatives inviting them to introductory meetings where an overview of the program was presented. Although the current economic situation has put some companies on hold regarding participation, others such as BD, Central Carolina Technical College, Dorn Veterans Administration Hospital, University of South Carolina, and Invista, have initiated components of the rideshare program for their employees. Currently, one vanpool, operated by the public transit agency, is in operation.

Vanpool / transit riders who qualify for and receive benefits under the Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program could have their costs fully covered. Currently, only one employer offers the benefit, but the SLRCOG periodically updates others via email. SLRCOG is committed to growing the program, and will continue to engage local employers as the economy improves. These activities inspired another Council of Government, the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments, to implement a similar program.

For more information, contact Orlando J. (O.J.) Papucci, Transportation Coordinator, at 803.775.7381, ext. 379, or [sltransit@slcog.org](mailto:sltransit@slcog.org).

### State Vanpool/Rideshare Program, Wisconsin

Wisconsin's State Vanpool/Rideshare program currently has 73 active vanpools. The program evolved from a demonstration project initiated in July 1978, when approximately 100 commuters began riding to and from work in eight vans. It was originally developed mostly to encourage energy conservation. The state owns and operates all the vans, and program operations are fully self-funded by the riders per State Statute 16.82.

Although the program is structured to serve state employees, riders do not have to be state employees to participate. However, each vanpool is required to have at least one state employee as part of the pool. Currently, about 1,000 individuals participate, with most traveling from outlying areas to the city of Madison. Approximately 25 percent of current vanpool participants commute to work with private employers. The average round-trip commute is 100 miles.

Participating federal and state employees are eligible for benefits under the Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program. Federal employees receive the full benefit; state employees qualify for a partial benefit. Many participating employers also offer the benefit, along with flextime for vanpool participants.

Individual vanpool rates vary according to the number of paying riders, total daily average round-trip miles and driver/coordinator discounts, if any. Fares are periodically reviewed and adjustments are made as the number of riders, discounts or commute mileage changes. The fares collected cover all administrative, purchasing, fuel, insurance, parking and maintenance of the vans. All drivers, primary and back-up, must participate in a defensive driving course. Drivers are required to meet an active driver requirement. If this rule is not met, then refresher training is mandatory. Drivers are eligible for discounts and can use the van for limited personal use at a reimbursement cost per mile to the state.

A guaranteed ride home is offered in conjunction with the program. Vanpool participants qualify for up to three rides annually at no charge. Rides are provided by a local cab company.

The vanpool program is marketed via the state of Wisconsin's website ([www.doa.state.wi.us/vanpool](http://www.doa.state.wi.us/vanpool)), through the local Metropolitan Planning Organization and by the state university system.

Interest in the program continues to grow with expanded waiting lists. Because the program is state-sponsored, it has faced some funding limitations, which has made expansion difficult. However, the upcoming state budget, if approved, does incorporate support for expansion.

For more information, contact Brian Luther, at 608.266.5612 or [brian.luther@wisconsin.gov](mailto:brian.luther@wisconsin.gov).

**TCAT, Inc., Ithaca, New York**

TCAT, Inc. (Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, Inc.) is a non-profit corporation that provides public transportation for Tompkins County, New York, and portions of Tioga County, where many residents commute up to 90 minutes each way to work.

TCAT introduced the idea of a vanpool to support commuters who work or live in Tompkins County in 2008. It is the only vanpool program sponsored by a public transit agency in New York State. Vanpool programs that serve downstate residents are actually sponsored by transit agencies in neighboring jurisdictions. To implement the program, the agency had to address insurance issues specific to the state of New York.

TCAT partnered with VPSI to implement a vanpool program that meets state requirements. The program is also supported through a partnership with Cornell University. Cornell is the largest employer in the area, and a large number of faculty, staff and students traveling to the university commute from rural or remote metropolitan areas.

The university is providing start-up funding to market and operate vanpools outside fixed-route areas where no specific operating authority is required. Approximately \$700 per van is allocated, lowering the costs per participant. The program should be operational by October 2009.

For more information, contact Joe Turcotte, General Manager, at Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, 607.277.9388, ext. 444, or [jt1@tcatmail.com](mailto:jt1@tcatmail.com).

