

Reinventing Transit

American communities finding smarter, cleaner, faster transportation solutions

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Interview: Nanci Fitzgerald of The Rideshare Company

May 18, 2009 | Posted by [Edward Burgess](#) in [Transit Innovations](#)

Van pools are one of the most efficient types of transportation in terms of **CO2 emissions** per passenger ([comparison of CO2 emissions](#)). Our report, Reinventing Transit, highlights how they have been successful, even in rural areas such as California's [San Joaquin Valley](#). Meanwhile, [easystreet®](#) (a program of [The Rideshare Company](#)) provides van pool service to the suburbs of Connecticut and beyond. Recently I got a chance to speak with Nanci Fitzgerald, VP of Business Development for The Rideshare Company. Read on to see what I found out about the program, how it has grown, and their plans for the future.

EDF: How did the easystreet® van pool service get its start?

Nanci Fitzgerald: In the early 80s, gas shortages made it hard for commuters to get to work. So our CEO Jon Colman started The Rideshare Company to help companies in central Connecticut find more efficient, less expensive transportation for their employees through ride sharing. The only criterion was that people had to live and work near each other. Following the initial success of the program, we started [easystreet®](#), our van pool service in the early 90s.

How big is easystreet® now?

Today we've expanded to over 600 vehicles. Most are in Connecticut, but we have expanded to include routes into Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, and New Jersey. Over 4500 daily commuters use our traditional van pool service.

Other than the van itself, what other services does easystreet® provide?

We take care of everything related to vehicle operation including gas, insurance, maintenance, repairs, and even 24-hr roadside assistance including back-up vans. We also help to set up and promote routes in particular geographical areas.

How is the service funded?

Rideshare Company is a non-profit company, but our fares and fees cover nearly all of our expenses (both capital and operating). Only a small portion of our funding comes from state and federal grants.

How much does it cost to use?

It's free for drivers and about \$140-150 per month for regular passengers, depending on the miles and number of people in the van. The commuter tax break alone more than offsets the cost and easily beats the cost of driving once you factor in gas, insurance, oil changes, and so on. You can check out our commuter calculator on [easystreet.org](#) to see what the cost savings would be. But for most people the biggest savings are the peace of mind. Reading a book or newspaper on the way to work can be a lot more enjoyable than battling traffic.

Tell me a little bit about your employer partnerships – how does that work?

We partner with a wide variety of employers including large insurance companies like Aetna and government jobs centered in Hartford. Companies are often looking for more cost effective ways to attract and retain employees rather than building expensive amenities like parking lots and shopping centers near their offices. In addition to the basic van pool service we also allow companies to contract with us to use our vans for a set period of time. We'll cover the operations and maintenance as usual, but they will manage and schedule the vans themselves.

How do you go about setting up a van pool?

For most requests we go through a standard checklist: First we'll check to see if there are any open seats on an existing route. If not, we will try marketing a new route to the area where the person lives. If multiple employees work in same place, we'll also try promoting the route through their employer. Right now we are also in the process of upgrading to a brand new website that will include fully interactive maps to show people where open routes are and allow commuters to sign up instantly.

Any plans to expand the service further?

We've continually expanded at our borders and will continue to do so. Our company also has a large knowledge base on commuter behavior that will allow us to provide targeted commuter marketing services to employers around the country. Right now we're working with a partner in Chicago.

Readers: Know another good commuter service that helps cut down pollution and traffic? Leave a **comment** and let us know!

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