



**Port of Houston Authority**  
**Vanpool Policy and Guidelines**  
**June 2013**



## Vanpool Program Introduction

The Port of Houston Authority Vanpool Program is a privilege and is not a guaranteed benefit to be available to all employees. The vanpool program is subject to the approval of the Port Commission and may end at any time. The Vanpool Coordinator, a PHA employee, will coordinate the vanpool program and be the contact person between the participants and Houston Metro/STAR. The Vanpool Coordinator functions will include communicating vanpool policy formation and revisions and resolving personal conflicts between vanpool participants. Also, if there are more interested vanpool groups than there is funding, the Vanpool Coordinator will keep track of active and inactive vanpools to determine when a vanpool can be funded by PHA.

## Vanpool Program Requirements, Policies, and Responsibilities

### *General Program Requirements*

- Full time Port of Houston Authority employees are eligible to participate in the vanpool program. **Employees who receive an auto allowance are not eligible to participate in the vanpool program.** Temporary employees and interns can participate in program and ride in the vanpool if there is space on a vanpool. However, they are subject to the following restrictions.
  - The vanpool they are riding on must already meet the ridership requirements.
  - Temporary employees and interns will not be able to use pool cars to drive home.
- Participants must vanpool at least 12 days a month for PHA to maintain the monthly subsidy from Houston Metro. If we lose the subsidy for non-participation you will be responsible for reimbursing the PHA for the \$35. The \$35 will be payroll deducted on the first payday after we receive the invoice.
- Participants will pay \$25 per month, payable via bi-weekly payroll deductions (\$12.50 per pay period), toward the cost of leasing the van. PHA will pay remaining cost less the \$35 per rider, per month subsidy from METRO. Participants will be responsible for the cost of gas and toll road fees required to operate their van.
- A vanpool will be ended if a vanpool's ridership falls below five members (including the driver) for two consecutive months. Vanpools will be disbanded if ridership is not brought up to the minimum level within the 30 days after the first month.
- Each vanpool must have a minimum of two approved drivers.
- Only approved participants can ride in a vanpool vehicle. An approved participant is defined as a participant that is on a roster for a vanpool that services PHA. It is the driver's responsibility for ensuring riders are on the roster before they ride in the vanpool.

## ***Vanpool Participants Requirements***

- Participants should make every effort to be punctual and arrive at the pick-up point prior to vanpool departure. A participant who is ill, or does not plan to ride, should make the best possible effort to contact the primary driver ahead of the departure time.
- Decisions regarding schedule changes, pick-up/drop-off location changes, etc. are to be agreed upon by all participants of the vanpool.
- State of Texas seatbelt law requires the driver and all passengers to wear seatbelts. The PHA employee will be 100% responsible for paying any fines incurred (ie. Seatbelt, speeding ticket, etc) while driving or riding on the vanpool.
- Participants may not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs while driving or riding on the vanpool.
- All personal items should be removed from the vanpool vehicle. PHA, the primary driver, and other vanpool participants are not responsible for any personal items that are lost, stolen, or damaged.
- No smoking is permitted in the vanpool vehicle and within 20 feet of the vanpool vehicle.
- Vanpool participants must refrain from wearing scented colognes or perfumes and eating foods with strong, unpleasant odors if other participants of the vanpool are bothered by these items.
- Participants should conduct themselves in a manner that maximizes their own safety and the safety of the other participants. It is the participant's responsibility to be aware of and comply with PHA's non-discrimination, sexual harassment and racial harassment policies.
- Vanpools should establish their own internal policies, by consensus, regarding comfort issues such as radio play, air conditioning, heating, cell phone use, etc.
- Appropriate behavior, language and conduct is expected and required at all times while riding the vanpool.
- The Vanpool Program is dependent on volunteers who accept responsibility for driving and administering the daily operation of the van.

## ***Vanpool Driver Requirements***

- All full time Port of Houston Authority employees who possess a valid Texas Driver's license are eligible to become drivers in the Vanpool Program. STAR will perform a 5 year background check on all vanpool drivers (primary and alternate).
- STAR (the vanpool vehicle provider) will handle the approval of drivers. To be an approved driver, a participant must meet the following criteria:
  - Driver has volunteered to be a vanpool driver and receives no compensation from the vanpool group for driving.
  - Driver has a valid Texas Driver license.
  - Driver is 25 years of age or older.

- Driver has a minimum of five years current and uninterrupted licensed driving experience.
- Driver does not have more than one moving violation or at-fault accident in the past 12 months.
- Driver does not have more than two moving violations or at-fault accidents in the past 36 months (or a combination thereof).
- Driver does not have any record of convictions for serious offenses such as:
  - Excessive speed (20 mph or more over posted speed limit).
  - Operating to endanger.
  - Reckless or careless driving.
  - Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
  - Operating a motor vehicle with a suspended or revoked license.
  - School bus stopping or passing violations.
  - Leaving the scene of an accident involving personal injury or property damage.
  - Motor vehicle homicide.
- A motor vehicle report will be obtained for use in determining approval.

