



VANPOOL

HANDBOOK & REFERENCE GUIDE

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Section 1: Getting Started

Introduction

In October 2007, the Centre Area Transportation Authority (CATA) expanded its “family of public transportation services” by introducing vanpools to the RideShare Program, CATA’s ride matching and Guaranteed Ride Home services. The program was renamed **CATACOMMUTE**.

RideShare, in operation since 1999, brings together people traveling from or through the same communities to work in the Centre Region, and helps them establish carpools and vanpools. CATA uses a web-based, computerized program to match individuals from the surrounding communities who share the same commute. When you register online at www.catabus.com, you will be asked to provide information to create a matchlist personalized to your schedule. Participants receive a free, custom report that provides a list of participants who live in or commute through your area. You can create or join a carpool or vanpool and/or contact a participant with a question. All information is protected and confidential. You’re on your way to saving time, money, and wear and tear on your car, not to mention having a more pleasant commute with new friends.

The new vanpool initiative was made possible by funding from the federal Congestion Management/Air Quality (CMAQ) program. The Centre County Metropolitan Planning Organization allocated funds to the new program, in response to a request by CATA, as a small step towards reducing traffic congestion and air pollution.

Why Vanpool?

Any type of ridesharing will provide the benefit of reducing stress, reducing wear and tear on your vehicle, helping the environment, meeting new people, relaxing while someone else drives, reducing congestion on roads, and saving money on gas, parking and insurance. The following table demonstrates the value of vanpooling versus driving alone:

<u>Commute: 40 miles</u>	<u>Cost:</u>	<u>Daily</u>	<u>Monthly</u>	<u>Yearly</u>
Alone	54 cents/mi.	\$ 22	\$ 432	\$ 5184
12-Passenger Van		\$ 3	\$ 55	\$ 656

Elements of a Vanpool

Though each vanpool is unique, all share three important elements:

- The Drivers, Back-Up Drivers, and Riders – the people who make up the vanpool are crucial to its success.
- The Van – the vans are a major public investment of tax dollars. When a van is driven and maintained properly, the commute runs smoothly and costs are kept as low as possible.
- The **CATACOMMUTE** Office – There is a strong team of people working behind the scenes who make this program possible by providing insurance, maintenance, loaner vans, rider recruitment assistance and group problems assistance.

Section 2: Successful Vanpoolers

The People in the Vanpool

Vanpools are groups of 7-12 people who share a commute together. Vanpools are successful when effective cooperation takes place within the group. For vanpooling to work effectively and efficiently, every member of the vanpool group needs to take on certain roles and responsibilities.

There are three important roles in each vanpool. Each of these has a set of responsibilities and is essential for the vanpool to operate successfully:

- Primary Driver
- Back-Up Drivers
- Riders

Knowing the responsibilities of the drivers and riders of a vanpool is important! It helps to clarify who does what and makes it possible for the various jobs to get done as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Drivers and Back-Up Drivers agree to all requirements within the Driver Agreement and CATA policies.

As the primary driver, you may ask disruptive riders to leave the vanpool. Reasons for termination include, but are not limited to, disruptive behavior, consistent and/or excessive lateness, or not paying the monthly fare. Drivers shall notify the Commuter Services Manager of any incidents before asking the rider to leave and will document reoccurring incidents to the Commuter Services Manager.

Riders agree to all requirements and responsibilities within the Participant Agreement and CATA policies.

Please note that both vanpool driver and rider privileges are revocable by CATA at any time for unsafe practices and failing to adhere to vanpool policies and procedures.

As a participant, you are encouraged to complete a Reasonable Suspicion Incident Checklist form if you feel the driver is driving inappropriately or unsafely and send it to the CATACOMMUTE Office. The Commuter Services Manager will conduct an investigation and provide the results to the vanpool group at the conclusion of the investigation. As a general rule, a driver will be given one (1) warning when violating the Driver Agreement and/or CATA policies before being removed from the authorized drivers' list. However, CATA reserves the right to revoke privileges at any time.

