King County Metro March 2020 Newsletter

Dear Commuter Van Participant,

The holidays are in the rear-view mirror and we are cruising into 2020. With over 1,600 commuter vans on the road and 10,000+ customers, we often receive many of the same questions. This newsletter covers what has been trending lately. Please take a few minutes to read through the information below and, as always, reach out to us at 206-625-4500 or vanpool@kingcounty.gov with any questions.

Included in this bulletin:

- **Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Message**
- **Fuel Theft On The Rise!**
- **Program Policy Change: Missing Voyager Cards**
- **Is Your Voyager Gas Card Locked out?**
- **Do You Know Who Is On Your Vanpool Waitlist?**
- **Park & Ride Permit Parking**
- **Good News and Testimonials**

**NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) MESSAGE** – As you may be aware, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has affected residents in the region. In addition to the existing cleaning regimen, Metro is increasing the frequency of cleaning of “high-touch” areas such as buttons, handholds, pull cords, rails, and stanchions on our fixed route buses. We are recommending your group take steps in your commuter vans as well.

1. If you or other riders are experiencing symptoms of the virus, it is essential for the health and well-being of the community for you to please stay home or telework. As during any cold and flu season, each of us should **cover all coughs and sneezes**, **avoid touching parts of our face** to avoid picking up the virus and **wash our hands frequently**. Due to the small, enclosed environment of your Commuter Van, we encourage participants to be extra discerning when they are experiencing cold or flu-like symptoms.

2. We are recommending drivers and participants use **disinfectant wipes** and **spray** to clean vehicles and carry hand sanitizer. Before and after the commute, we recommend you wipe down vehicle surface areas including: door handles (in and out),
steering wheel, armrests, seatbelts/seatbelt buckles, nobs (including climate control, radio, glove box, etc.), key fobs, fuel cards should get a wipe down – all seats a spray down.

3. If your group is missing a van driver or needs to be parked for an unknown period of time (more than a week) due to employer-requested telecommute or illness, please send an e-mail to vanpool@kingcounty.gov with ‘Ridership - novel coronavirus’ in the subject line, your group number, and a short description of your situation. We will work with your group to explore available options.

Please refer to the following tips and resources for the latest information.

- Public health’s website is the best source of information about how to be personally prepared.
- Here’s a link to a fact sheet with details about the COVID-19 that you should read and share.
- The CDC has up-to-date information on prevention, treatment, FAQs, and more.
- Metro Matters blog post gives an overview of Metro’s cleaning protocols.

We understand these recommendation may cause additional group communication and effort by drivers and participants and we appreciate your dedication to our program and to your group’s health. Thank you in advance and thank you for being a part of our program. We welcome any feedback or best practices you and your group comes up with.

FUEL THEFT ON THE RISE! – We want to alert you to a high volume of fuel thefts over the entire Puget Sound region affecting many commuter van programs. Vehicle fuel tanks have been punctured and gas lines cut to steal fuel; this vandalism impacts you, your van, and the Metro VanPool Program.

Ways to identify a fuel theft:

1. Daily walk-around inspection of your vehicle – specifically, look for fuel on the ground. Do you smell a fuel odor?
2. Monitor the fuel level in your van daily. If you recently fueled your van and now it is low on fuel - is fuel missing?

What to do if you find a fuel leak:

1. DO NOT START, MOVE, OR FUEL YOUR VAN!
2. Call King County at 206-625-4500 immediately and report the issue. We will dispatch a tow truck to have your van moved and repaired and coordinate commute options for your group.

Ways to reduce your risk:

1. Overnight, only park at your specific parking location approved by King County.
2. Parking locations should be secure - preferably off-street in a driveway or garage at your home. Case-by-case parking exceptions may be granted.
3. Parking exception locations are reviewed for security. Eligibility may be revoked for compromised locations.

4. Notify all group members to be on alert for any suspicious activity at your parking location. Call 911 to report suspicious activity.

