

# Rural Transportation Options in Klickitat County

January 2019

Report prepared for:

- Mid-Columbia Economic Development District
- Klickitat County, Washington
- United States Department of Agriculture

Report prepared by the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO)  
Research Foundation

## Abstract

Transportation is a significant expense for employees working at several Klickitat County job sites, particularly in the eastern portion of the county. Anecdotally, distance and costs are contributing factors to challenges with employee recruitment and retention, although likely not the only factor. Transportation solutions might be one strategy to help with retaining the employees who are well suited with the jobs available. Any transportation solution must be reliable and offer advantages over driving alone. Sharing rides where possible results in a cost savings for the employee; if it results in lower employee turnover, then employers might see benefits such as lower operation costs or increased productivity as a result of knowledge and skill retention.

Some options to improve employees' commutes could include vanpooling or carpooling, with a variety of roles for workers themselves in finding and sharing rides and assistance that might be provided by area employers, public sector partners, or third-party private sector mobility services for vanpooling or carpooling. Area stakeholders might try different combinations of mobility strategies depending on their locations and needs. Attention to rural transportation safety also improves workers' commutes.

## Acknowledgements

The National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation would like to extend deep and sincere thanks to the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District and its staff, including Kathy Fitzpatrick and Amanda Hoey, as well as Klickitat County and its staff, including Dave McClure, Richard Foster, Sharon Carter, Norma Pickett, Ruby Irving, and Gordon Kelsey for assistance. They, along with Dana Peck with the Goldendale Chamber of Commerce, Dale Robinson with Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Commission, and Shamus Misek with Washington State Department of Transportation, provided detailed information and feedback on transportation needs and economic trends. Many individuals in management and ownership positions from about a dozen area employers and other stakeholders also generously gave their time to talk with the research team about their businesses, workforce, and transportation needs. These business contacts are not listed individually here because their responses are generally aggregated in this report, but their time is much appreciated, and the information was invaluable to understanding how location affects commute options and business models.

This report was authored primarily by NADO Associate Director Carrie Kissel. Work was conducted under a contract from the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Business Development Grant Program. Any opinions, findings and conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding agency. Any mention of a specific company, product, or service in this report does not constitute or imply an endorsement by the research team.

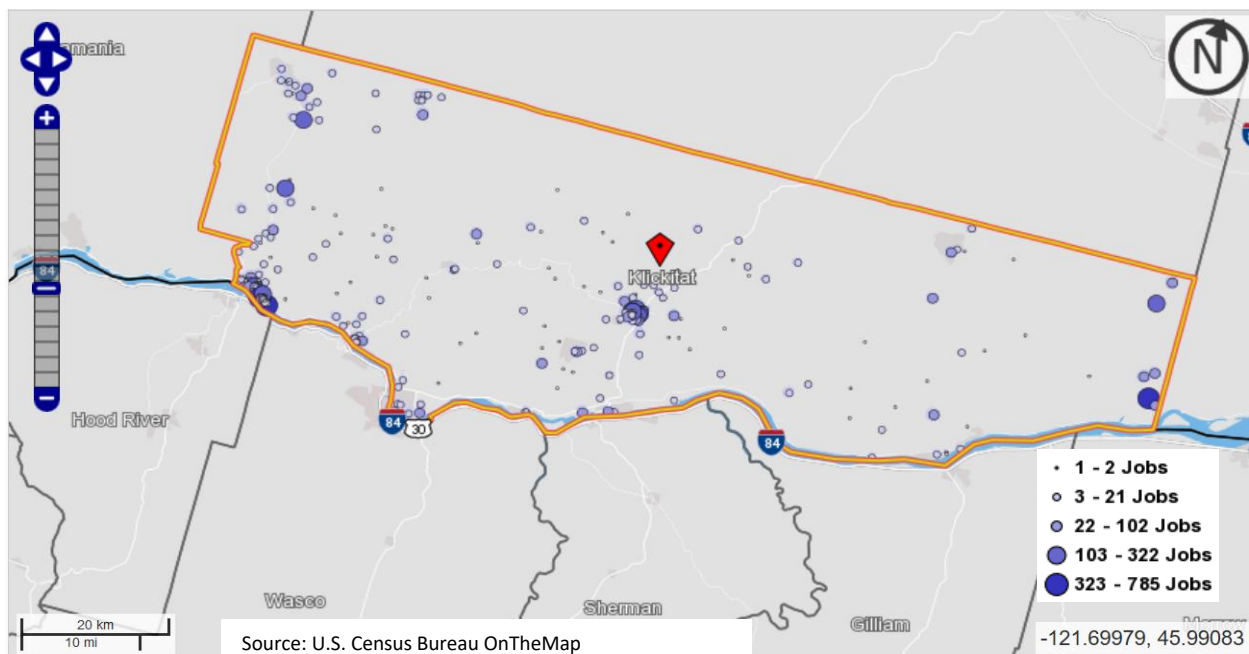
## Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	2
Introduction .....	4
Demographic characteristics.....	4
Klickitat County Employment Transportation Challenges .....	7
Employment Transportation Options .....	10
Establishing Rural Vanpools .....	10
Employer-provided Vanpools or Carpools .....	11
Private Vanpool Provider .....	12
Transit Agency Commuter Vanpool Program .....	14
Rural Commuter Transit.....	17
Informal Carpooling .....	18
Ridesharing Platforms .....	19
Parking Issues.....	20
Transportation Tax Benefits.....	23
Regional Mobility Management and Transportation Management Associations.....	24
Other Funding Sources.....	25
Connection to Economic Development .....	25
Conclusions .....	26
Appendix I. Employer Interview Questions.....	28

## Introduction

Klickitat County is a rural county in southern Washington along the Columbia River Gorge. The county has economic opportunities alongside challenges, including some concentrations of jobs located in areas with few residences or amenities, requiring long commutes for many employees. In 2018, the National Association of Development Organizations Research Foundation worked with area stakeholders to identify issues and research potential mobility options that might improve employee access to work, and as a result, improve recruitment and/or retention for their employers, which might reduce costs associated with employee turnover.

**Demographic characteristics:** Klickitat County had a total population of 20,318 in the 2010 Census, with a male population of 10,268 (50.5 percent) and female population of 10,050 (49.5 percent).<sup>1</sup> The racial composition of the county population is: white – 87.7 percent; American Indian and Alaska Native – 2.4 percent; Asian – 0.6 percent; African American – 0.2 percent; some other race – 5.6 percent; two or more races – 3.3 percent. Of the total residents, 2,171 (10.7 percent) identify as Hispanic or Latino.<sup>2</sup> Klickitat County’s foreign-born population is estimated to be 1,258.<sup>3</sup> Foreign-born residents are estimated to be from the following regions of origin: Latin America – 83.5 percent; Asia – 7.9 percent; Northern America 3.3 percent; Africa – 2.5 percent; Europe – 2.4 percent; Oceania – 0.4 percent. The top five estimated nations of origin for foreign-born residents include: Mexico – 971; Canada – 42; Philippines – 33; Liberia – 29; Guatemala – 28.<sup>4</sup> An estimated 3,974 (19 percent) of Klickitat County residents have a disability.<sup>5</sup>



<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2010. American FactFinder, [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2010.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. American Communities Survey 2012 – 2016 Estimates.

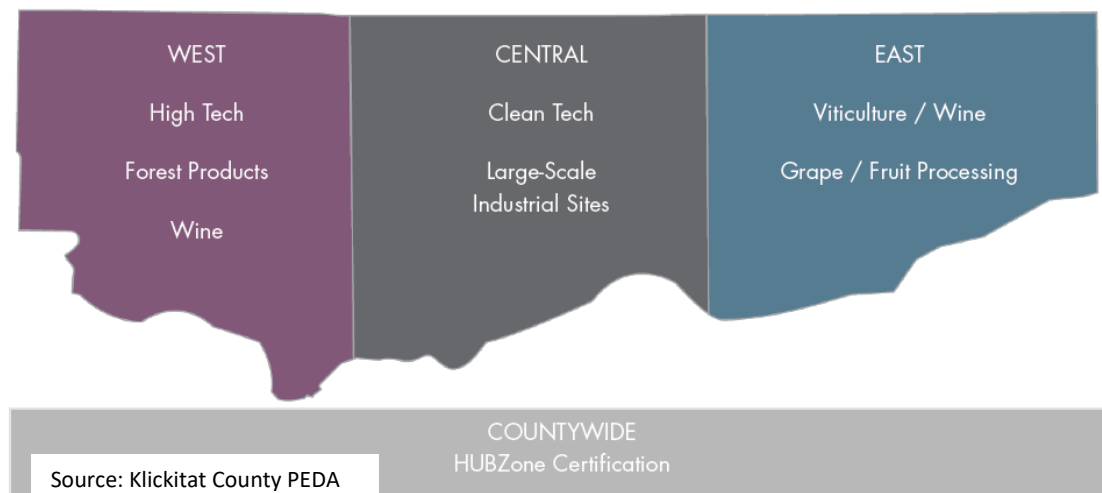
<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. American Communities Survey 2012 – 2016 Estimates.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. American Communities Survey 2012 – 2016 Estimates.

