

County trying to spread word about Rideshare

*By Nick Paulson
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Commuters in Portage County have an easy way to find a carpool but might not know about it.

The county is looking to rectify that.

Rideshare, an online program that helps commuters find each other for a carpool, has been in Wisconsin since 1990 and in Portage County for about a year. Still, many residents don't know the service is available here.

"The problem is people don't think it applies to them, because (the advertisements) say Southeast Wisconsin," said Carrie Placeway, mobility manager for the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Portage County.

The statewide program has been promising money to redo the advertisements to more accurately reflect the program's range, but reportedly has continued to put off the changes because of budgetary concerns. Portage County has floated the idea of asking local businesses that would benefit from the program to fund a new advertisement, but officials don't want to end up wasting money if the state goes through with the change.

The county now hopes to work with some of the larger employers in the area to promote the program internally and get it moving.

"Not a monetary support at this time, but it sure would help build the base," said Jon Baltmanis, a member of the Public Transit-Human Service Transportation Coordinating Committee, which oversees the program.

Rideshare allows commuters to find others who work near them. Many businesses have similar programs in-house, but Rideshare connects people who might otherwise never have found each other by using a statewide network on its Web site, www.rideshare.wi.gov.

To work properly, however, there needs to be enough people signed up that common destinations are readily available and carpooling is convenient.

As of September, only about 25 people in Wood, Portage and Marathon counties had registered. Considering the traffic between the cities, Placeway expects more workers to be interested, provided she can get them the information.

"A better approach might be visiting employers and presenting the Rideshare program in individual meetings," Placeway said.