



Statesville commuters are carpooling to lessen the pain at the pump

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With record-breaking gas prices squeezing people's wallets, more commuters are trying to catch a ride.

Jill Baker, who works at Binder Chiropractic in Statesville, decided in March to start carpooling from her home in Cornelius.

"(Gas prices) just kept going up and up," Baker said.

In the Charlotte metropolitan area, motorists have seen record increases at the pumps in the past couple of months. On Tuesday, the average for unleaded regular fuel hit \$3.974.

Fortunately for Baker, she knew someone through the Greater Statesville Chamber of Commerce who lives close enough to carpool.

Other commuters have turned to the Internet in their search for a compatible carpool partner.

Advertisements seeking riders or drivers can be found on sites, such as iCarpool, Share the Ride NC, Erideshare and Carpoolworld.

These sites are a little like dating sites with descriptions that include whether they smoke, what they look like, what their interests are and how many seats are available in their car.

Carpoolworld.com Vice President Isabelle Boulard said subscriptions to the service in North Carolina have gone up 1,500 percent since December.

Boulard said commuters are trying to find a solution for the gas predicament and are reaching the point where they are comfortable with carpooling.

"People are saying 'I'm ready to carpool now,'" she said.

Boulard and her husband, Max, operate the Web site from their home in Jericho, N.Y.

AAA Carolinas spokeswoman Carol Gifford said the company is encouraging people to find alternatives to emptying their wallets at the pump.

Even though the national gas price average went down two-tenths of a cent Monday, there isn't a trend indicating prices will continue to drop.

Gifford said supply and demand, along with market speculation, continues to influence prices.

There are some benefits to carpooling. The two obvious ones are saving gas and getting to ride in the high-occupancy vehicles lane, which requires at least two people.

Baker only carpools when her schedule isn't too hectic, but she feels like it helps.

"You can have social conversations," Baker said. "You feel like you're saving gas and cutting down on the vehicles on the road."