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Vanpool Programs:

Implementing Commuter Benefits Under the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative

Vanpool Programs

Implementing Commuter Benefits under the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative

- A vanpool is a group of people who are coming to the same workplace from the same community, riding together in a van. Vanpools typically carry from seven to fifteen passengers, and operate weekdays, traveling between one or two common pick-up locations (typically a park-and-ride lot where a rider may leave his/her car, or a transit station) and the place of work.
- Vanpool programs can be administered in a variety of ways, allowing the employer to be fully involved or simply promote it from the sidelines.
- Employers can help employees form vanpools through rideshare matching. Rideshare matching helps potential vanpoolers locate others nearby with similar schedules. Regional rideshare services in most areas allow interested employees to register directly for no cost. Employers can direct their employees to these free services. Rideshare agencies can also help organize vanpools directly with employees.
- Employee benefits from vanpooling include cost-sharing, less wear and tear on vehicles, time savings in regions with HOV lanes, and the ability to talk, eat, sleep, or read while commuting. Vanpool participants report saving up to $3,000 a year on gas, car maintenance, and wear and tear as well as reduced commute stress and time. The primary employer advantage is the need for fewer parking spaces; other advantages include less employee stress and improved productivity.
- Vanpools make sense in many locations, and are particularly well suited for areas with limited mass transit and long distance commutes. Metropolitan areas with high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes are also particularly well suited for vanpools since the lanes provide vanpools with substantial time savings over driving alone.
- Providing vanpool benefits is one of the primary benefits under the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative (CCLI). Employers must offer at least one of three primary benefits to their employees in order to participate in the CCLI (the other two are parking cash out and telecommuting). Under this option, the employer agrees to provide at least $32.50 per month in transit or vanpool benefits for any employee (or the full monthly commuting expense if it is less than $32.50 per month).

This document is one in a series of Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative briefing papers designed to help employers implement commuter benefits.

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U. S. Department of Transportation (DOT) have established a voluntary National Standard of Excellence for employer-provided commuter benefits. Commuter benefits help American workers get to and from work in ways that cut air pollution and global warming pollution, improve public health, improve employee recruiting and retention, improve employee job satisfaction, and reduce expenses and taxes for employers and employees. Participants in the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative (CCLI) agree to meet the National Standard of Excellence, and qualify as Commuter Choice[SM] Employers. CCLI participants agree to:

- Centralize commute options information so that it is easy for employees to access and use;
- Promote the availability of commuter benefits to employees;
- Provide access to a guaranteed ride home program;
- Provide one or more of the following primary commuter benefits:
  - ✓ Vanpool or transit benefits of at least $32.50 per month
  - ✓ Parking cash out of at least $32.50 per month
  - ✓ Telecommuting program that averages six percent of daily work force
  - ✓ Other option proposed by employer and agreed to by EPA
- Provide three or more of the following additional commuter benefits:
  - ✓ Ridesharing/carpool matching
  - ✓ Pre-tax transit/vanpool benefits
  - ✓ Shuttles from transit station
  - ✓ Parking at park-and-ride lots
  - ✓ Provision of real-time transit information
  - ✓ Preferred parking for ridesharers
  - ✓ Reduced parking costs for ridesharers
  - ✓ Employer-sponsored vanpool or subscription bus programs
  - ✓ Employer assisted vanpools
  - ✓ Secured bicycle parking, showers, and lockers
  - ✓ Electric bicycle recharging stations
  - ✓ Employee commuting awards programs
  - ✓ Discounts/coupons for bicycles and walking shoes
  - ✓ Compressed work schedules
  - ✓ Telecommuting
  - ✓ Lunchtime shuttle
  - ✓ Proximate commute (working closer to home)
  - ✓ Incentives to encourage employees to live closer to work
  - ✓ On-site amenities (dry cleaning, etc.)
  - ✓ Concierge services
  - ✓ Active membership in a Transportation Management Association (TMA) or similar organization
  - ✓ Other options proposed by employer
- Exceed a minimum benchmark of either 14 percent of employees who do not drive alone to work or an average vehicle ridership (the number of vehicles divided by the *total* number of employees) of 1.12.

Please see the CCLI Agreement and Agreement Particulars documents for specific information about employer participation requirements.

Disclaimer

EPA provides this briefing as a service to employers participating in the CCLI. Information about private service providers is intended for informational purposes and does not imply endorsement by EPA or the federal government.

The information presented here does not constitute official tax guidance or a ruling by the U.S. Government. Taxpayers are urged to consult with the Internal Revenue Service of the U.S. Department of Treasury or a tax professional for specific guidance related to the Federal tax law.

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Vanpool Programs: A Summary

Vanpooling brings together seven to fifteen commuters together in one vehicle, typically a van. One person usually drives and maintains the van, while riders split the expenses. In some cases, companies own and operate the vanpool, offering employees the chance to ride at a reduced rate as a work benefit.

The primary benefits of vanpooling depend on the market segment. In areas with high occupancy vehicle lanes, vanpools allow commuters to bypass traffic jams, providing potentially significant time savings. For long-distance commuters, vanpools provide a relaxing way to travel, since the passengers have time to read, work, or sleep. For employers facing a parking shortage, vanpooling can reduce the cost of building additional parking facilities.

There are three primary types of vanpool programs:

- **Owner/operators** are individuals who buy/lease a vehicle for vanpooling. Riders generally meet at a central location and pay the owner a set monthly fee. Affordable insurance and adequate coverage are major issues with this group.
- **Employers** can buy or lease vehicles for use by their employees. The employer (or a group of employers) organizes the vanpool riders and insures and maintains the vehicles. The employer may charge a fee to ride in the van, and/or subsidize the service.
- **Third-party vanpool providers** are private organizations (either for-profit or non-profit) that operate vanpool services for commuters, companies, and government agencies. A vanpool vendor leases the vanpool vehicle for a monthly fee that includes the vehicle operating cost, insurance, and maintenance. The vendor can contract directly with one or more employees. The group of users typically pays the monthly lease fee. These operators manage approximately 5,000 vans across the U.S. VanPool Services, Inc (VPSI) is the predominant provider, with approximately 3,500 vehicles across 60 cities.

In many regions, rideshare organizations assist employers with recruiting riders, locating park-and-ride lots, and other planning and implementation issues. A list of regional rideshare organizations is available in the Appendix.

