



Inside This Issue:

Nearly a Decade of Vanpooling at Marathon Oil Company

Vanpoolers Picking up Friends at the Woodlands

Commuter Challenge Offers Commuting Relief in Detroit

Transportation News That Moves You

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Nearly a Decade of Vanpooling at Marathon Oil Company

In the mid 1990s Marathon Oil Company started offering vanpooling services to their employees in the Houston area. Since 2003, Marathon has been recognized by the EPA as a *Best Workplaces for Commuters*SM employer and is on their *Best Workplaces for Commuters* Fortune 500 list.

Last December, Marathon decided to offer a 9/80 work schedule option to eligible employees in the Company's Houston Tower beginning January 2, 2006. The majority (85%) of Marathon's Houston employees elected to take advantage of this option, which, while saving one round trip commute every two weeks, created challenges with some of the existing vanpools' commuting schedules.

About 300 vanpool participants had to work out schedule differences with their colleagues to keep their vanpool groups viable. The Volunteer Driver/Coordinators of the existing vanpools did such an effective job of communicating with



their colleagues and managing the work schedule changes that, not only did all the existing groups remain intact, but two new vanpool groups were recently formed!

As Celeste Moore, Vanpool Administrator at Marathon notes, "VPSI was the key coordinator working with the groups to ensure a smooth transition. We were concerned about the vanpool groups during the 9/80 transition, due to schedule change coordination needs. We are very pleased with the outcome."

Don Scarborough's van was among the groups that ended up morphing into two vanpools. Don started vanpooling two years ago when he moved to the Houston area from Oklahoma City, OK.

When the 9/80 schedule option was offered, his group decided to split up. Don's original group was in a 14-passenger van. Today five members of the original group, plus one new rider, are traveling to and



Marathon employees, from left to right, Paul Peacock, Leon Tylenda, Celeste Moore and Bob Winland

See *Marathon Oil Company*,
Continued on Page 3

Vanpoolers Picking up Friends at The Woodlands

Daily commutes are often filled with snail-paced traffic, monotonous routes, high fuel costs and stressful driving. At Hewitt Associates, six groups of employees have found a better way to get to and from The Woodlands office park. Commuter vanpooling was first introduced at Hewitt's Texas facilities in January of last year. Since introduction, the program has grown to include vanpool groups commuting from Missouri City, Pasadena, Porter, Humble, Westchase and the Heights area of Houston.

Hewitt further enhances this cost effective alternative to driving alone by offering employees the option of paying up to \$105 per month of their vanpooling related expenses through a pre-tax payroll deduction. Hewitt also designates reserved, preferential parking for each vanpool.

According to Margaret Andrew, Woodlands Vanpool Program Coordinator, "Allowing employees to pay for vanpooling expenses through payroll deduction and on a pre-tax basis has inspired many of our associates to give vanpooling a try."

And how do Hewitt employees like vanpooling? "The travel time is about the same but my cost dropped from \$300 to \$95 per month," says Victor Song, lease holder, primary driver and coordinator for his vanpool group. "Everyone who helps out with the van, including individual drivers and the coordinator receive an incentive for helping. The program has exceeded my expectations," Song continues. "It works exactly like it was advertised and presented to us."

The timing for starting a vanpool could not have been better for Song.

"I had been thinking about the high cost of fuel and the many miles my daily commute added to my car. The program includes a \$35 monthly incentive from Houston METRO and Hewitt offers a pre-tax program for commuting costs. These factors helped me decide that day to start vanpooling immediately. I would definitely recommend vanpooling for those who don't want to put more miles on their vehicle, want to save money on gas, reduce the stress of driving everyday and dealing with traffic."

Michelle Hsu, the driver and coordinator of the vanpool traveling from the Heights notes, "Definitely, the financial benefit is a big plus for our riders. There's camaraderie within the group. Sharing the van is a lot safer as well." Ms. Hsu adds, "Initially, everyone was concerned about the flexibility and not being able to have their personal cars available but this is no longer an issue since we can use the van for some personal use as well. We show up to

work on time and we leave at the same time every day from work. We use the toll road which saves us time. When I used to drive alone to work, I was only able to use the toll road occasionally since it was so costly. Now, the vanpool group shares the cost so it very affordable for us to use the toll road daily."

Sandy Sasnett, driver/coordinator for the 249/290 vanpool group observes, "We waited for almost six months to start our vanpool group. VPSI and METRO were as determined as we were to get us on the road. It was well worth the wait since we were able to gather a great group of riders. We all get along really well. We were able to fill the van to capacity the first month we began and we even have a waiting list now. We all enjoy not having to drive and of course the savings on gas and car maintenance helps too!"



From left to right: Jill Mitchell, Gregg Kramer, Sharon Daniels-McCabe, Sandy Sasnett, Diana Rowland. Van members not pictured are: Carrie Light-Austin, Tolu Adesanya, Sonya Soeharto, and Tomi Kayode

Marathon Oil Company (continued from Page 1)

from work in a minivan. Don says, "It's a nice change after commuting in the bigger van for two years."

