



Vanpool Program Overview

Introduction

CATS Vanpool is the alternative of choice for many commuters in the Charlotte region. The CATS Vanpool is a service offered by the Charlotte Area Transit System for commuters who would like to have more choices in their ride to work. Volunteering to be a vanpool driver or rider helps not only the commuting public, but the environment as well.

Let's look at some of the facts and benefits about vanpooling.

1. Vanpooling saves money, it can cut commuting costs 50% or more. Just think about how much you pay in gasoline, wear and tear on your vehicle, insurance and probably parking fees.
2. It helps business by decreasing absenteeism, increased productivity, and provides employees that arrive on time and ready for a new day.
3. Employers can benefit by participating in the Commuter Tax Program, which can provide tax savings.
4. Vanpooling makes for a stress free ride to and from work.
5. Vanpooling reduces air pollution by reducing gas consumption, exhaust emissions, and every vehicle left at home helps improve air quality. Did you know that forty to sixty percent of the pollutants are caused by transportation sources?

By now you may be asking how you go about becoming involved in vanpooling, well the process is very simple. One of the first things you need to do is speak with co-workers, friends at church, talk with your neighbors and see if they would like to save on their commuting cost and participate in the program.

CATS has two programs that commuters can take advantage of. There is the 15- Passenger Van Program and the Minivan Program. A commuter can start a vanpool with as many as 9 people in the 15-Passenger Program and with 4 people in the Minivan Program, with one of those individuals being the primary driver. The primary driver is the critical link in forming the vanpool. He or she

acts as the vanpool “leader” and drives on a regular basis, collects fares, keeps records, helps recruit riders, keeps the van clean and notifies our department of any maintenance problems. In exchange for these services, the primary driver rides for free in the 15-Passenger Program, and is entitled to use the van for personal use, up to 50 miles per month. However, the driver in the Minivan Program does not automatically ride for free but is entitled to use the van for personal use, up to 50 miles per month.

Each vanpool can have as many back-up drivers as they wish. Each potential driver or back-up driver must complete and sign a vanpool driver application. CATS then processes the application with the City’s Department of Insurance and Risk Management Division (DIRM). Once CATS has received approval of the application CATS can sign a lease agreement between the driver and the CATS Vanpool Program. This lease agreement covers the responsibilities of the driver.

Driver Responsibility

The driver’s responsibilities are to:

1. Complete a vanpool riders list and keep it current and make sure each rider signs a driver/rider agreement. This agreement informs the rider of the time and place of the designated pick-up and drop-off points;
2. Complete the driver’s log and send it in with the monthly lease check. This is an important part of the vanpool program as these logs are used to complete the yearly report for the Federal government. The form must report the van’s daily mileage and the number of riders for any day the van is in service;
3. Collect fares from the members of the vanpool. Each vanpool is free to set up its own record keeping; however, the driver is responsible for sending the monthly payments to CATS. The payments are due by the 10th of each month.
4. It is the responsibility of each vanpool driver or back-up driver to keep the van clean inside and out. If problems occur with the van, the vanpool coordinator should be contacted at 980-722-3396 or 980-722-722-3380.

Fueling

Fuel is available at any Fuelman station. Fuelman has 193 North Carolina sites and 96 South Carolina sites. Each vanpool is given a site location guide when the van is assigned. Vanpool drivers will be issued a Fuelman card. This card is required for each fueling transaction. The driver’s card is assigned a personal identification number (PIN). The driver, the vehicle, the date, and the location

and odometer readings are identified on the Fuelman reports forwarded to the vanpool coordinator. The fuelman report will be reviewed by the coordinator to ensure that no unauthorized entries are made.

The vanpool driver is allowed 50 free miles per month for personal use. Any mileage over the 50 miles will be the driver's responsibility to pay at the rate of .36 cents per mile, or the CATS approved rate. The driver should mail a separate check to cover this expense.

Vanpool Etiquette

Although too many rules can become burdensome and common sense is usually sufficient, the intent of setting up some practical ground rules is to avoid future misunderstandings and the difficulties which arise from them. The purpose of vanpooling is, after all, to achieve economy, safety and convenience in commuting.

Every vanpool group develops its own personality. Helping everyone to feel welcome in the group and developing comrades is important to the success of any vanpool. Some groups have developed democratic approaches to each decision affecting the group, such as a route change to accommodate a prospective rider. Other vanpools have operated quite successfully where the driver makes essentially all of the decisions, bearing in mind that his/her "customers" have a choice of accepting those decisions or changing to another form of commuting. Whichever style you adopt, it should be consistent with your personality and should be done in consultation with your riders for best results.

Try to take advantage of the opportunities vanpooling presents to make commuting a reasonably pleasant experience. A chance to read, catch some rest, converse and share with others are all possible within the same vanpool. A few simple ground rules, agreed to before starting up, will avoid conflict down the road. At a brief vanpool formation meeting, preferable before your van is scheduled for on-the-road commuting, your group should get initial ground rules such as an agreement on a radio policy (neutral background music works well), unscheduled stops, changes in the van route or times as well as delineating regular routes and stops at this time. Back-up carpool arrangements and wait times should also be agreed on. Although the process seems very formal, establishing an atmosphere of informality and cooperation will lead more quickly to the resolution of all issues. Occasionally, all present will not agree on the final majority plan and a search for an additional new rider or two that will commit to the adopted set of rules may be required.

Most forming groups find it extremely advantageous to meet within a few days right after a vanpool starts. Nearly always there are adjustments to initial ground rules, which the experience of a few days of operation require.

Guaranteed Ride Home

In case of an emergency at home during the midday, vanpool riders are guaranteed a ride home to their morning boarding location. A guaranteed ride home is offered to each vanpool member 2 times per month at no charge to the passenger. To get a ride home call 704-336-RIDE for assistance.