



Commuter ChoiceSM Leadership Initiative Phone Forum Implementing an Effective Vanpool Program September 18, 2002

Commuter ChoiceSM Leadership Initiative

Available exclusively to Commuter ChoiceSM Employers, phone forums provide cutting-edge information on a range of topics related to commuter benefits. Moderated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), these forums feature experts on key topic areas.

On September 18, 2002, the Commuter ChoiceSM Leadership Initiative held a phone forum focusing on implementing effective vanpool programs. A vanpool can be a cost-effective way to help employees get to and from their jobs. Patty Klavon, EPA forum moderator, provided opening remarks and introduced the featured participants.

Please note that more detailed information on implementing vanpool programs can be found in the Commuter ChoiceSM Leadership Initiative's *Vanpool Programs* (EPA420-S-01-010) and *Transit and Vanpool Benefits* (EPA420-S-01-003) briefs, available on the CCLI Web site at <www.commuterchoice.gov> or by calling 800 490-9198.

Featured Participant Presentations

David Harrison, Metro VanPool/VPSI
VPSI started in the mid-1970s as the Chrysler Employee Vanpool Program. The program was a success, so in 1977 Chrysler organized VPSI as a subsidiary company with the mission of providing innovative transportation services. Now an independent company, VPSI operates commuter transportation and mobility management programs from over 40 customer service and/or commute centers in 50 major urban areas throughout the United States and Europe. According to Mr. Harrison, an effective vanpool can:

- Expand your labor market so you can recruit from a wider geographic area.
- Reduce the need for parking by cutting the number of vehicles commuting to your site.
- Get your employees to work safely, on time, and less stressed.
- Show the community you care by working to improve the air we breathe.

VPSI's costs depend on the amount of employer support and on the market, as many areas provide subsidies to reduce the cost of vanpooling. To learn about any special programs that may be available in your area of the United States visit VPSI's national Web site at <www.metrovanpool.com>.

Vanpool fares can fluctuate from month to month. The rider pays the monthly fee in advance to reserve their seat for the month and is asked to give the vanpool group 30 days notice of their intent to leave the group. The individual's cost can then be off-set by their employer's Commuter ChoiceSM benefit. VPSI accepts all major vouchers and has a relationship with WAGE WORKS to enable electronic funds transfer of vanpool benefits. The fees—whether paid by the employer, the employee, an agency/TMA, or any combination of these—cover the vehicle, insurance, maintenance, program administration, and customer support. VPSI also provides additional administrative and enhanced customer support services under contract to different corporate and public clients at an additional cost.

Mr. Harrison suggested that employers implementing new programs carefully assess the commitments necessary to ensure a successful program. Employers



should consider offering commuter benefits to encourage participation, announcing the details of the program several times, allowing employees to meet on company time to plan their programs, and offering preferred parking, since one vanpool can save 7 to 14 parking spaces. To learn more about VPSI's services, visit <www.vanpool-usa.com> or call 800 VAN-RIDE (826-7433). Mr. Harrison can be contacted directly at david@metrovanpool.com or by calling 770 427-7665.

Catherine Hill, Virginia Department of Transportation

Catherine Hill is the commuter incentive program coordinator for the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). VDOT's vanpool program began in 1993 with 20 employees—72 now participate at VDOT's Richmond, Virginia, headquarters, plus another 79 in the agency's Northern Virginia office. By vanpooling, VDOT's employees prevent over 2 tons of harmful emissions per year. To support the program, VDOT offers a \$100 monthly transit subsidy to all employees, preferred parking, and a special parking pass that vanpool riders can use up to three times a month for emergencies. VDOT also includes vanpool training during new employee orientation. To implement the program, VDOT followed a nine-step process: 1) obtain management support, 2) assemble an advisory committee, 3) define program objectives, 4) inform employees, 5) conduct an employee survey, 6) determine scope of discount/subsidy, 7) address administrative details, 8) finalize and implement program, and 9) monitor and evaluate.

