



# Commuter CHRONICLE



News for Smart Commuters

Winter 2009

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## Firestone Partners with MilitaryVanpool.com To Promote Service Center Network



**By Mike Norvell  
VPSI's VP Business Development**

VPSI's military focused website, [www.militaryvanpool.com](http://www.militaryvanpool.com), which already lists over 700 existing vanpools in service with groups of military personnel and Department of Defense (DoD) civilians at 76 military installations nationwide, just added some more helpful information for commuters. Visitors to the site can now find store hours and contact details for every one of the 41 different Firestone Complete Auto Care facilities at 39 different military installations throughout the country.

As new Firestone Complete Auto Care facilities are opened at military installations, the store's information will be added to the website. VPSI has maintained a direct billing, national account with Firestone for years.

Now VPSI vanpools can be conveniently serviced right on base at any of these Firestone Complete Auto Care locations.

"The partnership between Firestone

and [militaryvanpool.com](http://militaryvanpool.com) benefits not only Firestone and VPSI, but also the vanpool customers. Firestone gains visibility for their rapidly expanding network of military service centers and VPSI adds another valuable service to their military-focused website," observed Peyton Youmans, webmaster of the military vanpool site. "The vanpool driver/coordinators probably benefit the most from the on-post service centers. They can now have their vanpool serviced while they work instead of taking the van for service on the weekend," Youmans added.

VPSI's Vice President – Fleet and Risk Management, Steve Pederson, noted that the Firestone relationship has been in place since 1999. "Having an always expanding network of direct billing vehicle service centers allows VPSI to deploy our service virtually anywhere in the country. This rapidly growing network of Firestone Complete Auto Care service centers within the secured military installations saves our customers time and money," Pederson said.

On a related note, navigating to the [www.militaryvanpool.com](http://www.militaryvanpool.com) site from the Van-Pools.com blog is easier than ever as a new Military Vanpool "badge" is now on VPSI's blog.

If you are active duty military, a DoD civilian, or a contractor who is commuting to a military installation anywhere in the country, check out

**See Firestone,  
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## Caution: Winter Weather is Predicted

In many areas, winter weather presents challenges to drivers. The van driver, the vanpool group and the van must be prepared and ready to expect the unexpected.

### Prepare the driver

A driver prepares by getting an early start each day. Adequate rest and proper nourishment may sound old fashioned, but they are still great preparation. A driver should watch or listen to the weather the evening before bed and in the morning before departing. Also know what the traffic report is for the commute.

If weather is too severe, have a plan to cancel the commute. Crashes, injuries and loss of life can be avoided by making the decision to NOT drive the van if conditions are dangerous.

### Prepare the vanpool group

Group communication is the key here. Now is the time to discuss with the vanpool group how a decision to cancel or delay will be made and conveyed to the group if the commute is too dangerous.

Everyone should have everyone else's phone number in the van and at



their home. Don't put the group at risk because someone is unwilling or unable to be reached or won't agree with a decision if it is too dangerous to drive.

### Prepare the van

Stick closely to the maintenance schedule and let the approved service providers keep the engine winter ready. Tires must be checked and adjusted more frequently to the recommended inflations to ensure proper road gripping and handling. Replace worn or streaky windshield wipers and carry a bottle of windshield solvent.

Equip the van with a map or GPS that the co-pilot (the other person in the front of the van) is familiar with its use. Carry a scraper and a brush. Have available warm boots, a bright reflective coat, hat and gloves as well as a flashlight, extra batteries, and a shovel.

When driving in slippery weather the driver must reduce speed and increase following distance as well as increasing the distance between the van and the following vehicle. Use the brake lights to send a message to the drivers behind the van to increase their following distances. Don't get caught between two vehicles without enough space to see or to make a lane change. Glance in the mirrors often to be aware of vehicles behind and beside the van. The van has anti-lock brakes if it is necessary to stop suddenly; keep the brake pedal firmly depressed, do not pump anti-lock brakes.

Heavy traffic can become a problem anytime but especially in the winter when the days are shorter and our to-do lists are longer. It is a driver's responsibility to get the van and the group safely to their destination. Stay in control and take all the time you need to be safe.

The driver and the passengers must be buckled in their seat and lapbelts at all times when the van is operating to avoid an injury in a crash. If the van is involved in a crash; stay in the vehicle. Injuries occur when occupants leave the safety of the van.

Andy Bawden is VPSI's Loss Prevention and Safety Manager. He conducts Vanpool Safety Meetings throughout the country. Contact Andy at VPSI's Troy, Michigan Home Office at 248-597-3544.



