

# Employer Spotlight

## Vanderbilt University and MTA Make Getting to Work Easier

A new partnership between Vanderbilt University and the Metropolitan Transit Authority in Nashville is making travel to work more pleasant and less expensive for faculty and staff—and improving air quality at the same time.

“Take a Ride to Work on Vanderbilt” allows full- and part-time Vanderbilt employees to ride to and from work free of charge on MTA buses. Through a unique agreement with MTA and Vanderbilt, riding the bus is as simple as scanning the magnetic strip on an existing Vanderbilt identification card on the bus fare box. MTA collects rider data and provides a monthly invoice to Vanderbilt.

“This partnership supports two of Vanderbilt’s key goals: giving back to the Nashville community and making unique and valuable benefits available to our employees,” said Vanderbilt Chancellor Gordon Gee. “We encourage other area employers to join us in this effort to clear pollution in the air and congestion on the roads.”

MTA officials describe this unique partnership as a “win-win” for Vanderbilt employees, MTA and the community. “We are pleased to be a part of this important transit partnership, which is a first for the Nashville MTA and Vanderbilt. We are hopeful this partnership will serve as a good working model for similar institutions,” MTA Chief Executive Officer Paul Ballard said.

Vanderbilt, the largest private employer in the mid state, faces the daily challenge of providing convenient parking for nearly 15,000 faculty and staff, as well as numerous patients and visitors. The Vanderbilt University Medical Center complex alone houses four parking garages and several surface lots. One parking garage, the South Garage, is the largest freestanding parking facility in Tennessee.

“The partnership with MTA helps Vanderbilt address parking concerns, provide a free benefit to employees, and improve the air quality in and around Nashville,” said John Howser, assistant director of News and Public Affairs for the Medical Center. “Medical Center employees also appreciate being dropped off at the front door. It’s very convenient, and employees don’t have to worry about fighting traffic to and from work,” Howser added. “This is a benefit that puts money in your pocket that would be spent paying for gas and for parking.”

The Ride to Work program began in July 2004, and early results indicate a great deal of interest among employees. Nearly 1,500 employees attended information sessions about the program, and Vanderbilt expects the number of regular transit riders to grow from 110 to about 500.

Both Vanderbilt and MTA participate in the Clean Air Partnership of Middle Tennessee ([www.cleanairpartnership.info](http://www.cleanairpartnership.info)). The Clean Air Partnership and MTA offer assistance to

employers in the Nashville vicinity who would like to establish programs to encourage employees to drive less. Such programs offer tremendous value:

- Provides a benefit for employees and employers that saves them money
- Decreases stress of commuting; enhances community relations
- Increases employee productivity
- Assists employers who provide parking (paid or unpaid) for employees
- Assists employers in recruiting and retaining employees
- Reduces congestion on busy highways by shifting people from driving alone to mass transit, van pools or commuter rail
- Helps reduce vehicle emissions and improve air quality

If you are interested in providing commuter options for your employees, the Nashville MTA offers this advice:

- Network with an employer who already has a program in place.
- Consider all the options and structure your program to fit the needs of your organization and your employees.
- Implement an aggressive employee outreach program to encourage participation.
- Contact your local Transportation Authority ([www.nashvillemta.org](http://www.nashvillemta.org)) to discuss the benefits of mass transit and how your employees can access the system. Many systems operate their buses throughout a city and more than likely there is already a bus stop within a few feet a company. The Nashville MTA has 40 different routes within Davidson County and also has special contracts to serve customers in Smyrna, Murfreesboro, Hendersonville and Mt. Juliet.
- Check out [www.CommuterChoice.gov](http://www.CommuterChoice.gov) and [www.CommuterChoice.com](http://www.CommuterChoice.com) on the Internet for excellent information on all types of employer programs.