



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is vanpooling? Is vanpooling the right choice for me?

Do you commute a long distance to work (minimum Program requirement is at least 15 miles one-way)? Are your work days and work hours relatively consistent -- or do they have the potential to be? If so, you may be an ideal candidate for vanpooling. A vanpool is a group of 5 to 15 people who commute together on a regular basis in a van. One person usually drives and maintains the van while riders pay a monthly fare. Vanpools that qualify for the VVTA Vanpool Subsidy Program are leased through qualified vanpool providers by either their employer or an individual.

What are the benefits of vanpooling?

Save money on gas and other commuting costs. If your van qualifies for the VVTA Vanpool Subsidy Program, your van will receive an ongoing subsidy of up to \$500 per month. By vanpooling you will also be able to reduce wear and tear on your car, save time by traveling in carpool lanes and thus reduce traffic and air pollution. Vanpool participants may also qualify for special perks at work, such as preferred parking, prize drawings, subsidies and more. Studies have shown that vanpool participants successfully lower their commuting stress and it is also an excellent way to meet new friends.

How much does it cost to vanpool?

Fares vary depending on the size of van, van features, commute distance, number of riders, fare subsidies, etc. Many times the vanpool agrees to permit the driver/coordinator to commute for free or at a reduced fare. After this is determined, the subsidy must then be distributed equally among the vanpool passengers. The monthly lease payment will cover the van lease, insurance and most maintenance costs. In addition, participating vanpool leasing agencies also accept TransitChek and the Federal Mass Transportation Benefits Program (MTBP) vouchers.

Will a vanpool pick me up at home?

To reduce the number of pick-ups and drop-offs, ensuring that everyone arrives to work and home quickly, most vanpoolers choose to meet at Park'N'Ride lots or other agreed-upon locations along the way. A typical vanpool may make anywhere from one to three stops to and/or from their work site.

What if I'm sick or go on vacation? Do I still have to pay for my seat?

Your monthly fare reserves your seat whether you use it or not. If you intend to be gone for an extended period of time, most vanpools allow you to temporarily “sublet” your seat to another rider. Remember, even if you miss a day here or there, vanpooling is still a bargain compared to driving alone.

If I become sick at work, how do I get home?

Leasing agencies and many employers offer a Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) program in the event of a personal emergency or any other unforeseen event that a RideShare participant needs a ride home from work. To see if your employer participates in the Regional GRH Program, log onto IE511.org/rideshare to find out.

What if I’m late or someone else keeps us waiting?

This is up to each vanpool group, and most vanpool groups set a standard waiting period, such as five to seven minutes, for the van to wait for all of its passengers to arrive.

Are there rules?

Most vanpools establish rules that cover such things as smoking, playing the radio, vanpool etiquette, tardiness, etc. The vanpool driver/coordinator may set some policies, while others may be voted upon by riders.

I’m trying to start a vanpool and don’t have quite enough riders. What do I do?

First ensure that your vanpool meets the minimum VVTA occupancy requirements (refer to the VVTA Vanpool Program Guidelines). If your vanpool does meet the minimum occupancy requirements, then you may consider starting your vanpool if riders are willing to pay a bit more. Once the vanpool is up and running, it’s easier to fill those few remaining empty seats.

Do I need to own a van to start a vanpool?

No. In fact, the VVTA Vanpool Program vehicles must be leased by either a commuter or one of the commuter’s employers, through one of VVTA’s partner vanpool leasing agencies. These companies lease commuter vanpools on a month-to-month basis and the lease includes insurance and maintenance. They also offer information and assistance for recruiting riders and setting fares and policies. If you decide to start a vanpool using your own van, or if you participate in a vanpool owned by your employer, you will not qualify for VVTA Vanpool Program subsidies.

I’m interested in starting a vanpool and taking advantage of the VVTA Vanpool Program Subsidy – what do I need to do?

There are a few steps to qualify and apply to the VVTA Vanpool Program. VVTA only accepts applications and monthly reports/logs, through its online/Web-based system called iVanpool. The steps to apply are as follows:

If you do not have access to a computer or the internet, contact VVTA for assistance at vanpool@vvta.org or call VVTA at 760-995-3561. ALL of the following criteria must also be met in order to qualify to the program, include (some of these criteria are explained further below):

- Only the leaseholder may apply directly to VVTA to participate in the program. VVTA will not accept applications from other vanpool passengers or the driver, if they are NOT the leaseholder.
- The vanpool must be used for commuting purposes to and from work;
- The driver of the vanpool must be a volunteer and a participant in the program;
- You must lease your van through one of the VVTA approved partner leasing agencies;
- Minimum occupancy at enrollment must be 70% or higher and maintained at 50% thereafter;
- Your round trip travel to and from work must be at least 30 miles;
- Your trip must either begin or end your its commute within the greater Victor Valley area including Barstow and surrounding communities and in specified areas of Lancaster, Palmdale and Kern County

Log onto www.iVanpool.org and select the “Get Started” button. The system will ask you a few simple questions to determine if you qualify for the Program. If you meet the minimum qualification requirements outlined in 11.b above, then iVanpool will let you know that you qualify and you may proceed. If you do not qualify, the System will let you know why, and you may try again (if you inputted in error) or contact VVTA for clarification.

