

Transportation Options: Easy Street Vans

By MELISSA JONES

With gas prices on the rise, public transportation is a great option for those wanting to save money while helping the environment. One option available to Middlebury residents is Easy Street, a statewide commuter van service sponsored by the Connecticut Department of Transportation. It offers transportation from Middlebury to Hartford with stops in Waterbury, Cheshire and Windsor.

One Middlebury van driver, Kim Seresin, described vanpooling with Easy Street as “phenomenal,” saying it has saved her money on gas and car maintenance and is better for the environment. She has been using Easy Street for four years. “They make it easy and take care of everything,” said Seresin, “I highly recommend it, and we are looking for more riders!”

Nancy Fitzgerald, press director of Easy Street, said the primary reason people use Easy Street is the cost savings. Commuting alone is not the most cost-effective way to get to work, Fitzgerald said. Another advantage is the environmental benefit. Fitzgerald said, for every six people in a van, there are five people off the road; this conserves natural resources and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. It also eases traffic. For these reasons, Fitzgerald believes that drivers should take advantage of public transportation.

The Easy Street Web site says riders and drivers frequently say Easy Street improves the quality of their lives, getting them to work on time and saving them money. Easy Street also benefits their communities by reducing congestion and automobile air pollutants. Personal benefits to riders are less wear and tear on your personal auto and a discount on personal auto insurance.

A special feature of Easy Street, as compared to other forms of public transportation, is the commuters’ relationships. Fitzgerald said riders achieve a group dynamic and get to know each other during what are often long commutes. Riders look forward to seeing friends every morning and get to work happy after a social commute. Some riders have been using Easy Street for as many as 15 years, and celebrate birthdays and other occasions with their fellow commuters.

One van arrives in Middlebury at 6:15 a.m. and returns to Middlebury at 5 p.m. It then stops at Exit 17W-18E on Chase Parkway in Waterbury at 6:40 a.m. and returns to that stop at 4:50 p.m. The van stops at 55 Elm Street in Hartford at 7:20 a.m. and returns to that stop at 4 p.m. It stops at 165 Capital Avenue in Hartford at 7:23 a.m. and returns to that stop at 4:03 p.m. It stops at 410 Capitol Avenue in Hartford at 7:28 a.m. and returns to that stop at 3:45 p.m.

A second van arrives at the park and ride lot off of Exit 17/1/84 in Middlebury at 6:30 a.m. and returns to Middlebury at 5:10 p.m. The van stops on Route 10 in Cheshire, 0.25 mile from I-691 (Exit 3), at 6:45 a.m. and returns to that stop at 4:55 p.m. It stops at 450 Columbus Avenue in Hartford at 7:15 a.m. and returns to the corner of Grove and Columbus Boulevard in Hartford at 4:22 p.m. It stops at One Orange Way in Windsor at 7:45 a.m. and returns to that stop at 4:40 p.m. It stops at 200 Day Hill Road in Windsor at 7:35 a.m. and returns to that stop at 4:05 p.m. It stops at the rear of 450 Main Street in Hartford at 7:30 a.m. and returns to that stop at 4:20 p.m.



Rita Concepcion of Middlebury stands in front of the Easy Street van that gets her and her fellow commuters to work.

The cost to ride the first van to Hartford is \$129 a month per person on a full-size van. The cost to ride the second van to Hartford or Windsor is \$127 a month per person on a full-size van. This cost may be defrayed by some employers, who pay all or a portion of the cost of vanpooling either through subsidy or a pre-tax payroll deduction.

If an Easy Street route doesn't meet your needs, you can start your own. The Easy Street Web site says starting an Easy Street minivan requires a driver and five full-time riders. A 12-person van requires a driver and eight full-time riders. Drivers of full-size vans ride free and enjoy 140 miles free monthly. While drivers of minivans pay the same fare as the riders, they enjoy 250 free miles monthly. That adds up to 3,000 miles annually.

The Easy Street fleet is made up of seven-passenger minivans as well as 12 and 15-passenger full-size vans. Fares are per seat, payable at the beginning of each month, and are based on round-trip miles. For more information on Easy Street, visit www.easystreet.org or call 1-800-972-3279.

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