King County Metro
Employer Van Demonstration Program

Questions and Answers

Background

The primary objective of the JobSeeker Employer Van Demonstration Program is to provide transportation for low-income and welfare clients who are entering the workforce.

Metro is interested in innovative partnership arrangements with employers to provide van transportation that addresses barriers that regular public transportation cannot. The program is intended to fill gaps in existing transportation services and programs. These partnerships should support sustained employment for these clients.

Programs may be designed to provide clients with transportation for traditional commute trips, shift work, and childcare. The program may include innovative approaches such as incentives for drivers to form and drive vanpools that include employees from low-income and welfare backgrounds. The program may also pay for expenses such as fuel, maintenance, or lease costs of operating a van program that includes these new employees

Partnerships between employers, transportation management associations, cities, social service agencies, housing authorities and/or community-based organizations are encouraged.

1. What is the expected annual cost of an Employer Van Demonstration Program? What costs are included? What portion of the costs were associated with drivers?

A van typically costs between $15,000 and $20,000 per year to operate. This includes all operating costs such as the lease, driver salary, maintenance, fuel etc. Drivers salaries may amount to 1/4 to 1/2 of the cost of operations, however, Metro **cannot** pay for driver salaries.

2. How does reimbursement work?

The employer would create an expense during a month. It would then bill Metro using the reimbursement form provided in the agreement. The form must be accompanied with appropriate documentation i.e. receipts, timesheets etc.

The County will issue a check to the company in the amount of 50 percent of the allowable reimbursable expenses. Allowable reimbursable expenses are those authorized by the Federal Transit Administration and the County. The turnaround time for reimbursements is usually 2 weeks.

3. For daycare trips, do destinations need to be specified in the application? What are the restrictions?

Trips to childcare centers and daycare centers are permitted in the vans. Companies will be required to meet all federal and state laws for transporting children. The grant will pay for 50 percent of this cost.

A parent and/or legal guardian must accompany any child who is being transported. Companies will be required to identify specific childcare centers that they will be transporting children to in their agreements. Vans may not be used for field trips or sundry event trips.

Vans may be used for emergency trips involving parents and children, as long as this is specified in the agreement.

4. What is the capacity of the vans?

Metro can provide 8, 12, and 15 passenger vehicles. Employers may also lease a vehicle from an outside vendor or contract with an outside vendor for the service.

5. When would the program end? What happens when the program ends?

Agreements cover service to December 30, 2000. They can be extended through December 2001 based on funding availability.

Metro has applied with other transit agencies in the Puget Sound region for multi-year funding from the Federal Transit Administration. We anticipate continuing this program for an additional 3 years until the end of 2003 but this will be based on the success of this program and continued grant funding.

6. Would a back-up vehicle be available? What happens if a van breaks down? If a service such as AAA were used, would those costs be reimbursable?

Back up vehicles will be provided at the sole discretion of the County. Generally, routine maintenance on the vehicles will take no longer than a day. Should the van be undergoing maintenance for a major repair the county may decide to issue a vehicle to permanently replace it.

Under the contract, the Company will be required to designate a responsible staff person who will respond to any accident or vehicle breakdown and inform the County of the condition of the vehicle. Contacting a towing service or AAA may be necessary for the Company to provide response. Since costs related to this incident would be van related, 50% of the costs incurred would be reimbursable under the conditions outlined in agreements.

7. Who keeps the van overnight?

The contracting company/agency will be responsible for storage of the vehicle.

8. Can a contract be with two or more employers/agencies?

The County will contract with a single agency for the vehicle but coordination, use, and cost sharing arrangements are encouraged between agencies.

9. Can an employer have more than one van?

Yes. Depending on the number of low-income employees being transported.

10. Do employees served need to be TANF recipients?

No. TANF recipients are the primary target group. Low-income populations that met the Department of Housing and Urban Development income are also targeted. Low-income households are defined as those with household incomes at or below 50% of the median income. This is calculated to be less than $25,000 annually.