Employers may provide their employees with tax-free vanpool benefits, or an employee pre-tax deduction program for vanpool expenses. Employers benefit from giving pre-tax or tax-free benefits because those amounts are not subject to payroll taxes (see separate briefing paper on Commuter Tax Benefits).

Employer Benefits

A business can benefit in several ways by offering vanpool services or benefits. Employers can boost employee morale and satisfaction, while decreasing business costs through reductions in payroll taxes and parking needs.

Employees view commuter benefits extremely favorably. Vanpool programs can:

- Lower employee commute stress and the cost of commuting for employees;
- Provide additional choices to employees;
- Heighten employee appreciation of employer; and
- Help make benefits plans more employee-friendly and environmentally friendly.

These positive attributes, in turn, can improve employee morale and make an organization a more desirable place to work, which can:

- Reduce employee absenteeism
- Reduce employee turnover
- Support recruiting and retention goals

Employees who vanpool generally see it as a major benefit.

Cost Savings

On the most basic level, an employer can offer a pre-tax benefit of up to $65 a month for an employee to use towards a vanpool program. In this case, offering vanpool benefits can be a low cost way to provide employees with an additional benefit. A vanpool option provides the employer with lower corporate income and payroll taxes, since the employer may deduct the cost of the providing the benefit and the amount reserved by an employee on a pre-tax basis from income. Employees also pay less in income taxes and social security taxes.

An employer interested in establishing a company vanpool program, through leasing or purchasing vans, will see added costs from the van payments. However, vanpool user fees, if charged, typically cover these costs. Again, a percentage of the user fee can be deducted from pre-tax salary, producing the same reductions in corporate costs and payroll taxes as providing a monthly transit benefit. Employers who subsidize vanpool expenses for their employees can also realize a cost savings in that any amount up to $65 is not subject to payroll taxes.

Reduced Need for Parking

Reducing the number of employees driving to work can reduce the demand for employee parking. Parking is expensive to build or lease, particularly in urban areas. As a result, vanpools and employer-provided vanpool benefits often provide a low-cost way to avoid the large expense associated with securing additional parking.

Employers can save a substantial amount of money in reducing the number of parking spaces required; one study estimates that annual per-space costs vary between $250 and $2,100.[1] In fact, 3M in Minneapolis, the acknowledged "father of vanpooling," started its program in the 1970s in response to a parking shortage, not the energy crisis. (US DOT, 1993)

Unlike parking, which is a long-term decision (leases are typically negotiated on an infrequent basis, and the decision to construct new parking has long-term implications) vanpool benefits can be adjusted immediately.

TAX CONSIDERATIONS

Tax provisions that allow vanpool benefits to be taken as a tax-free fringe benefit offer substantial financial savings to both employers and employees.[2] Vanpool benefits may be provided tax-free to employees up to $65 per month, or $780 per year. Tax benefits accrue to businesses and employees whether the employer pays for the benefits or the employee pays for it through a pre-tax salary deduction, as shown in Table 1.

According to tax law, a vanpool is considered a "commuter highway vehicle," and must meet the following criteria to qualify as a qualified transportation fringe benefit: 1) seats at least six adults (not including the driver); and 2) at least 80 percent of the mileage use can reasonably be expected to be for transporting employees between their homes and workplace, with employees occupying at least one-half of the vehicle's seats (not including the driver's).

[1] Victoria Transport Policy Institute, Online TDM Encyclopedia, available at www.vtpi.org/tdm. Costs are based on land, construction, and operations costs for suburban and urban locations, and for surface, structured, and underground parking.

[2] Employers should review with their tax advisor the tax implications for themselves and their employees.

Many states provide further tax incentives and/or subsidies promoting employer established vanpool programs. New Jersey offers a statewide Vanpool Sponsorship Program that provides a financial incentive for vanpooling in areas where public transportation is not available. Each vanpool group is eligible for $150 per month of sponsorship support. In Washington state, tax credits are given to employers who participate in commute trip reduction programs. The credit is equal to one half of the financial incentive paid to each participating employee. (Winters and Cleland, undated). In Oregon, employers can get a tax credit for purchasing vehicles for vanpooling. Under the Business Energy Tax Credit, an employer can receive a tax credit of 35 percent of eligible project costs, taken over a period of five years.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Vanpools can result in substantial benefits for employees, including increased comfort, reduced stress, and time savings. A reduction in commuting costs is also a major benefit to employees. Although many commuters don't realize it, per-mile costs for driving alone are generally far higher than for vanpooling.

According to the American Automobile Association, it costs an average of 35.5 cents per mile to drive a car: this includes gasoline, oil, maintenance, tires, and depreciation.[3]

If an employee has 40-mile round-trip commute at 35.5 cents per mile:

- The daily commute cost would be **$14.20**;
- The monthly commute cost would be **$298**;
- The annual commute cost would be **$3,578**.

This estimate covers only variable costs and excludes fixed costs such as insurance.[4] If vanpooling allows the employee to own one less car, the cost savings are substantially higher.

RIDES for Bay Area Commuters estimates that the cost per mile to a vanpool rider is an average of five to nine cents per mile depending on length of the roundtrip. In the above example, with a 40 mile round-trip commute and a per-mile cost of seven cents:

- The daily commute cost would be **$2.80**;
- The monthly commute cost would be **$61.10**;
- The annual commute cost would be **$739.20**, over $2,800 less than driving.

Vanpool passengers may also be eligible to receive additional benefits depending on the city and state in which they live. For example, Contra Costa County, California offers a $1,000 bonus to groups that can keep a vanpool running for a year. Massachusetts provides discounts on personal auto insurance to vanpoolers. Every month, each qualified passenger on the van receives a pass signifying vanpool participation for that month. By collecting 11 consecutive monthly passes during a policy year, a vanpool passenger can claim a ten percent discount on property damage and collision coverage (up to $75) at the beginning of a policy year. Massachusetts also offers free license plates and registration to vanpools.

[3] AAA, 2000. This figure reflects the AAA-estimated costs of gas/oil (6.9 cents/mile), maintenance (3.6 cents/mile), tires (1.7 cents/mile), and depreciation (23.3 cents/mile if under 15,000 miles annually). Because ownership costs do not decline with driving less, those costs are not included in this estimate

[4] The above calculations do not include the costs of parking if not provided by the employer.

