

TRIANGLE COMMUTER NEWS

FEBRUARY 1994

A Publication of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission

Ridesharing? Call 471-POOL



Vanpool driver survey: some vans fly, others crawl

A recently completed survey of vanpool drivers serving downtown Pittsburgh revealed dramatic differences in their operating speeds and times. From a breathtaking average top

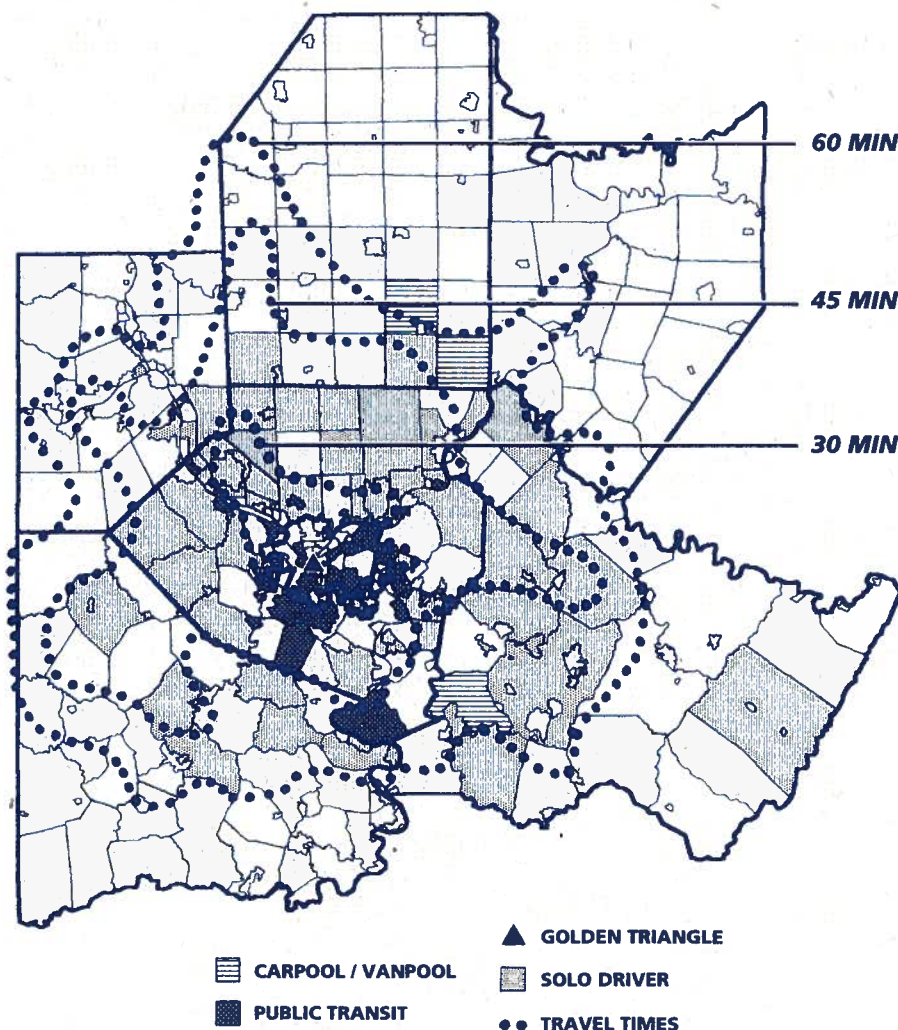
speed of 54 miles per hour for the morning rush hour commute for a pool operating out of Cranberry Township, reported average travel speeds range downward to as low as 16

miles per hour for a van carrying Shaler residents into town. Median speed for all the vanpools surveyed was 34 miles per hour.

Travel times also varied, as did the distances covered. Of the 27 survey respondents, the longest reported commute – a van which carries riders to and from Greensburg – averaged almost exactly one hour. At the opposite extreme, a vanpool from Ross Township averaged a mere 14 minutes during the three-day survey period. Contour lines on the accompanying map show inbound travel times in 15 minute increments. For municipalities with 20 or more residents who work in Pittsburgh, the dominant mode of commuter travel into town is shown by contrasting patterns on the map.