## Vanpooling Works at the VA

The Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center serves over 44,000 enrolled veterans in 25 eastern Oklahoma counties. The VAMC includes a hospital and outpatient clinic in Muskogee, a VA-staffed Community Based Outpatient Clinic and a separate Behavioral Health Clinic in Tulsa.

VPSI helped launch a new vanpool program in early September. So far, 72 employees are participating, helping to free up 61 parking spaces.

The program consists of nine vans, plus a loaner for emergencies. Vanpool services extend from Muskogee to Tulsa, Broken Arrow, Eufaula, Tahlequah

and Claremore.

"It's a great opportunity to work with the VAMC, helping them launch their vanpool program," said VPSI's Alice Lee-Cook. "We were able to organize several vanpool groups commuting into Muskogee, and one group with a reverse commute to Tulsa.

"Feedback from vanpool riders is very positive so far," said Reggie Hardy, Vanpool Coordinator. "The vanpoolers enjoy not having to drive their own automobiles to work and hunt for parking spaces. They also like the savings the program provides."

## VPSI Beta-Launches New Website

### VPSI moves the world...with a little help from technology!

We're beta-testing our new and improved website and want you to be among the first who have a chance to view it: [www.vpsi.org](http://www.vpsi.org).

The new site focuses on our corporate strengths and capabilities and highlights VPSI's leadership position within the transportation demand management (TDM) industry.

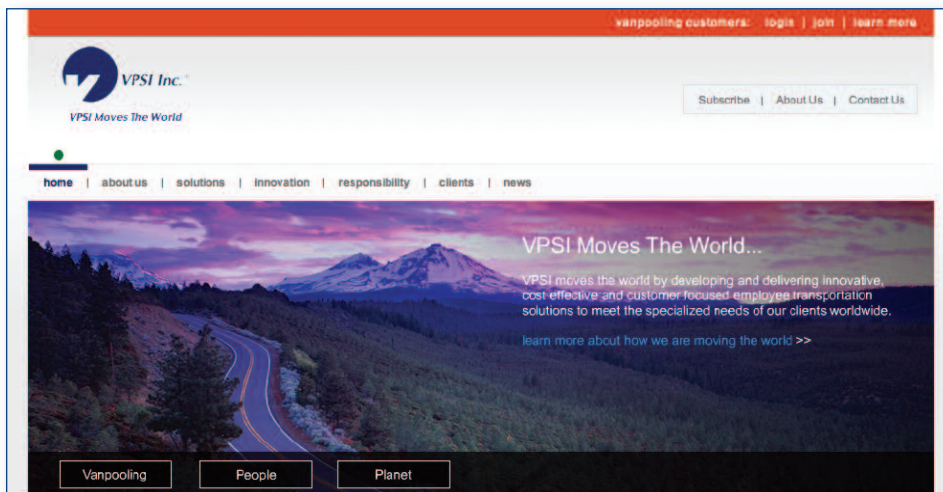
It includes a section dedicated to the people of VPSI. "Everyone makes the claim, but for VPSI it couldn't be more true - our greatest asset is our people," says Clark Gross, VP of Customer Initiatives. "We've got over 1100 person-years of experience

dedicated solely to this industry. That's unrivaled and simply amazing!" People featured in this section will rotate over time, as will content in several sections keeping the site fresh and up-to-date.

Though still *under construction*, the new site is visually pleasing and better organized than its predecessor.

Replacing the "old" site will be done over time. Until then, customers can still access their individual accounts as they normally do at: [www.vpsiinc.com](http://www.vpsiinc.com).

As you explore the new site, we welcome suggestions for additional features you'd like to see. Please direct your suggestions to Clark Gross at [clark.gross@vpsiinc.com](mailto:clark.gross@vpsiinc.com).



View the beta-version of VPSI's new website at: [www.vpsi.org](http://www.vpsi.org).

## 2009 "Best in Motion" Awards

Commute Solutions partnered with the US Department of Transportation and the Houston-Galveston Area Council to recognize employers who participate in programs, such as Clean Cities/Clean Vehicles, Clean School Bus or Commute Solutions. Over 150 Houston-Galveston area corporations, organizations and local governments have implemented clean fleet policies and encourage their employees to use commute alternatives such as car pooling, teleworking, vanpooling or riding the bus.

The event recognized 45 Clean Air Champions, and two new companies were added to the Best Workplaces for Commuters list. VPSI received the "Best Vanpool Driver Safety Education Program" award. VPSI has over 340 vanpools in service in the Houston-Galveston area.



VPSI's Cecilia Cannon and Angie Payne accept "Best Vanpool Driver Safety Education Award"

## Vanpool Driver Appreciation Day at WSMR

VPSI celebrated a Vanpool Driver Appreciation Day at White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) on September 22, 2009.