Table 1: Tax Savings for Employers and Employees

Option	Employer Tax Benefit	Employee Tax Benefit
Employers give their employees up to $65/month to commute via vanpools.	Employer receives tax deduction - Employer can deduct cost of benefit from corporate income for purposes of calculating corporate income taxes.	Employee receives up to $65/month tax-free. The employee does not pay any taxes on the value of the benefit.
Employers allow employees to use pre-tax income to pay for vanpooling.	Employer saves on payroll taxes (at least 7.65% savings) - No payroll taxes are paid on the income that is set aside by the employee.	Employee saves on income tax and payroll taxes - The amount of income set aside for vanpooling (up to $65/month) is no longer treated as taxable salary

When Vanpool Programs Make Sense

Vanpool programs can be established or sponsored by any employer with a commuting workforce. Typically the programs are most cost effective and beneficial for companies employing over 50 workers where some of the employees travel upwards of ten miles one way from residence to the workplace (Winters, Cleland, undated). Some rideshare organizations recommend that only employees with commutes over 20 miles one-way will benefit from vanpooling.

Regions with HOV Lanes

In areas with high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, vanpools are especially valuable for their ability to bypass congestion, saving commuters significant time. Depending on the length of the commute and the amount of congestion bypassed, using the HOV lanes may save 15 to 30 minutes each way.

Long Commutes, Outer Suburbs, and Limited Mass Transit

Employees with long commutes (20 miles or more each way) are the most likely to be interested in vanpools as a way to reduce the stress of long-distance commuting. By vanpooling, these employees can put their time commuting to use reading, catching up on sleep, or simply relaxing.

For employees in areas where mass transit is limited, sharing rides is the major alternative to driving alone. If many of these employees live near each other or along a particular corridor, vanpools become an easy and effective solution. Through cooperation with other nearby businesses, employers can virtually establish a transit system for their employees.

Some employers have found that instituting a vanpool program in conjunction with a move to a suburban location has assisted with retaining employees who might otherwise be put off by the long commute.

Lower Income Workers and High Priced Housing

Vanpools can work particularly well for employers with a large percentage of lower income workers. In resort towns, for example, the cost of living may be too high for many workers to live close to work, resulting in a limited pool of workers nearby. Vanpools can solve problems for both employers and employees.

For example, businesses in the western Florida gulf coast resort communities of Destin and South Walton had difficulty attracting and retaining service employees, especially during the tourist season. Restaurants, hotels, and stores along the coast needed workers, but potential employees could not afford the area's increasingly high-cost housing. Many workers who do accept positions have commutes of an hour or more. Workers also tended to lack reliable transportation. Turnover and absenteeism were high.

Area businesses formed a task force and decided that a vanpool system would offer a good compromise between reliability and flexibility at a reasonable cost. Organizers also recognized that vanpools would improve parking availability, solving a problem caused by the growth of tourism along the popular beaches of northwest Florida-the increasing number of vehicles streaming though the area during the summer season. (Association for Commuter Transportation, 1997)

Regions with Existing Vanpool Agencies

Many regions and urban centers around the nation already have successful third-party vanpool providers. The third-party provider can help interested employers develop a program tailored to their needs.

Vanpooling is often well suited for large employers, since they will be most likely to have a sufficient number of employees to form vanpools. Smaller employers, however, may be able to join together through a business association or regional vanpool agency to develop vanpools. Employees at small businesses also may be able to fill slots in existing vanpools serving larger employers located nearby.

IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES AND COSTS

Administrative issues generally pose only a short-lived challenge during the early stages of program implementation, but may be a potentially significant perceived barrier. Employers can, however, seek assistance in many of these issues from rideshare organizations.

Costs will vary depending on which of the three vanpool models an employer implements, but a vanpool program can often be provided at relatively low cost and with relatively little administrative burden, whether the employer or employee pays. If the company runs the program, incoming lease funds and/or tax credits can actually lower a company's total tax bill.

Vanpool Programs: Four Models

The monthly cost of a vanpool will vary depending on the choice of vendor, the choice of vehicle, the number of riders, and the total miles a group travels daily. One of the most important choices is selecting the form of vanpool program. The following sections review the primary choices and related costs and issues.

Employer-Purchased Vans

A company buys vans and administers the entire program, covering costs by collecting fares from riders. This option offers the greatest control over program policies. The biggest investment is buying the vans. Overall costs can be lower than those of any other type of vanpool program, allowing for savings to be passed on to riders in lower fares, and increasing ridership. However, many employers have moved away from this option because of the financial and time obligations of running the program.

Employer-Leased Vans

A company leases vans and administers either the entire program, some of the program, or none of the program, depending on the terms of the lease. Employer-leased vans are the next step down on the involvement scale from owning the vehicles. Costs will be higher to cover finance charges and overhead expenses of the vendor. However, leases help avoid having a fleet of depreciated vans if vanpool ridership declines. In many cases the leasing entity is responsible for maintenance and upkeep of the vans, which again reduces employer responsibility and costs. The increased cost is generally minimal. The lease cost for a van is typically about $1,200 a month, not including gas. Leases are generally based on monthly mileage.

Employee-Leased Vans

An employee group leases a van from a third-party vanpool vendor and pays fares directly to the vendor. The employer helps by promoting the van and referring employees; rideshare organizations can also perform these functions. Employee monthly leased vans are popular among employers because all financial and legal obligations are between the employees and the van vendor. However, such arrangements may entail monthly administrative fees.

In theory the employer is not required to get involved. However, if the employer supports the vanpool program through promotions, employee referrals and even fare subsidies, it is more likely to see-and keep-vans on the road.

Owner-Operator Vans

An employee buys a van and administers all aspects of van operation, including maintenance and insurance, entirely on his or her own. Employer involvement is virtually nonexistent. Rideshare organizations can sometimes provide support and assistance.

Costs to the employer will vary in relation to vanpool type. A number of regions have seen increasing demand for vanpool programs over the last few years. The Puget Sound Region has seen a 60 percent increase in vanpooling since 1995. (WSDOT, 2000)

Insurance Issues

It is important that vanpools be covered by adequate insurance, and that employers ensure that their policies are appropriate to the type of vanpool. The two types of insurance are described briefly below.