### ***Vanpool Driver Responsibilities***

- Stop at established pick-up and drop-off locations.
- Travel to and from work along the designated route.
- Ensure that driver schedules are arranged so there is minimal service disruption.
- Notify other participants in their vanpool group when the vanpool will not operate due to lack of available drivers so they can make other arrangements. Encourage participants in their vanpool to become approved drivers so there is more than the required minimum of two approved drivers.
- Bring all maintenance issues to the attention of the Vanpool Coordinator.
- Report all accidents involving the vanpool vehicle.

### ***Vanpool Recordkeeping Requirements***

- The primary driver or a designated participant in the vanpool group will be responsible for recordkeeping.
- Daily ridership information and monthly odometer readings will be recorded by the responsible participant.
- Submit the ridership and odometer information by the 5<sup>th</sup> working day of the next month to the Ride Metro website (<http://ridepro.ridemetro.org/rideprovan/>).

## ***Personal Use of Vanpool Vehicles***

- When the mileage limits for vanpool leases are calculated, it takes into account approximately 200 miles a month for personal use.
- Personal use can include, but is not limited to, taking the van to lunch, running errands during lunch, and the use of the van by approved drivers on evenings and weekends.
- It is up to each vanpool group to determine what acceptable personal use is.

## ***Termination of an Employee as a Vanpool Participant***

- All participants are expected to comply with Texas law and PHA policies during the daily commute. Showing respect for fellow passengers, a concern for safety and common courtesies are expected at all times. Behavior that may compromise the safety or comfort of the vanpool group should be discussed and resolved within the vanpool.
- If the vanpool can't resolve the problem, then a written complaint by email or inter-office memo may be sent to the Director, Human Resources. After reviewing the complaint and attempting to resolve the issue, the Director, Human Resources will bring the matter to the Managing Director, Finance and Administration who will consider termination of the participation privileges of anyone failing to behave in a manner consistent with these guidelines.

## **Forming and Operating a Vanpool**

### ***Vanpool Formation***

- To start a vanpool, a potential group must meet the following criteria.
  - At least five people are needed to start a vanpool.
  - The vanpool must travel at least 20 miles roundtrip to be eligible.
  - Each participant in the group agrees to ride at least 12 times a month
  - Each group needs at least two drivers (a primary driver and an alternate driver.) PHA encourages all participants to be approved as drivers.
- To find other employees that may be interested in starting a vanpool.
  - Provide the Vanpool Coordinator your zip code and in return the Vanpool Coordinator will provide a list of other interested employees that live in the same area. If no other employees have expressed interest, the Vanpool Coordinator will provide a list of employees that live in the same and/or nearby zip codes. You may then contact these employees.
  - You may also post an announcement on SharePoint to find interested employees.
  - Please do not send mass emails to Outlook groups like "Executive Office Building", "Central Maintenance", "BCT", and "Bayport". In other words, do not send emails to every employee. Only send emails to employees that have been provided by the Vanpool Coordinator.

- When at least five people are interested, please send the following information to the Vanpool Coordinator.
  - Name
  - Address
  - Work phone number
  - Work email (if available)
  - Home phone number
  - Work location (TB, BCT, or BP)
  - Identify which employee will be the primary driver.
  - Identify which employee(s) will be alternate drivers.
  - Vanpool Route information including pick up locations and proposed times.
- The Vanpool Coordinator will then determine if funding is available for the vanpool and if the group meets all applicable criteria.
  - If funding is not available, then the group will be put on a waiting list.
  - If funding is available, the Vanpool Coordinator will contact Houston Metro/STAR to start the process of getting a van for the interested group.
  - Interested participants should not contact STAR or Houston Metro unless directed to do so by these guidelines or by the PHA Vanpool Coordinator.
- Houston Metro/STAR will then contact the Vanpool Coordinator to set up a formation meeting. The Vanpool Coordinator will then contact the primary driver who will be responsible for contacting the rest of the group to set up a time and place for a meeting. (PHA recommends that these meetings be held during lunch in the lunch/break room.) At the formation meeting, parking locations, van types, etc. will be discussed. If needed, STAR will also help in securing permission for the locations where the van will be parked and at the pickup locations. The primary driver will also be responsible for:
  - Notifying the Vanpool Coordinator about the time and location of the formation meeting. The Vanpool Coordinator does not have to attend these meetings but will do so if schedule allows.
  - Signing as the driver on the “Three-Party Volunteer Driver Agreement”. The Vanpool Coordinator will be responsible for getting the signature from Executive Director as the provider.
- After the formation meeting, a delivery date for the van will be determined by the schedule and availability of vans from STAR and the schedule of the primary driver. Once again, please make the Vanpool Coordinator aware of the delivery date. The Vanpool Coordinator does not need to be there for the delivery but will show up if schedule allows.
- When the van is delivered, record the odometer reading.
- Within a couple of weeks the primary driver will receive an email from Houston Metro that says “*A new Ridepro account has been created for you*”. It will have a username and a password. PHA suggests that the primary driver change the password and then send the username and password to the Vanpool Coordinator. (The Vanpool Coordinator will, at times, spot check the vanpools to ensure proper recording of ridership).

