



No wheels? No problem, as PA Commuter Services builds its base

Shannon Boyer

Shannon Boyer stands in the parking lot at YTI Career Institute. Not having the car for awhile connected her with the carpool program there, which she'll likely stay involved with as one of the drivers. *(Paul Vigna/PennLive.com)*

Rebecca Hanlon | Special to PennLive By **Rebecca Hanlon | Special to PennLive**

on March 26, 2015 at 2:45 PM, updated March 27, 2015 at 8:26 AM

"For most people, they need these services almost as much as we'd like them to take advantage of them." - Kandi Fox, PA Commuter Services

When Shannon Boyer's car went from speeding her around town to puttering into a broken heap of metal, the 22-year-old Dallastown woman never expected that her lack of a ride would cause so much grief.

But without a reliable way to get to her classes at **YTI Career Institute** in Springettsbury Township, Boyer could have been kicked out of her electronics engineering program.

The solution for Boyer was found in another student with whom she could carpool each day.

"It was the perfect solution to my needs," she said. "I got lucky that the person I was carpooling with was amazing, and we became friends."

When **PA Commuter Services** set up an information table at the school recently, they were overwhelmed by the amount of students who needed help getting to school, their jobs or elsewhere, said Kandi Fox, employer outreach manager. More than 50 students signed up for information that day.

The organization serves nine counties: Adams, Berks, Dauphin, Cumberland, Franklin, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry and York. It is funded through federal **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality** programs. The 2010 Census estimated that there are 1 million commuters in those nine counties, many who drive alone, Fox said.

PA Commuter Services works to educate people on how they can find reliable transportation options. The most popular option is setting people up through a carpooling system. Here, either students at a school or employees at a company can be matched with others who can give them a ride. While the two drivers determine how they will work out the carpooling, either one person helping to pay for gas or the two taking turns to drive, PA Commuter Services primarily works to make those connections.

The program also offers regular commuters a backup plan, should they miss a ride or need to get somewhere in an emergency. Riders can hail a cab and be reimbursed in those situations, Fox said.

In addition, PA Commuter Services educates participants on public transportation that's available, as well as safe biking and walking routes, when available.

No wheels? No problem, as PA Commuter Services builds its base

"We are so proud of people for taking advantage of the environmentally friendly transportation options around them," Fox said. "For most people, they need these services almost as much as we'd like them to take advantage of them."

When Boyer's car got back up and running after five months, she decided she wanted to help others who might also be struggling to get around.

She thought carpooling with her friend was beneficial because of the convenience. Thanks to YTI's "shift-style" class schedules, most students are coming and going at the same time and can easily be paired up. Carpooling could be tough, she said, when she had to tweak her schedule to leave earlier or later or if she had to find an alternative.

"Being a full-time student is a financial and mental challenge," Boyer said. "Signing up for carpooling can take a lot of that stress off of your shoulders - especially when it's something as vital as getting to class."

Jan Vergos, director of student services at YTI's York Campus, said transportation has been a barrier for some students. Because the school treats attendance similar to the way an employee might, it's important that students don't miss classes, she said.

Adrienne Scott, YTI's Lancaster campus president, said the service is being offered to students there, too.

"I like the fact that life is full of unexpected obstacles and this demonstrates how you problem solve," she said. "Normal routine is your own vehicle, but when you don't have a way to use that vehicle, how do you live your life and meet your obligations? You have to look around you and see what resources are out there."

Since 2005, PA Commuter Services slowly has been spreading the message about transportation options that are available to Pennsylvanians. In addition to YTI, Fox has done presentations at **Harrisburg Area Community College**, **The Hershey Company**, the **Comcast** call center and **PSECU**.

This past February, there were 27,767 active commuters who chose to carpool, ride the bus, bike to work or find a safe walking route, Fox said.

"Many times, people are simply unaware that there are options for them," she said. "Any time we can share that information we're doing something good for the environment, and for our community."

For those interested in looking to carpool, visit the site **PA Commuter Services**.

© 2015 PennLive.com. All rights reserved.