

Ride-sharing plan proves to be energy saver

By Dennis Coffman
staff writer

Many of the energy-saving measures put into effect during the energy crunch that hit the nation back in the early 70s remain. But the 55-mile-per-hour speed limit is, in reality, a 60-65 mile-per-hour speed limit; alternative fuels, such as solar and coal gasification, have not lived up to their promise; and alternative modes of transportation still take a back seat to the automobile.

But one energy-saving idea was good then and it's good now.

It's ride-sharing: two or more persons sharing the same vehicle.

Ride-sharers can enjoy the comfort of private transportation without the costs in fuel, wear and insurance associated with one person driving back and forth to work alone.

And, now that there are regional agencies set up to provide the van, all the ride-sharer needs to provide is a body and a monthly fee.

RIDE SHARING In the seven counties around Detroit benefits everybody involved, from the driver who doesn't have to drive, to the company whose employees have a reliable, inexpensive way of getting to work; to the environment, which has fewer cars polluting it; to future generations, whose oil supply will last a little longer.

By now, most area motorists have driven past one of the 100 billboards urging them to call 983-RIDE for a free, computerized car pool and van pool rider matching service.

RideShare is the matching service provided by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) and funded by the Michigan Department of Transportation and the federal government.

It works with businesses to customize a van pool or car pool, based on the employee's home address, working hours, commuting patterns and the location of his company.

'It's clean and dependable. I don't have to wait in line for buses. And there's no standing up, like on a crowded bus. The van costs only about half of what the bus costs.'

— John Stewart
Livonia RideShare

"IT SAVES tons of pollution, gallons of gas," said Anita Ste. Marie, acting RideShare manager.

"It's been in effect five years now. The average daily round trip is 78 miles and the number of passengers is 12-14. A contractor, Vanpool Services, leases the vans from a dealer, then loans them to RideShare van pools," said Ste. Marie.

Van pool riders compare van pools not only to commuting by car, but also to taking the bus.

John Stewart, of Livonia, who rides with a van pool in Livonia, found that taking the van was a big improvement over taking a SEMCOG bus. Both pick up and deliver at the same Farmer Jack parking lot, Levan Road and Five Mile Road.

"It's clean and dependable," said Stewart. "I don't have to wait in line for buses. And there's no standing up, like on a crowded bus. The van costs only about half of what the bus costs."

Stewart said he would have to pay \$4 per day for a round trip bus ride from downtown Detroit to Livonia, while the van pool generally runs under \$50, depending on the number of riders. Stewart was met by his daughter after the van arrived, right on time, at 8:45 p.m.

"IT'S RELAXING," said Jean Kearney, of Canton. "I sit back, or talk or

take a snooze. I like it. It's economical, it's fun, better than driving and having to fight rush hour traffic."

Kearney said she chose to join the Livonia van pool, even though she has to drive to the meeting point from Canton, because the van pool hours match her working hours — 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. She has been riding the van pool since November 1984.

Jim Rembecki, of Livonia, has been riding the same Livonia van pool since it was begun one and one-half years ago.

"It's quiet, convenient, less expensive and dependable," he said.

Like Kearney, he went from the van to his car, which he had parked in the Five Mile Road-Levan Road lot that morning.

"VAN POOLS have eliminated a lot of their riders' commuting costs," said Ste. Marie. "Commuters save gas and get a reduction in their personal car insurance, while riding in a fully-equipped, air conditioned vehicle to work. Our only considerations are safety. The route, pickup points, times are up to the van pool passengers."

Ste. Marie said RideShare, which is funded by the federal government and the Michigan Department of Transportation,

"did a lot of work with employees."

"The program is constantly growing," she said. "The matchmaking service is free to the public. The only restriction is that the van pool passengers must be employed adults."

The impetus for forming a carpool or van pool can come either from employer or employees.

RideShare provides application forms for employees who want to participate. It also provides employees with printouts of the names and phone numbers of others who live in their area, the hours the employees work and in what area they work.

THE MATCH LIST even indicates whether the person is a smoker or a non-smoker.

From the match list, the employee can determine if there are enough persons living and working in his area to form a carpool or van pool.

A van pool can also be organized by a person who wants to be a driver. He can recruit nine or more passengers and send an application to van pool Services, Inc. If the driver's application is approved, he gets a van from Van Pool Services and begins the van pool.

Insurance on the van is provided by

Van Pool Services, which also pays for repairs and maintenance.

The driver of the van is allowed to take the van home after he drops off his passengers.

Each passenger pays the driver a monthly fare, based on operating expenses, fixed costs and the cost of gasoline.

THE TOTAL is divided by the number of passengers and the resulting amount is the monthly fare per passenger.

Passengers typically pay about \$50 a month to the van pool. An average 40-mile round trip in a 15-passenger van would range from \$45 with 14 passengers to \$58 with 10 passengers.

Van poolers can save in several ways: lowered insurance costs on their own vehicle; reduced wear on their own vehicle; parking fees, if the employer has provided space for van pool vans.

Depending on the choice of the passengers, the van will either pick riders up at their door, or at a central meeting point, such as a supermarket parking lot, where passengers can leave their cars or have someone drop them.

There are 77 RideShare van pools, called "Michivans." The average daily round trip distance is 78 miles. There

are 60 15-passenger vanspools, 16 12-passenger vanspools and one eight-passenger vanspool.

RIDESHARE EXPECTS to have 100 Michivans traveling the seven-county SEMCOG region, increasing by nearly 25 percent the number of people who engage in van pooling, which now stands at 999.

Car pooling uses the same concept as vanspooling. However, the smaller car pool groups allow for even greater flexibility.

With car pooling, one person may do all the driving in his own car and simply collect a weekly or monthly fee from riders. Or car poolers can share the driving duties equally.

RideShare provides the same matchlist to car poolers that it does to van poolers.

But whether the commuter chooses a car pool or a van pool, the savings are impressive. The 18 million Americans who share rides save the nation 14 million gallons of gasoline per day, or 3.5 billion gallons a year.

Over the years, nearly 3,000 car pools with more than 8,000 commuters have been formed with the use of match lists distributed in southeast Michigan.



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