Employer-Sponsored Pools

There are many levels of employer involvement in rideshare programs, and the type of coverage needed necessarily depends on the scope of employer involvement. For employer-facilitated programs in which an employer encourages the formation of carpools and vanpools by providing nominal incentives and the means for employees to vanpool, liability exposure should be remote. Insurers do not normally provide policies specifically covering this type of activity, and many employers feel that their comprehensive general liability policies should provide adequate coverage.

On the other hand, for companies that own, lease, operate, and maintain vanpools for their employees, fleet insurance is essential. For especially large companies, a group of vanpools may compose a small part of an overall fleet insurance program. Coverage should be less expensive in this case.

Third-Party Providers

Companies or individuals that lease a van from a third party can usually obtain insurance coverage through the lessor. VPSI, for example, offers comprehensive coverage with no deductible as an optional part of its package to lessees. Thus, the monthly cost to riders in a VPSI vanpool includes the cost of insuring the vehicle.

VPSI screens potential drivers' records, and rather than charging a higher rate for drivers who appear to be bad risks, VPSI simply will not approve such individuals as drivers. The portion of the total lease cost attributable exclusively to insurance costs is difficult to determine. Any large company with an existing fleet policy will likely be able to obtain insurance for leased or owned vanpools at rates below what would normally be paid for a commercial policy (Leibson and Penner, 1994).[5]

[5] For a comprehensive guide to insurance and liability coverage for vanpool programs, see the Legal Research Digest, "Successful Risk Management for Rideshare and Carpool-Matching Programs," available at www.nationalacademies.org/trb/publications/tcrp/tcrp_lrd_02.pdf

Rideshare Matching

One of the most important needs in setting up a vanpool program is matching potential vanpool riders. Many regions have rideshare programs whose main function is to match potential car- and vanpoolers with rideshare partners. Depending on the size of the employer, rideshare organizations can specifically match only employees of that company, or employees of several companies located near each other. See the Appendix for a list of regional rideshare organizations.

GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTATION

An employer interested in starting a vanpool program has numerous options. The company must decide how much it wants to be involved in the vanpool program. Employers may also wish to speak with a representative of a regional rideshare organization to determine the type of assistance and support available.

This section will help walk the employer through some guiding principles that will aid in the production of a successful vanpool program (USDOT, 1993).

1) Select a Vanpool Program Coordinator

The vanpool coordinator may be responsible for handling some or all program details. Even if the vanpool program is run by a third party vendor, an employer still must be familiar enough with vanpool operation to deal with any problems that may arise.

2) Organize a Vanpool Committee

The committee addresses company issues surrounding the vanpool. The extent to which the committee will deal with issues of finance, the van fleet, insurance, liability and others will depend on the type of program offered. By having a mix of people from different departments, the committee can best advertise and supply information surrounding the program to the entire workforce. The committee addresses questions such as:

- What would motivate people to vanpool?
- How much are people willing to pay?
- How much do we wish to spend?
- What will be the best schedules?
- Will we offer a vanpool benefit or subsidy?

3) Identify clusters of potential vanpool riders

This can be done through office e-mails, posting "vanpool riders wanted" flyers, or tapping human resources for home address and zip code information. Rideshare organizations and third party vendors can typically produce density maps showing locations of all employers and best commuting routes.

4) Market the Vanpool Program

Contact potential riders to determine the interest in vanpooling. If response rate is seemingly positive, implementation can continue.

5) Decide What Type of Program to Offer

As described in Implementation Issues and Costs, there are different ways to organize and fund a vanpool program. Which one is best for a company depends on the level of involvement a company is most comfortable with. All else being equal, increased involvement increases time and money investments, but reduces total operating costs.

6) Buy or Lease a Vanpool Van

The type of program the employer implements will determine the next step. If an employer chooses to buy vans, it is important to ensure vanpool vehicles meet current specifications. Specs will vary from region to region. If the company has established a lease agreement, the vendor will usually be knowledgeable in the regional requirements. Employers should consider not only specs required by state and federal law, but also those that make vanpooling more comfortable and appealing to employees.[6]

7) Secure Insurance Coverage

An employer must have adequate insurance for the vanpool. The method of obtaining insurance varies with vanpool type (i.e., leased or owned) and by state. Van vendors typically provide insurance coverage for companies that lease vanpools. Otherwise, a company will either need to self-insure or obtain coverage from an insurer specializing in vanpool risks.

8) Prepare Written Policy and Procedure Manual

The manual should answer every question that an employee could ask about a vanpool program. Each employer manual will be different, as there are literally hundreds of questions and policy variations that a company can address. Some examples include:

- Fare structure
- Payment periods
- Cancellation notice
- Wait time at stops
- Hours of operation
- Van ridership policy (could include eating and drinking policy, perfume, music, cell phone use, etc.)

9) Select Driver, Alternate Driver, and Complete Driver Qualification

States have different requirements enforced by law surrounding vanpool drivers. These should be researched before drivers are chosen. Employers may be involved with reviewing driving records, medical exams, and in the case of large fleets, even driver training. Many potential drivers may not have driven vans before, and driver training can familiarize them with handling requirements of large vehicles.

10) Begin Vanpool Service

As with many programs, the employers may wish to begin vanpool service on a trial basis before implementing a permanent program. The vanpool coordinator should also monitor the program to ensure that it is adequately advertised, that drivers and passengers are aware of their responsibilities, and to deal with any problems that may arise.

Employer Questions and Answers

The following questions might commonly be asked by an employer (e.g., a human resources administrator or business manager) interested in considering a vanpool program.

Question: How difficult -and costly-is it to administer a program?

Costs and involvement will vary greatly depending on the type of program selected by a company. The primary costs are upfront start-up costs. After the vans are purchased or leased the company will see relatively low out-of-pocket costs. Rider fares should be calculated at a level that will cover monthly maintenance and supply costs. If an employer is allowing for a pre-tax deduction of fares from an employee's salary, savings can be seen in payroll taxes.

Cost reductions can also be realized through employee parking space reductions.

Question: What amount of the employee fares should the employer provide?

