



Flexible Vanpool FAQ for Vanpool Operators

Background

Commuter Connections developed and introduced “Flexible Vanpool” to help vanpools fill seats left empty due to the emergence of hybrid work schedules. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, commuters riding in vanpools did so with relative consistency five days a week. Post-pandemic, the work from home and commuting landscape has greatly changed; many previous vanpoolers are now teleworking 2-3 days per week and are driving alone to work on commuting days. This is clearly an undesirable predicament for vanpooling, traffic congestion, and the environment.

The challenge the vanpool culture/industry is facing, and that Commuter Connections hopes to change, is the perception vanpooling is not a viable commute option with a hybrid schedule. With Flexible Vanpool, the aim is to facilitate a convenient way for commuters to try vanpooling while on a hybrid schedule, either in real-time or by reserving a seat in advance.

These FAQs seek to answer some basic questions about how Vanpool Operators and Coordinators can participate in the Flexible Vanpool program to increase ridership and potentially add new rostered riders to vanpools.

What is Flexible Vanpool?

- Flexible Vanpool is a new Commuter Connections program feature that helps Vanpool Operators and Coordinators advertise open seats in their vanpool(s) to the public. Enrolling a van in Flexible Vanpool means the public can request to join a vanpool in real-time or reserve a seat for a one-time ride on the van in advance.

How do I enroll a vanpool into Flexible Vanpool?

- Vanpools can be programmed into the Commuter Connections TDM System by local rideshare coordinators or Commuter Connections staff. As part of the vanpool enrollment process, Vanpool Coordinators and Operators can elect to advertise their van as “flexible.” (Important: Both the Vanpool Operator AND the Vanpool Coordinator must approve the flexible option for vanpools.) This will allow the van to display a cost-per-ride to the public. Other information needed for the enrollment process includes origin and destinations, departure and arrival times, days of operation, and vanpool Coordinator contact information.
- If more than five vanpools need to be uploaded, please see Appendix A on Page 3 for a sample of an Excel spreadsheet that can be submitted for Commuter Connections staff to upload into the system.

Is there a cost for enrolling vanpools into Flexible Vanpool?

- No. Commuter Connections provides this service for free to all vanpools operating in the Washington, DC region.

What if I need to update or remove a vanpool record after its published?

- Contact Commuter Connections staff at commutersupport@mwkog.org to request information modifications or to remove a vanpool from Flexible Vanpool.

What does the public see when viewing a vanpool using the traditional TDM System vs. the CarpoolNow real-time matching app?

- If matched with a vanpool using the traditional TDM System, a member of the public will see the name of a vanpool; the vanpool's origin and destination addresses; the work shift hours of vanpool members; contact information for the vanpool Coordinator; and the cost for a one-time ride.
- If matched with a vanpool using the real-time matching app CarpoolNow, a member of the public will see the name of the vanpool; its current location on a map; the estimated time until the vanpool will be at the rider's destination; and the cost for a one-time ride. If the Vanpool Coordinator agrees to pick up the rider, contact information will be shared.

How does a member of the public reserve a Flexible Vanpool seat for a one-time ride?

- Upon learning the cost of a one-time ride from a matchlist produced by the Commuter Connections TDM System, a member of the public can contact the Vanpool Coordinator using the contact information displayed in the matchletter to book a seat for a one-time ride on a specified date.

How does a member of the public request a Flexible Vanpool ride in real-time?

- Real-time vanpooling requires use of the CarpoolNow mobile application. A Vanpool Coordinator – while NOT driving – must start the vanpool trip in the app. The Coordinator will then be permitted to view any commuters who are requesting rides along the vanpool's route. A Coordinator may choose to pickup riders in real-time using the geolocation services included in the app. Riders will be told upfront the cost of a ride, if any, and agree to pay the billed amount prior to accepting the ride offer.

Does Commuter Connections facilitate payments?

- No. Commuter Connections offers the free technology to connect vanpools with potential riders, but the program is not responsible for collecting payments. However, an enhancement is currently in programming stages that will permit Vanpool Operators to link riders to their respective online payment portal if one exists. This will be a generic field so that Operators may link to whatever service they use (e.g., PayPal, Stripe, custom portal, etc.).

To allow for a free trial, can a vanpool enroll as a Flexible Vanpool without requiring payment on behalf of one-time riders?

- Yes. The Vanpool Operator or Coordinator would simply need to indicate \$0 for a one-time ride when enrolling the vanpool.

Is there a cap to the number of rides an individual may take on the vanpool?

- Each Vanpool Operator and Coordinator may implement a policy limiting the number of flexible rides an individual may take on a specific vanpool. Commuter Connections recommends a 10-ride limit before requiring an individual to formally register as a permanent vanpool rider.

Appendix A: Vanpool Import Table

Coordinator	John Doe
Phone	555-555-5555
Email	jd@noemail.com
Origin	123 Main St., Anywhere, DC 20000
Stop 1	456 High St, Anywhere, DC 20001
Stop 2	n/a
Destination (workplace)	789 1 st St., Anywhere, DC 20002
Shift Start*	9:00am
Shift End*	5:00pm
Seat Cost	\$10.00
Vanpool Status	Active
Total Seats	7
Operating Days	M, Tu, W, Th, F
Public (visible) comments	Meet at P&R and end at DOD
Private Comments	Need 2 more riders before delivery

*Shift start and end times are relative to when the vanpool arrives to the destination (e.g. workplace) and when the vanpool leaves the destination to return to the origin.