

## **The Vanpool Solution (Video Transcript)**

*A faster, cheaper and easier way to commute*

by Michael Ennis  
Director, Center for Transportation

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This script is from an in-depth, four-part Policy Brief by the 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*. The full report and the video can be found online at [washingtonpolicy.org](http://washingtonpolicy.org).

### **Host:**

Reducing traffic congestion is a top priority at Washington Policy Center. Why? Because Seattle is the eighth most congested city in America, and is on track to match the gridlock of current-day Los Angeles within twenty years. For Puget Sound businesses and drivers, traffic congestion has become more than just an inconvenience.



### **Tom Lundgren, Vanpool Rider:**

I've tried commuting along the I-5 over to the Port Orchard area and I found the traffic was absolutely horrendous. It caused a lot of stress. I just hated it.

### **Christine Knowlton, Vanpool Rider:**

The Seattle commute has increased in time. Typically, it takes me an hour if there is no traffic. On a typical day it would take me almost two hours to get over to Seattle because of the traffic.

### **Host:**

It's estimated that we motorists spend about 40 hours per year, or the equivalent of one full work week sitting in traffic.

Spending this much time stuck in traffic reduces our quality of life, takes time away from our families and has a negative economic impact on our community by reducing productivity and limiting employment opportunities. Yet, reducing congestion is not a priority in Washington State.

Some policymakers are hoping to get people out of their cars and into traditional public transit. But building fixed-route buses and rail have

limitations; for one, they are expensive, two, they lack flexibility in adapting to changing growth patterns, they have limited intercity travel demand, and they have no impact on reducing existing or future traffic congestion.

So what can motorists do for themselves to help reduce their time sitting in traffic? One way is to participate in rideshare programs like vanpooling.

**Michael Ennis, Washington Policy Center:**

With twenty public vanpool programs across the state, Washington has the largest public fleet in the country. In the Puget Sound region, there are more than seventeen hundred vans on the road every day carrying about five million passenger trips per year.

**Host:**

A vanpool must have at least five riders (four passengers and one driver) and can carry up to 15 total passengers. Groups can form by themselves or individuals can find existing vanpools to join.



Most transit agencies offer rideshare forums and services to connect vanpools with users. Vanpool groups can travel across county lines and distances can vary between 20 to 150 miles per day, depending on the group's origin and destination.

And vanpools are effective. King County's vanpool program alone carries more people than Sound Transit's entire Sounder Commuter Rail.

One person who is a big supporter of vanpool is Mark Rogge. Mark lives in Thurston County Washington, and has been using a vanpool for nearly fifteen years.

**Mark Rogge, Vanpool Rider:**

One major incentive for me is not having to drive the van in the morning and in the afternoon. Because of our long ride it becomes very convenient when we can take turns. I believe that vanpooling is one ingredient that can help improve our commuting experience.

**Host:**

Mark and his group typically begin their day in the parking lot of the Lacey Wal-Mart store.

**Mark Rogge, Vanpool Rider:**

Soon thereafter, we hit the highway, I-5 going north, and we don't make any stops in between Lacey and Bellevue.

**Host:**

Once they arrive in Bellevue, Mark's vanpool drops passengers off at two centralized locations close to their final destination.

Mark's commute is not unique as many motorists are finding ways to make vanpools work for them.

Vanpooling provides several benefits to those who use them. Vanpool groups gain access to HOV lanes, reduced ferry rates, preferential parking and free or reduced parking rates depending on the employer. Some employers also offer monthly compensation directly to their employees who commute with a vanpool.

**Michael Ennis, Washington Policy Center:**

By sharing a commute, vanpoolers also help the environment and help reduce traffic congestion. In 2006, vanpools in Washington carried over 6.7 million passenger trips, saved 23.8 million single occupant vehicle miles, and 9.5 million gallons of fuel.

**Host:**

Puget Sound vanpool agencies reported passenger demand grew by 52 percent between 2000 and 2008. Vanpool passenger demand in the first quarter of 2009 grew an astounding 16 percent, despite the state-wide economic downturn. Other mass transit systems actually experienced a slight reduction in ridership during this timeframe.

Drivers want transportation choices that work for them.

Vanpooling is more flexible than fixed route mass transit like buses and rail. This flexibility leads to meaningful benefits that are attractive. Users are able to spread the monthly costs of commuting among other passengers and lower their overall commuting expenses.



**Penny Guarin, Vanpool Rider:**

I've been in the vanpool for approximately twelve years. It's made my commute a heck of a lot easier.

**Rick Barringer, Vanpool Rider:**

I've started riding in the vanpool because it's a lot easier, quicker; get places quicker than you could if you were driving your car. On the ferries you can get priority loading, compared to driving your car on. Plus all the nice people inside, you ride with everyday. You just can't beat it.

**Christine Knowlton, Vanpool Rider:**

The benefits of being in a vanpool are a decreased cost to me. I get subsidies from the city of Seattle for riding in the vanpool.

**Tom Lundgren, Vanpool Rider:**

I've been riding vanpools since '97. And for me it's the only way to go. It cuts down on my commuting costs. For what it cost me for my vanpool and ferry rides, I couldn't drive ten miles with my car. It doesn't make any sense to drive.

**Host:**

Learn more about reducing traffic congestion and the benefits of vanpooling at [congestionrelief.org](http://congestionrelief.org).

*Michael Ennis is director of the Center for Transportation at Washington Policy Center, a non-partisan independent policy research organization in Seattle and Olympia.*