An employer may subsidize any amount. The federal *tax-free* benefit for vanpool benefits, however, is currently limited to $65 per month. As

[6] There are a number of state and federal assistance programs surrounding the lease and purchase of commuter vehicles. It is to the employer's benefit to examine these options before purchase or lease.

a result, the employee and employer must pay taxes on the value of the benefit that exceeds the $65 statutory limit. For example, if the employer provides the employee $75 per month to put towards vanpool fares, $65 is a tax-free fringe benefit, and the excess - $10 - must be included in the employee's wages for income and employment tax purposes.

Question: How is vanpool fare determined?

Costs are determined by adding up all the costs involved with the program, then dividing by the number of riders (not including the driver, who generally rides for free). Costs include both those that are fixed (vehicle purchase price less depreciation, insurance, registration, and license fees or your monthly leasing cost) as well as operating costs (maintenance and fuel).

In order to attract riders, many companies do not set fares equal to costs, but subsidize a portion of employee fares. Subsidies, if any, will be based on what a company can afford, what employees are willing to pay, what a company hopes to gain in revenues, as well as the savings seen on parking and other drive-alone expenses.

Question: What kind of commitment should I request participants to make?

Commitments will vary depending on the type of program an employer is implementing. Typically a 30 day notice prior to cancellation will give the company ample time to restructure program needs.

Question: Does a vanpool need to provide door-to-door service?

No. Each vanpool group sets up its own rules. Some vans will provide door-to-door service. Most typically set and schedule a number of convenient pick-up points.

Question: What are the responsibilities of the driver? How is the driver selected?

The driver is responsible for operating the vehicle, making scheduled stops, and arranging for the vehicle maintenance, fueling and fare collection. In return, drivers typically ride for free, and may also be given a set number of miles per month that they can use the vehicle for personal business. The driver is usually the person who comes forward and agrees to take responsibility for the vanpool, in exchange for getting to ride free. Drivers should be screened for their driving history and safety record; in addition, some states require medical exams.

Question: What do I do with empty seats on vans?

Empty seats typically mean less revenue. There may be periods where a rider may quit the program and a replacement cannot be found.

One option is to simply raise fares for the other riders. Typically this is a last resort. Increasing the fare to compensate for having one less rider will avoid any program cost increase to the employer, but may discourage other riders from continuing in the vanpool.

Some states, including California, Oregon and Washington, have short-term subsidy programs that will cover the cost the empty seat for an established period of time. This gives the vanpool coordinator a chance to find a replacement. If there are other employers in the vicinity it may be possible to expand the market pool by establishing a cross-employer program.

Question: What happens if the regular driver is not available to drive?

Each vanpool needs to have backup drivers to fill in when the regular driver is not able to drive due to vacations, sick leave, or travel/overtime commitments for work. If no driver is available for the van for a particular day, vanpool riders typically coordinate carpools. Some vanpools have a number of drivers who rotate driving responsibilities; fares for these people are then discounted based on the number of days each person drives.

Question: What are the best ways to promote vanpool programs?

An employer has numerous options to inform employees about the benefits surrounding vanpools. Some of the more frequent methods include but are not limited to the following:

- Company orientation meetings for new employees;
- Vanpool Committee meeting announcements;
- Advertisements in places seen frequently by employees (cafeteria, garage, elevators, etc);
- Distribution of program brochures (highlighting monetary benefits);
- Company newsletters;
- Voicemail or e-mail broadcast;
- Special promotional days (example: a "Pool Day" to encourage vanpooling);
- Company website.

EMPLOYER CASE STUDIES

The following five case studies of employer vanpool programs illustrate some of the issues and potential choices in implementing a vanpool program.

San Antonio, Texas - United States Automobile Association

USAA, an insurance and financial services firm, has run an extensive vanpool program since 1977. The program, which began with five vans at the firm's San Antonio headquarters, now has approximately 130 vans at five locations throughout the country. Ridership is currently at 1,020 employees. In San Antonio, there are approximately 825 participants in a total workforce of 15,000 (approximately five percent).

All vans are owned and maintained by USAA. USAA owns two sizes of van: "maxi-vans," with a capacity of 15 passengers, and "mini-vans," with a capacity of seven passengers. Drivers are responsible for routine maintenance (fluid changes and tire pressure), but USAA personnel perform other maintenance.

Van drivers are selected from the regular workforce. Each van has a regular and a back-up driver responsible for daily operation. Potential vanpool drivers must submit their driving record, take a drug test, and participate in a one-on-one driver training program. They are also encouraged to take refresher courses every few years via computer. Drivers must sign a Vanpool Program Participation Agreement. There is generally a waiting list to participate in vanpools as either a driver or passenger. Vanpools have reserved parking nearest the entrance. Although one of the perks of being a driver is use of the van during evenings and weekends, drivers must pay USAA the going IRS mileage reimbursement rate, and may not use the vans to transport anyone other than immediate family members. Drivers receive a fuel card from USAA to cover the cost of gas; other maintenance needs are the responsibility of USAA fleet managers.

Most vanpools have two or three pick-up locations, most often churches or retail centers. USAA has formal agreements with landowners to use their parking areas for vanpool passenger parking. In some cases, passengers can pay a premium and be picked up at their homes. Although most vans are scheduled to depart USAA at 5:15 PM, drivers will call up to latecomers to determine if they are on their way, and wait up to 15 minutes. The company also offers a guaranteed ride home program to vanpool participants.
The program costs approximately $500,000 annually. The lowest passenger fares are $21 every two weeks. Drivers do not have to pay. Fares are based on operating expenses, and vary by zone; all passengers within a zone pay the same fare, regardless of ridership on their particular van.

Payments can be deducted directly from employees' paychecks. USAA vanpools in different cities charge different fares. Fares are reassessed on an as-needed basis.

The program is publicized annually, especially during the ozone season between May and October. Publicity events include a vanpool fair, media events, commercials on the in-house television system, and article in company newspapers. The vanpool program distributes information regarding potential cost savings for participation in the vanpool, which is estimated at $5,200 to $7,100 per year. There are no parking cost savings, as USAA provides free parking to employees. However, the state of Texas allows a ten percent insurance discount to vanpool participants. The USAA vanpool program recently had their best safety record ever: two minor accidents in 1.7 million miles driven. USAA's driver training emphasizes safety and defensive driving, and although the USAA phone number is on the side of the vans, USAA receives very few complaints about drivers. (Longo, 2001)

Spokane, Washington - The Boeing Company

The Spokane plant of aircraft manufacturer Boeing employs 600 people, 160 of who use the company's 12 vanpools to commute. The vanpool program has been in existence for ten years. Boeing does not subsidize the vanpool program directly; however, Boeing gives all employees who do not drive to work alone a $25 monthly subsidy.