Altogether, 74 vanpools organized by SPRPC serve approximately 1,000 downtown Pittsburgh commuters every weekday. Another 16, coordinated by the University of Pittsburgh, serve commuters into Oakland. The vans, which can seat as many as 15 passengers, operate from communities as far away as Wheeling, West Virginia. The vehicles are leased from month to month by a commercial vanpool service. Passengers pay their drivers a monthly fee based on the van's lease price plus its fuel, parking and toll expenses. Monthly vanpool fares typically range from \$65 to \$90. All van maintenance and insurance costs are covered by the leasing company. Van drivers commute free of charge and enjoy unrestricted personal use of their vehicles during evenings and weekends. For additional vanpool information, call 471-POOL. ▲

HOW DO THEY COMMUTE? Patterns on the map show the form of transportation used by the majority of each community's daily commuters into Pittsburgh. Contour lines show inbound travel times in 15 minute increments. Municipalities shown in white either have fewer than 20 daily commuters or else use a mix of transportation modes into town.





Smithfield Street Bridge closed for repairs

The ornate Victorian-era Smithfield Street Bridge linking downtown to Station Square began undergoing a long-awaited \$16 million renovation on January 26. The project will be staged in two phases, according to PennDOT. The 110-year old span, which has operated under a three-ton weight restriction since 1988, will be closed to all motor traffic until November of this year, and then again from March to June of 1995. When it reopens, it will accommodate vehicles weighing as much as 23 tons, allowing bus service to operate directly from the PAT transit tunnel into the Golden Triangle.

Once its deck and supporting structures have been reinforced and restored to their landmark status, the bridge's eastern side – which has been out of use as a trolley lane for more than 10 years – will be opened to motor vehicles for the first time ever.

When completed, the bridge will feature three traffic lanes, including a reversible center lane, as well as rebuilt intersections with Carson Street and Ft. Pitt Boulevard at either end. During reconstruction, auto traffic accustomed to using the bridge, which carries as many as 15,000 cars a day, will be detoured onto the West End Bridge. However the span's pedestrian sidewalks, which are heavily used, will remain open throughout the project. ▲

Security, competition, drive private shuttle service growth

They seem to be everywhere and come in every size. Private buses and company vans, many of them following fixed routes and operating on regular schedules, have become the fastest-growing element in Pittsburgh's transportation network. And, according to a study about to be released by the Oakland Task Force, they are providing a safe, attractive and highly effective transportation alternative for a growing number of area residents.

Operated by a variety of enterprises including parking lots, hotels, hospitals, restaurants, and universities, as well as by auto repair shops, apartment complexes, and multinational corporations, Pittsburgh's expanding network of private shuttle vehicles has grown in response to mounting public concerns about personal security as well as to competitive business pressures.

The University of Pittsburgh's shuttle buses alone, which last year carried nearly a million riders, not only offer service up and down Pitt's hilly campus, they also operate routes into what the University calls its "Extended Campus" – North and South Oakland, Shadyside and Squirrel Hill, where large numbers of students reside. To safeguard its riders, Pitt also offers service on demand from early evening until 3:00 AM.

Unlike other parts of Pennsylvania, where the P.U.C. regulates shuttles, in Allegheny County that responsibility falls to the Port Authority. PAT's criteria for approving shuttle services – which they apply to third-party transportation contractors like Owens and Lenzner – deal mainly with documenting that the operator is reputable, safe and adequately insured. However, a far larger number of shuttles, which are owned and operated by hotels, restaurants, and other private companies as a convenience to customers and employees, are currently exempt from any regulation or reporting requirements.

As a result, nobody knows for sure how many riders the shuttles serve. But, according to Pat Hassett, who coordinated the Task Force's shuttle study, that number is significant. In Oakland, where Pitt's eight shuttle buses alone carry 5,500 daily riders, there are also separate shuttle services operated by Children's Hospital, the University Medical Center and Carnegie-Mellon University. Outside of Oakland, Shadyside Hospital, Allegheny General Hospital, and West Penn Hospital also operate private shuttles, each dedicated to serving its own patients, staff and parking lot patrons.

