

2019 Edition



"The Maryland Department of Transportation is a customer-driven leader that delivers safe, sustainable, intelligent, and exceptional transportation solutions in order to connect our customers to life's opportunities."

Commuter Choice Maryland

VANPOOL TOOLKIT

For Employers and Commuters



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What is Commuter Choice Maryland?

Commuter Choice Maryland is a statewide program designed primarily to encourage individuals who work in Maryland to choose alternatives to commuting alone such as using transit, ridesharing/carpooling, vanpooling, biking, or walking, or to reduce their commute trips through the use of telework and alternative or compressed work schedules.

Commuter Choice Maryland provides Maryland commuters with alternatives to driving alone that can be more cost effective and less stressful. These options help those traveling in and around Maryland the opportunity to play a vital role in reducing traffic congestion and improving air quality. The goals of Commuter Choice Maryland neatly align with the mission of the Maryland Department of Transportation as a customer-driven leader that delivers safe, sustainable, intelligent, and exceptional transportation solutions to connect customers to life's opportunities.



Contact Commuter Choice Maryland



Web CommuterChoiceMaryland.com
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Hours Monday-Friday from 8:30 AM – 5:00 PM
Email CommuterChoice@mdot.maryland.gov

2 What is Vanpooling?

Vanpooling is a convenient and easy way to commute. It's a lot like carpooling, in that multiple people share a driver and an origin or destination. However, there are differences that make it a better option for many commuters. Vanpools have at least four and sometimes up to 15 passengers. Unlike carpools, vanpools are treated as public transit for tax purposes, which means that the cost of commuting can be paid for with transit benefits. Vanpools can have a designated driver or rotating drivers. The driver can be one of the commuters (the most common practice) or can be hired from a vanpool provider. Passengers are not required to use them every day, and may choose other modes of travel, or telework, though they will not receive the maximum tax benefit unless they use the vanpool at least 11 days a month.

3 Why Vanpool?

Vanpools can be a great way to commute! Vanpools provide many benefits, for both commuters and employers.

Employers who sponsor company-provided vanpool programs can increase employee satisfaction and reduce absenteeism by providing an alternative, reliable form of commuting. Employers financially contributing to the operation of a company vanpool program are eligible for state tax savings through the Maryland Commuter Tax Credit and may also benefit from Federal payroll tax credits for pre-tax and/or employer-sponsored commuter benefits. A company-sponsored vanpool program can also help meet corporate social responsibility goals through contributing directly to reducing carbon emissions associated with company operations.

Commuters who use vanpools typically experience a more efficient commute than driving alone in areas where High Occupancy Vehicle or Toll lanes are available, fixed commute costs (except for gasoline) that may be cheaper than driving alone, and reduced costs of vehicle ownership, because their personal vehicle is used less often. Commuters who elect to drive the vanpool may receive reduced vanpool fares, and those who choose not to drive experience less stress and have the opportunity to use their commute time for activities other than driving. While many vanpools are sponsored by employers, these benefits are also available to vanpoolers who join or start vanpools independent of employer support.

Photo Source: University of Maryland Department of Transportation Services



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How Do I Start or Join a Vanpool as an Employee?

As an employee, there are multiple options available to you if you want to use a vanpool. You can join an existing vanpool at your company or in your community, if one is available that meets your needs. To find out about existing vanpools, contact the vanpool providers operating in your area (see Table 2). If a vanpool that meets your needs does not already exist, you can start your own. The easiest way to do so is with the help of your employer, using the following procedure:

1. Find a point of contact
2. Familiarize yourself with commuter benefits
3. Hold a meeting with the vanpool provider
4. Develop a vanpool schedule
5. Reach out to your company's human resources department and any neighboring company human resources departments to help advertise your vanpool

4.1. Find a Point of Contact

The first step in starting a vanpool at your company will likely be to find a point of contact in senior management or human resources who can help you connect with other employees at the company who live near you. This person can also help you claim the tax benefits associated with vanpool use, if they are available at your company. If your employer is unwilling to help you, or if you can't find enough people in-house to start a vanpool, you can always form a vanpool with others who work for different employers nearby. Vanpool providers can help connect you to those people. (A list of vanpool providers can be found in Table 2 at the end of this document).

4.2. Familiarize Yourself with Commuter Benefits

Familiarize yourself with all commuter benefits your organization offers—when recruiting potential vanpool users, it's important to be able to show them exactly what the vanpool will cost, and exactly how much of that they'll be paying out of pocket, as opposed to what any employer-provided commuter benefits will cover if they are offered. Visit CommuterChoiceMaryland.com for any resources that you can use to help you share the benefits of vanpooling. For many commuters, vanpools will be a cheaper commute option than driving alone.