Vanpool Driver Requirements

Any participant who would like to drive the van must complete an application, driver record history form, criminal background check form, and sign a Driver's Agreement. To qualify to be a Vanpool Driver, a driver must meet certain criteria as established by both CATA and its insurance company:

1. maintain a valid PA driver's license;
2. be at least 25 years of age;
3. allow CATA to obtain driver record history and criminal background checks, as needed;
4. not have any record of convictions for serious offenses such as reckless or careless driving, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, operating a motor vehicle with a suspended or revoked license, school bus stopping or passing violations, leaving the scene of an accident involving personal injury or property damage, or motor vehicle homicide;
5. not have more than one moving violation or at-fault accident in past rolling 36 months;
6. complete driver safety orientation at CATA's main office.

Once all information is received and processed it is sent through CATA's insurance company for final approval. When approval is received, the driver is notified and safety orientation is scheduled.

Section 3: Knowing Your Van

Inspecting The Van

Although the van is for your commute use, it is equipment borrowed from CATA. The van is an expensive public asset owned by CATA that needs to be protected through regular inspection, maintenance and proper operation.

Inspection of your van is critical to its reliable performance. Lack of attention to the simple details of inspection can cause you and your riders delay and inconvenience. It also can cause CATA costly mechanical repairs. Once you get into the habit of preventive care by making regular inspections, you will have greater confidence operating the van and can avoid more serious repairs.

To help you understand, enjoy and care for the van, the manufacturer of each van provides an owner's manual. The manual has an illustration that shows you the location of the items you will need to check during your inspections.

When conducting any inspection routine, be thorough, do not assume anything, do not rush, and do not wait to fix a problem. The following schedule is suggested:

Daily:

- Is there any visible body damage?
- Are gauges working correctly?
- Are mirrors clean and clear of fog, ice and/or snow?
- Are brakes working properly?
- Is power steering operating correctly?
- Are exhaust system and muffler making any noise?
- Are there excessive fumes from the fuel system?
- Is snow cleared from the roof of the van?

Weekly:

- Check windshield fluid
- Check head and tail lights, turn signal lights
- Check heater, defroster and air conditioning
- Check seatbelts for operation and accessibility

Monthly:

- Check coolant/antifreeze
- Check power steering fluid level
- Check transmission fluid level
- Check brake fluid level
- Check tires for visible signs of wear and tire pressure
- Check oil level

Maintaining The Van – Appearance, Preventative Maintenance Schedule, Scheduling Service and Repairs

The appearance of the van is important. It affects the riders' comfort and satisfaction and a well-kept van is more likely to attract new riders and create a favorable impression with the public. Remember to wash the van at least once a month and do not place any personal emblems or bumper stickers on the van.

A preventative maintenance (P.M.) schedule is meant to ensure a reliable and safe van for your commute. The P.M. schedule is as follows for all vans:

Preventative Maintenance (every 6000 miles) by CATA:

- Change oil and oil filter
- Lubricate chassis components
- Visually check for leaks or damage
- Rotate tires and check for wear and inflation pressures
- Inspect brake system
- Check throttle system
- Check fluid levels

Annually by CATA:

- State Inspection

The Commuter Services Manager will contact and coordinator with the primary driver all maintenance or repairs so that a loaner van can be assigned. When the driver drops off the van for a scheduled appointment, the Maintenance Schedule Form is placed on the driver's seat indicating the service or repair needed for that appointment.

Operating The Van

Driving a van is very different from driving a car. The increased height, length and weight of a van require you to be especially careful to ensure the safety and comfort of your passengers.

There are some simple, but important, habits for operating the van:

- Give yourself plenty of turning room, reduce your speed and look through the turn.
- Observe height and width restrictions. Clearance of at least 7'3" is required for 12-passenger vans.
- Use a passenger as a spotter when backing. If you are alone, use your mirrors or get out of the van to look at what is behind you.
- Yield the right of way and use your turn signals when merging or turning.
- Check your mirrors every 5 to 10 seconds to scan for traffic, other hazards and to see what is happening to the rear of the van.
- Secure the van before you leave it. Make sure you have the keys and it is locked.
- Choose a parking space with plenty of room.

- Allow longer stopping and following distances. Allow a 3-4 second following distance between the van and the vehicle in front. Increase the distance when driving in adverse weather or on rough roads.
- Drivers and riders must use seatbelts at all times.
- Use extreme caution when loading and unloading riders.
- As a driver, you will need to deal with problems that result from traffic conditions or rider activity. Special circumstances may cause your “hot button” response to occur. Hot buttons are things or events that produce an automatic, emotional response. By recognizing and catching your personal hot button reactions earlier on, you can prevent a small irritation from turning into a major catastrophe. Also, hot buttons are often the cause of complaints from the public about how vans are driven.