Klickitat County had an estimated 6,320 jobs in 2015.<sup>6</sup> Some job centers are clustered near population centers, but many are spread through the more rural portions of the county, as well. Major industries in the county include agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (1,421 jobs, 22.5 percent), manufacturing (1,236 jobs, 19.6 percent), educational services (676 jobs, 10.7 percent), health care and social assistance (545 jobs, 8.6 percent), accommodation and food services (351 jobs, 5.6 percent), public administration (346 jobs, 5.5 percent), and waste management and remediation (262 jobs, 4.1 percent). The majority of jobs are held by mid-career individuals, with 54.8 percent of workers in the 30 – 54 age range, 29 percent age 55 and older, and 16.2 percent age 29 and younger. Just over one-fifth of workers (21.9 percent) earn \$1,250 or less, while 38.8 percent earn \$1,250 to \$3,333 per month, and 39.3 percent earn more than \$3,333 per month.<sup>7</sup>

Klickitat County is one of five counties served by the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District, with a service area that also includes Hood River County, OR; Sherman County, OR; Wasco County, OR; and Skamania County, WA, along with Klickitat County. The total population of this five-county, two-state region is 85,220. The population’s breakdown by race is: white – 92.6 percent; American Indian and Alaska Native – 2.5 percent; Asian – 1.2 percent; African American – 0.7 percent; two or more races – 2.6 percent. Of the total population, 18.4 percent are Hispanic or Latino.<sup>8</sup> Klickitat County’s economy is connected to that of its neighbors, with workers who commute from other counties in the MCEDD service area and other neighboring counties and some businesses operating in multiple locations.

In 2017, the Klickitat County Public Economic Development Authority (PEDA) completed Advancing Economic Prosperity in Klickitat County: 10-Year Economic Development Plan. The plan outlines several goals that seek to advance the plan purpose statement: Achieve steady, balanced growth that benefits the entire county and protects the community’s character while providing employment opportunities to its citizens.<sup>9</sup> The goals include building physical and civic infrastructure (including improving



<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics (LEHD) Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), OnTheMap.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics (LEHD) Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), OnTheMap.

<sup>8</sup> StatsAmerica, using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>9</sup> Klickitat County Public Economic Development Authority (2017). Advancing Economic Prosperity in Klickitat County.

transportation assets, as well as broadband and other infrastructure that affect both transportation and the economy); short-term and long-term growth in industries such as high tech and clean tech, forest products, wine and viticulture, and fruit processing industries; real estate development (including workforce housing); workforce development; and business retention and expansion, attraction, and entrepreneurship promotion.<sup>10</sup> Although some types of economic activities occur across much of the county, PEDAs identified geographic concentrations of economic activities poised for growth in western, central, and eastern portions of the county.

In 2018, the Southwestern Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC, the region’s regional transportation planning organization or RPTO) completed a regional transportation plan update for Klickitat County. The plan documents the economic interrelationships with surrounding areas, as 30 percent of Klickitat County workers are employed in other counties, and 20 percent of employment in Klickitat County is filled by residents from other areas.<sup>11</sup> The RTP documents an increased reliance on driving alone, bicycle or walking, and working from home, while carpooling decreased from Census 2000 to Census 2010.

**Table 2-2: Work Travel Mode**

Klickitat County	2000	2000 Percent	2010	2010 Percent	2000-2010 Growth	2000-2010 Percent Change	2010 WA State Percent
Drive Alone	5,505	71.8%	5,810	75.3%	305	5.5%	72.3%
Carpool	1,182	15.4%	854	11.1%	-328	-27.7%	11.6%
Transit	51	0.7%	14	0.2%	-37	-72.5%	5.6%
Bicycle or Walked	363	4.7%	465	6.0%	102	28.1%	4.3%
Motorcycle/Other	90	1.2%	65	0.7%	-25	-27.8%	1.2%
Worked at Home	473	6.2%	525	6.8%	52	11.0%	5.1%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6,285</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>7,666</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1,380</b>	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Mean Travel Time to Work (minutes)	21.9	n/a	19.5	n/a	-2.4	n/a	25.4

Source: Southwest Washington RTC

Mobility has had a renewed focus in Klickitat County, with new transportation service provided by Mount Adams Transportation Service (MATS) that connects White Salmon and Bingen, WA to Hood River, OR and Goldendale, WA to The Dalles, OR. These new fixed routes run from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on weekdays, with a \$1 fare for riders over age 5. The services coordinate with that provided by Columbia Area Transit around Hood River, OR and to communities to the west, including the Portland Gateway Transit Center, via the Columbia Gorge Express.<sup>12</sup> MATS has long provided demand-response service to the general public, mainly for appointments and access to essential services, with vehicles and drivers located in White Salmon and Goldendale. Funding is provided through transit grants provided by the Washington State Department of Transportation, the Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities of

<sup>10</sup> Klickitat County PEDAs (2017).

<sup>11</sup> Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (2018). Regional Transportation Plan for Klickitat County, Washington, <https://www.rtc.wa.gov/reports/rtp/Rtp2018Klickitat.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Southwest RTC (2018); personal communication with Jason Kelly, January 2019.

Southwest Washington (for senior transportation), and Klickitat County.<sup>13</sup> A ballot initiative to create a public transportation benefit area was considered in 1998 but defeated by a narrow margin.<sup>14</sup>

## Klickitat County Employment Transportation Challenges

Through phone calls, site visits, and email conversations occurring from late 2017 through early 2019, the research team collected qualitative information from employers, county staff, transportation providers, and other stakeholders within and near Klickitat County. Communication occurred with owners or managers at approximately 12 businesses in sectors such as waste management and agriculture, along with several other individuals involved in transportation services, planning, economic development, and related sectors. Priority interview subjects were identified by staff of Klickitat County Economic Development and the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District, and additional interview subjects were identified by stakeholders. Using the semi-structured interview method and employer questions listed in Appendix I, the research team collected information on the size of each business's workforce (seasonal and year-round), the areas where employees live, how they currently commute, what shifts they work, challenges such as employees turnover and the time/cost of commuting long distances, future business plans that shape workforce needs, and any mobility strategies that are currently in use or have been used in the past. Most in-person interviews were conducted by team members from both the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District and the NADO Research Foundation, while most phone interviews were conducted by the NADO Research Foundation.

One large year-round employer has about 175 employees, most of whom live within Klickitat County. The largest concentration of employees is in Goldendale, although some commute from western Klickitat County, The Dalles, OR, and other locations. Very few residences are located near the employer. Employees typically work four ten-hour days per week, and many opt to work an additional fifth day of overtime. Most commute for at least an hour each way to work. Some informal carpooling occurs, but many employees drive alone. Parking options that are well-known and secure around Goldendale and around Maryhill Grade (to aggregate commuters from western Klickitat and those coming through The Dalles) could make carpooling a more viable option. Employee turnover is high, often at 18 – 20 percent of employees, and management has a goal of reducing turnover to less than 10 percent. Exit interviews reveal that the expense and time required for a commute of that length are the main reasons for leaving a job, and most report finding a job closer to their residence.

A food processing plant in eastern Klickitat County has 300 employees from June – December, and about 35 that work full-time year-round. Employees work in two shifts, day and night. In addition, the plant has truck traffic of about 50 trucks per day in the busy season. Management reports that the first interview question for prospective employees is, "How did you like the drive here?" in order to gauge whether the long distance from residential areas would be a deterrent. This firm has found that if employees stay through their first few weeks on the job, they often will stay for the season, but many positions turn over quickly because of the long commute. Employees working in more specialized jobs are more difficult to fill and retain, for instance in forklift operator positions that may be available closer to home. The plant uses Ben Franklin Transit's vanpool program to pay for two vans on behalf of those commuters, one day shift and one night shift, to come from Prosser into eastern Klickitat County. The

---

<sup>13</sup> Personal communication with Sharon Carter and Norma Pickett, May 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Southwest RTC (2018); personal communication with Sharon Carter and Norma Pickett, May 2018.

vans are not used solely by individuals living in Prosser, however, since employees drive in from the lower Yakima Valley to park in Prosser and take the transit vans. Those employees report a need for adequate parking that is secure in Prosser. Parking is sometimes used in Grandview, but individuals might be able to form carpools in other Yakima Valley communities if parking were available. If a mobility option were available from the lower Yakima Valley, employees from those communities would prefer to vanpool or carpool from near their homes rather than drive to Prosser in order to park.

