

Fuel Prices Drive Commuters To Transit And Ridesharing

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PONTOON BEACH - Fuel prices are on the rise - the highest since 2008 - prompting thousands of area residents to seek alternatives to driving alone. With Express service to Downtown St. Louis, high-frequency bus service throughout Madison County, and carpool and vanpool options through RideFinders, Madison County Transit (MCT) offers commuters a number of affordable and efficient transportation options that will save residents hundreds of dollars each month.

A recent AAA survey found that 59% of American commuters “said they would make changes to their driving habits or lifestyle if the cost of gas rose to \$4 per gallon. If gas were to reach \$5.00, which it has in the western part of the country, three-quarters said they would need to adjust their lifestyle to offset the spike at the pump.” With the state average now at \$4.57 per gallon, more commuters are seeking relief and finding that transit and ridesharing provide an ideal solution.

Every weekday, MCT Express buses carry hundreds of Madison County residents to and from St. Louis. MCT offers a series of convenient park and ride lots throughout Madison County, including a new location at Eastgate Plaza, complete with an expanded passenger waiting facility. Currently, MCT operates the following Express routes from 10 Madison County communities:

- #1X Riverbend Express: Service from Godfrey, Alton, East Alton Wood River, and Hartford.
- #14X Highland Express: Service from Highland, St. Jacob, and Troy.
- #16X Edwardsville Express: Service from Edwardsville, Glen Carbon, and Collinsville.

“I always try to ride the bus when I can,” said #14X passenger Julie Dant, “But with the rise in gas prices, I’m looking to ride even more.”

“Gas prices are insane right now,” said #16X passenger Liam Burke. “MCT fares are predictable and the express route picks up near my home, and drops off right by my work.”

For RideFinders, the St. Louis region’s carpool and vanpool program, operated by MCT, the rise in fuel prices has created a renewed interest in ridesharing as well.

“Riding in a vanpool is a no-brainer,” said Adam Clements, a RideFinders Vanpooler from Troy, IL. “It’s saves me hundreds of dollars each month, especially now that gas prices are so high. Vanpooling not only reduces the wear and tear on my own car, our Vanpool keeps at least four cars off the road.”

Through RideFinders, MCT assists commuters in the entire nine-county St. Louis region find a carpool or vanpool to work or class. The free ridematching service is available by calling at (314) 621-7433 or by visiting **ridefinders.org**. Commuters simply provide their home and work locations, work hours and commute preferences. This information is used to generate a personalized “matchlist” of other individuals or existing vanpools with similar commutes as theirs to contact and discuss the possibility of ridesharing.

Madison County residents have even more reason to vanpool with RideFinders thanks to the Madison County Vanpool Initiative. The Initiative offers discounted rates to residents of Madison County. Those living and working in Madison County pay \$50 per month, and those working in St. Clair County pay \$70 per month. The cost covers maintenance, fuel, and use of the van. In addition, all participants receive up to four free “Guaranteed Rides Home” per year if they need to leave work early or stay late.

Annually, sharing the ride to work through RideFinders, saves the 10,600 registered rideshare participants \$3 million in gas, maintenance and other commuting costs, and these savings grow as gas prices increase. More than 2,000 carpools comprised of over 5,000 participants and 41 vanpools with 300 participants which use vans leased from RideFinders, remove over 3,000 vehicles monthly and 25 million driving miles annually from the region’s roads. This benefits the region by easing traffic congestion and eliminating nearly 2 million pounds of air pollution annually.

“There has never been a better time to try transit or vanpooling,” said MCT Managing Director SJ Morrison. “In the last few years, we have reduced local fares, simplified our service, and created ways for passengers to buy passes on their phones. Riding MCT has never been easier.”

For details about MCT services, visit **mct.org**, call 618-797-4636 (INFO) or e-mail info@mct.org.