The 14-passenger vans are owned by the Spokane Transit Agency (STA). STA sets a fee for monthly usage, which is divided among the passengers; the more riders a vanpool has, the lower the cost per rider. The highest fare is approximately $45 per month; these riders travel over 80 miles one-way. There are no parking fees at the Spokane facility. Both drivers and passengers pay for the vanpool.

When a group of employees requests a new vanpool, STA checks the potential driver's license, driving record for the past three years, and insurability. (Although maintenance and insurance are handled by STA, drivers must carry insurance in their own names as evidence that they are insurable.) Drivers must also watch a driver training video and pass a short test. Drivers are not permitted to use the vehicles during evenings and weekends. Drivers are responsible for filling the gas tanks and keeping the vans clean, as well as providing off-street parking. Vans have more than one driver.

Passengers are picked up at centralized points, usually park-and-ride lots or retail parking lots. Vanpools can have no more than three pick-up points; most have two. Passengers can be picked up or dropped off at their homes only if they live on the route.

For safety reasons, vanpools have reserved parking at the facility. Previously vans parked in regular spaces next to employee cars, but now they have larger, reserved spaces.

Beverly R. Johnson, Human Resources Generalist, described the program as "grass roots." Although Washington State has a commute trip reduction law that mandates the facility to have a trip reduction program, the program was in place before that requirement. Most publicity is through word of mouth, although there are also bulletin boards with information on commuting. New vanpools are formed when employees request an additional route, or when the waiting list for one vanpool is large enough to accommodate a second vanpool. Waiting lists are maintained by the drivers.

Chevy Chase, Maryland - GEICO Direct

GEICO Direct, an automobile insurance company, has a Transit Incentive Program that includes operation of seven vanpools. Approximately 70 to 75 employees ride vanpools.

The 15-seat vans are owned by GEICO and driven by employees. When employees request permission to become a driver, they must allow GEICO to check their Motor Vehicle Record, a driving record that reveals whether they have had tickets or accidents. Although technically spouses are not supposed to drive the vans, they must have a Motor Vehicle Record check as well, on the chance that they may drive the van in an emergency. Generally, however, drivers are not allowed to use the vans for personal travel on evenings or weekends. The only exception is for errands performed along their usual route. Each vanpool is required to have at least one back-up driver; most have several.

Vanpool drivers are responsible for keeping the van's tank full and cleaning the vehicle. Any other maintenance work, including routine oil changes, is performed by GEICO's fleet maintenance personnel. Drivers are expected to report any maintenance needs to the fleet manager.

Vanpool drivers pick up their passengers at a central point, usually a park-and-ride or other commuter lot. In several cases, there is an agreement with a shopping center owner that passengers can park in one area of the lot. Although the vanpool does not pay the shopping center for all-day use, the incentive for the shopping center is that many passengers will shop there on their way home from work.

Vanpool passengers pay a rate of 5.1 cents per mile. For the longest-distance commuters, this works out to approximately $35 to $40 every two weeks. Fees are deducted directly from the employee's paycheck on a post-tax basis. Vanpool drivers do not have to pay. Although this is more expensive than GEICO's parking, which costs employees $10 per month, the main incentive for vanpoolers is to use the HOV lanes on congested Interstate 270. In addition, vanpools receive free preferential parking, closest to the building. According to Margie Robertson, TRIP Coordinator, GEICO subsidizes the vanpool program, but exact figures were not available.

Several years ago, GEICO had nine vanpools. According to Ms. Robertson, this number fell to seven with a major workforce relocation to Fredericksburg. In addition, with so many employees gone from the Chevy Chase facility, the previously severe parking crunch was reduced. Also, the widespread use of flextime makes it more difficult to coordinate vanpools. However, many employees still prefer to avoid traffic and wear-and-tear on their cars through the vanpools. Ms. Robertson noted that she had previously commuted by both carpool and Metro (the region's heavy rail service), but found carpools too unreliable and Metro too expensive. (Robertson, 2001)

San Diego, California - University of California at San Diego

The University of California at San Diego (UCSD) has run a vanpool program since 1978. Faculty, staff, and students who work at UCSD are all eligible. The program currently has 21 vans and a ridership of 310.

UCSD's Department of Parking and Transportation owns the 21 15-passenger vans and seven spares. A UCSD employee takes care of regular maintenance and cleaning; drivers are responsible for filling the tank and reporting any potential problems. The university is self-insured.

Employees volunteer to drive; they must obtain a copy of their driving record from the DMV (for a $5 fee), as well as pass a 40-minute physical (paid for by UCSD). Potential drivers also take a two-hour driving class from a UCSD DMV instructors. There are generally three to five drivers per van. Drivers are not allowed to use the van for personal errands. They are covered by UCSD insurance when driving to and from campus.

Vanpool fees range from $54 to $108 per month, with most routes costing between $60 and $70. Fares are based on distance; the longest route is over 70 miles one-way. Drivers do not have to pay; if driving duties are shared during the month, the drivers work out the savings between themselves. Also, students receive a $30 discount if they pay for the vanpool on a quarterly basis. For regular employees (not students), up to $65 can be paid on a pre-tax basis. According to Penny Baxter, Vanpool Coordinator, the program is financially self-sufficient. Vanpool fees are not much higher than parking fees, which range from $38 per month for students to $100 per month for reserved faculty spaces.

Passengers are picked up in the morning and dropped off in the evening at designated points. Many of these are in retail areas, park-and-ride lots, or churches. Ms. Baxter mentioned that churches are generally very cooperative, since their lots are generally full only once per week. Agreements with the retailers are usually very informal.

One difficulty in administering the program is that most vanpool passengers have different destinations. Not only is the campus relatively spread out, but some employees work off-campus. Therefore, most vanpools have three or four drop-points within the campus. However, the situation presents another problem: the difficulty of reserving spaces. Ms. Baxter mentioned an incident in which there were two reserved vanpool spaces at one campus building with an acute parking shortage. One vanpool driver went on vacation and the back-up driver, who worked in another building, parked at that building instead. The office received a number of angry phone calls asking why there was a vacant but reserved space. As a result, vanpools do not have reserved spaces, and have to compete with other drivers for the limited parking.