Like Don, Carol Schlegel relocated to the Houston area from Oklahoma City. She handles the paperwork for Don's van and was one of the original members that transitioned into a minivan. "Overall, it has been a very positive experience," Carol notes.

"Vanpooling definitely reduces commuting stress levels and saves us money. We have a great group of people. The Marathon subsidy of \$85 per month per employee plus the MiniPool subsidy pays for most of the monthly vanpool expenses. I'd heard the horror stories about traffic congestion in Houston. The vanpool program was a great alternative to driving everyday, and the month-to-month

commitment means people can participate without a long term obligation."

Leon Tylenda started vanpooling in 2003 when the TREK Sugar Land shuttle was discontinued. Leon observes, "It has been a great experience with a regular schedule, a great group of people, a relaxing ride and all the money I've saved."

Recently, Bob Winland, a member of Mr. Tylenda's vanpool group, expressed interest in starting a new vanpool from Missouri City. Initially, finding enough riders for the new Missouri City vanpool was a challenge, but coupled with the 9/80 work schedule change at Marathon, it eventually came together. Mr. Winland notes that while "it took us a while, with communication and coordination between the drivers, Marathon,

and VPSI; it worked out for us." Bob adds, "Our two vans have doubled the initial ridership. We are commuting for free as a result of the combined subsidies from Marathon and Houston METRO and vanpooling is definitely a stress reducer."

At Marathon, vanpooling has long been embraced as part of the company culture. Employees view participation in the program as a point of pride realizing they are helping the Company and their community to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution while saving themselves and their employer money.

VPSI has been providing vanpooling services to employers and individuals in the Greater Houston area since 1981. VPSI works in partnership with the METROVan and the MiniPool programs.

Commuter Challenge Offers Commuting Relief in Detroit

This Spring a major freeway rebuilding project, which will result in a number of lane and ramp closures in metro Detroit, is scheduled to start. To maintain the viability of area businesses, increase safety, and ease commuting stress, companies in Southfield and Detroit are invited to participate in Southeast Michigan's first "Commuter Challenge".

The Commuter Challenge will run under the direction of a public/

private partnership consisting of:

- Michigan Department of Transportation
- Compuware Corporation
- VPSI, Inc.
- Southeast Michigan Council of Governments
- Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation
- Detroit Department of Transportation
- The People Mover
- MichiVan Commuter Vanpools
- Association for Commuter Transportation

The challenge is designed to alleviate traffic during the M-10/Lodge Freeway (a major thoroughfare) construction by introducing rush hour drivers to different modes of transportation.

Employees are being encouraged to try carpooling and van-

pooling, use public transportation, walk, bike, and make use of flextime and telecommute benefits.

Each time an employee of a participating business chooses not to drive alone to work, he or she receives a point. Prizes will be awarded to companies, commuters, and coordinators throughout the Commuter Challenge and at the awards ceremony in May during National Transportation Week.

The challenge will run from March 27 - May 12, 2006.

Companies interested in participating are encouraged to have a representative attend one of the Commuter Challenge Workshops.

For more information visit www.michivan.com/commuter-challenge or call 313-324-3401.





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you'd like to contribute,
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Transportation News That Moves You

Spring Driving Safety Message

As the sun shines more hours each day, glare can make driving a little tougher. A driver needs to prepare for these spring driving conditions:

- Additional sun glare when driving into the sun
- Dirty windshields
- Wet and muddy conditions

Prepare for these conditions by having your sunglasses handy and removing everything stored between the sun visor and the headliner so you can use the sun visor. Keep the windshield washer fluid reservoir full and check it regularly. Increase your following distance on wet or muddy roads.

A clean, properly equipped van and a well prepared driver will help everyone enjoy a safe Spring.

There's a lot Riding on Those Tires

Taking a few minutes to check the air pressure in your vanpool vehicle's tires can be worthwhile to you and others. It can help you:

- Improve fuel economy
- Improve vehicle handling
- Increase tire life and performance
- Protect your van and others from avoidable breakdowns or accidents

Tire pressure can increase or decrease over time and with temperature changes. Both over and under inflated tires can make the van less stable; especially a loaded van at highway speeds.

Find the recommended tire pressure for your van on the driver's side door post and check and adjust the tire pressure regularly.

If you find that your tires

require air pressure adjustment, please visit a full service gas station or tire store to restore your tires to recommended inflation pressures. This service will be provided at no charge to you.

VPSI is Always Looking for Excellent Candidates!

If you know someone with great customer service, sales or management experience, looking to join a great company, please call our Staffing Specialist at 1-800-223-8774 ext. 3528 or visit the *Employment Opportunities* section of our website at www.vpsiinc.com to view our current openings.

Please mention you saw this posting in the *Commuter Chronicle*.