



## Vanpool Investment Program

### What is the program?

In 2003, the legislature developed a 10-year, \$30 million transportation plan to expand vanpooling statewide. The funds are designated for public transit agencies and can only be used for the capital costs of placing new vans on the road, or incentives to employers to increase vanpool use. Since 2003, more than \$12 million has been invested to purchase 577 vans for 20 transit agencies. At that time, vanpool operators set a goal of doubling the number of operating vanpools in Washington to a total of 3,180 operating vans by 2013.

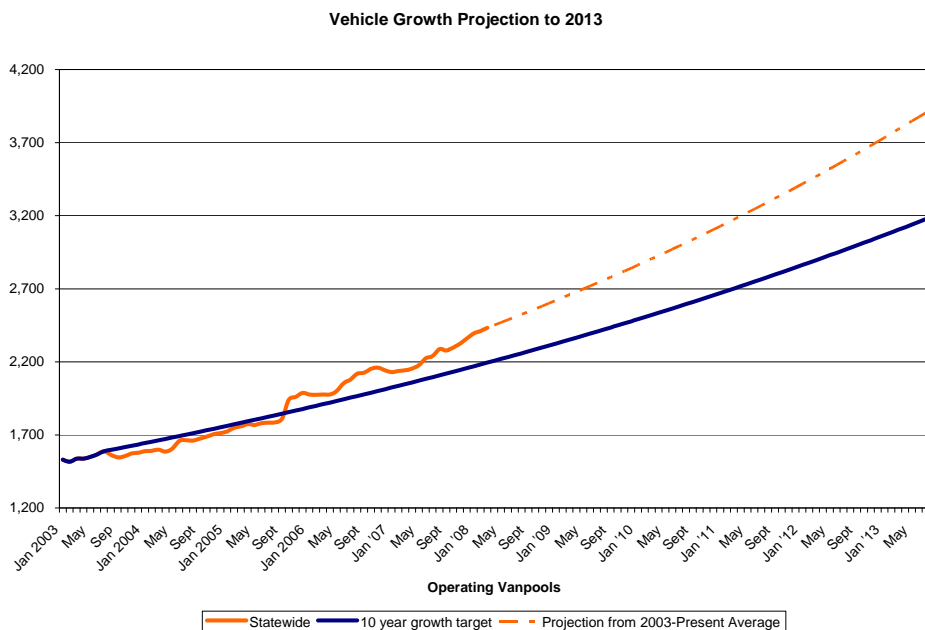
Vanpooling is a key strategy for local and state goals to reduce drive-alone commute trips and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per capita. It also supports rural economic development by providing an economical choice for commuters to travel long distances to work sites such as the Department of Energy’s Hanford site.

### How does the program help reduce VMT?

Vanpooling is a crucial approach for reducing VMT per capita. The 10 percent of commuters in the Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) program who live furthest from their work locations account for 30 percent of the VMT in the program, compared to less than one percent for the 10 percent of employees who live closest. This means that shifts from driving alone to vanpooling by even a relatively small segment of the long-distance commuter would have large reductions in VMT per capita. The long-distance commuter market should be a primary emphasis of the state’s efforts to reduce commute-related VMT.

### What’s happening now?

Washington State continues to lead the nation in vanpooling with the largest public vanpool fleet in North America. Vanpools traveled 29.3 million miles in 2007. For the central Puget Sound in 2006, the number of passenger miles traveled in vanpools was 2.8 percent of the peak period VMT. As of January 2008, there



were 2,360 vans operating statewide, at an average passenger count of 8.14, traveling 2,229,300 miles.<sup>1</sup>

Between June 2003 and January 2008, the number of vanpools in the state increased 51 percent to 2,360 operating vehicles. Ridership increased 53 percent during the same period. This dramatic growth can be attributed to several factors, including state investment, strong local programs, enhanced collaboration among agencies, and increasing gas prices. A significant portion of these vanpools travel to current CTR worksites.

Due to high commuter demand for vanpooling, the program is growing quickly. If current growth rates are maintained, the program will meet its 2013 goal by February 2011. Even with substantial state investment, transit agencies report waiting lists with formed groups for vanpools. WSDOT will not be able to meet the demand for new vans with the funding remaining in 2007-2009.

The statewide vanpool team is currently developing a new expansion plan and seeks to tie its ridership and van growth goals to the 2020 climate change goals.

### **What can we be doing with existing resources to enhance the program's ability to reduce VMT?**

The state is purchasing as many vans as possible with current resources. Local transit agencies operate and maintain the vans. Currently, the program provides vans to transit agencies based on their requests. Because funding is not sufficient to meet demand, WSDOT is developing criteria to prioritize the allocation of vans. For example, prioritization could be based on providing vans to those groups traveling the longest distances, or prioritizing groups for drive-alone commuters over carpoolers.

### **What could we (or should we) be doing with additional resources? (i.e. where are the opportunities for growth/enhancement)?**

WSDOT estimates that the anticipated funding level of \$7 million for the 2009-2011 biennium will not fully meet the demand for new vanpools. Additional resources would allow the transit agencies to continue current growth rates in vanpooling and reduce more VMT per capita. If additional funding was provided to maintain the program growth rates, between 2,700 and 4,100 additional drive-alone a.m. trips per day would be reduced from June 2009 to June 2011.

Current funding is limited to purchasing new vans or providing incentives for employers. If new funds were more flexible, a portion could be used for outreach and education to long distance commuters, technology improvements for improved data collection, and enhanced ridematching systems. These operational enhancements would develop a larger vanpool market and increase the average occupancy of each van.

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<sup>1</sup> WSDOT has limited data on the modes vanpool passengers shift from to join a vanpool, but the data available indicates that about 4.6 trips at that average passenger load would be shifting from a drive-alone mode. We therefore estimate that the VMT reduction for the month by vanpool passengers to be about 10.3 million miles for the month. While this figure doesn't directly annualize due to program growth, stretching this figure out for a 12 month period would generate a 124 million mile savings.

The growth of the statewide vanpool program is constrained by transit system demands for other fleet capital replacement or expansion, demands for vanpool capital replacement, limited maintenance base capacity, and fuel costs.

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