### **Vanpool Assistance Program, Virginia**

In Virginia, 1.2 million people travel one way to work via vanpool annually. In central Virginia alone, that accounts for 400 vanpools, many of which travel across rural communities, transporting commuters to jobs in larger metropolitan areas. More than 20 years ago, the state implemented a program specifically designed to support vanpool development.

The Virginia Vanpool Assistance Program, sponsored by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, provides financial support for new or existing vanpools experiencing a loss of passengers. The program has two distinct components: VanStart, which funds empty seats during the crucial start-up phase of new vanpools, and VanSave, which provides support for existing vanpools that are experiencing problems in their passenger levels due to the loss of riders. VanStart is the more commonly used component.

Non-profit vanpool operators in Virginia are eligible if they operate vanpools with a seating capacity of between 6 and 14 riders (excluding the driver), are insured and registered with the local jurisdiction's rideshare agency. The amount of funding provided is based on the average cost per seat of the vanpool and the average cost per seat of similar vanpools traveling under comparable distance and market parameters.

For VanStart, vanpool owners/operators must register with their local rideshare agency and apply for assistance within the first three months of operation. Vanpools must have a 50 percent minimum occupancy to qualify. Applicants for assistance from VanSave must have been in operation for a minimum of six months prior to applying for assistance and not have received any other state assistance funds in the past 12 months. Multiple van owner/operators may apply for assistance for a maximum of five vans, once every 12 months per van. In addition, they must have a minimum paying passenger vacancy rate.

The Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit program has had a major effect in expanding the number of vanpools throughout Virginia, as evidenced by the fact that many vanpools have been formed because it is available. For example, the fringe benefit program was instrumental in forming a vanpool that travels to the Naval Surface Warfare Center in King George County. The facility is the largest employer in that rural Virginia county.

Diana Utz, GWRideConnect director with the George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC), attributes the vanpool program's success to two factors. The first is a statewide vanpool insurance program known as AdVANtage. The insurance program is offered through a partnership involving GWRC's GWRideConnect program, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation and the Virginia Department of the Treasury's Division of Risk Management. AdVANtage provides liability and damage insurance for registered and licensed vanpools in the state. Fees, paid by vanpool riders, are used to self-insure member vanpools. The fees are based on factors such as vehicle age and how many passengers the vans carry.

The second factor contributing to the program's success is the vanpools' departure from several strategically located commuter lots, where riders meet for daily pick-up. In most cases, the vans are parked overnight at the lots. Particularly in rural communities, using a central staging area alleviates the necessity of vanpools traveling long distances to meet individual riders.

For more information, contact Diana Utz, GWRideConnect director, at 540.373.2890 or [utz@gwregion.org](mailto:utz@gwregion.org).

**Vanpool/Vanshare, Hytek Finishes Company, Washington**

Hytek Finishes Company is located in Kent Valley near the city of Seattle. The company currently operates on multiple work shifts. Its innovative vanpool program, in operation since 2007, is one that rural employers could replicate.

Although not located in a rural community, the area has very limited transit services. Service to and from the transit center is only available during peak hours, leaving workers whose shifts occur during other times no access. To address this gap in service, the company, with assistance from King County Metro, implemented a strong, heavily subsidized Vanpool/Vanshare program that provides access to the facility when public transit is not available. Currently, three vanshare groups participate and one vanpool serves the 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. shift. The vanshares operate during hours when train service is available. King County Metro's VanShare Program enables Hytek employees to take the commuter train to Kent station and then vanshare from the station to work. The vehicle is parked at the station overnight, ready for the group when it arrives each morning. Currently, most of the 36 participants travel from rural communities in Puyallup, Ortnng Graham and Bonney Lake; a few commute from Tacoma.

Hytek added the FlexPass program to its company benefits package in 2008. As a result, single-occupancy vehicle travel among Commute Trip Reduction-affected employees declined by more than 50 percent. The passes were free to employees for the first year of the program. This year all participating employees continue to use the FlexPass, though they are required to pay half the yearly cost. King County Metro coordinated the purchase contract, provided vanpool/vanshare presentations to Hytek employees and supports the work done by Hytek's employee transportation coordinator. Hytek also offers vanpool subsidies and preferred parking for high-occupancy vehicles. The program's success is credited, in part, to strong employee support and a strong working relationship with King County Metro.

For more information, contact Mika Imori, King County Metro, at 206.684.1527 or [mika.imori@kingcounty.gov](mailto:mika.imori@kingcounty.gov).