Front row: Alice Lee-Cook, Alex Scott, Josetta Leyva, Gael Parkinson; Last row: Michelle Saye, Alonzo Moore and Judith Flood

About 46 representatives from current vanpool groups and the transportation team attended to enjoy pizza and soda.

WSMR, located 45 miles north of El Paso, Texas, launched its program a year ago with three vanpool groups. Since then, it has grown to 30 vans, with three new starts planned in December.

The WSMR vanpool program contributes to a monthly fuel savings of \$45,493, reducing 186 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and eliminating 6,287 commute trips from the roads.

The transportation team at WSMR, headed by Josetta Leyva, was awarded an appreciation plaque, signed by VPSI President/CEO Jeff Henning.

VPSI sincerely appreciates the support and collaboration efforts from the WSMR Vanpool participants, particularly the Primary Drivers and the transportation team in regards to a successful vanpool program! We hope to serve many more employees in this great program.

## GreenWheels with a Heart



A call went out across Pfizer's Pearl River campus for volunteers to donate whole blood and platelets for an R&D colleague undergoing treatment at New York's famed Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital. The call was answered and several employees were ready to roll up their sleeves...and give a pint.

The problem became how to efficiently get them there and back. GreenWheels was the obvious answer, with its VPSI approved drivers and their vans. Peter Duda, Senior Director of Research Facility Operations, called the site GreenWheels Manager and it didn't take long for two trips to be organized. It was just a simple exercise in logistics - gathering, going, donating and returning.

The first trip was a breeze, going

just as planned. The second trip became a nightmare on the return, as the van battled NYC afternoon traffic and detours, winding up on the wrong side of the Harlem River and competing with Yankee Stadium and major construction traffic.

In the end all was well, the job got done and we wish our colleague a speedy recovery.

Pfizer Inc.'s GreenWheels Commuter Assistance Program is a high-value, low-cost multi-site program providing economic and personal assistance to commuters and environmental sustainability for the company.

VPSI developed the GreenWheels Program in 2001 as Wyeth (now Pfizer, Inc.) moved its pharmaceutical headquarters to Collegeville, Pennsylvania, and assisted employees

in the relocation. Since inception, GreenWheels has continuously grown, now serving nine sites company-wide.

### Firestone (con't.)

[www.militaryvanpool.com](http://www.militaryvanpool.com) for a listing of existing vanpools serving military locations from Hawaii to Alaska to Florida to Virginia.

With the increase of the maximum tax-free, commute-to-work benefit up to \$230/month, there has never been a better time for military personnel to take advantage of the military's Mass Transportation Benefit Program (MTBP). Links to the application forms for all three branches of the military are also available on the "Useful Links" page of [www.militaryvanpool.com](http://www.militaryvanpool.com).

## Transportation News That Moves You

### Transportation Sec. Announces Effort to Fight Distracted Driving

The Association of Commuter Transportation (ACT) reports that following a two-day summit on distracted driving in Washington, DC, US Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced three separate rulemakings that DOT would consider:

1. Making permanent restrictions on the use of cell phones and other electronic devices in rail operations.
2. Banning text messaging altogether, and restrict the use of cell phones by truck and interstate bus operators.
3. Disqualifying school bus drivers convicted of texting while driving, from maintaining their commercial driver's licenses.

Also, in October Senator Rockefeller (D-WV) introduced S. 1938, the *Distracted Driving Prevention Act of 2009*. This legislation creates a grant program

that acts as an incentive for States to pass 'anti-texting' bills. The legislation establishes a grant program whereby states qualify to receive funding if they pass laws which make texting on personal wireless communications devices a primary offense. The Senate Commerce Committee held hearings on this legislation as well as similar legislation introduced by Senator Schumer (D-NY) which is more punitive. Senator Schumer's legislation would withhold transportation funding from states which fail to enact strict anti-texting law.

### FTA Recognizes Role Private Sector Plays in Transit

Also from ACT: Speaking before the APTA Annual meeting in Orlando, FTA Administrator Peter Rogoff spoke about the role the private sector can play in delivering transit options, saying, "One of the things that I have been

struck by as I travel around the country is the strength of the business community in either helping or hurting a project that is seeking to get built.

"We have wonderful examples where businesses have seen the benefits that will come to them and have agreed to tax themselves to make the project happen. We have other examples where businesses have been singularly focused on avoiding those taxes or avoiding the disruption that comes with the construction phase.

"I intend to stand up an informal voluntary group of business leaders from around the country that will serve as ambassadors for transit. The kind of business leaders that can convince skeptical business people in other communities that transit is in the interest of their bottom line. There will be more announcements on this soon."

**For more info: [www.actweb.org](http://www.actweb.org)**