4.3 Hold a Meeting with the Vanpool Provider

Once you've found enough people who might be interested in vanpooling, hold a meeting with the vanpool provider, the primary contact, and all interested co-workers or persons, to explain the process. At this point, you will also want to have found a place to park the van overnight. Park and Ride lots (which can be found all over Maryland) are ideal, but if there is no Park and Ride near you, many big box stores are happy to let vanpools use their parking lots to store their van overnight.

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4.4. Develop a Vanpool Schedule

Once you have gotten together your group of riders, you will have to work together to develop a vanpool schedule that works with everyone's schedules. Some employees may have to adjust their working hours to align with other members of the vanpool. Also, once you have a set number of riders, you will be able to provide a firm monthly price for each rider.

4.5. Reach Out to Your Company's Human Resources Department

Riders who choose to join the vanpool should reach out to their company's human resources department, as well as to Commuter Choice Maryland, to ensure that they are maximizing their tax benefits for this commute if these benefits are provided by their employer. Your vanpool provider can help with this too, as they are experienced with helping riders form vanpools.

Photo Source: Anne Arundel County, Maryland



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How Do I Start a Vanpool at my Company, as an Employer?

A vanpool program is a great way to reduce your company's tax burden while providing your employees with a cheaper, more reliable commute. You may choose to make it part of a larger commuter benefits program; see the Commuter Choice Maryland Employer Commuter Benefits Toolkit for more information about that process. Employers who wish to start a vanpool program can do so by following these steps:

1. Designate a Program Coordinator
2. Decide on Your Company's Investment in the Program
3. Choose a Vanpool Provider
4. Promote Your Vanpool Program

5.1. Designate a Program Coordinator

As a starting point, choose one employee who will coordinate your vanpool program: they may be in your HR department, in your sustainability office, or in some other field. This person will be responsible for working with employees and the vanpool provider to maximize the program's effectiveness.

5.2. Decide on Your Company's Investment in the Program

At this point, it will be useful for that employee to know how much the organization is willing to invest in vanpooling: will your company subsidize employees' rides? If so, by how much? How much staff time and money will the company invest in promoting the vanpool? Bear in mind, when considering the organization's investment, that many employers will be eligible for the Maryland Commuter Tax Credit, which will offer employees tax savings on vanpool commutes.

5.3. Choose a Vanpool Provider

Most employers will have several vanpool providers to choose from, depending on where they are located (Table 2). Most of them will be happy to work with your company to meet its specific needs. Your vanpool coordinator should contact all of them and find the one that works best for your company.

5.4. Promote Your Vanpool Program

Once you have a vanpool provider, the next step is to promote vanpooling to your employees. In some cases, vanpool providers will do this for the employer. While each employer will use a unique set of media to get the word out about vanpooling, in general, employers should be looking to use as many different methods as possible. For instance, just sending a single email probably won't be enough: you should also hold a commuter fair, take advantage of video screens, post about it on your company's internal communication system, use intra-office mail, offer an introductory promotion, and give away company swag. While the techniques listed above may not all be applicable to your company's specific situation, the goal should be to reach employees as frequently as possible and in as many ways as possible. Once enough employees have signed up, your vanpool coordinator should work with your vanpool provider to ensure that all interested employees are being served by vanpools, and that all the employees in vanpools are maximizing their commuter tax benefits.

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Checklists for Employers and Commuters

Vanpool Checklist – For Employers

- Identify a lead at your company for your vanpool program
- Hold a meeting with vanpool providers and other potential vanpool users
- Determine the level of investment your company will provide for the vanpool program (for example, are you facilitating the involvement of a private vendor only or will the employer subsidize vanpool costs to the commuter)
- Examine potential tax savings, including savings through the Maryland Commuter Tax Credit, that may be available to your company
- Advertise the availability of the company vanpool program, and implement a vanpool matching system (note: there are some private vanpool providers who do this for the employer)
- Work with your company's Human Resources department to ensure all riders are maximizing their commuter tax benefits

Vanpool Checklist – For Commuters

- Work with your Determine if your company has a sponsored vanpool program or interest in starting one
- Reach out to vanpool providers serving your area and learn about existing vanpools that you can join, as well as the potential to start a vanpool
- If starting a vanpool:
 - Identify potential riders to join your vanpool
 - Coordinate with other interested riders to find a commute schedule that works for everyone
 - Find a place to park your van overnight
- Work with your company's Human Resources department to maximize or request access to Federal commuter tax benefits for vanpooling