11. What type of information is required for the quarterly progress reports?

The Federal Transit Administration requires that recipient transit agencies proved specific information about their programs. With respect to the van program, Metro will require that companies/agencies maintain daily trip logs that include origin/destination; pick up/drop off times; trip time; mileage and whether the trip was for adults or children. We will also want information about trip purpose i.e. commute, training, childcare and/or emergency. We may also want information about customer satisfaction with the service but this type of information will be gathered by surveying riders. Metro may want employers to assist in surveys of riders for ways to improve the program.

12. Does application need to identify # of trips, origin/destination, trip purpose?

The application does require a discussion of the need for the van and the purposes for which it will be used. *(See application form.)* Companies are not required to identify numbers of trips they propose to provide.

13. Can trips be flexible?

A major intent of the JobSeeker Van programs was to give employers a transportation tool to provide for needs that regular Metro service could not. The vans can be used in a variety of ways and provide the rider with trips to shifts, childcare, and training. Metro would not be capable of providing these trips.

More importantly, vans address many of the transportation barriers faced by these riders. This population does not always have access to reliable personal transportation. They often cannot afford insurance or they may not have a drivers license. Cultural differences may make regular vanpool or carpool formation difficult. This strategy provides them with regular transportation and a driver to overcome these barriers.

14. Can trips go beyond King County?

Yes.

15. How will the vans or the program meet needs of disabled populations?

a) *Existing ACCESS System* - employees can use the existing ACCESS system if they are within the service area and if they meet the service criteria. This system requires a one day-in-advance reservation and payment of a fare. The Job Access grant cannot be used as reimbursement for fares. Other funding sources such as TANF funds may be used for fares.

b) *Employer Leases Equipped Vehicle from Outside Vender* - An employer may lease a lift-equipped vehicle from an outside vender and Metro would reimburse the organization for 50% of the lease costs.

c) *Employer Leases Equipped Van from Metro* - An employer may also request a lift-equipped van from Metro instead of the regular vanpool vehicle. Accessible Services will make surplus vehicles with lifts available for this lease arrangement.

d) *Employer Hires Outside Service Vendor* - An employer may contract with an outside service provider to provide the transportation for these employees.

Scenarios

Here are some scenarios using a Company that has employees that meet the low-income/TANF criteria:

1. Business Use of Vans Program

In this scenario, the employer would lease a van from Metro for $300 per month through the King County JobSeekers Program. The employer will receive 50% operating support (see Allowable Costs) when the vehicle is used to transport new employees from low-income/TANF backgrounds to work or training locations. Unlike traditional vanpools, there is no mileage cost if the van is used for Welfare to Work/JobsAccess purposes.

2. Fleet Vehicles

The employer can use its existing fleet vehicles to transport low-income/TANF employees to the work site and also receive 50% operating support on qualifying trips. They would simply bill Metro for any operating costs associated with those trips. Again, Metro **cannot** pay for costs associated with drivers' salaries.

3. Partnerships with Social Service Agencies or Community Organizations

Employers may contract with a social service agency or community organization to provide transportation to low-income populations by leasing a van from metro through the JobSeeker Community Vans Program. The social service agency would contract with Metro to lease the van and an agreement would be worked out between the employer and CBO regarding van usage. The employer may also make a financial contribution to the agency's operations, which can provide a tax credit to the company.

4. Work Opportunity Tax Credits

Hire a welfare recipient and take advantage of the Work Opportunity Tax Credits, which can reduce employer federal tax liability by as much as $2,400 per new hire. For assistance with recruiting, screening and training welfare-to-work clients, contact the Seattle Jobs Initiative, King County Jobs Initiative, Employment Security Department, Department of Social and Health Services–WorkFirst or King County WorkForce Development.

5. Employee Transportation Programs

Create or expand an employee transportation program to help recruit and retain employees with a variety of transportation challenges. Commuting programs offer financial subsidies, discounted parking, Guaranteed Ride Home and other benefits to all employees that use transit, ridesharing, bicycling, walking, tele-work or compressed workweeks. Many employers also offer assistance finding a vanpool or carpool. Your transportation program may be eligible for a tax credit under the Transportation Equity Act (TEA-21).

Allowable Costs

Here are some of the costs that would be reimbursed at 50%:

- Fuel costs associated with transporting eligible employees.
- Lease costs
- Vehicle maintenance costs
- Costs associated with installing safety equipment for child transportation
- Insurance