

Vanpool participants extol program's benefits

by Dan Bender
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Associates who want to save money on yearly transportation expenses to and from work can do so through vanpooling.

Currently, there are 14 vanpools that transport nearly 200 DSCC and DFAS associates to and from work each day. Of those, nine are from the Dayton/Springfield area, three are from Newark and one each travel from Buckeye Lake and Lancaster.

The vanpools to DSCC have been coordinated since 1995 by RideSolutions, a nonprofit program of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission. The third Wednesday of each month, RideSolutions has a booth in the DSCC cafeteria.

David Abel, a project coordinator for RideSolutions, and Bonnie Love, a program assistant, were at the booth recently to answer questions and raise awareness of vanpool opportunities in Delaware/Sunbury, Dayton and Lancaster.

Steve Pendell, an inventory manager in the DSCC Commodities group, has driven a van from the Dayton area since 1996. He transports himself and 13 passengers 94 miles each way, leaving at about 4:45 a.m. and arriving at DSCC at 6:30 every morning.

Pendell, whose passengers live in cities including Bellbrook, Centerville and Xenia, said the benefits of

participating in a vanpool are significant.

"It helps people stay where they live and not disrupt their lives by moving and pulling their kids out of school," he noted.

Savings on vehicle

parts far outweigh the fee cost.

According to AAA estimates, the monthly cost of a 20-mile daily round trip to work is \$158 to drive alone, \$79 to carpool and \$62 to vanpool.

In addition, associates can receive extra money by vanpooling. Love said federal employees who vanpool receive up to \$65 a month through the Mass Transportation Incentive Program,

which encourages the use of alternative forms of transportation, such as Central Ohio Transportation Agency buses or vanpooling, to get to work.

A common complaint from people who don't use vanpools is that the travel times do not match their preferred work schedule. Abel said travel times can present a challenge, but he added that they are flexible.

"For a vanpool to work, compromise is essential," he said. "People need to get together and compromise on the time to make things work."

Pendell agreed, saying some of his riders had expressed reservations when the vanpool first started, but that they have been "pleasantly pleased" by the service.

Hudson said cooperation on his van worked out pretty well after an initial debate of "how can we get 15 people to agree on when and where to meet and when to leave."

In the event an emergency arises or a vanpool participant has to leave early or work late, Pendell noted that RideSolutions offers the Guaranteed Ride Home Program, which provides reimbursement of up to 90 percent of the cost of a taxi ride home, including a 15 percent tip. It can be used up to four times a year at no cost to registered vanpool participants, but "no one has had to use it yet," Pendell said of his riders.

Anyone interested in participating in a vanpool or other ride-sharing opportunity can call RideSolutions at (888) 742-RIDE.

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expenses and mileage are also benefits, he added. "That's a 170-mile round trip not having to be put on your car," he said. "There's a lot of benefits that way."

Art Hudson, a lead standardization activity engineer in the DSCC Operations Support Group who travels from Kettering each day, agreed that the benefits of vanpooling are numerous.

"There's less wear and tear on my personal vehicle and the cost to go back and forth is relatively small," he said. "You cannot drive a car (to and from work) for that kind of money."

Abel said the goal of vanpooling is to reduce the number of single-occupant vehicles on the road.

"It reduces traffic congestion, it reduces harmful pollution such as vehicle emissions, and it can save you a ton of money on your monthly commuter costs," he said.

Participants pay a monthly fee, usually about \$100 to \$150, to cover the cost of gasoline, insurance and other related expenses, but the savings to partici-