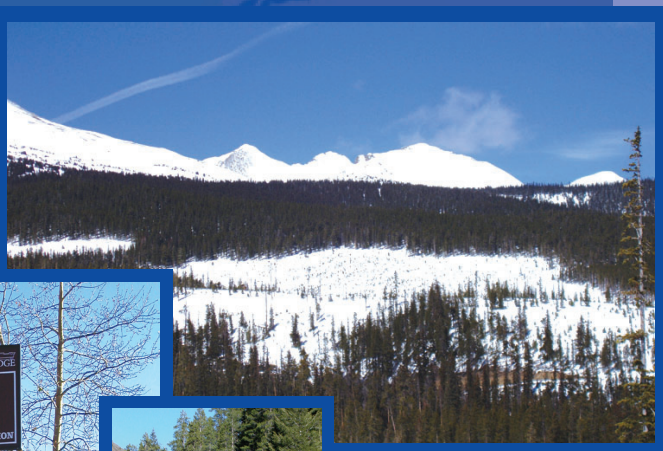


Rural and Mountain Community Vanpools:

A Brochure prepared for the Colorado Department of Transportation

Glenwood
Springs



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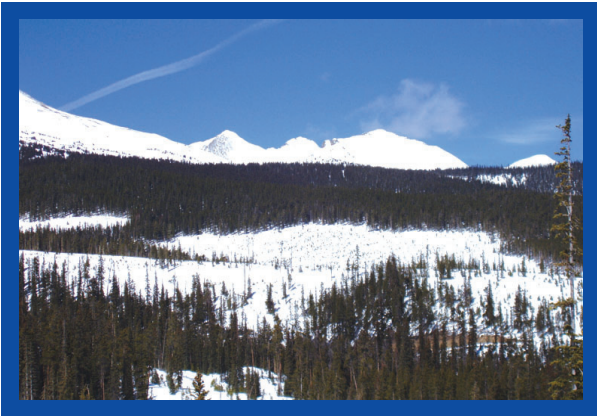


By:  **URBANTRANS**
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Colorado

Skiing, tourism and outdoor recreational opportunities

are the lifeblood of many of Colorado's rural communities. Resort areas such as Vail, Aspen, Copper Mountain and Keystone offer Coloradoans and visitors a variety of world-class activities, restaurants, services and shopping experiences. Yet, for years some mountain resort areas have suffered from on-going and often severe tensions between the lack of affordable housing and the abundance of low-paying service sector jobs. Simply stated, escalating housing costs throughout mountain resort areas has far outpaced wage and income growth. Furthermore, the very nature of rural and mountain geography is often manifested in both a general mismatch between housing and job locations as well as the reality of limited parking and future land availability. The result of these economic or geographic disparities is two fold.



First, employees must often travel long distances over winding, dangerous mountain passes in order to access work. Second, employers must often accept tardiness or absenteeism as a natural consequence to mountain or rural-based business. Finally, employers are often challenged with limited parking supply. Striking a balance between providing parking for customers as well as employees is often difficult in areas where parking supply is limited by land-use and geography.

Most of Colorado's mountain resort and rural communities recognize the negative impacts of the job-housing imbalance upon both residents and employers and have instituted a variety of policies, programs and services to assist in remedying the situation. Transit agencies such as the Roaring Fork Transit Authority, Summit Stage, Eagle County Transit and Steamboat Springs Transit provide free to low-cost transit service throughout their jurisdictions. Yet, adding service frequency and additional stops is often expensive and inefficient when covering a large rural area.

Vanpooling can assist in providing a low-cost, effective transportation alternative to communities, employees and employers.

This document is full of information regarding rural vanpools including:

- guidance on how to create a successful vanpool program
- three models of unique vanpool programs
- vanpool resources

Vanpool: Definition, Options and Opportunities

Vanpooling often provides a realistic alternative for groups of employees commuting from outlying towns or municipalities to a central employer or area of employers. Vanpools provide a middle-of-the-road transportation mode: When compared to transit, vanpools cost less and are more flexible yet when compared to carpooling, vanpools cost more and are less flexible. Developing a successful urban or rural vanpool operation requires effective organization, aggressive marketing and creative financing. Successful urban vanpool programs abound both within Colorado and throughout the nation.

