

Washington Policy Center's 31 Facts on Vanpools

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As traffic congestion and the financial and environmental costs of commuting continue to rise, a once overlooked transit alternative has quietly become the most *effective* option for many motorists: vanpooling.

Sharing a commute through a vanpool has several advantages:

- Vanpools reduce parking and fuel costs
- Vanpools allow access to HOV lanes
- Vanpools consume fewer resources
- Vanpools are cheaper, more flexible and faster than other mass transit choices

Regional growth projections and travel patterns show there is a large undeveloped market in vanpool demand. Yet, expanding vanpools is typically not a priority for public officials as other, less efficient transit modes are marketed and funded. Vanpools are not for everyone and they cannot effectively serve short, intra-city transit demand. Ridership figures, costs and market potential in the Puget Sound region, however, show that vanpools are a successful and more efficient way to move long-distance, intercity commuters.

Instead of spending more public money to connect cities with costly high speed rail, commuter rail, light rail and express bus services, policymakers should look to vanpools as the most efficient alternative.

Here are 31 interesting facts on vanpools from an in-depth, four part Policy Brief by Washington Policy Center, called *Vanpools in the Puget Sound Region, The case for expanding vanpool programs to move the most people for the least cost*:

1. The largest public vanpool program in Washington and in the United States is King County's, serving more than two million annual trips with 826 vans in operation.
2. In 2008, there were about 2,360 vanpools with an average load of 8.14 passengers per van across Washington State.
3. In the Puget Sound there are six transit agencies that provide vanpool services: Community Transit, Intercity Transit, Island Transit, King County Metro, Kitsap Transit and Pierce Transit.
4. Puget Sound transit agencies provide more than 1,700 daily vanpools and serve about 4.8 million passenger trips per year.

5. Nationally, vanpool programs report an average daily round trip within a range of 48-108 miles.
6. Vanpool passengers are charged monthly fares that vary depending on the group size, fuel prices and distance travelled. Fares can range between \$60 and \$200 per month.
7. In Pierce County, a vanpool group of nine, driving about 70 miles per work day, pays about \$87 per month, per passenger.
8. An average vanpool passenger traveling between Tacoma and Seattle would save about 28 percent in annual commuting costs compared to taking a bus, 45 percent compared to taking Sounder Commuter Rail and 61 percent compared to driving a car.
9. Puget Sound vanpool agencies reported passenger demand grew by 52 percent between 2000 and 2008.
10. Despite a global recession and unemployment rates doubling to nearly 10 percent the following year, passenger demand in the first quarter of 2009 grew to about 1.5 million trips, a 16 percent increase from the first quarter of 2008.
11. Sound Transit is spending more than thirty years and nearly \$40 billion to build a system that will only serve about 2.4 percent of all trips.
12. Traffic congestion in the Seattle region is predicted to double and reach the levels of present day Los Angeles by 2030, with or without light rail.
13. Puget Sound area vanpools served four times more passengers for one-seventh the cost of Sound Transit's Sounder Commuter Rail. King County's vanpool program alone carries more riders than Sound Transit's entire commuter rail, and for \$1 billion less.
14. Puget Sound area vanpools are 2½ times more efficient than Sound Transit's Express bus program.
15. In the seven years between 2000 and 2007, the six vanpool agencies in the Puget Sound area spent \$50 million in capital infrastructure. This is 18 times less than the same six bus agencies, 12 times less than Sound Transit's Express bus system and 20 times less than the Sounder Commuter Rail.
16. Vanpools are very inexpensive to operate. In between 2000 and 2007, the six regional vanpool agencies spent \$114 million to serve 837 million passenger miles. This means operating costs were only .14 cents per mile.
17. When accounting for ridership and distance traveled, vanpools cost between three and five times less to operate than light rail, buses or commuter rail.
18. Taxpayers pay about 80 percent of operating costs for light rail, buses and commuter rail, while users only cover 20 percent. In King County, vanpool passengers pay about 82 percent of operating costs for the vanpool program, while taxpayers only have to fund the remaining 18 percent.

19. Between 2002 and 2007, the public paid about \$1.26 for every vanpool passenger trip made in the Puget Sound region. In comparison, the public paid \$5.13 for every passenger trip on a Sound Transit bus and \$10.66 for every passenger trip made on the Sounder Commuter rail.
20. Vanpool fares would only need to rise about 50 percent to make vanpools self sufficient. On the other hand, Sound Transit's bus fares would need to rise about 259 percent, and nearly 200 percent for the Sounder Commuter rail, to break even.
21. Puget Sound area commuters traveled an average of 12.2 miles to work in 1999 and 12.8 miles in 2006, a five percent increase in seven years, despite government regulations to force compact development. Between 1980 and 2000, commuters who cross county lines to get to work increased from 10.4 percent to 16.1 percent. As commuters move further away from employment centers, transportation costs grow and demand for intercity rideshare programs like vanpooling becomes more attractive.
22. In 2003, a Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) study found the region could increase vanpool use up to 11,870 vans by 2030, a 600 percent increase from what currently exists today.
23. Increasing vanpools by 600 percent by 2030 would only cost the public about \$2.5 billion in taxes and move 20 percent more people than Sound Transit's \$23 billion light rail expansion.
24. The average passenger load for a vanpool is 8.14 riders per van, so vanpools in the Puget Sound could carry about 193,000 trips per day by 2030 for a public cost of about \$2.5 billion.
25. Sound Transit estimates its light rail expansion will carry only 163,000 daily trips by 2030, at a cost of \$22.8 billion.
26. By 2030, there will be about 1.78 million Single Occupant Vehicles traveling to and from work every day, presumably during the peak commute times when traffic congestion is at its worst.
27. By 2030, vanpools could eliminate 84,752 cars from the roadway, or 4.8 percent of all work related traffic in the Puget Sound region every day.
28. Without any onerous government regulations, social engineering or loss of mobility, vanpools could reduce regional Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) by between 4 million to 9 million miles per day by 2030.
29. In its long-range regional transportation plan *Destination 2030*, the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) estimates that regional Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) is trending toward 98 million miles per day by 2030. This means vanpools could reduce VMT in the Puget Sound by between 4.2 percent and 9.3 percent.
30. The PSRC estimates that if the *Destination 2030 plan* were fully implemented it would reduce VMT by about 4.1 percent for a cost of \$40-\$45 billion. If vanpools were expanded to reach their market potential, they could reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) by up to 9.3 percent for only \$2.5 billion.

31. Vanpools are the safest, cheapest and most cost effective transit mode for connecting commuters with urban employment centers.

This information is from an in-depth, four part Policy Brief, *Vanpools in the Puget Sound Region, The case for expanding vanpool programs to move the most people for the least cost* by Washington Policy Center. The report also includes a six minute video *The Vanpool Solution, A faster, cheaper and easier way to commute*. The full report can be found online at washingtonpolicy.org.

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