Agricultural employers in Klickitat County employ some individuals from within the county, but many employees commute from outside the county. For agriculture businesses in the eastern portion of the county, the most commonly reported places of residence are in Lower Yakima Valley communities such as Mabton, Grandview, and Sunnyside, as well as Prosser and Hermiston, OR. A smaller number of employees come from within Klickitat County or from other locations. The largest agricultural employer has 150 employees that work almost year-round, with peak harvest employment of over 300. The smallest farm has a peak employment of about 30 for a short period of time, with only a few employees year-round who work on multiple crops and value-added processing.

Regardless of size, agricultural employers report that their workers' shifts and schedules vary according to the work that needs to be done for the crops, seasons, and conditions. This often means that employees working on a crew at a particular site might be able to arrive and leave at the same times, but other crews working on a different crop or at a different site, even one that is nearby, would not be realistic carpool matches. Even though some neighboring businesses are likely to have busy seasons around the same times of year, it would be difficult for employees to share rides with other commuters coming from the same residential areas if they are working for different employers.

Agricultural employers report retention throughout each season as being a challenge, for multiple reasons. Few workers live near the work sites, so workers typically commute long distances, a significant financial cost and time investment. Some carpooling already occurs, as workers who know each other and live near each other already tend to ride together. Some workers' employment might be contingent on having a ride from another individual with reliable transportation in order to have access to their jobs.

Rural transportation safety has been a major concern in the past, with a concentration of fatalities, non-fatal crashes, and unsafe driving experiences in eastern Klickitat County. Employers report that some employees driving long distances from home may underestimate the risks of speeding, as they use speed in an attempt to shorten their commute. However, several employers in the area reported success with a recent partnership with the county to address speeding and safety through education and enforcement activities, as well as improved winter driving conditions since the roadway received new markings. This has improved the impacts of transportation safety directly for these employers and their employees. One manager reported, "We used to lose about one employee a year on the roads, and we have not had one since working with the sheriffs and the county on safety."

In addition to distance, worker fit likely also has a large role in retaining employees, with a large number of new employees quitting early because of a mismatch of interests and skills. Skilled workers do return to employers over time, but they often change jobs to maximize their earning potential. For instance, skilled temporary vineyard employees often switch to picking blueberries as soon as they can, before higher intensity seasonal work is complete at vineyards. However, they may return to the same vineyard the next season.



Due to the difficulty of retaining seasonal employees, many agricultural employers in the area use the H-2A Temporary Agricultural Worker program to fill vacancies. The program requires providing housing and transportation for the workers, so there are substantial obligations that employers must fulfill to use the program. Still, it has been reported as being a successful way to recruit employees by employers who have used the program for several years, and employers did not report any difficulties with finding an adequate number of temporary workers through the visa program.

Some employers are also trying out newer automation technologies for certain agricultural processes, such as mechanical suckering and shoot thinning in vineyards. This might alleviate some workforce challenges, although some wineries are expected to continue to prefer hand crews for higher priced products. Use of mechanical picking for frozen blueberries helps to manage competition for labor, although fresh-packed blueberries are still hand-picked.

Eastern Klickitat County employers try a variety of methods to fill open positions. Many use word-of-mouth as the primary method, but some also participate in job fairs in area or advertise on the radio, websites, or social media. More specialized jobs tend to be advertised using more methods and in more places.

Information provided through stakeholder interviews corresponded with some of the findings from a study conducted by the regional nonprofit People for People.

In 2013, People for People conducted an agricultural vanpool study. The initial focus was on Grant, Adams, and Yakima Counties in Washington, and with a focus on harvesting fruits such as apples and cherries. The study found that many people work in the same area where they live, and many have a commute of 30 minutes or less and are able to get a ride with a friend. Some workers that have their own transportation reported being interested in a vanpool if the fare was reasonable. However, of the 660 workers surveyed, only 18 percent said they were willing to be a driver. The key to worker interest was ensuring that they would not spend more time or more money getting to work.<sup>15</sup>

Interviews were conducted with individuals in management at agricultural operations, as well as employees. The interview results indicated that there was often no consistent end time to ag worker shifts, which were dependent upon the weather and the amount of work that needed to be done. The study also assessed the extent to which transportation is a barrier in recruiting and retaining available workforce.<sup>16</sup>

People for People was unable to move forward with a pilot project to provide transportation, because the study identified concerns over being identified as a farm labor contractor due to providing transportation for farm workers for a fee. Washington statute exempts nonprofits with members, which could include nonprofits formed as cooperatives, but not nonprofits that do not have members.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> People for People (2013). Eastern Washington Agricultural Vanpool: Pilot Project Summary.

<sup>16</sup> People for People (2013).

<sup>17</sup> Personal communication with Madelyn Carlson, March 2018.

## Employment Transportation Options

Transportation is a significant expense for employees working to eastern Klickitat County job sites. Anecdotally, distance and costs are contributing factors to challenges with employee recruitment and retention, although likely not the only factor, so transportation solutions might help with retaining the employees that are the best fit with the jobs available. Any transportation solution must be reliable and offer advantages over driving alone. Sharing rides where possible results in a cost savings for the employee; if it results in lower employee turnover, costs are likely to fall, or productivity will rise for the employers. Information in this section includes a combination of sources, including a review of published literature that may be relevant, case information from other rural U.S. regions, and stakeholder input from Klickitat County and neighboring areas.

One study about rural individuals' perceptions of shared mobility involved interviews with a cross section of people with transportation needs in rural Maine, including elderly, physically and/or mentally handicapped, commuters needing rides to work, low-income persons needing rides to a variety of destinations, and students. Fear of the unknown, including concern for personal safety and concern about reliability to return home when needed, was a significant factor in participants' willingness to share a ride or use another alternative transportation mode.<sup>18</sup> This study illustrates that mobility programs that are tried in Klickitat County very likely also would need to be designed to address concerns such as reliability and safety, as well as time and expense identified in the surveys conducted by People for People. Building trust and engaging employees and potential employees in multiple ways may be necessary for a mobility program to be successful.

### Establishing Rural Vanpools

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) provides a guide for establishing a vanpool program in rural and mountain communities. This guide advises that employers or local governments try to meet transportation demand through rideshare matching and carpool promotion before investing in a vanpool program. The guide identifies three main types of vanpool initiatives: employer-sponsored programs, third-party program such as a public or private entity, and owner-operated programs in which individuals handle maintenance and insurance on their own while driving a group of other people to work.<sup>19</sup>

CDOT's tips to establishing a vanpool include: identifying transportation need, such as long commutes and the risk of being tardy to work; connecting with riders to identify common commute routes, with at least eight individuals interested in vanpooling to justify securing a van; securing a van, including obtaining or providing for funding to cover the vehicle, insurance, maintenance, vanpool administration and recruitment; and identify and train a driver to observe legal requirements and processes. Successful cases described in the guide include a business that obtained its own van, which was used for the commute only and not personal trips due to insurance restrictions. The initial fee used to cover vanpool costs was dropped when the business realized the value of providing the benefit as an employee

---

<sup>18</sup> Rusbult, Vicki (2016). Assessing Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) In Rural Maine As An Approach To Increase Transportation Options, <https://dune.une.edu/theses/65/>.

<sup>19</sup> Colorado DOT (2008). Rural and Mountain Community Vanpools, [https://www.codot.gov/programs/commuterchoices/documents/cdot\\_brochure\\_print.pdf](https://www.codot.gov/programs/commuterchoices/documents/cdot_brochure_print.pdf).

retention strategy. The community where the employer was located uses parking pricing that was waived through a partnership with the city, who provided a parking pass.<sup>20</sup> Cases include instances where drivers are charged a fee to participate, as well as public-private partnerships where some grants are used as well as fares or employer support. Effective marketing includes lettering on the participating vans.<sup>21</sup>

Arizona DOT identified that vanpooling is most attractive to employees traveling at least 15 miles one-way to work. Vanpool efforts require management and staffing resources, as well as investment in public relations. Financial incentives and disincentives, as well as public education and marketing, are important to recruit participants.<sup>22</sup>

### Employer-provided Vanpools or Carpools

Employers that see long commutes and remote locations as a cost affecting their business might choose to support transportation by providing vehicles for employees' use. Owning, maintaining, and insuring vehicles, as well as ensuring that adequate drivers are available, takes effort to coordinate. For some employers, their long-term business planning makes it worthwhile to invest in the vehicles and administration of the program.