Fuel theft often comes hand-in-hand with vehicle damage which costs the program through repair and fuel charges and inconveniences groups by requiring loaner vans or carpooling to work.

**PROGRAM POLICY CHANGE: MISSING VOYAGER CARDS** – Missing or lost Voyager cards result in additional program expense due to associated replacement charges. Starting April 2020, primary drivers will be charged a $50 replacement fee for missing or lost cards. Replacement charges will not be covered by employer subsidy or ORCA.

**LOCKED VOYAGER GAS CARD?** – Too many incorrect PIN entries will lock your Voyager gas card. If your card is locked for this reason, call the US Bank/Voyager Fleet Assistance number (800-987-6591) on the back of the card. A Voyager representative will unlock the card after you answer some basic verification questions (e.g., van number, license plate number, etc.) to ensure you can fuel the van.

**WHO IS ON YOUR VANPOOL WAITLIST?** – Mobile friendly and featuring a brand new design, RideshareOnline.com has been Washington State’s premier ridematch site for 10 years. Now with over 15,000 active users in King County alone, and every vanpool in the region listed, RSO contains the biggest group of commuters looking to share the ride in the State.

If your group is looking for riders to reduce fares or meet ridership requirements, there is a great new vanpool waitlist feature that primary drivers can access to see who matches your commute and could join your van.

If you are a primary driver, simply sign into your account, select Ride Match > My Trips and then More Options > Riders Waitlist (see screenshots below) for your Vanpool trip to see if you have a waitlist of others interested in joining your group. Easy peasy! Email vanpool@kingcounty.gov with "Vanpool Waitlist Question" as your subject if you have any questions.

**PARK & RIDE PERMIT PARKING** – Parking continues to be in high demand throughout Puget Sound with many park & rides filling before 7:00am. To help improve access for commuters who cannot arrive early, Sound Transit and King County Metro have implemented permit parking programs at heavily congested park & ride locations (please visit links for program specifics). Each facility may have different amounts of spaces set aside for permit parking and no facility has all spaces set aside.

Many vanpoolers wonder if permits are required for their group. For these programs, permits are not required for vanpool use of park & ride facilities. However, there are some additional details to be aware of:
1. Vanpool groups are not automatically guaranteed space at park & rides.
2. For personal vehicles at park & rides selected for permit parking:
   - If members arrive early, spaces should be available.
   - If members arrive after lots are full, free carpool permits are available for those who can carpool to the park & ride.
   - Solo drivers may also purchase single occupancy vehicle (SOV) parking permits.
3. Permit parking spaces may change at individual facilities as conditions change. All park & ride users are responsible for understanding requirements at the park & ride they are using.

For questions regarding permit parking at specific park & rides, please visit the links above for who to contact. Email vanpool@kingcounty.gov with "Vanpool Permit Parking" as your subject with questions about vanpool parking.

GOOD NEWS AND TESTIMONIALS – We think our customers are the best and we love to hear what they think of our program!

First, a huge shout-out to our King County Metro commuter van volunteer drivers as we celebrate Driver Appreciation Day on March 18. With 6,000+ current drivers and almost 16 MILLION miles driven in 2019, you are the backbone to our program! The peanut butter to our jelly! The mini to our van! We wholeheartedly appreciate and celebrate you everyday - thank you for helping make King County Metro largest, longest-running, public commuter van program in the Nation for more than 40 years!

“I just completed my first year as a van rider and backup driver. I’ve made new friends, networked with coworkers and feel so much more relaxed while commuting. We listen to podcasts, give each other networking tips and share recipes.”

-Alka S.; T-Mobile

Thank you and Happy Vanpooling!

King County Metro Commuter Van Services

Get the latest! Like us on Facebook to stay up to date on incentives, contests and everything else that’s hip about Metro Vanpool.

Send us an e-mail.

Or give us a call at 206-625-4500 during business hours (8-5, M-F).