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## Smart Growth News

### Pennsylvania

#### Carpooling: The Economics of Successful Transportation Sharing in Southwestern Pennsylvania

In this era of sprawling suburbs few commuters stay within their town borders, the high gas prices additionally tax patience and pocketbooks, and "more and more people are trying to find other ways to work in the morning," such as carpooling, reports Pittsburgh *Tribune-Review* writer Noele Creamer, finding that the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission's CommuteInfo program, launched in the early 1970s to help people link to carpools and vanpools throughout its ten-county region, saw a 57 percent increase in information requests in the 2004-05 fiscal year, and received both the Association of Commuter Transportation's 2004 Renovation Award and the Westmoreland County Smart Growth Partnership's Certificate of Merit.

The 200 registered carpools and 35 vanpools serve more than 400 participants in each category, says program manager Lisa Kay Schweyer, counting only those who have registered. "Once people make the connections, they don't always tell us what they end up doing," she observes, adding, "We even have people who are looking to bike pool and just want to do the trip with someone."


After completing an online or phone survey, the writer reports, interested commuters get information on potential ride matches and can join them immediately. Carpool members can stop the next day if unhappy, while vanpool participants usually commit themselves from month to month and can quit once they pay their shares. The equal shares cover the gas cost, parking fees and occasional daily care of the nine-seat or 15-seat vans from a third-party provider, who covers maintenance and insurance and provides a back-up vehicle should a van break down.

"The absolute money savings makes it worth it," says a primary van driver for 10 years, Latrobe resident Jody Burtner, her current group of 13 riding some 30 miles one way between Greensburg and downtown Pittsburgh. "Our shared rate is \$165 a month," she exclaims. "You can't even park for that much every day in Pittsburgh." Registered carpool and vanpool riders can take an emergency ride, up to four times a year, should the primary driver or vehicle encounter problems and leave them stranded -- their receipts reimbursed for up to \$100 annually.

"You save money in gas, on parking and wear and tear on your vehicles by carpooling and vanpooling," stresses CommuteInfo manager Schweyer. "There are some people in the program who literally couldn't afford to work unless they found an alternative to driving their own cars to work every day." -- *Tribune-Review* 6/25/2006

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