Mercer Ranches is an agricultural employer in eastern Klickitat County that has developed a carpool program as an incentive for several employees. Mercer Ranches has up to eight vehicles used for carpooling during its busiest seasons, and scales back to five carpools at other times. Due to the variety of crops grown by the enterprise, many employees work almost year-round, although seasonal employment does scale up significantly with the use of temporary employees and guest workers. The vehicles used the Mercer Ranches carpool program are a mix of minivans and sedans; newer vehicles have tended to be minivans to accommodate more passengers comfortably. Vehicles are provided to individuals in supervisory positions, with the expectation that they arrange to bring other employees with them on their commute. Full insurance and a fuel card also are provided.<sup>23</sup>

The carpool program has been successful in providing a segment of Mercer Ranches employees with reliable transportation. Participating in the carpool program seems to have been effective at retaining employees over time. Using the company's own vehicles, in contrast to a transit agency or other vehicle, offers a transportation option for midday errands, such as sending an employee to replace a part without having to send management staff off-site. Because the vehicles are purchased by the company, though, all the vehicles still require car payments and insurance during the seasons that they receive little to no use. Employees have assigned responsibilities to record passenger names and track mileage.<sup>24</sup>

**Takeaways for Klickitat County stakeholders:** The carpool program has been effective and manageable for Mercer Ranches. A program like this be a better fit for businesses that already own some company vehicles, compared to businesses that currently have no vehicles. Employers

---

<sup>20</sup> CDOT (2008).

<sup>21</sup> CDOT (2008).

<sup>22</sup> Arizona DOT (2008). Implementing a Statewide Rideshare and Vanpool Program in Arizona.

<sup>23</sup> Personal communication with Mark Eshleman and J. R. Garza, May 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Personal communication with Mark Eshleman and J. R. Garza, May 2018.

considering a similar program might benefit from starting small to minimize risk, with a few vehicles that could be used for most of the year. Employers should investigate insurance options before considering purchasing particular sizes of vehicles; for example, 15-passenger vans might be expensive to insure and not be full of passengers very often. Minivans might be more effective than larger or smaller vehicles, for passenger comfort, driver ability to operate the vehicle safely, and to offer middle ground in the number of seats as the workforce fluctuates over time. Employer-owned vehicles could be used in combination with other strategies. For example, working with a private vanpool or carpool provider would allow an employer to experiment with commute options before committing to purchasing vehicles in an employer-owned carpool program. Also, employers that purchase some vehicles might benefit from working with a private vanpool or carpool provider to scale up during busy seasons, rather than maintaining an entire carpool fleet for the whole year.

### Private Vanpool Provider

Using a private vanpool provider can offer employers flexible options that can scale up or down to meet demand.

Enterprise Rideshare is one option of a private vanpool provider that offers vanpool or carpool support for employment transportation nationwide, including in Washington and Oregon. Enterprise Rideshare provides rides for groups of 4 – 15 people, typically for 2,000 miles per month. Contracts are month-to-month with a 30-day termination notice, so the number of vanpools can be scaled up or down according to seasonal employment needs.<sup>25</sup> Enterprise offers interested employers data mapping and cluster analysis of employee location data (using an anonymous identifier for employees). Enterprise also holds outreach events on-site to recruit interested individuals and assist with sign-ups.<sup>26</sup>

Each vanpool identifies customers to serve as a main driver and back-up driver, or take turns sharing driving responsibilities among members. Drivers must have a valid license and clean driving record, and they must be at least 25 years old.<sup>27</sup>

Pricing varies depending on the specific vehicle type, amenities, and additional mileage. Fuel is not included in the monthly contract, but Enterprise can provide a fuel card for rideshare members to use if desired by a sponsoring employer. Pricing varies according to the specific details of the agreement, but in 2018, typical monthly base pricing in the Pacific Northwest started at:<sup>28</sup>

- 7-passenger minivan for \$950/month
- 12-passenger van for \$1,100/month
- 15-passenger van \$1,200/month

When working with private sector clients, the vanpool typically identifies one customer to be the main point of contact and receive invoices and maintenance notices. That customer is responsible for collecting payment from other riders, if the rideshare members are paying for part or all of their own share of the transportation.<sup>29</sup> Customers must follow the preventive maintenance schedule using

---

<sup>25</sup> Personal communication with Chris Carcich, July 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Personal communication with Chris Carcich, July 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication with Chris Carcich, July 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Personal communication with Chris Carcich, July 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Personal communication with Chris Carcich, July 2018.

approved vendors. Enterprise seeks to add new vendors to the program where necessary to meet demand in new locations.<sup>30</sup>

Employers may offer rideshare through Enterprise as an employee benefit to reduce the cost to get to work and boost retention. Employers can choose to pay for part or all of the cost of the monthly contract, or employers can set up a pre-tax payroll deduction so that employees receive a tax benefit for participating for using their own funds to pay their share of the rideshare fee.<sup>31</sup> The amount of employer investment in transportation will likely vary, depending on the amount that workers recruitment and retention are challenges for doing business.

An emergency ride home program can be set up as part of the Enterprise contract, in case a rideshare member needs to leave work in the middle of the shift to address an emergency or unscheduled overtime with the approval of supervisor. There is flexibility in setting up the emergency ride home in the vanpool contract, so that it might include taxi or transportation network company (TNC) fare in places where those services available, but other options such as accessing an Enterprise rental car with assistance from Enterprise staff to move the cars.<sup>32</sup> No Enterprise rental locations existed in 2018 in Klickitat County, but locations exist in neighboring areas such as The Dalles, Hood River, and Hermiston, OR, and in the Tri-Cities area, WA.<sup>33</sup> Personal automobile mileage reimbursement could be an option for commutes in more rural locations without other mobility options, although that is used less commonly than other transportation options.<sup>34</sup>

Employers can work directly with Enterprise to initiate service, but transit agencies can contract with Enterprise to provide vanpools as a service option without the responsibility of owning the vehicles. This occurs with the Valley VanPool program that operates in Salem and Eugene, OR.<sup>35</sup> State agencies can also work with Enterprise to support vanpools. The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) supports vanpooling through its Go Vermont! program, with vans provided through Enterprise Rideshare. VTrans uses flexed Federal Highway Administration funds to support vanpools arranged through Go Vermont! at \$700/month. This reduces the cost to the vanpool participants, making vanpooling cost significantly less than driving alone.

VTrans reports that recruiting potential participants requires a time investment in communicating information about the benefits and how the risks are mitigated, such as through emergency ride home programs. However, once a group of riders has been recruited, the vanpools continue to operate over the long term, demonstrating that participants do see benefits. Go Vermont! has vanpools that operate to year-round work, as well as ones that serve seasonal jobs such as employment at ski resorts. Many have 8 – 10 riders, and the riders together typically set 2 – 3 pick-up locations where riders will meet. Parking has not been an issue for the vanpools, since some riders might meet at the driver's house, and

---

<sup>30</sup> Personal communication with Chris Carcich, July 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Personal communication with Chris Carcich, July 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Personal communication with Chris Carcich, July 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Enterprise (n.d.), <https://www.enterprise.com/en/car-rental/locations/us.html?icid=header.locations.rental-us.locations- -ENUS.NULL>

<sup>34</sup> Personal communication with Chris Carcich, July 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication with Stephanie Millar, July 2018.

others have been able to park at park-and-ride lots or in private lots that allow parking by vanpool participants.<sup>36</sup>

**Takeaways for Klickitat County stakeholders:** Contracting with a private vanpool provider for vehicles could work for Klickitat County employers who want to make reliable shared transportation available to employees without having to acquire and maintain vehicles and appropriate insurance. Enterprise offers services that might assist with getting a vanpool program initiated while minimizing employer effort, such as identifying clusters of employees and holding outreach events to recruit employees to participate. Significant flexibility exists in this model, including scaling up and down with seasonal work or to try a short-term pilot project. Employers could choose whether and how to structure a transportation benefit or use it as a retention bonus. If Klickitat County leadership wished to offer commuter transportation as a new public transportation service without the risk of obtaining vehicles or hiring drivers, the county could form a standalone transit agency or work through Mount Adams Transportation Service to investigate a commute options program with Enterprise or another rideshare program. This would likely require assigning staff a responsibility of supporting the vanpool program, even if employees themselves or employers were paying the full fee for participating. For more information on Enterprise Rideshare, interested parties should complete the contact form at <https://www.commutewithenterprise.com/en.html>.