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Vanpool Financial Assistance and Reward Programs

Some local governments or large employers in Maryland provide additional financial incentives for vanpooling. These incentives can help defray the costs of operating a vanpool or provide assistance in getting one off the ground. A list of these reward programs for which Maryland commuters may be eligible can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: List of Vanpool Reward Programs

Program	Eligibility (Refer to the program for complete eligibility details.)	Incentive
Maryland Commuter Tax Credit	Tax benefit for employers who provide a vanpool program for their employees.	Employers may claim a tax credit for 50% of the cost of providing the commuter benefits, including a company provided vanpool program, up to a maximum of \$100 per month for each employee. The tax credit can be taken against the state personal income tax, corporate income tax, or the insurance premium tax.
Pool Rewards	Vanpools commuters traveling to and from the Washington, DC area.	New vanpools comprised of at least seven individuals who currently drive alone to work and get at least seven people together may qualify for a \$200 monthly 'Pool Rewards' incentive.
RideSmart Commuter Solutions	New vanpools traveling to and from Prince George's County, MD.	Subsidy is paid during the first three months of a new vanpool operator's expenses, up to 100% for the first month, 50% the second and 25% during the third month of operation. A nine-passenger van can receive up to a \$850 per month subsidy and a fifteen-passenger van can receive up to a \$1,225 subsidy.
TransIT Rideshare Vanpool Incentive Program	New, not-for-profit vanpools traveling to and from Frederick County, MD.	Eligible vanpools may receive financial assistance on a per seat basis during the first 12 months of operation. Assistance ranges from \$158 to \$500 a month per-seat depending on the size of the van and the length of participation with the incentive program.
University of Maryland (UMD) Vanpools	UMD employees living at least 15 miles from campus.	UMD pays the full cost for the first four vans to sign up for six months. All registered vanpools receive free parking. Vanpool participants each receive one free Bundle Pack of 10 daily parking permits for each vanpool participant and free registration in the Guaranteed Ride Home program.
Vanpool Alliance	Vanpools with routes start from, travel through or terminate in the highlighted portion of this Northern Virginia region.	Vanpool operators receive \$200 monthly for participation in the program. Operators can use the \$200 to defray their operating costs or directly subsidize riders.

How Can I Find a Vanpool?

Many vanpools are provided with the assistance of private vanpool providers who either lease vans directly or sell seats on owner-operated vans. These operators are experienced and knowledgeable when it comes to navigating the start of a new vanpool and can provide assistance with everything from finding a vanpool to join, identifying potential riders for a new vanpool, finding a currently operating vanpool that you can join, and ensuring you get the maximum tax benefits for vanpooling. A list of private vanpool providers and resources can be found in Table 2.

Table 1: List of Vanpool Reward Programs

Vendor	Contact Information
Northern Virginia Vanpool Alliance	Maryland commuters can locate and join vanpools traveling from Maryland into Northern Virginia on the Vanpool Alliance website: http://vanpoolalliance.org/ .
Enterprise Rideshare	<p>Baltimore Metro Area</p> <p>Aaron Craft, Account Executive Admin 1899701 Wedeman Ave Linthicum, MD, 21090 410-259-4302 Email: Aaron.craft@ehi.com</p> <p>Washington DC Metro Area</p> <p>Dayna Paszkiet 2273 Research Blvd, Suite 600 Rockville, MD 20850 301-481-6723 Email: dayna.a.paszkiet@ehi.com</p> <p>https://www.commutewithenterprise.com/</p>
ABS Van Rentals, LLC	<p>Jerry Brown, Owner Ashley Baer, Office Manager 197 Tyler Von Way, Suite 101 Fredericksburg, VA 22405 703-348-VANS (metro) 540-659-6323 (business) 540-657-9173 (fax) www.absvans.com Email: ashley.absvans@gmail.com</p>

Vendor	Contact Information
EZ Vans, Inc.	Kevin Elliott, Owner 12020 Sawhill Blvd, Spotsylvania, VA 22553 540-446-4034 (business) Email: ezvans.inc@comcast.net
Maryland RideShare Corporation	1606 Grandads Lane Silver Spring, MD 20905-5572 301-384-2233 Email: MdRideShare@aol.com
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority - Vanpool Resources	Information on additional vanpool providers can be found on WMATA's website: https://www.wmata.com/service/regional-transportation/van-pools.cfm#MD





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