You must still go through this process even If you have an existing vanpool lease from one of VVTA's approved vanpool leasing providers (Commute with Enterprise, Green Commuter, Airport Van Rental (AVR)). If you have an existing vanpool lease from any other 3rd party leasing company, you are not qualified to participate in this subsidy program. Should you change your lease to one of the VVTA approved Leasing Partners (Commute with Enterprise, Green Commuter, AVR), then you may proceed to qualify for the Program. Upon qualification, you will be asked to create a user name and password, so that you may continue with the application process.

VVTA recommends that if you do qualify for the Program, but do not have an existing lease, the next step is to contact one of VVTA's Partner Leasing Agencies (Commute with Enterprise, Green Commuter, AVR) to compare lease rates and their terms and conditions. You are only required to enter into a month-to-month lease with these agencies and rates will never exceed those that are publicized on VVTA's website (note these are maximum rates and rates are negotiable with the Partner Leasing Agencies).

Once a leasing agency has been selected, and your lease is executed or about to be executed, then you must finalize your route, recruit riders, set fares and policies, and so on. Whoever is selected to be the primary driver, you must fulfill any legal requirements for driving a vanpool. Your vanpool leasing company is an invaluable ally in your efforts to pull together a vanpool and can assist in all of these areas.

If you already have a lease, or upon executing a lease with one of the VVTA approved leasing agency, then continue with the iVanpool application. You will need the following information as you complete this online application process:

- Be aware the vanpool begins its route when the driver starts up the van each workday. That location can be at the driver's home, or at a Park'N'Ride lot, or another location. But this will be considered the first “pick up” location of the vanpool route.
- You will need to identify all other location(s) that you will be picking up vanpool participants on your way to work, as well as the location(s) that you drop off passengers at work. A cross street or address of each location is required, or you may use the handy mapping tool on the iVanpool website.
- The names, email addresses, a contact phone and the employer name of each of the vanpool participants, including the driver.
- Read and agree to the online Participation Agreement.
- If you are not the vanpool's primary driver, then the primary driver must be included in the passenger list and identified as the Primary Driver. When doing so, iVanpool will send him/her a request to also log onto the iVanpool website, create a username and password, and read and approve a Participation

Agreement as well. If the leaseholder is not the primary driver, then the primary driver logging onto iVanpool and executing the Participation Agreement is a Program requirement.

- You also have the option to select one passenger as an Alternate Administrator. When identifying this passenger, select “Alternate Administrator” and iVanpool will send him/her a request to also log on to the iVanpool website, create a username and password. By doing so, this passenger will be able to update information on iVanpool about your vanpool and also be able to submit monthly reports into the system. VVTA recommends you create an alternate for administrative purposes, in the event you are away on vacation or unavailable to complete updates or monthly reporting requirements.
- Identify the name of your leasing agency and the vanpool start date.
- Upon “Submitting” this information, your leasing agency will also submit specific information about the van and upload to iVanpool a copy of your executed lease. VVTA will review the application and possibly contact you, your vanpool participants or your leasing agency for additional information.
- Upon approval, VVTA will notify you, along with the start date of your subsidy and the exact amount of your subsidy. Note that all subsidies start the first of the month following approval – there is no proration for partial months.

What if I already have a vanpool that is leased through one of your approved Vanpool Leasing Agencies - can I participate in the VVTA Vanpool Program Subsidy?

You would still have to follow the process identified in the Vanpool Program Guidelines as summarized above. Remember, you are only required to enter into a month-to-month lease with these agencies and the lease must be with a VVTA-approved leasing partner. Should you have a lease with a different leasing agency, VVTA will not accept that lease agreement. Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us and we encourage you to review the leasing agency information on the VVTA website.

Once enrolled, when does the Vanpool Program subsidy begin?

Complete Applications (including all items identified in question above) must be received by VVTA on or before the close of business on the 15th of the month to be considered for the subsidy. Should the online Vanpool Application not be submitted or are not complete, approval may be delayed – so make sure everything is complete and accurate upon submittal. The subsidy will appear as a credit on the following month’s vanpool lease statement from your Leasing Agency. Vanpool Applications received by VVTA after the 15th of the month, may not be processed until the following month and the subsidy may not begin until the first of the second month.

What are the next steps?

Once enrolled, VVTA will engage in periodic communication with the Vanpool Participant (Leaseholder). The participant is responsible to keep the all of the information submitted into iVanpool complete and up to date and to provide VVTA with monthly reporting/logging information. Logging is simple and the lease holder must track a few bits of information, from the first of the month to the last day the vanpool operates during a calendar month period. So for each day the vanpool operates, log which of the passengers in your passenger list commuted to and from work. You can update this iVanpool log daily, weekly or at the end of the month. Then at the end of the month, you will summarize the vanpool’s out of pocket costs for the month (fuel, fluids/oil, car washes and so on) as well as the last odometer reading of the month. Then you hit “submit” and your reporting/logging is complete for the month. In addition, should there be changes in passengers, your route, drop off or pickup locations, it is your responsibility to go back into iVanpool and update that information.

