

# Info on vanpools could mean money for area

BY SCOTT SHENK | Posted: Wednesday, May 23, 2012 12:10 am

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Regional transportation officials are trying to join a vanpool data collection program that could bring in millions in federal funding.

But millions will have to be spent before any of the expected revenue would arrive.

GWRideConnect's Diana Utz said joining the Northern Virginia Vanpool Incentive program would be a good thing. GWRideConnect is a Fredericksburg-area nonprofit that is part of Commuter Connections, which helps commuters in the Washington region find alternative modes of transportation such as vanpools, carpools and buses.

"I think it's a great program," she said.

The Federal Transit Administration runs the vanpool incentive program and distributes funds to participating localities.

The information goes into the National Transit Database and is used as a way to monitor and plan for mass transportation needs and uses.

"They use it for a whole host of things," said Al Harf, executive director of the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission. Stafford, Spotsylvania and Fredericksburg are members of the commission.

Harf also is a board member of the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization and has often talked about the program at FAMPO meetings.

He and others say the program can help on several levels.

First, it could be a source of new revenue, netting between \$4 million and \$5 million annually by fiscal 2017-18, Harf said.

A portion of the federal funds would be used to pay for the costs of the program, most of which would come from monthly payments to vanpool operators, who would get \$200 per van for collecting data. Vanpool operators would opt in to the program.

The remaining millions could be used for transportation projects--such as road work, park-and-ride lots, new buses and traffic signals.

The revenue would be split among Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania, Stafford and several Northern Virginia localities.

A benefit of the program, officials say, would be the improved data collection on vanpools. And it could lead to the creation of more vanpools, Utz and Harf said.

According to Utz, vanpools continue to hold steady with about 400 in the Fredericksburg area.

"Vanpooling is very popular in this region," she said.

The Commonwealth Transportation Board has already pledged \$3.5 million for the program. The localities have to match a small percentage of that money, a total of about \$100,000 for FAMPO.

The state funding falls \$1.6 million short of what regional transportation officials sought for the program.

Harf said they are still working to close that funding gap.

He and FAMPO administrator Lloyd Robinson will meet this week with Sen. Mark Warner's staff to see if more money can be found.

If the \$1.6 million isn't available, Harf said, they could scale back the program.

"That's still under discussion," he said, noting that they are looking for a "Plan B" if the state doesn't provide the additional money.

The FAMPO board could vote on joining the program in July.

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