## ***Vanpool Ridership Log***

- The primary driver or a person designated by the vanpool will be responsible for keeping a ridership log that shows when the participants rode on the vanpool. Also, the odometer needs to be recorded at the end of each calendar month. The following codes should be used:
- Note that it is important to know why a rider did not ride since the *Sick, Holiday, Vacation, Jury Duty, Alternate work schedule, and Did not ride—business requirement* codes count toward the minimum 12 days riding requirement.

I	1-way inbound	D	Scheduled Day Off
O	1-way outbound	J	Jury Duty
2	Round Trip	B	Did not ride—business requirement
S	Sick	N	Did not ride—reason unknown
H	Holiday	A	Alternate work schedule
V	Vacation	X	Not on roster

- Also note that “D” (Scheduled day off) will be used as the code for your ETR day.
- At the end of the calendar month the primary driver or the designated person will enter the odometer reading and the ridership log information on the Houston Metro Ridepro website at [www.ridemetro.org/rideprovan](http://www.ridemetro.org/rideprovan) by the 5th working day of the next month.

## ***Adding New Riders***

- When an employee is interested in joining a currently operating vanpool the employee should contact the Vanpool Coordinator to find out the name of the primary driver of the van they are interested in. The employee should then contact the primary driver to find out if the vanpool meeting location and commute times are compatible with the employee’s needs. After the employee has talked to the primary driver and has determined to start riding the vanpool then:
  - If the van has enough space for the new rider, the employee needs to send name, home address, home phone number, work phone number, work email address (if employee has one), primary driver name, and vanpool number to the Vanpool Coordinator. The rider may start riding the vanpool the next day after the Vanpool Coordinator responds with an email or phone call saying their name has been submitted to Houston Metro as a rider on the vanpool (usually the same or next day).
  - If a bigger van is needed to accommodate the new rider, then the new rider should still send the information detailed in the previous bullet. However, the primary driver will need to contact the Vanpool Coordinator to request a bigger van. The Vanpool Coordinator will then contact Houston Metro/STAR to start the process of getting a bigger van.

- If a bigger van is not available, then the new rider will be put on waiting list for the vanpool.

### ***Deleting Riders***

- When a participant permanently stops riding a vanpool, the employee should log in to the Houston Metro Ridepro website at [www.ridemetro.org/rideprovan](http://www.ridemetro.org/rideprovan) and use the “Manage Vanpool Roster” option to remove the participant from the vanpool.
- Inform the Vanpool Coordinator by email of the participant’s removal from the vanpool roster.

### ***Changing Primary Drivers***

- If the current primary driver no longer wants to be the primary driver, the vanpool should identify the new primary driver. The current primary driver should contact the Vanpool Coordinator with the name of the new primary driver.
- If the new primary driver is already an approved driver, then no other action is necessary except to log in to the Houston Metro Ridepro website at [www.ridemetro.org/rideprovan](http://www.ridemetro.org/rideprovan) and use the “Manage Vanpool Roster” option to change that participant to the primary driver.
- If the new primary driver is not an approved driver, the Vanpool Coordinator will send the driver approval form by email or fax for the new primary driver to fill out. The completed form should then be sent back to Vanpool Coordinator who will send it to STAR. Approval usually takes two days. If the new primary driver is approved, then they may start driving the next day after approval. If the new primary driver is not approved, then the vanpool will need to select another primary driver. Please note that the van needs to have at least two approved drivers.

### ***What to do when you have a scheduled doctor visit, errand, scheduled overtime, etc...***

- As a participant of a vanpool, it may not be possible to be on the van every day because of doctor visits, personal errands, or scheduled overtime. Therefore it is recommended that an employee drive their personal vehicles on days where they know they have a doctor appointment or they know they will be working late. Driving their personal car is the only way that an employee can guarantee that they will make their appointment. Even though an employee’s department may have vehicles and PHA has pool cars available, it is not the responsibility of the PHA to provide transportation for personal time. The vanpool is an additional benefit offered to employees. Pool cars are provided to PHA employees to conduct PHA business.