### Transit Agency Commuter Vanpool Program

Ben Franklin Transit (BFT) is a public transportation agency serving Franklin and Benton Counties, including the cities of Kennewick, Pasco, Richland, West Richland, Benton City, and Prosser. Services include fixed route transit, dial-a-ride for individuals with disabilities that limit their use of fixed route, demand response service in the smaller communities of Prosser and Benton City, and commuter vanpool.<sup>37</sup>

The commuter vanpool program is available for commutes that either begin or end within the Public Transit Benefit Area (PTBA), which is the voter-adopted taxing district that funds transit. The PTBA is a sales tax of 6/10 of 1 percent; the maximum PBT rate in Washington can be 9/10 of 1 percent tax. Ben Franklin Transit's PTBA includes Prosser, not far outside of Klickitat County. With the vanpool program housed within a transit agency, facilities are available that make it feasible to own and maintain vans, along with maintenance staff, two fleet coordinators, and a vanpool assistant to support program staff in ride matching and vanpool management. In 2018 – 2019, BFT has been in the process of implementing software to track the driver log by odometer, rather than relying on paper forms, and simplify data management. Drivers are commuters, rather than professional transit agency employees, who undergo training using videos, to improve their knowledge of safe operation of the vehicles, although online training has been used elsewhere in Washington State.<sup>38</sup>

BFT's vanpool fleet is a mix of minivans, 12-passenger vans, and 15-passenger vans. Vanpool group fares are based on a fixed base plus a per-mile rate that is divided amount the users of the vanpool. Some vanpool riders agree that the driver's fare will be split among the other passengers, as a benefit to

---

<sup>36</sup> Personal communication with Ross MacDonald, January 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Ben Franklin Transit, n.d. <http://www.bft.org>.

<sup>38</sup> Personal communication with Terry DeJuan, May 2018.

driving. BFT has looked at custom seating or USB charging as potential amenities to improve the vanpool rider experience.<sup>39</sup>

In 1989, eight public transit agencies joined together to form the Washington State Transit Insurance Pool (WSTIP), which now has 25 agency members. Members have found that obtaining self-insurance through the pool has been significantly less cost than private insurance. 15-passenger vans often have higher insurance rates, and they are rarely filled with 15 passengers for the comfort of the riders, so 12-passenger vans or minivans may work better for some vanpools.<sup>40</sup>

BFT vans are driven to 150,000 miles before being replaced. Surplus vans are auctioned. BFT keeps a fleet of 36 vans as maintenance vans, to use in instances when regular vans are undergoing maintenance.

Many of the vans are used within or near the metro Tri-Cities area, but the area served by BFT is larger due to the fact that vans must either start or end within the PTBA. As a result, several vans are used annually to transport workers to farms in rural areas outside the PTBA and other employers. The vans are used only for commuting to the workplace, and then other transport is used to move the workers to the job site.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to fares, PBTA tax receipts, and other revenues, grant funding such as the WSDOT Vanpool Improvement Program (VIP) have supported BFT's vanpools. VIP funds are available to transit agencies to support capital expenses such as adding or replacing vans. Funding varies, but the statewide total has been \$8 – 10 million in recent biennial spending packages adopted by the state legislature.<sup>42</sup>

CalVans is a program run by the California Vanpool Authority to provide 8- and 15-passenger vans and qualified drivers in a program that meets all federal and state requirements for farm labor transportation and for general purpose commuting. Grant funding provided the initial start-up costs for administration and to purchase the vans. Now, the program is sustained through fees paid by riders, which vary by length of route but are typically a little more than \$2 per ride. This fee covers operations costs such as maintaining, insuring, and replacing the vans.<sup>43</sup>

Drivers are volunteers. For general purpose commuting, the vanpool drivers are also commuters who collect payments from their fellow riders and submit them to the agency. For farmworker transportation, the California Vanpool Authority recruits volunteer drivers. All drivers must have a Class C license, physical, clean driving record, and have responsibilities regarding fuel, car washes, and maintenance as outlined in their driver agreements. Employers do not pay to have their employees participate, unless they choose to provide a transportation voucher. Grant funds are available to subsidize transportation in certain areas. Sample documents are available on the program website, such as driver agreements, vouchers, steps to setting up a commuter vanpool, and other legal information.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Personal communication with Terry DeJuan, May 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Personal communication with Terry DeJuan, May 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Personal communication with Terry DeJuan, May 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Personal communication with Terry DeJuan, May 2018.

<sup>43</sup> California Vanpool Authority (n.d.). <https://calvans.org/>.

<sup>44</sup> California Vanpool Authority (n.d.). <https://calvans.org/>.

What is now CalVans began as a pilot program of a county transit agency in 2002, called the Agricultural Industries Transportation Service (AITS) at the time. AITS ran into several legal hurdles, including: that transportation providers needed to be certified and pay a fee to be farm worker contractors that could provide transportation; whether a driver could be paid or could only have expenses covered through fees from riders; and the legal difference between transporting farmworkers to fields or to work places such as packinghouses or processors. The vehicles are not considered farm labor vehicles according to California code, but rather are classified as vanpool vehicles, carrying 10 – 15 individuals for nonprofit, work-related transportation for adults. To distinguish between the practice of giving rides for money and operating the vanpool van, drivers sign a contract spelling out that they must not charge riders any fee other than that established by the agency, not require workers to ride with them, and other stipulations. A legal case in 2004 determined that the van drivers were collecting a *fare* for a transit agency, rather than collecting a *fee*, and were not required to register as a farm labor contractor. Because the vans transport existing workers rather than potential ones, a legal opinion by the U.S. Department of Labor in 2007 determined that “nothing in the [Migrant and Seasonal Worker Protection Act] is intended to prevent an employer from encouraging workers to participate in voluntary arrangements designed to provide safe and efficient transportation.”<sup>45</sup>

Noteworthy lessons learned from the pilot project include that significant outreach was needed to develop demand for the program. Outreach included visiting work sites such as packing sheds and fields at approximately 50 area growers. The top method for recruitment of drivers and riders occurred when the agency secured a booth at flea markets and other outdoor markets in other communities, and also ensured that Spanish-language literature was distributed. Drivers must have a degree of altruism to be willing to drive; there is minimal financial benefit to having the longest work day of all the vanpool participants, outside of avoiding wear and tear on personal vehicles by using the vanpool vehicles for the commute. Drivers and riders can have limited personal use of the vans, such as stopping for groceries or childcare during the commute. In 2006, the state legislature appropriated \$20 million from the state’s public transit account to start up the Agricultural Worker Transportation Program, which funded planning and service grants.<sup>46</sup>

**Takeaways for Klickitat County stakeholders:** BFT currently has two active vanpools from Prosser into eastern Klickitat County that is sponsored by an employer. If parking were available and the cost savings were great enough, there could be additional interest among workers traveling to eastern Klickitat County. However, many of the employees who commute to eastern Klickitat County are coming from the Lower Yakima Valley and would have to travel to and park in Prosser to access Ben Franklin Transit’s vanpool program. This is currently done by some employees, but employers report that additional secured parking would be desirable in Prosser.

If there were broad public support for a vanpool program that served county-wide needs, Klickitat County could consider proposing a PTBA to voters again in the future. Employees that commute from other jurisdictions might also benefit if a PTBA were adopted in other neighboring counties whose residents commute into Klickitat County.

---

<sup>45</sup> Kings County Area Public Transportation Agency (2009). The Farmworker’s Roadway to Employment: The History of the Agricultural Industries Transportation Service, <https://calvans.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/AITS-booklet.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> KCAPTA (2009).



BFT has significant experience and informational resources available that might assist any new vanpool program with identifying successful practices, including methods for collecting mileage, program policies and procedures, vanpool driver and rider agreements, and tips on recruiting employers and commuters to participate in the vanpool program.

The CalVans example is also instructive for analyzing transit agency roles in providing general commuter vanpools and farmworker transportation, as well as navigating the legal complexities related to providing certain types of transportation.

## Rural Commuter Transit

Two rural commuter transportation systems from elsewhere in the U.S. are described briefly below. In each of these two models, the vehicles and drivers are provided by the transit agency, under contract to employers that have a demand for employee transportation.

