

Ridesharing: The Place to Start

It's easy to understand why ridesharing is increasing in popularity. Whether via a carpool or vanpool, ridesharing can offset fluctuating gasoline costs and growing traffic congestion. Ridesharing also reduces pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Employees who share rides save wear and tear on their vehicles as well as wear and tear on themselves by decreasing stress. Many work or solve work problems during the ride. Ridesharing can make a long commute interesting, enjoyable and affordable - all while helping employees arrive at work relaxed and ready to concentrate on the tasks at hand.

Employers also benefit when their employees are able to access rideshare options. Their workers are likely to be more productive, miss fewer hours at work because of traffic delays, and stay on the job longer when they have a predictable, cost-effective means for traveling to work. Having fewer employees drive to work also frees up parking spaces for customers or other visitors. Your company can encourage employees to commute to work with others by promoting the various ridesharing options available to them and facilitating their participation in those options.

Carpools

Carpooling is among the easiest and most flexible ways to share a ride to work. Carpoolers either pay a pre-established weekly or monthly fee or share actual costs plus any parking fees. Carpool riders typically establish rules and etiquette to sustain the carpool partnership, such as timely notifications of absences and whether food or beverages are allowed in the car.

Formal arrangements, such as online carpool matching services, are available to registered commuters in many Michigan areas and through this Web site. These services are organized by employers, MDOT, local governments, regional transportation authorities, and local nonprofits.

Vanpools

Vanpools allow groups of up to 15 people to commute to work on a prearranged basis, with one of the riders agreeing to be the primary driver and one or two others serving as back-up drivers. Vanpools allow commuters to reduce travel time, avoid highway congestion, and split the cost of work trips so that they are more economical.

Vanpool riders may meet at one designated location or at specified pick-up and drop-off stops along the way. The number of passengers, length of trip, insurance, gas, parking fees, and third-party fees, if applicable, will determine the actual cost per passenger. The driver usually travels at no cost. The group may also allow the driver to have personal use of the van on nights and weekends. Participants may all work at the same location or at nearby locations. Vanpool riders usually agree on a set of rules that govern rider etiquette.

Three types of vanpool arrangements are available to employers who want to offer their employees a vanpooling option. They are:

- MichiVan: A vanpool program sponsored by the Michigan Department of Transportation and operated by VPSI, Inc.
- Employer-sponsored and operated vanpools
- Driver-owned and operated vanpools

How Businesses Can Encourage Ridesharing

Many employers offer services that encourage commuters with similar commute routes and work hours to share a ride to work. Employer activities may include the following:

- Maintaining an on-site ride-matching forum to facilitate the creation of new carpools and vanpools or to fill empty spots in existing carpools and vanpools. This could be as simple as a ridesharing bulletin board, an electronic email or list-serve communication system, or the services of an employee transportation coordinator.
- Reserving premium parking spaces for carpool and vanpool vehicles.
- Posting or distributing information on the benefits of shared-ride options, including tax benefits available to employees who ride by vanpool or public transportation.
- Sponsoring or co-sponsoring (with other local companies) a shuttle service that brings employees from the closest public transit stop to the workplace.
- Offering financial incentives for employees who switch to shared-ride options on a trial basis.
- Having company leaders use (and publicize their use of) shared-ride options.
- Providing a Guaranteed Ride Home service for employees who commute by a shared-ride option but can't return home using that option due to an emergency or illness or because of unforeseen overtime (many of these programs already exist in Michigan communities).
- Providing an on-site company vehicle or shared vehicle for employee use during the day for errands or off-site meetings, thus eliminating the need for the employees to bring their own cars to work.

Easy Things You Can Do

Many employers have found that providing incentives that make an employee's commute to work easier benefits both the employee and the company. Incentives may cost very little or nothing at all. Here are a few examples of some of the incentives you can provide to your employees.

- Have transit schedules, rideshare, and Guaranteed Ride Home information available to employees. Just having bus and rail information at the work site can be a tremendous help to employees, especially for those who do not use public transit regularly. You never know when an employee may have to take his or her car in for repairs or when a snowstorm will hit the area. Having transit information available means employees can easily use other commute options when they cannot use their own vehicles.
- Preferential parking for carpools and vanpools. Reserve the parking spaces closest to the door as an incentive for carpools and vanpools. Or, if employees must pay for parking, offer a free space for carpools and vanpools.
- Host a commuting information day. Local alternative commute experts will come to your office and set up an information table in your lobby, cafeteria, or other high-activity area. This allows employees to ask questions and receive information about their specific commute.
- Provide equitable parking and transit incentives. If your company offers free or reduced-rate parking for employees, why not offer comparable incentives for employees who share rides, use transit or bike to work? Give employees a choice between the parking incentive and the alternative transportation incentive.
- Provide bike lockers or covered bike parking to protect bicycles from the elements.