### ***What to do when you have an emergency, required overtime, sick child, etc...***

- If a vanpool participant has an emergency (personal illness, family illness, death in family, home emergency) and needs to get home before the vanpool departure time, then the employee:
  - Can use vehicles assigned to their department (subject to employee's department manager approval.) if available. Vehicle will need to be returned next business day.
  - Can use PHA pool cars if available (subject to employee's department manager approval. Vehicle will need to be returned next business day.
  - If it is known that a PHA car will not be able to be returned the next business day or if there are no PHA cars available, then the vanpool participant can use the Guaranteed Ride Home program through Houston Metro. The Guaranteed Ride Home program;
    - Can be used up to three times per calendar year.
    - Can be used for personal illness, illness of a family member, death in family, home emergency (house fire, flooded house, etc.), and unscheduled overtime required by your PHA).
    - Cannot be used for personal errands, scheduled medical appointments, and natural disasters when work force is dismissed.
- To use Guaranteed Ride Home, call METRO RideShare Services, at 713-224-RIDE (7433) or toll free at 1-888-606-RIDE (7433) between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday (except Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day).
  - The RideShare Customer Service Representative will give you the name of the taxi company and the taxi vehicle number that will pick you up. You will be required to show a picture ID and verify your destination with the taxi driver before your trip will be executed. At the end of your trip, you are required to verify the fare, and sign and date the voucher indicating you used the service. Tips or gratuities are optional and must be paid by you.
  - If you realize that you need to use the Guaranteed Ride Home and it is after 5 pm then email Houston Metro at [consultantss41@ridemetro](mailto:consultantss41@ridemetro) and let them know that you are taking a taxi home as part of the Guaranteed Ride Home program and for what reason. You will have to pay the taxi fare so keep you receipt because you will need to mail it to Houston Metro to get reimbursed. Print out the email you sent also to mail in with you receipt. It is not a 100% guarantee that you will get reimbursed so please make sure you print out email that you sent to Houston Metro originally plus make sure you provide your address for them to send a check to. Please be aware that it may take 4 weeks until you get a reimbursement check. For address to send check to, please call the Guaranteed Rid Home phone number and ask for the address.

## ***Reporting an Accident***

- The primary driver must report accidents, incidents, vehicle damage, or theft of vehicle to the local STAR office at 713-682-3133 within 24 hours.
- If a van is involved in an accident then please follow the following procedures.
  - Do not discuss the facts of the accident with anyone other than law enforcement and never admit fault. Simply tell law enforcement your observations.
  - When involved in an accident, if there is even a minor complaint of injury, immediately call 911.
  - Even if there are no injuries, call 911 and request law enforcement.
  - Turn on hazard lights if vehicle is disabled.
  - If the vehicle contains safety reflective triangles or flares, and instructions for their use, then use them accordingly.
  - Exercise good judgment as to whether riders should stay in van or move to a safer location.
  - Obtain as much factual information about the accident as possible regarding injured person(s) and other property damage.
  - Describe and diagram the accident.
  - If the police are on the scene, obtain the name, department address, and badge number of the investigating police officer.
  - Obtain facts about the other vehicle(s):
    - License number
    - Name, address, and telephone number of registered owner.
    - Name, address, and telephone number of driver of other vehicle.
    - Name and address of insurance company covering the other vehicle.
    - Damage to other vehicle.
  - Fill out the accident report that is contained in the van in the blue and white zippered bag labeled *Important Vanpool Documents*.
  - Fax accident report to STAR within 24 hours (fax number on cover sheet.)
  - If van is not drivable then contact the local STAR office (number on cover sheet) and local office personnel will assist in removing van and arranging alternate transportation.
- In the event of an accident involving injuries or death, contact the STAR headquarters at 1-800-223-8774 and select extension 3540 for the Insurance Manager, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Damage to the van resulting from vandalism, unknown causes, and theft must be reported to the local STAR office within 24 hours.
- Notify the Vanpool Coordinator and the PHA Risk Management Department with details of the accident.

## ***Van Maintenance***

- Each van has a STAR Preventive Maintenance Coupon Book which has coupons for use at specified mileage intervals. When your vehicle is within 750 miles of a specific coupon's stated mileage interval, the van should be scheduled for the service listed on the respective coupon.
- Some service providers will even be able to pick up the van from PHA and return it the same day. Please contact the local STAR office to for information on the approved service providers.
- The coupon booklet also has emergency coupons located in the back of the book. These coupons may be used for a minor emergency repair after hours to get you back on the road quickly. This would involve items such as jump starts, flat repair, tire change, or any emergency repair, not to exceed \$50.00.

## ***Hurricane Procedures***

If the Houston area is forced to evacuate because of a hurricane, the van should not be used for evacuation. Please leave van where it is usually parked in the evenings and weekends. Insurance will cover any damage to the van that a hurricane might cause.