



511NY Rideshare Program

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Prepared For: National Association of Development Organizations and the Southern Georgia Regional Commission

Program Overview

As one of a host of mobility options, 511NY Rideshare provides a statewide vanpool program in New York State. 511NY Rideshare was launched in 2010 by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT). The program is funded by New York State and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration. The goal of the vanpool program is to convert single-occupancy commute trips to vanpools to reduce emissions, address parking challenges, and improve employee recruitment and retention.



Program Operations

ICF administers the vanpool program on behalf of the New York State Department of Transportation's (NYSDOT's) 511NY Rideshare program. When ICF identifies a potential vanpool opportunity, they reach out to the vanpool vendor, Commute with Enterprise, who works with the employer and employees to finalize the details and provide the van for leasing. Commute with Enterprise is responsible for operating the vanpool including program promotion, vehicle leasing, and vehicle maintenance. As a part of their administrative function, 511NY Rideshare program provides Commute with Enterprise with an allowance to lower the monthly lease costs for vanpool participants. In exchange, Commute with Enterprise must provide 511NY Rideshare with information on the number of vanpools in operation and passenger names, used to quantify trips and mileage reductions, and register vanpool participants in the Guaranteed Ride Program (GRP).

Individual vanpools are able to choose meeting and drop off points, usually at a common location such as a park-n-ride or a big box retailer. In one region, ICF coordinates with local churches to pay for parking spaces when necessary.

The Guaranteed Ride Program (GRP) program is provided for vanpool members. In case of an emergency, the GRP program enables a vanpool participant to use alternative travel modes (Lyft, Uber, public transit, taxi) to get home, to a doctor, or other emergency location. Members can utilize up to \$300 in total GRP program funds per year. GRP is somewhat different than GRH programs offered by other agencies in that the destination does not have to be one's home.

Current Ridership

The New York State Vanpool Program currently has around eighty-six vanpools operating across the entire state. Most of these vans are operating in more urbanized areas. Thirty of the vanpools are going to federal worksites (primarily military bases). Vanpools have been found to be popular with Federal employees as they are provided with a subsidy that drastically reduces the cost. The program has found success with providing vanpools to military bases and other employers that have a large campus-like location (e.g., casinos) as a vanpool can provide more flexibility in where participants get dropped off. In contrast, public transit may only be able to drop people off at an entrance, where the employee would then have to walk to their building. ICF has also seen success with setting up vanpools for overnight shift employment, which is generally when public transit does not operate.



New Coast Guard Vanpool, Photo Credit: ICF

Program Funding

The 511NY Rideshare program utilizes both Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds (CMAQ) and state planning funds. The program currently does not report to the National Transit Database (NTD). The NTD allows vanpools to report their mileage (just as public transit agencies report to the NTD) to access a regional pool of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds which are administered based on ridership. Since these funds are limited, NYSDOT has not seen this as a priority to date.

Marketing

Both ICF and Commute with Enterprise have developed marketing materials and conduct outreach and vanpool is promoted on the program website (<https://511nyrideshare.org/vanpool>). Additional marketing materials include printed flyers, social media campaigns, and magnets and signs that can be placed on the sides of the vans. Marketing on the vanpool vehicles includes both the 511NY Rideshare logo and the Commute with Enterprise logo.

ICF has found word of mouth to be a beneficial form of marketing, noting that many do not understand that a vanpool could work for their place of employment. Once an employer begins a vanpool, a snowball effect is often observed, where other employees begin asking if a vanpool could work for them too.

Another way that ICF promotes the vanpool program is through writing short success stories. ICF asks a vanpool to take a group photo and they interview members to compile the vanpool's story. Success story participants are given a \$25 gift card for participating. The success stories are shared to NYSDOT and help to put a human face on the program.

"I was tired of driving in traffic nightly. My eyesight was horrible during the winter months when it got dark early. Now I sit back and relax with my tablet. I only drive my car less than a mile from where our driver drops us off. Knowing that if my daughter got sick and I had a way to get home to her definitely made a difference in joining the vanpool. It gives me peace of mind knowing that I'm not stuck here at work if I need to leave."
 - Cathy, Leviton employee, on vanpooling and GRP, which she learned about through 511NY Rideshare



Members of the Stony Brook Southampton Hospital Vanpool, Photo Credit: ICF

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Buy America Requirements Can Be A Challenge:

ICF has found third-party leasing of vanpool vehicles to be the easiest way to comply with Buy America requirements, as Commute with Enterprise has multiple vanpool vehicle options. However, as of October 25, 2022, the FTA announced a two-year partial waiver for unmodified vans and minivans due to a lack of compliant vehicles¹.

Vanpool Programs Can Be Difficult to Implement, Marketing the Savings and Word of Mouth Is Key:

Vanpool programs require multiple individuals to live and work in a similar location and with similar schedules to commit to commuting together. ICF has found that marketing the savings is a great way to recruit vanpool members. Often, once one vanpool starts up it seems that word of mouth really helps to grow the vanpool program, as similar companies see the benefits that one employer is getting from implementing a vanpool.

Certain Companies May Be More Effective for Vanpool:

The following employers have found to be good fits for vanpools: shift workers of any kind (manufacturing), late night/overnight shift job sites (no transit at night), Federal job sites

¹ Federal Transit Administration, Buy America: <https://www.transit.dot.gov/buyamerica>

(subsidy available), employers with large campuses (transit does not drop off at specific buildings, like an industrial park), and companies where that first/last mile can make the trip difficult (e.g., casinos, military bases).

National Transit Database (NTD) Reporting Benefits & Drawbacks:

The NTD is used by some vanpool programs to generate Federal Transit Administration (FTA) formula funding. However, for new programs reporting to NTD, there is a two-year funding lag. Additionally, in some areas, accessing these funds can be a political challenge, as the NTD generates funds to a regional pool of transit funding that eligible agencies can utilize. If a vanpool program begins using these funds, they can be viewed as just another agency taking a piece of an already small pie.

Learn More

For more information about the New York State Vanpool Program, please visit the program website at: <https://511nyrideshare.org/vanpool>

For more information about ICF, go to: <https://www.icf.com/>

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This work is supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture under a cooperative agreement. USDA is an equal opportunity provider. Any opinions, findings and conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders.