

NIH Vanpool FAQs

What is a vanpool?

A vanpool is a group of 4+ people who ride to work together in a vehicle from a vanpool company (usually a minivan). Vanpool participants receive a monthly monetary benefit through NIH toward the van, which also includes insurance, fuel, and maintenance costs!

What is a vanpool coordinator?

One vanpool participant, called the vanpool coordinator, is designated as the point person for working with the parking office and the vanpool company. They act as the manager for the van and keep track of any logistical needs.

Who owns the van? What is NIH's role?

Vans are owned by Enterprise (Commute with Enterprise, the vanpool company). NIH's role is to help facilitate the payment of Transhare benefits (working as a liaison between WMATA and Enterprise) and arrange a parking space at NIH. Maintenance, lease/agreement, route, and other logistics are worked out between the vanpool participants and the vanpool company.

Who drives the van? Can I be paid to drive?

The vanpool participants work out shared driving responsibilities amongst themselves. However, at minimum any drivers must be at least 25 years old, be licensed for a minimum of 3 years, have never had a DUI, and have a good driving record. A more complete list of requirements is available from the vanpool coordinator and/or the vanpool company. Drivers may not accept remuneration for driving, even from fellow vanpool participants.

Are vanpools always in big vans?

No! There are several vehicle sizes available from the vanpool company depending on the needs of the vanpool group, ranging from mid-size SUV to large capacity van. The most common vehicle is a minivan.

How is the van start/end time and route determined? Where do vanpools meet?

The start location and time are determined by the vanpool participants. Most vans choose to meet at a designated location, such as a park and ride. The route is similarly decided by the vanpool participants. Some vanpools stop at multiple locations, so contact the vanpool coordinator for details and options.

Where does the van park at NIH?

The parking office provides a designated parking space for the vanpool at one chosen facility. Participants who work in a different building can arrange with their fellow vanpoolers to be

dropped off- this is a common scenario, so don't be afraid to reach out to the vanpool coordinator to discuss your needs!

Where is the van stored overnight?

Vans must either be parked overnight at the residence of a designated driver or, with prior written approval from the vanpool company, may be parked in a safe public location such as a park and ride. Alternate overnight locations must be worked out directly with the vanpool company.

Do I have to ride every day? What if I am on leave?

Vans are expected to operate at least 80% of the time, but that does *not* mean that everyone has to ride each day. However, each participant is expected to ride at least a majority of their working days (not counting any days you are on leave or AWS). You are expected to commit to participating on the roster at least one full month when deciding to join (i.e., it is not a hop on, hop off kind of thing).

What happens to my parking pass if I join a vanpool? What if I need to drive myself one day?

Joining a vanpool is a trade- you give up your regular parking pass in exchange for the transit benefits and a dedicated ride each day. Don't worry though- vanpoolers have access to 12 one-time parking passes per quarter for those days that they need to come or leave early/late.

In addition, all vanpool riders are eligible to participate in the Maryland "Guaranteed Ride Home" program. From the MDOT website: "Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) is a service that provides up to six free rides home per year for registered commuters who work in qualifying counties and regularly bike, walk, carpool, vanpool, or take transit to work. GRH is designed to rescue commuters who are worried about how they'll get home when a personal emergency arises." <https://www.mdot.maryland.gov/tso/pages/index.aspx?pageid=50>

Joining, Leaving, or Starting a Vanpool

What is the monthly deadline to join a vanpool?

You can join a vanpool at any time. However, Transshare benefits must be allotted by the parking office by the 15th of the month, to take effect in the following month. There is paperwork involved, so you will need to contact the vanpool coordinator and the parking office as soon as possible in order to meet this deadline. If you miss the deadline, you can still join the vanpool but will just need to pay your portion out of pocket until your benefits kick in.

What happens if I need to leave a vanpool?

Please give your vanpool coordinator at least 30 days' notice so that all deadlines for removal paperwork can be met.

I want to start a vanpool. What is the process?

Great! The first step is to get at least 3 other colleagues (total of four people) to commit to joining the van and designate one of you as the vanpool coordinator. After this, contact the parking office. You must contact the parking office early in the month in order for the paperwork to be processed in time for the van to start the following month. Transshare benefits *must* be allotted by the 15th of the month, and there are a LOT of steps that have to take place before this can happen.

How many people are needed for a vanpool?

A minimum of four people in a six-seater vehicle are required for a vanpool to start. However, practically speaking, the Transshare benefits for four people likely will not completely cover the vehicle cost. So while you may start a vanpool with four people, you may have an out-of-pocket cost until more riders join. The minimum number to avoid out-of-pocket costs completely is usually 6 people in a 7-person minivan, for example. However, different vehicle sizes have different costs- contact the vanpool coordinator of the van you wish to join, or (in the case of a new van) reach out to the parking office for a quote. There are also occasionally state or county programs that offer money to cover empty seats.

Money, Payments, and Insurance

Who pays for the van?

NIH offers up to \$325 in Transshare benefits to each person joining the van that can be used toward the van bill and fuel charges, but ultimately the vanpool participants are responsible for the total monthly cost. If the vehicle is filled, then the Transshare benefits are likely more than sufficient to cover all costs. If the vehicle is not filled, the vanpool participants are responsible for sharing any out-of-pocket costs that remain after the Transshare benefits are applied. However, if there are any out-of-pocket costs, usually these come to a very reasonable amount-- much less than paying for gas for your own vehicle in a month!

How is money exchanged to pay for the vanpool?

NIH coordinates directly with WMATA to have Transshare benefits sent to the vanpool company. Payment of any out-of-pocket costs is facilitated by the vanpool coordinator using the share cost feature of the Enterprise billing website/app. No cash is ever exchanged.

How are fuel costs paid?

Vans are provided with a fleet fuel card. Fuel charges are added to the monthly van bill, which is paid for by Transshare benefits. If there are not enough vanpool participants for the Transshare allowance to completely cover costs, the vanpool participants are responsible for the remaining balance.

What about insurance?

Insurance is provided by the vanpool company as part of the lease/agreement for all approved drivers and riders.

Can I take the bus or train and a vanpool?

You must choose whether to use your NIH Transshare benefits for a van or the bus/train. This is due to the way that Transshare benefits must be allocated in the system.

Do vanpools qualify to use the HOV lanes?

Yes! Vanpool participants mention that this is a great perk and time saver.