

SPRPC ONGOING RIDE-SHARING PROGRAM
PROGRESS REPORT-FY 1984-85

Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission
564 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15219

July 1985

Company coordinators again had little interest in ridesharing in the 1981-82 fiscal year. The poor economic conditions continued and even became more depressed with layoffs, early retirements and plant closings becoming weekly events. During this period, however, third-party vanpooling increased considerably. While the company sponsored vanpool programs remained comparatively stable, total vanpool activity increased from 147 vans in June 1982 to 224 by June of 1983--a 52% increase. Many of the new vanpools could be attributed to transit riders' dissatisfaction with the substantial fare increase and service reduction put into effect during the fall of 1982. Other significant ridesharing events during the 1981-82 fiscal year included the following: The State General Assembly enacted legislation that clarifies van/carpool activity; the University Health Center of Pittsburgh's strengthened its ridesharing program; Ridesharing of Southwestern Pennsylvania, Inc., a non-profit corporation, was formed by public and private ridesharing advocates.

During the 1983-84 fiscal year, ridesharing did not grow as anticipated. Poor economic conditions continued. The unstable employment base created a situation where the statement, "I have more important things to think about than ridesharing" was predominate. In light of the "success" of the 1981-82 Parkway East reconstruction, neither company executives nor their employees were concerned about the 1984 construction season. Although the Parkway Central was among the several major road projects and much more disruption was projected than had previously occurred, the public did not see the need for ridesharing. Company vanpools programs decreased from 101 in June 1983 to 84 in June of 1984, a 16.8% reduction in vanpooler participation. Third-party vanpooling showed a modest increase from 116 in June 1983 to 129 in June 1984, a 11.2% increase in vanpooler participation. The Parking Patron Survey found that the number of privately-owned and operating vanpools increased from 7 in June 1983 to 28 in June 1984.

Again in the 1984-85 program year, company sponsored vanpools declined; in June 1984 there were 84; only 63 remained in June 1985, a 25% decrease. Almost half of these losses resulted from Gulf Corporation closing its downtown headquarters and its research and development complex. Ten vanpools were terminated from this employer alone. The third party vanpool program also declined; the number of vanpools decreased from 129 in June 1984 to 124 in June 1985 (3.9% decrease)

Although company management continued to have little interest in ridesharing, individual calls for car and vanpool assistance increased almost 20% (2700 in 1983-84 to 3200 in 1984-85). By responding to these calls, SPRPC staff "saved" at least 8-10 vanpools and 18 "aborted" vans were assigned to new groups. Private owner/operator vanpools increased from 28 in June 1984 to 35 in June 1985. Of these seven new private vanpools, five were formed from former third-party groups.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

SPRPC has actively promoted ridesharing since the 1973-74 "energy crunch." At that time, ridesharing alternatives enjoyed considerable interest, because there was an oil shortage and EPA required all major employers, that supplied large numbers of employee parking spaces, to submit a "ridesharing plan." More than 150 local employers participated in SPRPC's "Commuter Computer." Gulf Oil Corporation introduced vanpooling to the region by starting two vanpools. However, the energy problem was temporarily resolved and the EPA mandate was never enforced; therefore, local company interest in ridesharing declined.

From 1975 to 1977, SPRPC maintained the capability to carry out carpool matching and responded to requests by individuals and a few companies to provide ridesharing services. Gulf increased their vanpool fleet to five.

In 1977-78, energy shortages generated renewed interest at Federal and local levels. SPRPC responded again, actively promoting ridesharing among major regional employers. During this period, promotional materials were prepared, questionnaires printed, and a slide presentation developed. As a result of the 1977-78 work program, 17 additional vanpools were formed and a total of 22 vans were in operation in the SPRPC region. Carpool activity also began to increase as major employers surveyed their employees for ridesharing references. As a result of SPRPC's ridesharing effort, 2.5 million vehicle miles of travel (VMT) were "saved" as gasoline prices continued to climb.

During the 1979-80 period, local employers showed considerable new interest in ridesharing. By the end of June 1980, vanpool activity in the SPRPC region increased from 22 vans to 80; these vans operated from 18 different work sites. Over 6,500 employees requested carpool matchee listings. The SPRPC master file increased by 12,000 records. During this period, an estimated savings of 6 million VMT was realized.

A marked improvement in ridesharing continued through the next program year. During the period July 1980 to June 1981, 49 additional vanpools were implemented within the region bringing the total vans in operation to 129. The SPRPC data base was increased by an additional 25,000 survey responses. Over 13,500 carpool matchee listings were given to interested individuals. An estimated annual savings of over 8 million VMT was realized during this period. Much of this 1981 ridesharing activity can be attributed to the Parkway East reconstruction program, which permitted introduction of the third-party vanpool alternative to East Hills commuters.

During the 1981-82 fiscal year ridesharing interest began to dwindle as a result of the declining economy and the "oil glut" which increased fuel and supplies reduced gasoline prices. In addition, Federal, state and local pressure for energy conservation was not as strong as it had been during the 1978-1980 period. By June of 1982, there were 147 vanpools in the region, 18 more than the previous year.

Chapter 2

SPRPC ONGOING RIDESHARING PROGRAM

Many commuters, disrupted by the Parkway Central reconstruction, sought alternatives. Telephone calls for assistance increased almost 20 percent during this program year. On the other hand, most downtown employers did not respond favorably to SPRPC's request to distribute survey forms to their employees. Only one major company, Mellon Bank, surveyed ridesharing interest among its employees.

The number of third-party vanpools declined by 3.9% despite SPRPC's considerable efforts to form new groups from aborted vanpools. In total, 28 vanpool were formed either by new groups or by reassigning small vanpool groups. As a result, the third-party vanpool fleet remained at about the same level as the previous year.

EMPLOYERS RIDESHARING ACTIVITY

During the 1984-85 work program, the Golden Triangle ridesharing base file increased from 800 records (remaining records after the file was purged in June 1984) to 3,500. About 1,100 of these records came from ridesharing surveys at Mellon Bank and the Federal Executive Board; 700 records were obtained from Allegheny General Hospital. Other records came from individual request for ridesharing assistance received via the 471-POOL number. More than 2,600 carpool matching forms were distributed to employees by their company coordinator or were mailed directly to individuals. Table 1 reports the current mode of travel to the Golden Triangle and ridesharing interest of persons in the SPRPC master file.

SPRPC conducted a major ridesharing program for employees at Allegheny General Hospital. Available parking for employees was reduced drastically, because spaces along the East Street Valley Expressway right-of-way were eliminated and the City of Pittsburgh initiated on-street parking restrictions. SPRPC staff met with hospital officials to design and implement a ridesharing program. As a result, the following occurred:

1. SPRPC made arrangements with the Port Authority to provide transit schedule racks at the hospital.
2. Staff, in cooperation with the hospital personnel, designed a promotional campaign including newsletter articles, posters, and a travel questionnaire. (See Appendix I for samples of these promotional materials.)
3. Staff provided a demonstration van for employees to view during a "ridesharing week".
4. SPRPC processed over 700 survey returns and provided carpool match listings to 450 employees.