



Commuter of the Month

Vanpool Driver Rich Gariepy

Our first Commuter of the Month for 2020, Rich Gariepy admits he first thought about joining a vanpool because he wanted to drive in the MnPass lane on I-35W and he wanted to save money on his daily commute.

What he didn't expect, though, was how rewarding the experience would be.

"I have gotten so much more out of it than just saving time and money," he said. "I consider the people I commute with each day to be very good friends now. Nobody puts headphones on, and we all share very different ideas and backgrounds openly and respectfully. I think we have all learned from one another and grown in many ways."

His employer, Best Buy, participates in the region's vanpool program, **Metro Vanpool**. Best Buy has several vanpools traveling to its corporate campus in Richfield. Along with the regional matching system that assists commuters in finding others with a similar commute, Best Buy helps form vanpools by connecting employees from the same area who are interested in sharing the ride.

"I had to pass up the first opportunity because of the timing, but the second chance I had allowed me to join a pool that met my needs," Gariepy said.

Gariepy's group of six meets at Metro Transit's Kenrick Avenue Park & Ride facility, just off I-35. The covered parking works well – particularly on days of inclement weather – and is centrally located for all participants.

The group has changed over the 18 months he's participated, due to schedule changes. In fact, he stepped in as the vanpool's coordinator after the first coordinator moved out of state. Each vanpool assigns a designated primary driver and at least one back up driver so the van can operate continuously. In Gariepy's van, all riders are registered alternate drivers, so there is maximum flexibility when scheduling conflicts arise.

Gariepy encourages commuters who have the interest or opportunity to go ahead and investigate vanpooling as an alternative to driving alone to work.

"Give it a try," he said. "Be patient if at first it seems clunky. The benefits far outweigh any hassle you might perceive."

Commuter Services has several vanpool resources available to anyone interested in learning more. By filling out our Commute Assistant form, commuters can learn how to start a new vanpool or join an existing one. Commuter Services is happy to talk to your company about starting a vanpool program. Please contact Kate Meredith, Director of Outreach at Kate@494corridor.org or 612-750-4494.

RICH GARIEPY (far right) works for Best Buy in Richfield and is a vanpool driver and coordinator.

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