With vanpool, commuters save by traveling together

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CALDWELL — Sylvia Marmon of Caldwell has been taking advantage of the Ada County Highway District’s vanpool program since 1981. Last year alone, she saved more than $3,000 by leaving her car at home.

“I do just about everything I can do to avoid driving my own car,” she said.

More than 170 Canyon County residents hop into 20 vans with other commuters to ride to work through the program. Although it’s run by the Ada County district, the program has routes throughout Canyon County.

Marmon volunteers to drive the van from Caldwell to downtown Boise, which means she doesn’t have to pay for the service. She fuels and washes the van and handles paperwork to “pay” for her usage. There are 11 people who ride with her in the van. Most are government workers, she said. Marmon works for the city of Boise.

“We’re definitely a family,” she said. “We know when somebody’s parent or child is sick. We bring treats and celebrate occasions.”

Marmon first started using the vanpool when her job at Simplot moved from Caldwell to Boise. When she started a new job with the city, there wasn’t a van route that worked, so she carpooled for a while. She’s been on her current vanpool route since 1999.

The monthly fare for the vanpool depends on the route. Caldwell to downtown Boise is $120 per month and from Nampa to downtown Boise, it’s $100. The first month is free for new riders to try out, and some employers offer incentives to vanpool participants that allow them to save $20 for each of the three months’ fare after that, according to ACHD.

Vanpool participants can also save money on their personal car insurance, because insurance companies provide discounts when drivers tell the companies they are using a vanpool for their daily commute instead of their own car, according to ACHD.

The financial advantages of the vanpool program are important to Marmon, but she also feels good about her impact on the environment and reducing congestion. Marmon enters her vanpool usage into

Intercounty Route

ValleyRide Route 42 heads north on Maple Grove Road Tuesday afternoon in Boise. Route 42 makes stops in Caldwell, Nampa, Meridian and Boise. Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2014 (Greg Kreller/IPT)
the Idaho RideShare website, which tells her not only how much money she has saved, but also how many gallons of gas and how many pounds of CO2 emissions she’s saved. Last year, it was 8,823 pounds.

“I feel great about it,” she said. “... If more people would do it, it would save so much on congestion and air pollution.”

The Rideshare website, i-way.org, can connect commuters with other people who share their commute and work times to ride together. It also connects people for single events.