Western Iowa Transit (WIT), a regional transit program of the Region XII Council of Governments (COG), has partnered with Crawford County, Iowa on commuter routes between the city of Denison (population 8,362) and two employers, one each in the cities of Harlan (population 4,881) and Ida Grove (population 2,142). The service picks up workers at specified locations in Denison and transports them 30 miles south to a prepared meats company in Harlan or 30 miles north to a small manufacturer in Ida Grove. Regular routes have been established between these communities that deliver over 100 workers six days per week to these two locations. The COG initially used existing vehicles and an old school bus it acquired but has since purchased more appropriate vehicles for its transit fleet to meet the need, including underutilized vehicles from another transit service in Iowa.<sup>47</sup>

A major layoff left 400 workers in Denison without jobs, many of whom were transportation disadvantaged. Region XII COG wrote an application to the State of Iowa for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) on behalf of Crawford County, helping to facilitate conversations between the company and the county concerning local match, use, and time of service. The COG is also the region's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) grantee and operated the transition center in Denison for displaced workers from the major employer closure. WIOA staff members were able to assist workers around Denison who were interested in jobs at the two plants through job fairs and referrals. This work continues, with the commuter service eliminating barriers to employment for persons with no license or vehicle. Of note is that after the grant was exhausted for the Harlan service, the employer chose to fund continuation of the route so that this access to workers remained.<sup>48</sup>

The Western Iowa Transit commuter service has resulted in several benefits. The City of Denison retained residents who could use transportation rather than relocating to find employment. This has retained those workers' wages in the local economy, through paying taxes in the county and through their transactions with local businesses. Workers wanted to remain in Denison where they have established family and social connections; international immigration has helped Denison to be one of only two non-metro Iowa cities to increase in population in recent years. The communities of Harlan

---

<sup>47</sup> Personal communication with Rick Hunsaker, March 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication with Rick Hunsaker, March 2018.

and Ida Grove benefit because their major employers are able to find a source of workers who have reliable transportation, helping to stabilize that community's economy.<sup>49</sup>

[Coastal Regional Coaches](#) is a program housed in the Coastal Regional Commission of Georgia. Coastal Regional Coaches is a 5311 rural transit provider, with demand-response transportation. It also provides employee transportation for three manufacturers and two hotels in the tourism-based area of Jekyll Island, as well as another business in Charlton County, GA. Future rural commuter transit opportunities might involve taking transportation disadvantaged clients of social service agencies to training or employment. The commuter service picks up employees at designated places in order to transport them to three shifts per day, six days per week. This service is provided through a purchase-of-service (POS) contract. The employers pay a rate per vehicle, rather than per person, to use the 13-passenger vans. The rate is calculated to include costs such as fuel, insurance, driver time, and overhead. Vehicles are available for 5311 demand-response service when not in use for the commuter service. This arrangement has been beneficial to the region by helping employees get to work, helping businesses retain employees who are often traveling more than 25 minutes to work, and providing revenue to the transit program. The contract revenue covers the cost of providing the service and generates an additional \$40,000 in revenue each year, supporting the agency's ability to provide match for federal funds.<sup>50</sup>

[Takeaways for Klickitat County stakeholders](#): This rural commuter transit model could be a potential option for Klickitat County if, in the future, county leadership desired that the county provide a new employment transportation service in addition to the demand-response and fixed route options available currently through MATS. It would require developing a new business model, which would involve some risk to the county to acquire and maintain vehicles in order to provide the additional service, as well as employ the drivers. If an employer were interested in a POS contract for work occurring on standard shifts, vehicles used for commuter travel might also be used for certain 5311 demand-response trips in the eastern portion of the county between commuter runs. However, long work days for commuters working 10-hour or longer shifts, coupled with long commutes could make it tricky to schedule drivers.

### [Informal Carpooling](#)

Employers can provide opportunities for their workers to self-organize carpools. Much of this already happens at Klickitat County worksites, where employees carpool with family or friends, who are likely people who they already know. For employees who do not already have close connections, however, creating a sign-up sheet for people to share information about interest in carpooling in a central location such as a break room or on a clipboard can allow people to self-select into a ridesharing arrangement.

Employees should opt into a carpooling interest group and choose what information to share, such as phone number to arrange rides or home addresses when selecting parking and meeting locations. If management is aware of clusters of employee residences from their own analysis or using third-party software, they might suggest a general area where carpoolers could look for specific pick-up spots in order to share rides. For example, management could provide sign-up sheets for separate areas within

---

<sup>49</sup> Personal communication with Rick Hunsaker, March 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Personal communication with Don Masisak, July 2018.

their commute-shed, such as western Klickitat County or the lower Valley, without revealing where employees live, or allow them to put sticky notes or pins in a map to show the area where they are commuting from.

Cell phone networks in rural Maine have been useful for neighbors to communicate about trips and are particularly useful to homebound individuals, whose trips into town to complete shopping or other errands would be difficult to complete without driving assistance. One cell phone network operates by text, as neighbors text a group to let them know about an upcoming trip, and others can text back a shopping list or request a ride.<sup>51</sup>

Employees at Klickitat County businesses who live near each other could borrow the cell phone network model to identify regular rides or back-up transportation, where someone who could provide a ride if another employee's planned transportation fails. Having a back-up plan can help to reduce work days missed as a result of transportation, but it might result in both worker needing and the one giving the ride arriving later than their scheduled arrival time. Employer policies regarding time and attendance might discourage workers from deviating from their planned commute to give a ride that was not scheduled in advance, but policies could be re-shaped if necessary, to increase employee comfort with giving back-up rides.

### Ridesharing Platforms

Washington and Oregon maintain statewide ridesharing platforms (<http://www.drivelessconnect.com/>) to assist commuters with finding rides in a carpool or vanpool. In Washington, areas of the state where trip reduction is a priority often have financial support for mobility managers to assist employers with setting up accounts and recruiting riders.<sup>52</sup> Klickitat County could apply for funds to support mobility management, incentives for using mobility options, or to reduce carpool or vanpool fares through the Washington State DOT consolidated grant program. However, such a request could put new mobility activities in the same pool of funding requests as ongoing service provided to Klickitat County through Mount Adams Transportation Service.<sup>53</sup> Employees can sign themselves up for the rideshare platform Drive Less. Connect to find their own ride matches, but they would need to be aware that the ridesharing board is available and be comfortable using it without having a filter to limit potential matches to co-workers.<sup>54</sup>

Private sector providers also can assist with implementing a carpool program. Waze Carpool is one option, although several others also exist. Waze offers a carpool matching service that launched nationwide in October 2018 after pilot implementation in several regions. Waze matches up riders and drivers so that drivers can earn a bit of gas money for their regular commute. Waze facilitates the matching process and handles the payments through Google Pay. Similar to Enterprise Rideshare, Waze Carpool can be set up so that commuters pay the full rate to carpool, which is set at .54 cents per mile (the maximum rate set by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service), or employers or public sector entities can subsidize rides or provide an introductory discount to allow people to try out the service. Waze Carpool

---

<sup>51</sup> Rusbult (2016).

<sup>52</sup> Personal communication with Kathy Fitzpatrick, March 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Personal communication with Shamus Misek, July 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Personal communication with Kathy Fitzpatrick, March 2018.

can screen which riders and drivers are visible to one another, by using email address domains associated with a certain employer or school or by geofencing the location of the workplace, which would extend the workplace filter to employees that do not have work email addresses.<sup>55</sup>

Waze Carpool currently has a partnership with Amazon for employees 75 distribution centers around the United States, including in some rural locations. Waze Carpool reports that the Amazon partnership works well in places that are not easily served by transit, since it captures some of the potential occupancy in vehicles already being used for commuting.<sup>56</sup>

This option could work well where a large or small number of people are commuting along a particular route and for a shift. Waze Carpool assists employers with rolling out the commute program and customizing it for the context and level of employer involvement.<sup>57</sup> Using the service would require that drivers and riders use an app to schedule rides, which is done in advance rather than on-demand. This means that users would need to have internet or cell phone access to schedule their rides for the week from their home or another location, but it could work for job sites that have little cell service since the rides would already be arranged. Users also must have access to use Google Pay, which requires a bank account or credit card, as well as internet access to set it up.<sup>58</sup>

**Takeaways for Klickitat County stakeholders:** Carpooling offers decreased commuter costs and can be accomplished with low effort using employees' existing vehicles, such as through sign-up sheets, or in more formal methods such as through state rideshare boards or Waze Carpool. Private sector partners such as Waze Carpool offer service without employers or transit agencies investing in vehicles. The flexibility to allow commuters to pay their full fare or access a ride subsidy can meet a range of employers' needs. Less formal approaches to carpooling are likely to work better for employees that may not have banking services or consistent internet or cell service, but online ridesharing or use of a carpooling app such as Waze might work to allow employees that likely do have access to opt into a carpooling arrangement without significant effort made by the employer. For more information on Waze, interested parties should contact Brianna Fischer at [briannafischer@waze.com](mailto:briannafischer@waze.com). Other carpool and rideshare platforms offer contact information on their company websites.

## Parking Issues

Commuters that live near each other or are already family or friends might be willing to meet or be picked up at a rider's or driver's home. But other potential carpool or vanpool riders would require access to parking in a convenient and safe location to avoid increasing commute times with multiple stops. An analysis of parking opportunities could help employees to know where they can park to take advantage of the cost savings of sharing the commute through a carpool, vanpool, or other option.

Stakeholders who were interviewed mentioned two park-and-ride lots owned by WSDOT in Klickitat County. The park-and-ride near the bridge between Klickitat County and Hood River, OR was reported to be used consistently, with several cars parked there daily, although the lot is generally not filled. A

---

<sup>55</sup> Personal communication with Brianna Fischer, January 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Personal communication with Brianna Fischer, January 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Personal communication with Brianna Fischer, January 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Google Pay (n.d.), <http://pay.google.com>.

park-and-ride lot closer to Goldendale was also mentioned by stakeholders, but reportedly is used very little. Many users do not know about the park-and-ride, but stakeholders also spoke about feeling like the rural surroundings made the Goldendale area park-and-ride less safe.

