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## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

### Carpooling for Grown-Ups --- High Gas Prices, New Services Give Ride-Sharing a Boost; Rating Your Fellow Rider

By Jennifer Saranow

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THE NUMBER of carpooling commuters applying for a new ride-matching service on RideshareOnline.com, a site offered by King County Metro Transit of Washington state, was up 62% last year from the previous year. A Personal Journal article on Feb. 2 incorrectly said the number increased 38%, due to incorrect information provided by King County Metro Transit.

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(END)

CARPOOLING, for most people, loses its appeal sometime after the fifth grade. For many adults the thought of making obligatory chitchat with a neighbor, the safety risks of hooking up with a stranger, and the general annoyance of being hostage to someone else's schedule wipe out any advantage of getting a free lift.

But rising gas prices and new services and incentives are making carpooling easier, more efficient and less of a long-term commitment. As a result of the proliferating options, carpooling is up sharply in a number of major cities including Seattle, Miami and Chicago.

Transportation agencies, nonprofits and start-ups across the country are offering immediate online lists of potential carpoolers, whether for one-time trips to locations like ski resorts or train stations or for daily commutes. Some Web sites even provide incentives like prepaid gas cards, store gift certificates, reserved parking spaces or taxi vouchers for rides home.

Companies such as AstraZeneca PLC and Best Buy Co. have also been encouraging employees to **carpool** in recent years in the U.S., something employers last did during the oil crisis in the 1970s. Nintendo of America Inc. gives carpoolers the option to put their name in a monthly drawing for one of 10 \$50 gift cards and an end-of-year lottery prize of \$500. Earlier this year, AstraZeneca started using one of its plant locations as a park and pool, and Best Buy has long offered parking close to entrances for both vanpools and carpools.

The higher cost of gas is generating sharp increases in the use of ride-matching services, which are free for consumers. RideshareOnline.com, a site offered by King County Metro Transit, a unit of the King County Department of Transportation in Washington, enables people to match up for regular commutes or to one-time events like Seattle Mariners baseball games. About 17,321 commuters applied for a new ride-match on the site last year through November, up 38% from 10,704 in 2004.

South Florida Commuter Services says its two-year-old immediate online ride-matching site for the Miami area, 1800234ride.com, now has about 68,200 participants, up from about 39,000 last year at this time. ShareTheRide.com in Arizona says it has about 6,000 users in its database, roughly double the number it had the same time last year, and on Craigslist.com, across all cities, there were 13,424 ride-share posts last November, up from 7,992 in November 2004.

The average driver spends about \$2,800 annually at current gas prices to fuel a typical passenger car, compared with about \$2,280 a year ago, according to AAA. By cutting down the number of days and miles someone drives, carpooling could save consumers hundreds of dollars a year. Most carpoolers generally take turns driving and split gas costs. Vanpools, meanwhile, usually include a monthly fee that consumers pay for a seat on the van.

While many state and local governments have long looked to ride-sharing as a means to reduce congestion and improve air quality by getting more single-occupant vehicles off the road, previous matching services like 1-800-numbers posted along the road or online request forms on older Web sites failed to catch on among consumers. Both of these methods could mean waits of a few days to two weeks or longer for matches.

In contrast, the new online matching services bring up results instantly. Some, like a new service offered in Indianapolis, match users based on where they live, work and their work hours and also bring up available vanpools in the area.

Rebecca Schmitt, 24 years old, recently started a new job in Indianapolis, which is an hour's drive from her home in Bloomington, Ind. After spending about \$60 on gas weekly, Ms. Schmitt found fellow commuters at [www.327ride.net](http://www.327ride.net), a site offered by IndyGo, the public-transportation service for the Indianapolis area, which started offering immediate online ride-share matching last spring. Ms. Schmitt now drives the group once a week and estimates she spends about \$10 weekly on gas.

Until now, carpooling has never widely caught on, in part because of the difficulty in finding suitable fellow riders and drivers. About 10% of workers ages 16 and over in the U.S. carpoled to work in 2004, whether in a car, truck or van, compared with nearly 78% who drove alone and about 11% who carpoled in 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

But given the growing demand, the services are expanding geographically. NuRide.com, a Web site owned by NuRide Inc. of Herndon, Va., that rewards ride sharers with points that can be redeemed for gift certificates from stores such as Brookstone and Old Navy, expanded earlier this year to the Hampton Roads, Va., metro area. The Houston-Galveston Area Council now offers NuRide.com for its region, and the site also began serving Connecticut and New York last year in partnership with local transportation departments.

Later this year, regional transit agency Valley Metro plans to expand to all of Arizona its immediate ride-matching service, ShareTheRide.com, which

currently serves just the Phoenix area, and the Memphis area will get an immediate online-matching service next month.

Elsewhere, about 100 organizations including universities, ski resorts and hospitals have paid to set up destinations, whether in their actual locations or surrounding areas, to which people can arrange ride shares to on site AlterNetRides.com, up from just 25 organizations this time last year. Diamond Peak Ski Resort in Nevada, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles and some offices of Lockheed Martin Corp. are among those that have recently signed up.

Still, there is no guarantee that all users will find a match. Most of the sites let people specify whether they want to be drivers or riders and sometimes people listed already have matches and haven't taken themselves off the sites.

The sites also recognize some people are wary of carpooling with strangers. To address such concerns, NuRide limits membership to those with an official email address from a major organization like an employer or school, has members rate each other, and lets users block certain people from match lists.

Most sites also recruit users by encouraging employers to promote the services as employee benefits. This typically costs employers nothing, so many people are likely to match up with co-workers.

Federal proposals also are in the works to encourage ride-sharing. One bill in Congress, the Gasoline for America's Security Act of 2005, which passed the House last fall and has been referred to the Senate, directs the Department of Energy to establish and carry out a program to encourage the use of carpooling and vanpooling to reduce the consumption of gasoline.

## Finding a Ride

As gas prices rise, a growing number of free Web services are cropping up that immediately match people up with a list of potential carpoolers, whether for one-time trips to locations like ski resorts or for daily commutes. Existing Web sites are also expanding. Here's a look at some sites and the areas they serve.

SITE	WHERE	COMMENT
<b>NuRide.com</b>	Connecticut, New York, Washington, D.C., Houston/Galveston and the Hampton Roads, Va.,-metro area	Rewards ride sharers with system similar to frequent flier miles. Users earn 100 points for each ride longer than five miles. Each point is valued at approximately a penny and rewards include \$25 gift cards.
<b>AlterNetRides.com</b>	Serves every zip code	About 100 organizations, including ski resorts, hospitals and universities, have paid to set up destinations to which people can arrange ride shares to.
<b>RideshareOnline.com</b>	Washington state	Lets users find matches for rides for commuting and to events like basketball games, trade shows and concerts.
<b>Carpoolworld.com</b>	Everywhere	About 15 organizations like universities currently use the site to provide ridesharing to employees and others, up from about five before last year.
<b>eRideShare.com</b>	U.S. and Canada	One of the first carpool matching sites, it launched in 1999. About 39% of posts are requests for rides, compared with 21% that are offers to take turns, 33% that don't specify and 6% that are offers to drive.

Source: The sites

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