Two years ago, a study commissioned by the City Planning Department estimated that between them, Pitt, CMU, UPMC and Children's Hospital operated a total of 26 shuttle vehicles in Oakland. Since that time, both the number of vans and the number of service providers have grown as the result of heightened concerns over personal safety, worsening traffic congestion, scarcity of nearby parking, and increased competition for patrons.

"There's clearly a trend for major employers to provide off-site parking and free shuttle service to the actual place of employment to reduce staff parking problems," according to John Lubmir of Lenzner Coach Lines. "Student safety and security are what drives the Pitt program. But with the hospitals, it's more a function of congestion."

Ironically, the growth in shuttle patronage has come at a time of declining transit ridership and increased commuting by private car. Those trends have led some public officials to speculate that growing shuttle use has come at the expense of transit patronage. But that idea is vigorously refuted by shuttle operators. Private shuttles, they point out, are not open to the general public, they do not charge fares, and they do not travel the same corridors as traditional mass transit. They offer a unique service which a growing number of organizations have found fills an important niche in the lives of their workers, guests and clients – regular commuters as well as occasional travelers. ▲

Federal tax change proposal would affect employee parking

Cash, pass, or park?

A series of Clinton administration proposals, intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, could make the alternatives to solo auto commuting considerably more attractive. A provision in the President's wide-ranging "Climate Change Action Plan" would allow employers who lease parking space for their employees to offer them the equivalent value in transit vouchers or cash without affecting the company's own income taxes.

If an employee were to opt for the cash equivalent of a company-leased parking spot, or about \$2,000 a year for companies located in the Golden Triangle, that money would be subject to tax as regular income. The tax revenue from that provision alone would generate \$1.3 billion a year, according to administration estimates.

Alternatively, an employee could choose to receive a comparable value in public transit passes, which would be free

of income tax. Depending on how the law's final provisions are drafted, transit vouchers could also be used to pay the cost of vanpool participation. Vanpools into Pittsburgh generally range from \$60 to \$90 a month. Monthly passes for transit operators serving downtown Pittsburgh range between \$40 and \$150, depending on distance. Employees

choosing to retain their company-provided parking would be exempted from tax on their equivalent cash value. As proposed, the "cash-out" provision would only apply to companies with more than 25 employees. The administrations proposals are expected to go to Congress during the current legislative session. Stay tuned. ▲

Detours, Delays and Diversions



Winter is traditionally an off-season for scheduled PennDOT road work. But projects continue on several major roads in the region while others remain closed or restricted in some fashion until construction resumes in the spring. Noteworthy road projects now underway include:

Smithfield Street Bridge. Repairs to this historic span linking downtown to Station Square will keep the bridge closed to all motor vehicle traffic through mid-November. However, pedestrians will be able to use its sidewalks throughout the entire time.

Route 65. Ohio River Boulevard will remain closed to traffic between the McKees Rocks and West End Bridges during the replacement of a shorter span near Western Penitentiary.

Fort Pitt Tunnels. Restoration work to the granite facades of the tunnel portals will continue to cause lane restrictions in both directions, but those restrictions will apply primarily at night and on weekends.

I-279 southbound. A widening of the highway bridge over Suffolk Street in the city's East Street Valley area will continue to force inbound lane restrictions beginning at 9:00 AM daily. HOV lane passenger requirements will remain at two persons per vehicle until the bridge work has been completed.

Highland Park Bridge. The ramp leading from Rt. 28 southbound onto the Highland Park Bridge will be closed until October for reconstruction. The ramp leading from Rt. 28 northbound onto the bridge will also be closed for rebuilding later this season.