Other parking options could be available in areas where the Klickitat County workforce is traveling. For instance, VTrans reports that vanpool riders in Vermont, a state with a largely rural character, can access parking even at private sector sites without problem. Businesses assume that park-and-ride users might be more likely to stop into a business while trip-chaining for errands after work. Allowing riders to park fills businesses' spaces with potential customers when those parking spots might have stayed empty for much of the day.<sup>59</sup> In Goldendale, there may be city or county offices that typically have open parking.<sup>60</sup> If a small number of spaces in those lots were open to residents sharing rides, it might lead to higher utilization of that public asset (land used for parking) while supporting decreased commute costs, increased reliability, and environmental benefits associated with trip reduction.

Future park-and-ride analysis could be done around Maryhill Grade, if there were enough demand to aggregate commuters coming across the Columbia River from Oregon with those coming from western Klickitat County communities. However, parking at rural Maryhill Grade would likely cause users to have the same concerns about safety and security of their vehicle as the existing park-and-ride outside Goldendale, if there were not investments in security such as fencing and a secured gate.

Workers coming into eastern Klickitat County and their employers may be interested in a park-and-ride lot under consideration by the City of Prosser.<sup>61</sup> Prosser is considering applying for funds to develop a lot, which could potentially be located on land owned by the city and could be a secured facility, with a fence and keypad.<sup>62</sup> Parking costs would likely be affordable for truck drivers or commuters, as it would be operated by the city to cover costs and meet identified needs rather than generate significant new revenues.<sup>63</sup> Parking in Prosser could enable commuters to use BFT vanpool vans, if a vanpool option accommodated their needs, or simply to ride with co-workers to carpool in personal vehicles.

#### Lessons Learned about Parking and Shared Mobility

Elsewhere in Washington, King County Metro conducted a one-year pilot program to test the concept of providing paid park-and-ride facilities near transit. The goal of this program was to increase the availability of park-and-ride inventory and usage, as well as increasing access to and use of transit. Some of the research questions identified in the pilot program included: Would property managers be interested in renting excess parking to transit customers? Would transit customers pay for parking when current park-and-ride parking is free? Some locations sold out of available passes for the number of spots. The program worked well in places near paid and time-limited parking, rather than locations that were not well served by free street parking. The final report also recommended integrating communications technology to improve locating available parking and reserving a space, as well as recruiting additional parking providers and conducting outreach to employers. In this model, King County Metro (a transit agency) managed the program and assisted with navigating local regulations,

---

<sup>59</sup> Personal communication with Ross MacDonald, January 2019.

<sup>60</sup> Personal communication with Dale Robinson, June 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Personal communication with Deb Heintz, January 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Personal communication with Deb Heintz, January 2019, and Steve Zetz, December 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Personal communication with Steve Zetz, December 2018.

while a private sector parking operator (selected through an open RFP process) managed the participation of properties and users.<sup>64</sup>

King County Metro identified potential parking site locations that met several criteria, including an adequate amount of available space (25 spaces) and safety infrastructure (managed entry system or patrolled premises), as well as high demand for parking in the area and near available transit. Paid parking was available with a monthly pass in some locations, and with a daily rate for others. Property owners or managers opted into the program for their parking sites. Recruitment worked best with “warm” calling where a contact was known, as well as cold calling that resulted in a conversation with a decisionmaker about why the property was likely to succeed. Indirect outreach through newsletters or advertising was the least effective recruitment method. Grant funding was used to offer the first month free to participants. Customer participation was strongly correlated with active outreach campaigns.<sup>65</sup> Participants did not cancel after the first free month. Property owners were generally interested in participating because of the opportunity to generate revenue from underutilized parking, but they have been patient in locations where demand built slowly. Customers reported that certainty of a guaranteed spot was the most important benefit from participating in the program. A customer survey showed that 30 percent of customers did not take transit regularly prior to participating in the parking program. The City of Seattle adopted an ordinance allowing flexible use parking that limited the need for property owners to apply for charge of use permits. The program evaluation showed that increased parking inventory could be achieved for a cost of \$265 per parking spot, in contrast to building new parking at \$30,000 – \$75,000 per spot if King County Metro built new park-and-ride facilities.<sup>66</sup>

**Takeaways for Klickitat County stakeholders:** Long-distance commuters might be willing to park in facilities in locations that are not traditional park-and-ride facilities, such as those provided by WSDOT or local agencies. Certain lessons learned in King County could be transferrable to a more rural context: non-traditional park-and-ride spots might be more successful at sites with more activity and people nearby or with security infrastructure that are near higher volume commute route, with an opportunity to carpool or vanpool (in contrast to the transit route focus of King County’s study). Although the King County pilot program identified 25 available parking spots as the minimum adequate number, a much smaller number of parking spaces, perhaps even 3 – 5 spots at a site, could be adequate to ease carpooling and vanpooling in Klickitat County.

Experience in King County showed that “warm calling” acquaintances to investigate parking options was the most successful outreach method. If Klickitat County business owners or management have relationships with business owners or county officials who could make parking available, they might start a conversation about parking on behalf of their employees, if the employers want to take an active role in expanding transportation options. Employees interested in starting a vanpool or carpool can take an active role in identifying parking by talking with the management of businesses that often seem to have open parking spaces. This could lead to new opportunities to use a few spaces along major commute corridors.

---

<sup>64</sup> King County Metro (2018). Phase II Report: Progress Report, Evaluation, and Recommendation.

<sup>65</sup> King County Metro (2018).

<sup>66</sup> King County Metro (2018).

King County Metro found that property owners and managers were most interested in the parking program because of the potential for revenue generation from parking fees. However, paying to park is not the norm in or around Klickitat County, and benefits (such as security) would likely have to be substantial for commuters or their employers to want to pay. Other benefits to property owners or managers might exist beyond parking revenue. For publicly owned parking lots that typically have excess space such as some county offices, the benefit might be higher utilization of the public facility, while businesses such as retail stores could see more visits from commuters who park there during work hours but come inside to shop after work.

Business owners, managers, and area employees interested in transportation options should stay aware of parking-related developments that might affect their commutes and provide comments about their potential use of such sites. Stakeholders interested in parking, safety, and other transportation issues that cross the Klickitat/Benton County line should contact the Prosser Economic Development Association (<http://www.prosser.org/>) to be added to a transportation-interest email list and consider attending its annual meeting in April 2019, which will have a theme of transportation.<sup>67</sup>

### Transportation Tax Benefits

Employers and employees can receive tax benefits by providing a transportation benefit. The 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act changed some aspects of this benefit beginning in 2018. Employers can still support parking fees, transit fares, and commuter highway vehicle fees such as vanpool fares.<sup>68</sup> Commuter highway vehicles (vanpool vehicles) have a seating capacity for at least six adults (not including the driver), and at least 80 percent of the mileage use can be reasonably expected to be for transporting commuters.<sup>69</sup>

In 2019, up to \$265 for parking, transit, or vanpool fares can be provided by employers as a tax-free benefit for employees. Beginning in 2018, employers can no longer deduct transportation benefit payments to employees as a business expense, unless the benefit payments are considered taxable income on the individual employees' W-2. Employers can structure a transportation benefit program to use employees' pre-tax salary to pay for the transit, parking, or commuter highway vehicle fees, rather than the employer paying for those benefits. This would reduce the employers' payroll tax responsibility.<sup>70</sup> If employees had been paying out-of-pocket for transportation expenses that are eligible to be paid as pre-tax income, then it would reduce most employees' individual income tax burden.

Employers should consider the impacts of mobility programs with their legal counsel. In May 2018, a Texas Supreme Court case held an employer liable for a crash caused by an employee who was driving coworkers in his own personal vehicle and was compensated by the employer for driving. This should not discourage employers from encouraging carpooling, but they should consider liability along with

---

<sup>67</sup> Personal communication with Deb Heintz, January 2019.

<sup>68</sup> National Center for Transit Research, University of South Florida (2018). "Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefit Summary Table," <https://www.bestworkplaces.org/resource-center/qualified-transportation-fringe-benefits/>.

<sup>69</sup> Federal Transit Administration (n.d.). "What is a commuter highway/vanpool vehicle?" <https://www.transit.dot.gov/what-commuter-highwayvan-pool-vehicle>.