Most rural vanpool providers suggest municipalities, employers or other agencies invest first in a rideshare matching and carpool program prior to moving forward with formal vanpool efforts. Then when demand dictates, move to vanpool options.

Three Types of Vanpools

- 1. Employer-Sponsored Programs:** Companies purchase vans, provide insurance and maintenance costs and administer ridesharing. Employers have the option of either purchasing or leasing vehicles, with cost recovered through passenger fares, reduced parking and improved employee productivity.
- 2. Third-Party Program:** This setup involves a ridesharing organization, public agency, public-private partnership or van leasing company which leases vans to commuter groups or small employers.
- 3. Owner-Operated Programs:** This approach allows individuals to purchase a van and charge passengers for commuting costs. These programs can be supported by subsidies from employers or facilitation from public agencies. With owner-operated vanpools, the maintenance and insurance costs are paid by individual owners.



Key Ingredients for Success

The challenges of starting a vanpool in a rural or mountain community often hinder communities from recognizing vanpools as a realistic, feasible mode of transportation. Including the following key ingredients in your vanpool formation can assist in reducing the challenges of developing a successful vanpool program!

Identify Need: Do long commutes result in tardy employees? Are groups of employees traveling long distances? Are recruits located farther and farther away from the employment center? Do gaps in transit service exist? If a single employer or cluster of employers respond “yes”, vanpooling is a possible solution!



Connect with Riders: Identify where employees are commuting from and how they are currently commuting. Pinpoint common commute routes and partner with neighboring businesses to identify additional commuters using those routes. If more than eight commuters are interested in vanpooling, your next step is to secure a van.

Secure a Van: The number one challenge for vanpools is establishing revenues to cover vanpool costs. The total cost of vanpooling includes: purchase or lease of van, insurance, van maintenance and upkeep as well as administration, marketing and recruitment. Maintaining vanpool ridership is critical otherwise empty seats result in higher per person costs which leads to an inefficient mode of transportation. The following provide some resources to use when securing the van:

- *Partnerships:* Formal partnering with local governments, transit agencies and employers is critical to the success of a vanpool. Don't overlook human service organizations as they are often working to assist individuals with commute issues.
- *Funding:* There are multiple creative ways to fund vanpooling. The recently released “Vanpool Pricing and Financing Guide” provides over 17 pricing mechanisms and outlines creative financing ideas. Working with your key partners will greatly assist in designing a sustainable vanpool funding system. See resources for additional information.

- *Insure:* Securing adequate insurance is of utmost importance. Often it is difficult to ensure a single van. Working with a transit agency or private vanpool operator may be helpful.
- *Recruitment:* Advertising your vanpool program and recruiting new riders is a must! Utilize the vans to advertise while out on the road, leverage partnerships to set recruitment goals and periodically invite additional neighboring employers to participate.
- *Administration:* Administering the vanpool program is an on-going responsibility. Ensure one individual has the time, tools and resources to successfully manage the program, make strategic recommendations and work with partners to instill a sense of progress and success. Often transit agencies or private vanpool operators fill this need.

Identifying a Driver: Forms and Legalities: It is important to select, screen and train a driver. The driver is usually responsible for driving the vehicle, collecting fares and working closely with the administrative office. Each vanpool program requires different legal forms and screening procedures prior to putting the driver behind the wheel. Drivers are often asked to take a defensive driving course to further ensure the safety of the vanpool. Vanpool programs often request a commitment from the riders as well as screening. In rural communities or employer-based vanpools this is less common. Those vanpools working with a private vanpool operator will benefit from their existing forms and knowledge of the legal process.

Rural Vanpool Programs

Yes, It Can Be Done! Despite the challenges of putting together a sustainable vanpool program in a rural or mountain community, these three communities have succeeded at just that!

Buy a Van and Keep Employees: Wells Fargo, Aspen, Colorado: Located in the Roaring Fork Valley and surrounded by the Rocky Mountains, Aspen is an internationally renowned summer and winter resort town.

In the mid 1990's the Bank of Aspen's manager recognized the impact of rising housing costs on employee retention and recruitment. Good, reliable employees, priced out of Aspen, were commuting longer and





longer distances. In an effort to retain these employees, the manager developed an employer-sponsored vanpool program. Despite the bank's eventual merger with Wells Fargo Bank, the vanpool program has remained a successful and cost-efficient program.

