



Going Green

Transportation Subsidy Program Region 9

The Transportation Subsidy Program provides eligible employees with a set amount per month for mass and vanpool transportation (excluding parking). For employees who participate in the program, this benefit is not subject to tax. To participate, you must fill out the enrollment form, “U.S. Department of the Interior’s Public Transportation Subsidy Program Application” which can be obtained from your administrative officer, human resources office, or the Human Resources website at www.nbc.gov/facilities/transportation_subsidy.html. All completed forms should be given to Ben Livingston in the Division of Human Capital.

The following questions and answers may help you to better understand the Transportation Subsidy Program.

What is the Transportation Subsidy Program?

This program gives enrolled employees a set amount each month for mass transportation and vanpools (excluding parking). It is designed to encourage employees to use mass transit for commuting to and from work. Employees will receive the subsidy through the Metrochek program which is distributed on a quarterly basis.

Who is eligible for the Transportation Subsidy Program?

Employees in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area who use mass transportation or vanpools to commute to work will be eligible for the subsidy. You must be enrolled to receive the subsidy. Employees are not eligible to participate in the subsidy program if they are in a carpool that receives a federally subsidized parking space. There is no provision in existing statutes to reimburse employees for carpooling expenses.

What qualifies as mass transportation or a vanpool?

Mass transportation is any form of public transportation (bus, light rail, subway, train, or authorized vanpool). A vanpool is a “Commuter Highway Vehicle” having a seating capacity of at least 6 adults, and is to be used for transporting employees to and from work for at least 80% of the mileage. Vanpools frequently satisfy the criteria for a “Commuter Highway Vehicle” while carpools do not.

Recertification and Training Process

Each participant must adhere to the following guidelines to remain in the transit subsidy program:

- Complete a new Program Application (www.nbc.gov/facilities/pdfs/publictransportationsubsidyprogramapplication_04-09.pdf).
- Complete a new Commuting Expense Worksheet (www.nbc.gov/facilities/pdfs/transitsubsidycommutingexpenseworksheet.pdf).
- Successfully complete the Transit Benefit Integrity Training (available only on DOI Learn). Be sure to print a copy of the certificate of completion to include in your application package.
- Additionally, all employees who do not already use SmartBenefits (e.g., transit subsidy benefits are used for Metrorail, Metrobus, Metro-authorized van pools, Cue, Fairfax Connector, Ride On, DASH or DC Circulator) will need to submit a SmartBenefits Program Application (www.nbc.gov/facilities/pdfs/SmartBenefits_Application_4-20-09_formfillable.pdf) with a copy of the SmartTrip Card on the back of the SmartBenefits Program Application.
- All applicants must submit the Program Application, Transit Subsidy Commuting Expense Worksheet, and Transit Benefit Integrity Training certificate to their program Administrative Officer.

Are vanpool riders and vanpool owner/operators eligible to participate in the Transportation Subsidy Program?

Vanpool riders are eligible to participate if the vanpool is a "Commuter Highway Vehicle" and is registered with the local transportation authority and accepts transit passes as payment. Vanpool owner/operators are not eligible to participate in the Program.

Can I participate in the Transportation Subsidy Program if I use qualifying public transportation less than 5 days per week?

Employees may have an established commuting pattern which consists of using a vanpool and/or public transportation less than 5 days per week on a regular and recurring basis. If you have such an established commuting pattern, you are only allowed to claim transportation expenses for the days that you are using a vanpool and/or public transportation. This must be indicated on your application form and will be reviewed against your actual transportation expenses claimed. Occasional or sporadic use of public transportation does not qualify for participation in the program.

What is Metrochek and how do I use it?

Metrochek is a universal fare media voucher for the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. Currently, many different companies accept Metrochek as a voucher for transportation costs. Metrochek can be used instantly as a Metro subway ticket, or exchanged for a variety of other passes. For more information on Metrochek, see <http://www.wmata.com/metrochek/metrochek.htm>.

How often are Metrocheks distributed?

The Department of the Interior has contracted with the Department of Transportation (DOT) to administer the program. DOT officials set-up distribution locations each quarter to distribute the Metrocheks. You will have to present your government ID when picking up your subsidy. For the most up-to-date information, please visit www.nbc.gov/facilities/transportation and click on the Transit Media Distribution Schedule link.

If I am a new employee, should I wait for the next distribution period before signing up?

You can apply for the Program at any time. Your transit pass will be pro-rated based on when the application is processed. Please remember there are no retroactive provisions for this program.

How do I cancel my enrollment?

To cancel enrollment, a written notice and your unused fare media must be sent to Ben Livingston, Region 9 Transportation Subsidy Program Coordinator, Division of Human Capital, Mailstop 2000, stating the date you wish to end your participation in the program.

If I leave the Service, what happens to the unused fare media?

You will be required to return the fare media to your office. If you have used more than the pro-rated amount, you will be required to reimburse the Service for the difference.

What is the role of a supervisor in the Transportation Subsidy Program?

Supervisors serve as a certifying official for employee participation. Supervisors will receive the transportation subsidy application form from their employees to review for completeness; perform "reasonable" checks to ensure eligibility; and sign the forms to signify approval. Supervisors will also ensure that the Payroll Cost Structure Account Number is complete and accurate.

Additional questions about the Program can be addressed to your servicing personnel office or visit the www.nbc.gov/facilities/transportation_subsidy.html.

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