If VVTA approves my vanpool's participation, am I or my vanpool participants eligible for any other vanpool subsidies, either through another public agency or my employer?

Once VVTA approves a vanpools' participation in the Vanpool Subsidy Program, the participants in the vanpool (including the driver, coordinator and passengers) are no longer eligible to receive subsidies from a neighboring County Transportation Commission Vanpool Subsidy Program (such as Los Angeles Metro, Orange County Transportation Authority or the San Diego Association of Governments). Vanpool participants are also not eligible to receive any further vanpool subsidies from the Inland Empire Commuter Services (IECS) – which is a staggered nine-month vanpool subsidy funded by the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) and the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBCTA) and may not receive the three-month \$2 a day subsidy for new ridesharing commuters. Accepting subsidies from any of the above-mentioned programs while receiving a VVTA subsidy simultaneously, will immediately disqualify the vanpool and its participants from participating in the VVTA Vanpool Subsidy Program.

The types of incentives or subsidies that are permitted while receiving the VVTA Vanpool Subsidy, are Employer Subsidies, which are provided directly to any of the vanpool participants' by their employer. The types of subsidies include, but are not limited to, the Federal Mass Transportation Benefits Program (MTBP). If an Employer Subsidy is funded by the types of incentives identified in 16.1 above, then those types of incentives are not permitted as long as you are enrolled in the VVTA Vanpool Program. In addition, IECS also offers a reward program for San Bernardino County residents that have been ridesharing for three or more months. Qualified vanpool participants are permitted to apply and participate in this reward program – for more information, call IECS at 1.866.RIDESHARE (866.743.3742).

If I start a Vanpool, do I have to be the driver?

No, you do not need to be the driver. Your duties can be limited to helping your vanpool to get on the road by recruiting a driver and/or alternates, helping to find riders and researching vanpool leasing options. Once the van is up and running, you can simply pay your fare and be a rider, or continue some administrative duties such as collecting fares or overseeing paperwork. Remember, if you are the Applicant/Leaseholder/vanpool coordinator and not the Primary Driver, the Primary Driver still must submit a Participation Agreement to the iVanpool system, in order to complete the Vanpool Application process and must comply with your Leasing Agency requirements as well.

What are the benefits of driving the van?

Since every vanpool sets its own rules, the benefits of driving will vary based on how you choose to organize your vanpool. In exchange for driving and handling maintenance, drivers often ride at a discount or for free, and may also have limited use of the van on evenings and weekends, while riders split expenses. Other vanpools split the driving duties between several people, giving each of them a discount. Or, your vanpool may prefer to run more like a "co-op" with everyone taking a turn at driving, collecting fares, handling maintenance responsibilities, etc.

Is the Vanpool Program available to persons with disabilities?

Yes – the Program Partner Leasing Agencies have ADA accessible vehicles available for vanpool groups. Particularly, if there is a vacancy in a vanpool and a person with a disability applies for a seat, the vanpool and your Vanpool Leasing Agency must make accommodations for the individual to become a vanpool member. VVTA contractually requires its Vanpool Leasing Agencies to comply with this ADA requirement.

Are there any other added benefits?

As an added bonus, both employers and employees can benefit by participating in “Commuter Benefits”, a program outlined in the federal tax code, that offers employers tax breaks for subsidizing vanpools for employees. In addition, employees may benefit when they set aside pre-tax dollars for vanpool commuting expenses. For more information, go to the Commuter Benefits’ website.

I want to join a vanpool that comes into my area but have been told I must qualify as a driver to join the vanpool. I just want to be a passenger. Do I have to qualify driver?

No, you don’t have to qualify as a driver. One of the advantages to belonging to a vanpool is that you don’t have to be a driver; you can simply be a passenger and enjoy a relaxed ride. In order for the vanpool to continue to receive the subsidy, they cannot discriminate against those who either are unwilling or unable to drive. Should you have any further questions, please feel free to contact VVTA.

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Who are the Partner Leasing Agencies and why are there only two agencies to choose from? Why can’t I use the existing vehicle through a lease that I have with my car company?

Federal requirements govern the VVTA Vanpool Subsidy Program and VVTA was required to conduct a formal procurement process to place under contract Partner Leasing Agencies. The procurement was conducted in early 2012 and again in 2018, was publicly advertised and the agencies who applied were required to follow many federal requirements. As a result of this procurement process, three Partner Leasing Agencies were selected and approved by the VVTA Board of Directors and they are Commute with Enterprise, Green Commuter and Airport Van Rental. A lease through any other leasing agency is not permitted for participation in the VVTA Vanpool Subsidy Program. Visit the VVTA website for information on VVTA’s Partner Leasing Agencies.