Implementation Steps:

1. **Funding:** Bank of Aspen purchased a van, insurance and identified an employee driver. The Bank takes all fiscal responsibility for upkeep and maintenance and replaces the vans when necessary. Due to insurance and liability regulations, the van is used solely for commuting purposes. Drivers cannot use the vans for personal trips.
2. **Fees:** Initially, the Bank charged \$3.00 a day for trips from Rifle to Aspen. After realizing the impact the vanpool had on retaining employees, the fee was dropped. Employees currently ride the van for free.
3. **Key Partnership:** Given the strict parking requirements in Aspen, the City of Aspen supports the vanpool through the provision of a parking permit.
4. **Challenges:** Given the popularity of the vanpool and the on-going employer support for the program, challenges are limited and easy to address.

Employer Savings Reported: Black Butte Ranch, Oregon: Black Butte Ranch, a four-season resort destination, is located eight miles south of Sisters in Central Oregon. The Ranch, a popular summer destination, hires summer seasonal staff to assist with housekeeping, retail and food services. Unfortunately, the Ranch was having problems recruiting employees from the outlying communities. Many of those they did recruit were commuting sixty miles from nearby Redmond. Concerned with employee recruitment, retention and job accessibility, the HR manager sought help from nearby Bend's Commute Options Program. Commute Options contacted Portland's VPSI program and set up a meeting between the three organizations. The result: the implementation of a seasonal vanpool program that assists the HR department with recruitment and retention while saving the employer money each season.

Implementation Steps:

1. **Funding:** Black Butte Ranch pays full cost of the vanpool and hired VPSI to provide operation and administrative support. VPSI provided (and continues to provide) the van, insurance and operating and administrative duties for Black Butte Ranch. Commute Options provided start-up PR assistance and connected Black Butte Ranch with state funding opportunities.
2. **Fees:** Black Butte Ranch pays all vanpool fees for employees.
3. **Key Partnership:** Timely resources provided by VPSI and Commute Options assisted in maximizing employer interest and implementing the program quickly.
4. **Challenges:** Recruiting riders was at first challenging, but as word got around the van quickly filled.



Construction Concerns Inspire Vanpool: Missoula, Montana:

Missoula, located in northwestern Montana is a small city at the hub of five valleys along the Clarkfork River. For many, Missoula is an escape from urban ills. However, traffic congestion and air pollution threaten the outdoor appeal of Missoula. When the Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT) opted to widen Highway 93 south from Lolo to Florence Montana, a group of concerned constituents requested the creation of transportation alternatives and services. Among other things, MDOT funded a vanpool pilot project that soon expanded to include seven vanpools. The vanpool program is funded with MDOT CMAQ monies with match gathered from the City, County, Parking Commission, University of Montana, St. Paul's Hospital and a few private individuals. The vanpool program continues to grow as funding allows.



Implementation Steps:

1. *Funding:* MDOT provided pilot project funds and CMAQ funds are the main on-going funding sources. Rider fees and grants round out vanpool revenues.
2. *Fees:* Commuters are charged \$.08 per mile. One company covers the cost for their employees by sponsoring a company vanpool.
3. *Key Partnership:* The local partners provide needed local match for the program as well as support with ensuring the vanpools are successful.
4. *Challenges:* Rider recruitment and turnover is the biggest challenge. To keep ridership and fare revenues even the managing organization consistently monitors the program. Advertising the vanpool program via large lettering directly on the van has proven to be the best recruitment tool.

Vanpool Resources and Information

- **Funding:** Vanpool Pricing and Financing Guide: Center for Urban and Transportation Research http://www.cutr.usf.edu/tdm/pdf/Vanpool_values.pdf
- **Private Vanpool Operators:** VPSI, Inc. www.vanpoolusa.com 1-800-826-RIDE
- **Existing Colorado Vanpool Programs:** *RideArrangers* (Denver Metro Area) www.ridearrangers.org 303-458-POOL (7665); *RideFinders* (Colorado Springs Area) <http://www.ci.colospgs.co.us/page.asp?navid=1212> (719) 385-7433, *SmartTrips* (Fort Collins Area) <http://www.smarttrips.org/> 1-800-332-0950
- **CASTA:** Colorado Association of State Transit Agencies: <http://www.coloradotransit.com/>
- **Colorado Department of Transportation** Contact: Deborah Sakaguchi, Deborah.sakaguchi@dot.state.co.us, 303-757-9088

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