Handling Emergencies and Accidents/Incidents

It is important to know how to handle emergencies to protect lives and to ensure that questions of liability are handled properly. Serious problems that you may encounter fall into three categories: breakdowns, collisions/accidents, and theft/vandalism.

Breakdowns: In the event that roadside assistance is needed, the driver calls the **CATACOMMUTE** Office at 814-238-2282 ext. 134. If there is no answer at that extension, dial 0 for the operator and then ask for ext. 162 (Shop Office). If the breakdown occurs within 20 miles from State College, normally a mechanic or auto service will come to your location. A loaner van will be provided if the van is not operable. If the breakdown occurs more than 20 miles from State College, an auto service will be contacted to come to your location. If the van is not operable, it will be towed back to the CATA garage. The driver will be able to accompany the van and tow truck into State College. Riders should have an emergency plan set up in the event a van becomes disabled (i.e. carpool arrangements). On a case by case basis, it will be determined if it is feasible to dispatch a loaner van to pick up the group.

Accidents/Incidents: Contact 911 to report the accident or collision when there is injury or death to any person, or damage to any vehicle to the extent it can't be driven under its own power and therefore requires towing. The driver or backup driver will then call CATA to notify staff of the occurrence. The driver or backup driver will also call CATA's insurance carrier to report the incident. Information and forms that need to be completed are located in the Accident Report Kit found in the van front storage compartment. Disposable cameras are also available on all vans to take pictures of any property or vehicle damage.

Do not admit fault but be sure to exchange information with the driver if another vehicle is involved. Obtain name, address and phone numbers as well as insurance information, driver's license number and vehicle license numbers. You may also want to get information from the first responder and ask for a police report. An insurance card from CATA's insurance carrier is in each van along with the van's registration card.

Theft/Vandalism: Contact the **CATACOMMUTE** Office as soon as possible after the incident. If there is damage to the van, contact CATA's insurance company to file a claim. Record as much information as possible and use the disposable camera to take pictures of any damages. Never leave the van unlocked and personal items should not be left in the van as a temptation for theft.

Section 4: Fare Policies

Calculating Group Fares

Vanpool fares are based on operating, depreciation and insurance costs. The base cost includes vehicle depreciation and insurance. The operating cost includes gasoline, tires, parking and maintenance. Therefore, the monthly fare is the base cost plus a per mile operating cost. Fares are evaluated every three months with adjustments as needed. Fares are divided among the number of riders in the vanpool, as agreed upon by the vanpool group.

Fare calculation example (12-passenger van traveling 66 miles round-trip per day)

66 miles x 21 work days = 1,386 miles per month x 25 cents per mile = \$346.50 + base rate of \$420 = \$766.50. \$766.50 divided by 11 riders (driver rides free) = \$69.68 each rider per month.

Fares are due the first of every month and collected by the driver, or back-up driver. An invoice will be e-mailed to the primary driver at the end of each month. A single check written to CATA or credit card payment and the completed daily log form are to be received at 2081 W. Whitehall Road, State College, PA 16801 no later than the 10th of the month. A late fee is assessed on any payment received after the 10th of the month.

Vanpool Subsidy

A new vanpool subsidy may be available for start-up groups. Please ask the Commuter Services Manager about the availability for your group.

When Shift Changes Occur

When the work schedule of the majority of van riders is changed and creates an instance where other riders no longer have the van available to them during the normal hours established for the vanpool, those riders whose hours did not change are not required to pay for the days the van runs a different schedule.

In this instance, those who will be riding during those adjusted hours will share a little more in that portion of the month's fare; and those affected by the adjustment and can't ride, will not be responsible to pay for that period of time.

This does not apply to sick or vacation time, when the individual changes their own schedule.

Van Doesn't Run

If the van does not run through no fault of CATA, there is no credit given for that day(s). Each vanpool has at least three drivers who can coordinator their schedules so that the van operates. There may be rare occasions where all drivers are not available to drive. The vanpool should create a backup plan for those unforeseen circumstances.

