

Vanpool services provided by CalVans and their origins

California State Employees

In the 1990s the State of California began a prison building campaign where they constructed upwards of 10 prisons in the Central San Joaquin Valley. All of the prisons were placed in smaller rural communities with the promise that the prisons would bring an influx of professionals to the community. The prisons were built but the professionals chose in most cases to reside in nearby larger communities where there were more social amenities.

In the early years the State provided groups with the ability to receive a State van that the employees could use to travel to and from work. That program was subsequently stopped and a monthly stipend provided for those that chose to vanpool to work.

CalVans first vanpool was a result of a group of older employees who were losing their State sponsored van and was looking for another public agency to take over the van so that they could continue vanpooling to work. CalVans did not take over the van, but instead secure another van to provide the service as part of its public transit program. The condition placed on the program by the Board was the condition that all costs related to providing the service were to be paid by those receiving the service.

Farm workers traveling to the fields for employment

The first request for a vanpool came from a County Supervisor on behalf of a local pistachio farmer who wanted to help his workers get to work. Staff did preliminary work in setting up a vanpool, but ran into opposition from the State Department of Labor concerning the legality of a public agency providing the service.

At about this same time there was a farm labor accident resulting in the death of 13 farmworkers. This caused the governor to convene a task force to look at ways of providing safe transportation to farm workers. These efforts ultimately lead to the funding of the AITS (Agricultural Industries Transportation Services) Project managed by CalVans. This forced confrontation with a number of Federal and State agencies who felt a public transit agency had no business providing public vanpools to farmworkers.

Over the course of 6 years the program was able to address all challenges and finally received approval from all agencies. Today the program provides from 150 to 200 vans, depending on the season to farmworkers in most agricultural areas in California. The program also facilitates the movement of vanpool groups between regions for seasonal work.

Contractor-Growers

Contractors and Growers are now offering vouchers to their workers that cover the cost of using a CalVans vanpool. CalVans can offer this service because it was formed as a public transit agency, allowing employers the ability to provide transportation vouchers to those employees who elect to ride in the vans. Presently over 12 employers are providing their farm workers this

option. This is now benefiting more than 80 vanpool groups by providing them a free ride to work.

Teachers

Unlike teachers of earlier times, many teachers no longer live in the community in which they teach. They like the State workers mentioned earlier, chose to live in nicer communities than those they teach in. A number of teachers are concerned because of the poverty or gang activity that goes on where they teach. Teachers do not receive a subsidy for commuting but feel the cost is worth it. Teachers generally use the older vans that have been paid for to keep their costs down

College Students

CalVans has found success in the community of Shafter in Kern County. Shafter is a primarily Hispanic community with residents that struggle with transportation issues. In early meetings those interested in vanpooling to the local Taft College cited the lack of money to purchase transportation, the lack of licenses among those that do drive and the need to use the primary vehicle for work as opposed to school.

Though the collaborative efforts of the City of Shafter, non-profit agencies and advisors at school a vanpool was formed. CalVans leveraged Air District and JARC grants to help keep the initial cost down. The students conducted bake sales as needed to cover any shortage. The students also use older vans that have been paid for to reduce their monthly cost.

For the past 5 years one to two vans make the daily trip between Shafter and Taft College. School advisors let the vanpool drivers know of gradating high school students who may need the service in the coming year. CalVans Staff holds an annual meeting at the local Catholic Church to coordinate the beginning of the school year. It is at this meeting that the vanpool groups are formed and the drivers identified. Drivers must be 25 with no more than two points or at least 21 with no points.

Federal Employees

Military, IRS, Federal prison workers and others federal workers use the program to access a number of different locations. In most cases they elect to use a newer van because of the monthly \$130 stipend they receive. Like the State workers, most of them travel some distance to reach their place of employment

Solar Employees:

California is moving to being green and thus promoting clean solar energy. In the Central Valley these solar farms are usually at a distance from the cities. With workers looking for ways to save money they turned to CalVans for help in starting vanpools to these remote sites. We have workers traveling from Bakersfield to the solar farms being constructed adjacent to Lancaster.