Ms. Baxter pointed to three reasons why the program is not more popular, despite the on-campus parking shortage, increasing congestion, and HOV lane time savings. First, the dispersed nature of the campus means that many people would not be able to walk to their office once they arrive on campus. Second, university management does not seem to be very supportive. Ms. Baxter mentioned an example in which a van driver had to quit the program because her new employer, a highly placed university official, refused to allow her to leave at the same time every day. Third, a number of employees have adopted flex-time schedules, and all but one of the vanpools keeps a regular 8 AM to 4:30 PM schedule.

The program is publicized through e-mail, flyers, new employee orientation, and the vans themselves, which bear the department's name and web site. There is also a program in which potential riders can ride for three days free on a trial basis. While Ms. Baxter did not have figures available on the number of people who had tried this option, she said that everyone who has tried it has become a regular rider. She also said that she would be willing to assist potential riders in convincing insurance companies to lower employee rates for driving less.

Boston, Massachusetts - CARAVAN for Commuters

CARAVAN for Commuters is a rideshare organization that serves the state of Massachusetts, primarily the Boston area. They coordinate approximately 150 vanpools in the state. CARAVAN assists employers in establishing vanpools.

According to Susan O'Brien, Operations Manager, CARAVAN generally requires employer involvement only for the initial stages of vanpool formation. CARAVAN uses employee names and addresses to create a map showing the distribution of where employees live, and publicizes the potential vanpool among employees. Depending on the size of the company and the willingness of the employer, CARAVAN can also expand vanpool matching to other employers. Ms. O'Brien noted that some companies, primarily in the high-tech field, request that only their own employees ride on a vanpool, out of concern that proprietary information might be divulged.

CARAVAN then meets with potential vanpoolers to discuss logistics and payment. CARAVAN works with two third party vanpool providers, and allows the group to decide which one to use. The vanpool driver signs the lease.

CARAVAN's ongoing support of vanpools includes recruiting new riders, locating parking (a difficult task in congested downtown Boston), and distributing the insurance cards that allow riders to receive discounted auto insurance.
One example of a CARAVAN-organized vanpool runs from South Yarmouth to Boston. The route is 85 miles one-way, or a two-hour drive. Helene Murdock, a vanpool rider for over 14 years, became the coordinator for her vanpool several years ago.

She reported that her contacts with CARAVAN have been very positive. For example, when the vanpool ridership dropped several years ago to only nine riders, CARAVAN assisted in recruiting new riders. Even though the vanpool is currently full at 14 riders, Ms. Murdock receives a weekly mailing from CARAVAN listing all new prospective riders who live in the area and keep similar schedules. Similarly, when VPSI, the vanpool provider, expressed concern about vandalism incidents in the previous van parking location, CARAVAN helped Ms. Murdock locate a new parking space near her office. Had the parking space been further away, the vanpool would have had to alter their drop-off protocol.

Ms. Murdock said that the group's monthly fees are just over $1,381 per month. This includes the lease fees, gas, cellular phone fees of $55, and a $2 snack fee. Another rider figures the cost per passenger and distributes bills, which are paid directly to her. She maintains a separate checking account exclusively for tracking vanpool expenses. Vanpool fees are divided on the basis of number of days each person is a passenger in the van. Because six riders rotate driving duties, those six persons pay lower monthly fees.

As CARAVAN suggests, the South Yarmouth vanpool maintains written rules covering such topics as what the vanpool does in cases of early dismissal and winter storms.

Services That Support Implementation

Rideshare Organizations

In addition to rideshare matching for carpool and vanpool programs, rideshare organizations can assist employers with other aspects of establishing vanpool programs, from helping employers decide which type of program is right for them to identifying third-party vanpool providers. Most types of assistance are provided free of charge. A list of regional rideshare organizations in included in the Appendix.

Local Governments and Transit Agencies

Services to help employers implement vanpool programs are provided by many regional and local government entities. Transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), city and county transportation agencies, transportation management associations (TMAs), and transportation management organizations (TMOs) throughout the U.S. provide assistance to employers in starting and maintaining transportation demand management programs such as vanpools. They often are a great source of information for employers about options to help implement a vanpool and local programs that support employer initiatives. An employer can decide to hire an organization to help establish a program, or simply obtain preliminary information.

Guaranteed Ride Home Programs

One of the barriers that prevents some employees from taking transit or a vanpool to work is the fear that they will not be able to get home quickly in the event of an personal emergency, such as picking up a sick child from school, or working unscheduled overtime. Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) programs provide commuters who regularly carpool, vanpool, bike, walk or take transit to work with a reliable ride home when emergencies arise. GRH programs are generally considered a support program for broader programs such as vanpool. See the briefing paper on Guaranteed Ride Home Programs for further information.

Park-and-Ride Lots

For potential vanpoolers who do not live in immediate proximity, a park-and-ride lot may be a good meeting place. The availability of park-and-ride lots may encourage vanpool drivers who would otherwise be inconvenienced by picking up and dropping off passengers at their homes. Vanpools can also work out parking arrangements with owners of other parking lots, such as shopping centers or churches.

ASSOCIATIONS AND CONTACTS

This section includes contacts for employers looking for additional information about setting up a vanpool program. For additional information on setting up a tax-free or pre-tax deduction program for vanpool benefits, see the briefing paper on Tax Benefits.

Information Clearinghouses

Association for Commuter Transportation
P.O. Box 15542
Washington, DC 20003
Tel: 202-393-3497
Fax: 202-546-2196

Act@act-hq.com
www.ACTweb.org

The Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT) is a membership organization that promotes commuter choice and transportation demand management. They sponsor annual conferences on commuting, and publish educational materials for employers.

National Transportation Demand Management (TDM) and Telework Clearinghouse
Center for Urban Transportation Research
University of South Florida
4202 E. Fowler Avenue
CUT100
Tampa, FL 33620-5375
Tel: 813-974-3120

http://www.nctr.usf.edu/clearinghouse

The National TDM and Telework Clearinghouse is a compendium of research and information on TDM and telecommuting. TDM refers to a set of programs and policies that are designed to make the best use of existing transportation resources without additional infrastructure investment. Much of the Clearinghouse information is available electronically. The site contains information for employers interested in establishing trip reduction programs and commuter benefits.