Section 5: You and The Vanpool Group

A Driver Wears Several Hats (Leader, Recruiter, Facilitator, Communicator)

Vanpools are successful for many different reasons. In general, the success of your vanpool depends on your understanding of not just your role in the group, but also how well you work with the vanpool riders. As a leader, you will provide information and direction for group decisions. The vanpool will operate more smoothly when all of the vanpoolers feel they have a personal investment and ownership in it. As a recruiter, you need to make sure that the vanpool has as many riders and backup drivers as necessary at all times. Make sure to engage the entire group in recruitment activities because it is in everyone's interest to keep your van commuting. Search your RideShare account (My Matches) to find new participants.

As a facilitator, you can help the group make decisions and help settle differences that may arise. You should encourage all participants to get involved and to contribute ideas. You will need to respond to individual members' needs, deal with members' expectations and ask for feedback, foster a friendly group atmosphere to maintain open and relaxed communication, and you will need to focus on the issues and not the personalities. You should seek advice from the Commuter Services Manager when you would like a fresh perspective.

As a communicator, you need to relay information to both the Commuter Services Manager and to the vanpoolers. You should plan and conduct vanpool meetings to provide updates. Riders are valuable, and your responsiveness to their questions and concerns and how you work with them greatly influences their decision to continue vanpooling.

Vanpool Group Dynamics

Often the most important element in the success or failure of a vanpool is the way the people interact as a group. The vanpoolers are a collection of individuals who are mutually dependent on each other for the purpose of vanpooling.

Vanpool members hold expectations about promptness, safe driving, pickup and drop-off locations, radio stations to listen to, temperature, scents, and personal hygiene. Other concerns that vanpool members need addressed when they consider joining a vanpool are coordination of childcare, strict job arrival and exit times, and attendance to outside activities such as son/daughter athletic events and classes.

Differing expectations and outside pressures make it important to develop operating rules as a group. These should be written or typed up and distributed to everyone in the vanpool. Remember to copy new riders who join the van!

We recommend that you consider the following tips:

- Orient new people to the van and to the group. Make sure everyone sees themselves as members of the group.
- Hold meetings to keep tuned in to what is going on.

- Work to solve problems before they grow bigger.
- Use the Commuter Services Manager as a consultant – he/she has probably dealt with similar issues with other groups in the past.
- Talk with people on a regular basis! Find out how they think the vanpool is working.
- Consider keeping a calendar or notebook in the van so members can keep track of each others' planned absences and for odometer readings.

In all groups, there are times when individual ideas and issues might jeopardize the operation of the group. No matter how hard you try to avoid problems, they can still occur. How problems are handled is as important as the problem itself. Conflicts may arise concerning nonpayment of fares, lateness, personality traits, seating arrangements, not wearing seat belts, no backup driver arranged, and miscommunications.

When there is a dispute in the vanpool, try using the following rules:

- Stop arguing
- Sit down together
- Take turns listening without interruption
- Summarize, clarify and acknowledge what the other person said
- Don't make accusations
- Separate personalities from problems
- Look for creative solutions by brainstorming
- Look for a way to make the agreement enforceable
- Write down the agreement
- If you can't agree, take a break and come back later
- Look for trade-offs
- Say what will happen if the dispute does not end
- List and prioritize all possible solutions
- Ask someone you both trust to mediate the dispute

If any disputes with riders or between riders cannot be resolved by the vanpool group, please contact the Commuter Services Manager.

Section 6: Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH)

CATA is aware of the possible emergency needs faced by ridesharing commuters. In an effort to address this concern, we offer the Guaranteed Ride Home Program (GRH).

Registered members of the RideShare program who are linked to a carpool or vanpool have the opportunity to join GRH for an annual fee of \$10 (no fee required for full-time Penn State Faculty and Staff). CATA staff will assist you with a free ride home (up to 50 miles) in case of an emergency, up to four trips per calendar year. The Guaranteed Ride Home program includes such emergencies as personal illness and/or medical emergency (including riders and/or family members), workplace shut-down, family disasters (flood, fire, etc.), and mandatory, unscheduled overtime.

You will be provided with a taxi ride or a rental car (if a qualified driver) to the appropriate destination at no charge to you. Arrangements to pick up a child from daycare or school and then proceed to the proper destination is also allowable. The Guaranteed Ride Home program will also provide rides to registered riders whose driver has an emergency and cannot provide the ride home.

Call 814-238-2282 ext. 134 or 150 when you need an emergency ride home. Someone is available to answer the phones here at CATA between the hours of 5 AM and 2 AM, so you will never have to worry about getting a ride.