



April 1, 1998

Los Angeles County
Metropolitan
Transportation
Authority


One Gateway Plaza
Los Angeles, CA
90012

213.922.6000

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 194
Los Angeles, CA 90053

TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FROM: JAMES L. de la LOZA, EXECUTIVE OFFICER
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

SUBJECT: REGIONAL VANPOOL CONCEPT

ISSUE

At their November 1997 meeting, in response to a motion by Director Patsouras, the Operations Committee directed staff to develop a one-year vanpool pilot project and implementation plan in cooperation with public and private entities, and to develop non-monetary incentives to encourage the growth of vanpooling. Finally, the Committee directed staff to return to the Operations and Planning and Programming Committees with a report. This report serves as the initial response to that motion.

BACKGROUND

Staff have performed preliminary research of vanpool approaches for MTA to pursue as an alternative for addressing the needs of the commute travel market. However, in order to determine which alternative is feasible for implementation, further study of the various approaches for implementing a regional vanpool program is underway. This effort is being conducted in cooperation with public agencies, private entities, bus riders and the labor interest. In addition, staff will work with private vanpool providers and public agencies to develop non-monetary incentives to encourage vanpooling as a commute alternative.

MTA Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Project Evaluation studies have found that vanpool programs are one of the most cost-effective strategies for reducing single-occupant vehicle travel. The pursuit of a vanpool strategy provides an opportunity for MTA to serve the commute market through a more cost-effective approach, especially long-distance commutes. In addition, a vanpool strategy has the potential for helping MTA meet its Consent Decree requirements and supporting Welfare-to-Work transportation needs. Several of the vanpool alternatives being investigated may require up-front funding to implement, but may provide long-term cost savings to the agency. Once a recommended strategy is proposed, the related financial impact will be outlined.

Definition

Vanpools are comprised of five to fifteen commuters who share a ride to work on a regular basis. The driving is either shared by all the riders or one member serves as the primary driver. A monthly fee is paid by the members to cover expenses. Vans may be owned or operated by an individual, employer, private vendor, public agency or non-profit organization. Vanpools are more applicable to long distance commutes. According to MTA TDM evaluations of vanpool programs, vanpool riders perceive vanpool service to be more comfortable than bus service for long-distance commutes, provide more door-to-door service, operate with very few stops, have flexible routes, but have more rigid schedules.

Current Activities

Unlike many other regions, there are no regional or area-wide public vanpool programs operated in Southern California. In this region vanpools have typically been operated, sponsored and subsidized by employers with little public subsidy. With financial support by MTA, the Southern California Association of Government's (SCAG) Southern California Rideshare (SCR) manages and operates the regional ridematching data-base, helping companies and individuals to join or establish new vanpools. SCR tracks and assists over 1,700 vanpools within the region. In addition, through MTA's TDM Program, several vanpool incentive programs have been funded through the MTA Call for Projects process. MTA is currently funding trial vanpool fare subsidy programs through SCR countywide and through several Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) on a more local level. In addition, through funding provided by SB 836, MTA is developing and implementing a voluntary ridesharing program. This program will offer commuters using alternative modes of travel, including vanpools, incentives in the form of gift certificates, to encourage ridesharing in the region. SB 836, is the State legislation that phases out employer trip reduction requirements and provides funding for voluntary rideshare efforts.

Vanpool Alternatives

Throughout the country, vans and vanpool services are being used by an increasing number of transportation agencies to address a number of niche services. The following are proposed alternatives for further examination. These range from incorporation of vanpools as part of MTA services, to providing assistance to other providers and organizations to encourage growth of vanpooling. The process used to identify these alternatives consisted of: reviewing MTA's express services, analyzing the performance of lines with characteristics similar to vanpools, gathering extensive information on regional vanpool programs operating across the nation, reviewing vanpool services in Southern California, and meetings with staff from Operations Planning, Labor Relations and Multimodal Planning Departments to gather information. Based on this preliminary research, staff have identified the following four alternatives for further study:

- 1. Replacement of high cost express bus lines with vanpool service. Re-deploy MTA resources previously devoted to the express service to support existing crowded lines.**

This alternative could be considered for application to those express lines with low ridership, limited number of stops, limited number of runs, and those that operate in peak hours only. Staff have reviewed MTA express services that meet these criteria and have

found several lines that hold some promise for such a vanpool service. If implemented, major modifications must be made to the existing route, stops and times of operation. Under this alternative staff will examine the feasibility of replacing segments of a line or the entire route with vanpool service, and will address operational issues such as driver, maintenance, fuel, insurance, fare structure, and labor issues.

2. Enhance current express services using vanpools.

The focus of this alternative will be on enhancing and supplementing existing express routes. This approach can be applied to lines that experience overcrowding or lines that do not operate as frequently as needed. Vanpools could also be utilized to serve areas with low population densities where use of full size buses are not warranted. King County Metro in the State of Washington has been successful in using vanpools to supplement express lines.

3. Utilize vanpooling for developing new corridors of service, providing Consent Decree new services and support Welfare-to-Work transportation needs.

This alternative could best be applied in corridors and markets where estimated demand does not warrant service with full size buses. Examples of this application include late night services, reverse commute services, and suburban to suburban service. *Pace*, the transit provider in suburban Chicago, has been successful in using vanpools to provide reverse commute service. Additionally, this alternative could be applied to examine new opportunities based on maximizing utilization of High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes. Vanpool service could also provide an innovative approach to help meet some of MTA's Consent Decree requirements.

In addition, the transportation needs of welfare recipients entering the job market through welfare reform represents another commute market that the region will need to address. Working in cooperation with SCAG, staff will be investigating funding opportunities through the Department of Labor for vanpool programs that target welfare recipients.

4. Support SCAG in their effort to develop and implement a regional vanpool program.

SCAG has been exploring various options for increasing ridership and encouraging growth of vanpooling in this region. Some of the concepts under consideration by SCAG include provision of vanpool service through contracting with a third party vanpool provider; and providing regional marketing and advertising of vanpool services.

A model under consideration by SCAG is the program implemented in the State of Connecticut, which has approached vanpooling by contracting with *2-Plus*, a private ridesharing company, to operate and administer vanpool services throughout the State. Another focus of this alternative will be to evaluate and examine the resources and funding needed for better marketing vanpool programs and to identify methods that would maximize available resources.

Under this alternative, staff will examine the nature and extent of MTA's support of SCAG's efforts in developing and implementing a regional vanpool program, and will address issues related to expanding and enhancing marketing and advertising of vanpool services.

To determine viable alternatives, a thorough examination of each will be conducted. In evaluating these options, staff will address all the issues and obstacles involved in implementation of each alternative. Those which involve operation will require: selection of candidate lines; in-depth analysis of line performance; analysis of vanpool operational issues such as driver, maintenance, fuel, insurance, fare structure, labor issues; examination of expected cost savings; investigation of the origins and destinations of corridor commuters or current express bus riders; identification of park and ride facility availability; and development of marketing strategies.

In addition, staff will examine potential opportunities to secure additional federal funding through reporting vanpool operational data such as vehicle and passenger miles as part of MTA's annual National Transit Data bus statistic reporting. Realization of such opportunity would require development of a coordinated and centralized data collection mechanism. Pace, in the State of Illinois, and Pierce Transit, In the State of Washington include vanpool operational data as part of their annual transit statistic reporting.

It is anticipated that it will take approximately 3 months to collect and analyze the data and develop a recommendation of an approach for a vanpool program and implementation plan.

**Prepared by: Sina Zarifi, TDM Project Manager, Countywide Planning
Cosette Stark, TDM Manager, Countywide Planning**