Rideshare Organizations

As discussed above, there are rideshare organizations in many regions. If an area is not listed in the Appendix, the MPO for the region may offer more assistance on locating rideshare programs. The appropriate MPO can be located through the Association for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (202-457-0710 x19); a list of MPOs with web pages is available at www.ampo.org/mposnet_old.html.

Vanpool Companies

Many different vanpool companies operate in different parts of the U.S. Employers should contact their regional rideshare agency for information on specific operators available in a particular location.

Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative

For more information on the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative, contact the Commuter Choice Hotline at 888-856-3131, or see www.commuterchoice.gov

Emissions and Transportation Benefits

Reducing the frequency that commuters drive alone generates numerous benefits. Vanpool programs can be an effective way to reduce vehicle travel and associated problems: emissions of air pollutants and greenhouse gases, traffic congestion, and high parking demand.

Each vanpool removes on average 13 cars from rush hour traffic. A study completed in Puget Sound, Washington, found that the city's 1,450 vanpools eliminate more than 11,000 vehicles and 22,000 driving trips every workday (WSDOT, 2000). This reduces the annual mileage traveled by single occupant vehicles by 2.7 million miles annually. One established vanpool has been found to remove up to 160,000 pounds of polluting emissions per year. Puget Sound's fleet of vanpools yields annual reductions in greenhouse gases of an estimated 63,475 tons. The more passengers in a vehicle, the lower the energy use and CO_2 emissions per passenger mile. For this reason, the CO_2 emissions resulting from a daily commute by vanpool are significantly lower than if commuting by car.

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APPENDIX: COMMUTER RIDESHARE PROGRAMS

The table below lists some of the third-party commuter rideshare programs in the country. Employers located in areas not listed below should contact the MPO for their region to determine if others exist.

Location	Sponsoring Agency	Type of Agency	Contact Info	Website?
Atlanta, GA	Commuter Connections	Rideshare sponsored by Atlanta Regional Commission	87-RIDEFIND	www.commuteconnections.com
Albany, NY	Capital District Commuter Register	Rideshare	518-458-2164	www.commuter-register.org
Augusta, ME	Go Augusta	Rideshare	800-280-RIDE	www.goaugusta.org
Birmingham, AL	CommuteSmart Rideshare	Rideshare	800-826-RIDE	www.commutesmartrideshare.com
Boston and Massachusetts	CARAVAN for Commuters	Rideshare	888-4-COMMUTE	www.commute.com
Contra Costa County, CA	Contra Costa County Commute Alternative Network	Public consortium	510-215-3035	www.traks.org/incentive/guarantee/incentive.html
Denver, CO	Ride Arrangers	Rideshare sponsored by Denver Regional Council of Governments	303-455-1000	www.drcog.org/ridearrangers
Detroit, MI	Southeast Michigan Council of Governments	Council of Governments	313-961-4266	www.semcog.org/index.html
Houston, TX	METROVan	Rideshare	713-224-RIDE	www.hou-metro.harris.tx.us/METVAN.HTM
Kansas City, MO	Mid-America Regional Council	Rideshare	816/842-RIDE	rideshare.marc.org
Las Vegas, NV	Regional Transportation Commission	MPO	702-228-RIDE	www.catride.com/catmatch/
Long Island, NY	Long Island RideSharing	Rideshare	631-737-CARS	www.737cars.com
Miami, FL	South Florida Commuter Services	Rideshare	800-234-RIDE	www.commuterservices.com/sf/
Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN	Metro Council	MPO/ Transit Agency	651-602-1602	www.metrocommuterservices.org/index.asp
Morris County, NJ	TransOptions	Rideshare	973-267-7600	www.transoptions.org
Nashville, TN	Regional Transportation Authority	MPO/ Transit Agency	615-862-8833	www.rta-ride.org/ridehome/ridepolicy.htm
New Hampshire	NewHampshire DOT	State Department of Transportation	800-462-8707	www.state.nh.us/dot/rideshare
New Haven, CT	Rideworks	Rideshare	800-ALL-RIDE	www.rideworks.com
New York, NY	Commuter Link	Rideshare	718-886-1343	www.commuterlink.com
Phoenix, AZ	Valley Metro	Transit Agency	602-262-7242	www.valleymetro.maricopa.gov

Location	Sponsoring Agency	Type of Agency	Contact Info	Website?
Portland, ME	RideShare	Rideshare	800-280-RIDE	www.ridesharemaine.org
Rhode Island	Rhode Island Public Transit Authority	Transit Agency	888-88-RIPTA	www.ripta.com
San Diego, CA	San Diego Commute	Rideshare sponsored by San Diego Association of Governments	800-COMMUTE	www.sdcommute.com/van_pool .html
San Francisco Bay Area, CA	RIDES for Bay Area Commuters	Rideshare	800-755-POOL	www.rides.org
San Mateo County, CA	Peninsula Traffic Congestion Relief Alliance	Public/non-profit Joint Powers Association	650-994-7924	www.commute.org/
Seattle, WA	Metro Rideshare Operations	County	206-625-4500	transit.metrokc.gov/van-car/van-car.html
Stamford, CT	Metropool	Rideshare	800-346-3743	www.metropool.com
Tallahassee, FL	Commuter Services of North Florida	Rideshare	888-454-RIDE	tmi.cob.fsu.edu/commute/#
Tampa, FL	Bay Area Commuter Services	Rideshare	813.282.8200	www.tampabayrideshare.org
Vermont	Vermont Public Transit Authority	Transit Agency	800-685-RIDE	www.vpta.net
Vermont and New Hampshire	Upper Valley Rideshare	Rideshare	802-295-1824	www.uppervalleyrideshare.com/ /uvrs.grh.html
Washington, DC	Commuter Connections	MPO	800-745-RIDE	www.mwcog.org/commuter
Windsor, CT	The RideShare Company	Rideshare	800-972-3279	www.rideshare.com

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

This guidance document and other information about the Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative are available at www.commuterchoice.gov or by calling the Commuter Choice voicemail request line at (888) 856-3131.

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