<sup>70</sup> National Center for Transit Research (2018).

benefits in structuring how to support employee transportation. It may reduce liability to use a third-party service or to develop a contract with the employee that states the employee is an independent contractor while driving.<sup>71</sup> If the employer subsidizes transportation by supporting vehicles or mileage fees rather than paying employees who are drivers a bonus fee to use their own vehicles, and as long as participation is voluntary, the benefit structure might limit an employer's liability. Legal counsel should be sought for business-specific advice.

**Takeaways for Klickitat County stakeholders:** In Klickitat County, offering employee tax benefits for parking fees and transit fares would not currently provide much benefit. But employers that have employees that are coming from the same area or same corridor could vanpool, if the number of people was large enough to warrant a van. Either a pre-tax deduction (as long as it is saving the employees money compared to paying out of pocket to commute alone) or a transportation benefit supported by the employer would improve the household economics for transportation to work. Since transportation is likely not the only barrier to work, employers might wish to experiment with finding the best transportation support that is affordable, easy to implement, and provides benefits to both the employee and the employer.

### Regional Mobility Management and Transportation Management Associations

Mobility management efforts are ongoing in the Columbia River Gorge, particularly through Gorge TransLink, an alliance of rural providers offering public transportation services throughout the region. Staff support is provided through the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District, using grant funding. The region could apply for grant funding to support additional mobility management work, such as outreach to area employers to use the Drive less. Connect. Rideshare program in Klickitat County.

One rural mobility study identifies transportation management associations (TMAs) as an option for improving rural mobility.<sup>72</sup> TMAs are often formed as nonprofits that serve a particular area, which could be as geographically compact as a commercial district or industrial park.<sup>73</sup> For areas that are more rural in character, a TMA could be geographically larger, including communities or counties along travel corridors or in an economic region. TMAs are often public-private partnerships, and as a result they may be funded through member dues and other sources, with local government support or federal or state grants.<sup>74</sup> They are formed as standalone entities or as a program within an established service-based organization. Services offered by TMAs vary according to the desires of its members and available resources, but they focus on offering mobility options through programs such as: commute trip reduction, commuter financial incentives, guaranteed ride home, parking management, ridesharing, transit improvements, transportation access guides, and marketing such as commute options and transportation demand management programs.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Cannon, Paul (2018). "Your Company Carpool Incentive Could Be Exposing You to Legal Liability," <https://www.business.com/articles/employee-carpooling-incentive-legal-liability/>

<sup>72</sup> Rusbult (2016).

<sup>73</sup> Victoria Transport Policy Institute (2018). "Transportation Management Associations," *TDM Encyclopedia*, <https://www.vtpi.org/tdm/tdm44.htm>.

<sup>74</sup> VTPI (2018).

<sup>75</sup> VTPI (2018).



Tips to starting a TMA include: identify the geographical area to be served; analyze current transportation patterns and options; establish contact with key stakeholders such as the business community and local government stakeholders; secure funding for the TMA (which may include a mix of member dues, local support, and grants), along with a business plan for how funds will be spent and a plan for sustaining funding in the future; recruit business commitments based on the business plan; recruit leadership to form an initial board of directors; register as a nonprofit organization (if applicable); establish operating procedures for the organization or TMA program and adopt the work plan; determine staffing; establish database of member businesses and others, as well as their commute characteristics; conduct the work plan, including conducting outreach about transportation options on a continuing basis; monitor results.<sup>76</sup>

For Klickitat County or a larger region, such as the Columbia River Gorge, a TMA program could consist of area employers, public sector partners, or others pooling funds for mobility management assistance or to provide match for grant applications.

### Other Funding Sources

Most state and federal funds for transportation flow through state DOTs and are in commonly accessed programs, such as Washington State's consolidated transit grant application. However, in certain cases, other federal funds from certain programs are available to assist employees with transportation. However, many of these benefits exist primarily for workers who meet certain criteria, such as income eligibility, rather than any worker. They are often available only for a limited timeframe, such as to assist individuals with transitioning to work. These limited sources of funding might include Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or Vocational Rehabilitation. Eligible expenses can vary by the locality administering the funds, but they might include transportation benefits such as transit passes or reimbursement of transportation expenses.

### Connection to Economic Development

During this project, several interviews with employers and other stakeholders were conducted. All mentioned the relationship between transportation, economic development and land use. These comments included noting the length and economic cost of the commute, the attractiveness of jobs closer to home, the lack of residential areas and amenities near many workplaces, and transportation safety risks of corridors where individuals travel at high speed. Any mobility solutions that are effective at helping employees to share rides or improve the reliability of their rides will decrease household expenses and improve household economic success. Where these efforts allow employees to stay longer in their jobs, employers may see decreased turnover costs and higher productivity due to less re-training of new individuals. Spillover effects may be seen elsewhere in the economy, including spending in local businesses.

---

<sup>76</sup> Philbin, Susan (n.d.). Guiding Principles for the Establishment of An Area-Wide TMA, republished by VTPI, <https://www.vtpi.org/tm/tm44.htm>



Mobility and economic development are interconnected with transportation safety. This is especially important in rural areas, which see a higher share of fatalities than urbanized areas, and causes significant personal loss, as well as economic losses related to missed work and medical expenses. Mobility strategies might also improve safety, since they could reduce the number of vehicles and amount of travel necessary for employees to commute to remote job sites. Rural transportation safety is a priority that has received attention in Klickitat County, through roadway improvements, signage, partnerships with law enforcement, and social marketing with area employers.<sup>77</sup> This focus is expected to continue through the future development and implementation of a county transportation safety plan.<sup>78</sup> Local roads have a fatality rate three times higher than the Interstate highway system, and such local road safety plans are identified as a Proven Safety Countermeasure by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).<sup>79</sup>

In neighboring Benton County, local stakeholders have worked with WSDOT to identify high-risk locations and potential improvements. In 2018, WSDOT added a center line rumble stripe to State Road 221 to mitigate risk.<sup>80</sup> Such rumble stripes let drivers know when they have left their lane, and they are another Proven Safety Countermeasure.<sup>81</sup> WSDOT and stakeholders have also identified locations where lighted arrows might help improve safety at hairpin turns, and four intersections where left turn lanes would likely reduce the incidence of rear-end crashes where a vehicle is turning. This corridor probably serves some of the workforce coming into eastern Klickitat County, so safety improvements would likely benefit stakeholders on both sides of the county line.<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusions

No single transportation program is going to benefit all commuters in Klickitat County, with various needs and work patterns. For employers whose employees work year-round or for several months on shifts with a standard start and ending time, carpool or vanpool options might help employees to decrease their costs and increase reliability. Where the transportation needs are predictable, or where the employers' need to reduce turnover is great, a higher level of investment (financial, time, or both) by the employer is likely to occur.

<sup>77</sup> Personal communication with Gordon Kelsey, May 2018.

<sup>78</sup> Personal communication with Gordon Kelsey, May 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Federal Highway Administration, Office of Safety (2017). Proven Safety Countermeasures: Local Road Safety Plans, [https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/local\\_road/](https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/local_road/).

<sup>80</sup> Personal communication with Deb Heintz, January 2019.

<sup>81</sup> Federal Highway Administration, Office of Safety (2017). Proven Safety Countermeasures: Longitudinal Rumble Strips and Stripes, [https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/long\\_rumble\\_strip/](https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/long_rumble_strip/).

<sup>82</sup> Personal communication with Deb Heintz, January 2019.

For other employers, flexibility in transportation options is needed, with the ability to move between sites or run an errand for agricultural jobs, and to accommodate work schedules that vary significantly. Programs that could be used seasonally without a significant outlay of time or financial investment by employers would be the best options to test whether a potential reduction in transportation expenses (either with an employer subsidy or simply by reducing expenses through employees pooling resources) or an increase in reliability helped to improve worker recruitment or retention.

Employers and their employees might try a variety of strategies to see what works best for their needs or try different strategies for different times of year. Understanding whether employees might be reluctant to carpool for particular reasons (personal safety, reliability of shared rides, or emergency rides home) can help to structure which strategies are tried first.

Continuing the focus on transportation safety partnership between Klickitat County and employers will likely continue to mitigate safety-related risks and improve the commutes of workers in eastern Klickitat County and benefit all the stakeholders living and working in the remote rural area.

## Appendix I. Employer Interview Questions

How many employees does your business typically employ?

How does employment vary throughout the year?

What types of work do employees complete?

What shifts do the employees typically work?

What communities or general areas do your employees live in?

Where do your employees work? Are there multiple work sites?

How do your employees get to work?

Do any employees carpool? Are there any other mobility options that have been tried?

Do you think there are opportunities to improve employees' commutes?

Do you have challenges recruiting or retaining employees? Are those challenges the most noticeable for all kinds of positions, or for certain types of jobs or in certain seasons?

How do you recruit potential employees?

How do you see your business changing in the future? Do you think you will have an available workforce to meet those business opportunities?

Are there other workforce or transportation issues you would like to discuss?