

# Ridesharing to Work & Training:

Options for Veterans Transitioning Service Members and Their Families

## Part of the *Transportation for Our Military Series*

*This brief, which is part of a series focusing on the transportation needs of veterans, explains how ridesharing programs operate and how they can benefit veterans, active military, and their families. Ridesharing, via vanpool or carpool, is an easy and affordable means of traveling to work, training, and other activities. Below we highlight innovative responses that can help communities, such as those with a Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative grant, and other veterans service organizations connect veterans, active duty service members, and military families with ridesharing opportunities to jobs, education, health care, and other vital services.*

It's easy to understand why ridesharing is increasing in popularity. Whether by vanpool or carpool, it provides practical, flexible transportation to work and other destinations. Ridesharing is a solution that fits rural, suburban, and urban areas. It can supplement regular community and public bus service, provide an affordable option in response to high gasoline costs, and aid in reducing traffic congestion by consolidating single-occupant vehicle trips. In short, ridesharing is a promising travel option for veterans, transitioning service members, and their families, whether they live on or off base.

Ridesharing can enhance the participants' quality of life by allowing them to

- Save wear and tear on their vehicles
- Travel in less congested high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes to decrease commuting times
- Make a long commute interesting, enjoyable, and affordable
- Provide a predictable, cost-effective means to work, enabling workers to arrive at work consistently on time and less distracted by commuting struggles

For veterans and their families in particular, ridesharing, whether by carpooling or vanpool, can

- Be a more flexible option for traveling on and off base than public transit buses, which may have only limited access or stops on bases
- In families with only one vehicle, allow military spouses to use that vehicle for errands, activities, work, and school while the active military worker commutes by ridesharing
- Accommodate the atypical scheduling demands of base life
- Qualify employees who ride by vanpool for valuable federal pre-tax savings

## About Vanpooling

Vanpools provide rides for groups of 7–15 people commuting to jobs, education, or training opportunities on a prearranged basis by van. With vanpooling, one of the riders agrees to be the primary driver and 1–2 others serve as back-up drivers. Vanpool riders share travel costs. The number of passengers, length of trip, insurance, gas, parking fees, and third-party fees, if applicable, will determine the actual cost per passenger. The driver usually travels for free or a discounted cost; the group may also allow the driver to have personal use of the van on nights and weekends.

Vanpool riders may meet at one designated location or at specified pick-up and drop-off stops along the way and travel to the same or nearby locations. Interim stops can include dropping children off at child care and school. Riders generally agree on a set of rules that govern rider etiquette.

Local vanpool providers, transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations, city and county transportation agencies, and transportation management associations may provide assistance in starting or growing a vanpool program.<sup>1</sup> The assistance they provide includes help with

- Recruiting riders
- Approving and training drivers
- Determining routes
- Collecting monthly fares
- Developing tools for marketing, monitoring, and maintaining the program

<sup>1</sup> For a directory of online national and regional rideshare sites, visit: <http://www.rideshare-directory.com/>. A listing of transportation management associations is available at: <http://web1.ctaa.org/web-modules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=1467&z=5>. A directory of metropolitan planning organizations is available at: <http://www.ampo.org/directory/index.php>.

Colleges and universities, career centers, and employers can also be a good resource for veterans and military families wishing to join an affordable vanpool.

A number of military bases around the country have implemented successful vanpool programs.<sup>2</sup> Third-party operators have helped them establish, manage, and administer a vanpool program. Transportation officers, installation environmental personnel, or safety officers on base are usual points of contact for those interested in launching a vanpool program. The Transportation Incentive Program (TIP) provides transportation subsidies to eligible military personnel to pay for transit and vanpool costs incurred in their local commute from their residence to their permanent duty station. As of January 2013, the maximum allowable benefit amount is \$245 per month per participant.

## About Carpooling

Carpooling is among the easiest and most flexible ways to share rides. Carpoolers either pay a pre-established weekly or monthly fee or share actual operating and parking costs. Many carpools establish rules and etiquette to sustain the carpool partnership, such as timely notifications of absences and whether to eat or drink in the car.

On base, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation staff (MWR) may be starting points for coordinating carpools. As a division of the military's Installation Command, MWR staff administer a variety of recreation, social, and community support programs designed to enhance the lives of soldiers, civilians, families, military retirees, and other eligible participants in the Army, Navy and Air Force. Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS) staff provide similar services for their families.

Civilian online rideshare matching services are available to registered commuters in many metropolitan areas and can be used by military personnel and veterans. Rideshare members can create online accounts and then search for others traveling to the same destination as themselves. The online site also produces a list of other rideshare members with similar origin and destination points whom the user can contact directly. These sites are designed to provide limited personal information to protect user identity until a ride is arranged. Some sites allow users to limit carpool options to a pre-designated group, such as company employees. Similar options may be designed to provide a sense of comfort for base residents. For example, a carpool could be limited to military spouses residing on a specific base.

## Ridesharing to Non-Work Destinations

Carpools and vanpools can travel to more than just employment sites. For example, Kings Area Rural Transit (KART) in California implemented a vanpool program to provide students with affordable access to a community college located 35 miles

away. Because it owned the vanpools, KART was able to allow eligible riders age 21 and above who had perfect driving records to become drivers, whereas traditional vanpool companies limit drivers to those age 25 and above. Once student participation grew enough to merit two vanpools, the vanpool schedule could be staggered to allow students to return home at different times during the day. KART, a long-time vanpool provider, kept rider fees low by using fully depreciated vehicles, which benefited the mostly low-income students. Programs such as this can be replicated to provide access to education and training for veterans and their families.

Carpools may also improve access education, training, or other destinations for family members or friends who serve as caregivers to injured or disabled service members. For example, a carpool for service members to routinely scheduled medical appointments at VA centers or other medical treatment facilities could also drop off the service member's caregiver at training, shopping, or other destinations or even transit hubs. Once the service member completes an appointment, the driver can also pick up the caregiver for the ride home.

## For more information

Did you know? Across the nation, transportation providers and organizations serving veterans are working together to improve access to transportation for veterans and their families. To learn more about these state and local Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiatives and get involved, visit [www.fta.dot.gov/veterans](http://www.fta.dot.gov/veterans).

Read more about Joblinks' resources to support local partnerships in helping veterans, active duty service members, and their families access employment and other destinations through transit and ridesharing strategies.

Share your stories with us: The perspective of veterans and active duty service members is especially welcome. Visit <http://bit.ly/JoblinksVeterans>.

*The Joblinks Employment Transportation Center connects communities with transportation-to-work solutions. Visit us at [www.solution-stogether.org](http://www.solution-stogether.org).*

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<sup>2</sup> For a listing of vanpools serving military bases around the country, visit <http://www.militaryvanpool.com>.