Ms. Hill recommended working with third-party organizations such as RideFinders, a nonprofit organization that provides a partial subsidy, formation and ridematching services, and a Guaranteed Ride Home service for VDOT's vanpools. Von Tisdale of RideFinders said that to ensure effective implementation, her

organization uses surveys and analysis for formation, asks employees questions to help them envision the comfort of riding in a vanpool, and offers a sample van for kickoff meetings. She also recommends constant followup to maintain a sense of urgency in the early stages of vanpool development and lots of incentives to maintain support.

To locate local rideshare organizations in other areas, visit the Association for Commuter Transportation's Web site at <www.commuterchoice.com>.

Kelly Robertson, GEICO Direct, Inc.

Kelly Robertson provided an overview of GEICO Direct, Inc.'s vanpool program. GEICO began leasing vans for its facilities in the extremely congested Washington, DC, metropolitan area in 1985. When the company opened a new office in Fredericksburg, Virginia, many employees changed offices. GEICO researched the new commute patterns of its employees and decided to buy its own vans. The company owns six vans, which each carry 12 employees. GEICO charges a minimal cost to each employee of \$0.05 per mile traveled, which is much less than the \$0.38 cost of driving alone. On average, the cost for 2 weeks of vanpooling is \$13.01 per employee. GEICO exempts vanpool drivers from the fees and therefore does not have trouble finding drivers. Drivers also receive full coverage under GEICO's insurance.

To promote the program, GEICO includes vanpool information in its new hire orientation, on its Intranet, and in its weekly newsletter. The program has been very successful—employees enjoy reduced transit cost, shorter commute time by being able to access the high occupancy vehicle lanes, and lower stress.

Open Discussion

Following the featured speakers' presentations, other forum participants asked ques-

tions and provided additional information on some of the points discussed.

- Liz Daly of BP Cherry Point Refinery in Blain, Washington, asked what VPSI's criteria was for clearing driver records. David Harrison explained that VPSI requires the driver to have a valid driver's license in his/her home state, be over the age of 25, have uninterrupted driving privileges for at least 5 years, and have no more than one moving violation or at-fault accident in the last year (and no more than two in the last 3 years). VPSI also checks for excessive speeding, reckless driving, driving under the influence, driving with a suspended license, or school bus violations within the last 7 years. VPSI automatically denies drivers that have been convicted of leaving the scene of an accident or committing homicide with a motor vehicle.
- Chontel Trujillo of IBM's Boulder, Colorado, facility asked for suggestions on improving participation in their vanpool program. Participants suggested working with the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) and using cluster analysis to determine the optimum pickup/drop-off strategy.
- Royce Charney of Trust Administrators of Oakland, California, described his company's credit card-based transit card program. Alan Brasili, a VDOT employee who coordinates and drives a VPSI vanpool, noted that he uses the card and finds it very convenient.
- Donna Norfleet of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) asked for advice on how to implement a vanpool program at a large healthcare facility. David Harrison noted that dealing with the diverse work schedule and service needs of the differ-

ent types of employees at healthcare facilities can be challenging. He suggested segmenting the employee population, learning about union contract concerns, checking for subsidy programs in the area, and pushing for designation of an employee transportation coordinator, if one is not in place.

- Corey Krejcik of VPSI discussed the company's relationship with Wyeth in the Philadelphia region. VPSI has helped Wyeth develop and support a Commuter Assistance Center (CAC) that serves as a one-stop commuter resource center at campuses located in St. Davids, Great Valley, and Collegeville, Pennsylvania. The CAC administers the commuter benefits program for this three-site area. Ride matching and in-house support for vanpool groups are just two of the many services provided by the CAC. Other CAC services include managing an inter-campus shuttle service, promoting bicycling to work, and arranging ad hoc transportation for departmental events. For more information, contact Mr. Krejcik at 610 902-4917 or by e-mail at <krejck@wyeth.com>.

Closing

Patty Klavon of EPA closed by thanking the featured participants for their enlightening presentations and thanking all Commuter ChoiceSM Employers for participating in the forum. She invited employers to provide suggestions and ideas for future forums and reminded them that the Commuter ChoiceSM Leadership Initiative is available for assistance by contacting <commuterchoice@epa.gov> or calling the hotline at 888 856-3131.