Vanpool Riders Needed

Weekday vanpools to downtown Pittsburgh depart from and return to communities throughout the region. Current passenger openings include the following:

From: Delmont/Export/Murrysville

Work times: 8:00 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$72
Contact: Linda Zoskey
Phone: 565-7914

From: Gibsonia

Work times: 7:30 - 4:15
Monthly fare: \$75
Contact: Richard Vendemio
Phone: 393-8838

From: Greensburg/Jeanette/Irwin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$80
Contact: Dave Ross
Phone: 566-5750

From: Greensburg/Jeanette

Work times: 8:00 - 5:15
Monthly fare: \$80
Contact: Kevin Bossart
Phone: 234-1096

From: Irwin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$69
Contact: Richard Peer
Phone: 281-4052

From: Latrobe/Rt. 30

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$85
Contact: Luanne Stepanic
Phone: 234-4832

From: Mars/Valencia

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$76
Contact: Patrick Dickson
Phone: 433-4549

From: Monroeville

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: Harry Banks
Phone: 433-4835

From: Monroeville/Murrysville

Work times: 8:00 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: Mark Gibson
Phone: 497-6792

From: McKeesport/Elizabeth

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$75
Contact: William Bury
Phone: 392-8773

From: Moon Township

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$67
Contact: James Cafaro
Phone: 227-2856

From: Monaca/Ambridge

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: Cindy Robinson
Phone: 234-0517

From: Mt. Pleasant

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$99
Contact: Eugene LaPosta
Phone: 227-6030

From: Natrona Heights/Allegheny Valley

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$75
Contact: Carolyn Nulph
Phone: 261-3640

From: New Kensington/Oakmont/Plum

Work times: 8:15 - 5:15
Monthly fare: \$74
Contact: Richard Deutsch
Phone: 288-1708

From: N. Huntingdon/Irwin

Work times: 8:30 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$76
Contact: Donald Douglass
Phone: 234-5230

From: N. Huntingdon/Irwin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$73
Contact: Patrick Lengel
Phone: 391-7834 x177

From: Perryopolis/Rt. 51 South

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: Charles Kennedy
Phone: 471-2000

From: Pleasant Hills

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$65
Contact: Wade Fox
Phone: 391-5590 x312

From: Robinson Twp./Forrest Grove

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$66
Contact: Raymond Terpack
Phone: 633-3792

From: Stubenville/Weirton

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$75
Contact: Kimberly Sisinni
Phone: 255-8791

From: West Mifflin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$65
Contact: Adesta Kondas
Phone: 633-3892

From: Whiteoak/N. Versailles

Work times: 7:30 - 4:15
Monthly fare: \$73
Contact: Harry McDaniel
Phone: 644-6663





Census data confirm it: Downtown and Oakland really are different

According to the 1990 U.S. Census, a total of 115,000 people commute to work every weekday in downtown Pittsburgh. Another 55,000 travel to work in Oakland. But those same data also bear out

what residents of the area have long suspected: the workday rhythms of Pittsburgh's two busiest commercial hubs are distinctly different from each other.

In the Golden Triangle, 63% of the workforce arrives during the traditional morning rush hours. In Oakland, only about half the workers travel during the morning peak; the rest arrive at different times throughout the day, reflecting the shift changes and work patterns characteristic of hospitals, colleges, and the businesses serving them.

In the Golden Triangle, transit plays a very big role in moving commuters – particularly during the rush hours, when it carries more than 37% of the commuters. In Oakland, it plays a much smaller role, with just one out of five workers traveling to work by bus.

In the Golden Triangle, 42% of the rush hour commuters drive to work by themselves. In Oakland, solo drivers account for 54 % of the peak hour workers, and an even larger share of its off-peak commuters.

In the Golden Triangle, which is almost entirely commercial, very few people either walk or bicycle to work – just over 1% according to the census. But in Oakland, where apartments and private homes are woven throughout the district, nearly 7% regularly use muscle power to get themselves to work.

In the Golden Triangle, 73% of the rush hour commuters travel in from surrounding suburbs and outlying counties. But in Oakland, fully 41% of the peak hour commuters already live in city neighborhoods, and more than half of its off-peak commuters are also city residents.

Surprisingly, the census showed that both downtown and Oakland experienced identical rates of carpool use – 19%. The survey also reflected the importance of the city's two hubs to the entire region. Virtually every one of the 400-plus municipalities in the six-county metropolitan area had at least one resident who regularly commuted into either Oakland or the Golden Triangle to earn a living. ▲

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Printed on Recycled Paper

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 164
Pittsburgh, PA

The preparation of this publication was financed in part through a grant from the United States Department of Transportation, the Federal Transit Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Department of Transportation of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as well as the counties of Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Washington, Westmoreland, and the City of Pittsburgh.