What is Park and Ride?

Buses, carpools and ‘vanpools’ meet at parking lots around the valley

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Each morning, Treasure Valley commuters, from Mountain Home to Ontario, Oregon, park their cars in lots near their homes, hop on a bus or carpool, and head to work, school or some other destination.

Part of Ada County Highway District’s Commuteride program, these parking lots, called Park and Ride lots, allow valley residents to park daily for free. From the Park and Ride lots, commuters can catch the bus or join a carpool with co-workers or fellow students.

Overall — for bus services, carpooling and vanpooling — about 8,000 commuters use Park and Ride lots each year, according to Natalie Shaver, public information specialist for ACHD.

There are nearly 50 Park and Ride locations, with some stemming back to the 1970s. Some of these lots are owned by ACHD, a couple are owned by the Idaho Transportation Department, but the majority are made available through informal parking arrangements between the highway district and businesses, churches and parks.

The lots provide a single place for commuters with similar destinations to meet, said Mark Carnopis, community relations manager for Valley Regional Transit, which provides bus routes to Park and Ride locations through its ValleyRide transit network. For example, a Boise State University student who lives in Nampa can park their car at a Park and Ride lot near their home and take the bus to a stop near campus, or co-workers who live in Eagle but work in Caldwell can meet at a nearby Park and Ride location and take one car to work.

Kyle Gilleard, 47, of Meridian, participates in a “vanpool” with co-workers at Micron.

The vanpool program from Commuteride allows a group of five or more people with similar commuting routes and schedules to borrow a van for their commute. ACHD covers all of the operating costs associated with the vanpool including the vehicle, maintenance, gas and insurance, and riders pay a monthly fee.

ACHD’s annual budget for Commuteride is $2.9 million, with most of that going to the vanpool, according to Nicole DuBois, ACHD spokeswoman.

Gilleard said he pays about $100 per month for his vanpool, which he meets at the Ten Mile Park and Ride lot in Meridian at the corner of Ten Mile and Overland roads. Gilleard, who lives about four miles from the lot, said he vanpools to work about three times per week.

“I really like it,” he said of the program. “It saves wear and tear on my rig, and I don’t have the stress of driving in (to Micron).”

Micron is southeast of Boise, about 17 miles from the Ten Mile Park and Ride lot. Gilleard said he has been participating in the vanpool for six months.

A co-worker at Micron drives the van, Gilleard said. “Somebody signs up as a driver, and (if) you get enough riders, they’ll get a route going,” he said. The van travels directly to Micron in the morning and drops Gilleard off at the Ten Mile lot in the afternoon.

Compared to driving to work, Gilleard said, “it’s probably a wash money-wise,” but he sees the benefit to not using his vehicle every day, “and it’s a little more environmentally friendly, too,” because fewer gas-guzzling vehicles are on the roads.

For information on Park and Ride, visit commuteride.com, and to find a route, visit sharetherideidaho.com.

PARK AND RIDE STUDY

The Ada County Highway District and the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho are partnering to study “park and ride” around the Treasure Valley.

The $100,000 study will be a joint project, and include representatives from the Idaho Transportation Department, Valley Regional Transit and the Federal Highway Administration.

ACHD Commuteride will provide a majority of the funding for the project at $85,000, while COMPASS will provide the remaining $15,000 and will manage the study while providing data.

The study will be folded into COMPASS’s Communities in Motion 2050 long-range transportation plan along with ACHD’s Strategic Plan, according to an ACHD Study Purpose document.

“This park-and-ride study’s main purpose is to support an increase in non-single occupancy vehicle options,” said Rachel Haukkala, an assistant planner with COMPASS. “The biggest thing is properly locating park-and-ride facilities … that will maximize the use of transportation funds.”

—Thomas Plank, Idaho Press