

Frequently Asked Questions (and answers!) regarding Changes to Commuter Club's Vanpool Program for 2009

During the week of November 10, 2008, Commuter Club held Roundtable Discussion meetings, in order to discuss 2009 funding for our vanpool program. Since a decrease in available federal subsidies will impact the cost, ridership and other vanpool policies, Commuter Club challenged current vanpoolers to work through the issues facing all of us in the upcoming year. The Roundtable Discussions provided Commuter Club with such valuable suggestions and questions we compiled them into a FAQ sheet to provide information to those who were not able to attend the roundtable discussion groups.

Q: What changes are taking place to the vanpool program?

A: The vanpool program will cost participants \$100 per month in 2009 due to a decrease in federal subsidies and increased ridership. A new federal regulation will require that all vans have a average daily ridership of 8 vanpoolers. As always, Commuter Club will work with each vanpool to keep their daily ridership above 7.5. Each van will have a minimum of 10 paying riders to stay on the road. Due to the changes taking place, Commuter Club staff will be generous with each van's daily and paying ridership in the first quarter of the year.

Q: Why are these changes taking place?

A: Please see attached sheets for detailed funding information. The short answer is that the Georgia Regional Transit Authority (GRTA) has decreased the amount that each van is subsidized. In 2008, GRTA paid \$600 toward the cost of each van per month. In 2009, GRTA will be paying \$300 toward the cost of each van per month. In 2008, we saw a 40% growth in Commuter Club's Vanpool program. This means that our CID subsidy contribution has to be spread across more nearly double the amount of vans.

Q: When do the changes take place?

A: Changes will begin January 1, 2009.

Q: Why is the federal subsidy getting cut in half?

A: We, unfortunately, do not have the answer to that question. For more information, you'll have to inquire with GRTA.

Q: Are there other options to find funding?

A: We have researched and brainstormed many other alternatives, and at this point it seems fair to say that Commuter Club has exhausted funding avenues. We may find new viable options in the future, but we have no other avenues at present.

Q: Has Commuter Club investigated or researched other cities to get ideas or innovations to help this situation?

A: Commuter Club, as part of the regional Transportation Management Network and with expert consultants, has looked at other programs. The reality is that Commuter Club was far below market rate at the \$50 per seat price point. At \$100 per seat we are still below an average national rate and market rate.

Q: Can we use other vanpool vendors to reduce costs?

A: In order to receive the federal subsidy, we do not have any other choices of vendor at this time. However, if other vendors become available we will figure that into your choice and our funding.

Q: Can we look into utilizing smaller vehicles, such as 8 person vans?

A: Eight person vans do not receive any federal subsidy, and our research has shown that they cost riders more than the 15 passenger vans.

Q: Would it be possible for vanpool participants to approach our employers about subsidizing the vanpool?

A: Absolutely. Please feel free to contact Commuter Club staff to help explain tax incentives and subsidy programs to your employer.

Q: With gas prices decreasing, it will be harder to get riders. Can Commuter Club help existing vanpools market their rider vacancies?

A: We will actively help you to fill your vans within the limits of information and technology provided to us by regional partners and our own compilation of data.

Q: Would Commuter Club consider evaluating each van's value and organizing payments based on the ridership and distance driven by each van?

A: We had considered that as an option to funding the vanpool program. At meetings when this option was mentioned, it seemed that the majority of riders prefer the flat rate.

Q: Can vanpools that have teleworkers get a break on average daily ridership?

A: We will work together to see what options are available to vans with multiple vanpool-teleworkers.

Q: MARTA has a contract with fuel. Can Commuter Club do something similar?

A: We do not have the option of contracting in the same way that MARTA does for fuel because of the difference in program size. That being said, we will research the possibility of working with a fuel company.

Q: Why not a flat rate of \$75 per month instead of \$100 per month?

A: \$75 per month per rider per van will not make up for the cost of the program as it stands right now.

Q: Can old riders be grandfathered in and only new riders pay \$100?

A: At this point, our funding only takes into account our existing fleet. We have a hold on placing new vans with a Commuter Club subsidy.

Q: Can payments be made staggered throughout the month?

A: Commuter club does not accept your payments. The vanpool vendors accept payment. We would be happy to request this option on the behalf of vanpoolers to both VPSI and Enterprise.