

**Frequently Asked Questions and Answers
for
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program**

Updated: April 2006

COMMUTER TRANSIT SUBSIDY BENEFITS PROGRAM CONTACTS

Q1: Who should I contact regarding the USDA Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program?

A1: Please visit <http://www.usda.gov/da/shmd/transitcoord.html> for a complete listing of all USDA Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinators by mission area.

Q2: Who administers the distribution of faremedia for the USDA Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program?

A2: The Department of Transportation (DOT) is responsible for USDA's quarterly and/or monthly faremedia distributions in both the National Capital Region (NCR) and specific USDA field locations. Faremedia is distributed on-site at USDA for NCR employees and mailed to designated Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinators in the field. All employees must sign for faremedia provided by DOT.

Q3: Where do I find the USDA Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program distribution schedule in the NCR?

A3: At the following website: <http://www.usda.gov/oo/subsidyschedule.htm>

ELIGIBILITY

Q1: Who is eligible for the USDA Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program?

A1: All USDA salaried employees, including part-time, temporary, stay-in-school and those who work on an intermittent work schedule, provided they use mass public transportation (includes, but is not limited to buses, subways, rail, light rail, elevated rail, streetcars, trolleys, ferries, and /or authorized vanpools) to commute daily to and from work and not receive a free federal parking benefit. Drivers, alternate drivers, and passengers of qualified vanpools receiving a free Federal

parking benefit are also eligible. Volunteers, contractors, and employees assigned from private temporary agencies are not eligible.

Q2: Are carpoolers eligible to receive transit subsidy benefits?

A2: No. Carpoolers are eligible for pre-tax parking benefits if their mission area participates. Please refer to Item #1 and contact your mission area Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator for additional information.

Q3: What are the eligibility requirements for the USDA Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program?

A3a: Participants must be a USDA salaried employee who uses mass public transportation (subway, train, bus, ferry, etc.) or authorized vanpool.

A3b: Plan to use mass public transportation or authorized vanpool to commute daily to and from work. This includes employees who are detailed to other USDA offices.

A3c: Must not receive a free Federal parking benefit (vanpools are exempt from free Federal parking).

Q4: How much commuter transit subsidy benefits am I eligible to receive?

A4a: Eligible employees may receive up to the statutory limit, currently \$105 per month or their actual commuting costs, whichever is less. If your costs exceed the statutory limit, you will be required to continue to use mass public transportation and supplement additional costs with your own funds.

A4b: The monthly cost to commute daily to and from work is based on the exact number of actual working days using mass public transportation and/or authorized vanpools. Employees are not eligible to receive benefits for days when they do not use mass public transportation to commute to and from work. Examples are telework, official travel, annual/sick leave, etc.

A4c: Employees must obtain reduced faremedia (disability or senior citizen) and transfers (using multiple modes of mass public transportation or authorized vanpool) when available.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Q1: How do I apply for the USDA Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program?

A1: Employees must complete and sign both pages of the AD-1147, Public Transportation Benefit Program Application, dated 12/31/2005 and submit to their designated Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator in hard copy.

Previous editions are not usable. Employees must recertify annually using the same form, usually in November.

Q2: When can I apply for the program and when are benefits effective?

A2: As long as the eligibility requirements are met, employees may apply for benefits at any time. Benefits become effective on the date of the employee's signed application. However, if the application is received after the date identified in DR, 4080-811-04 dated December 7, 2004, Appendix A, the appropriate action identified in Appendix A will take precedence.

NCR employees: as early as two days after their application is received by DOT or at the next USDA on-site distribution, whichever comes first.

Field employees: For monthly faremedia, if application is received by the 5th of the month, the participant will receive benefits the following month. For quarterly faremedia, if the application is received by the 15th of the month, employee will receive benefits the following month.

Q3: Where can I obtain a copy of an AD-1147?

A3: A copy may be obtained from your commuter transit subsidy benefit coordinator or by visiting the Work/Life website at <http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/ffwg.htm>.

Q4: What if my commuting costs increase or decrease, my name changes, my address changes, etc?

A4: Employees must complete both pages of the AD-1147 if any of the above applies. Effective date rules remain the same as for a new enrollment. However, if increased benefits are needed, you may be required to wait until the following month or quarter depending on where you are geographically located.

Q5: What if I no longer wish to commute using mass public transportation and/or eligible vanpool, retire, resign, or transfer to another federal agency?

A5: You must submit page 1 of the AD-1147 and elect "cancellation" at the top of the form. Please be advised that if any of the above applies, you **MUST** return any fare media for the remainder of the quarter to your Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator three working days before the effective date of your action. Monthly faremedia not returned for the months in which you were ineligible to receive it must be paid by a check to the "U.S. Department of Agriculture." You may opt to have the debt reported as taxable income, and in some instances your final salary check may be withheld until the debt is satisfied.

Q6: What if I transfer within the same agency but go to the field from the NCR or vice versa--do I still keep my faremedia?

A6: Faremedia used in the NCR is not interchangeable in field locations and vice versa. It is up to you to complete page 1 of an AD-1147, mark “cancellation” and attach any used and unused faremedia to cover the remainder of the quarter and provide to your current Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator. Complete a new AD-1147 (both pages) electing “change” and submit to the new coordinator that you are transferring to. Both coordinators will work together with DOT to ensure that you receive your new faremedia.

FAREMEDIA DISTRIBUTION

Q1: What is faremedia?

A1: Faremedia are vouchers, passes, and metrocheks purchased by DOT from local transit authorities and issued by DOT to eligible participants for mass public transportation and authorized vanpools.

Q2: How, when, and where will faremedia be distributed to employees?

A2: In the NCR, faremedia is distributed quarterly at all USDA locations with monthly make-up dates in the second month of the quarter. Distribution schedules may be distributed by your mission area Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator and will be posted on the following website:
<http://www.usda.gov/oo/subsidyschedule.htm>.

In the field, faremedia is distributed monthly or quarterly depending on location to either a designated field Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator or the coordinator for the mission area. (See coordinators listing at <http://www.usda.gov/da/shmd/transitcoord.html>.)

Q3: In the NCR, what if I miss the quarterly on-site faremedia distribution AND the make-up date -- can someone pick up for me?

A3: No, USDA does not honor third party pick-ups. You will be required to go directly to DOT to obtain benefits. Keep in mind that benefits are forfeited for each month that they are not picked up. Directions, including hours of operation, can be found at <http://www.usda.gov/oo/subsidyschedule.htm> or by contacting your Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator. You must bring your USDA badge and provide the last four digits of your social security number to obtain faremedia.

Exceptions: For medical and hardship situations are on a case-by-case basis. Your Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator may pick up for a participant in such cases.

Q4: In the NCR, what if I'm temporarily or permanently disabled and can't pick up faremedia at a USDA location or DOT?

A4: USDA has made arrangements with the TARGET Center to pick up and mail transit subsidy benefits directly to you. For procedures and additional guidance, please contact them directly on 202-720-0600.

Q5: What if my mode of transportation does not accept DOT's fare media?

A5: You would be eligible to receive a cash reimbursement for your commuting costs after it is determined by the DOT USDA Account Manager that DOT's issued fare media is not accepted by the mode of transportation. You would be required to submit to your designated Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator an AD-1170, Transit Subsidy Cash Reimbursement Certification, by the 10th of the month (DOT's deadline is the 15th of the month) following the end of the previous quarter (except for an earlier deadline for the 4th quarter). Checks will be issued from DOT to your designated Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator within 7-10 business days. Upon receipt you will be required to sign for this check.

Q6: How are transit quarters determined for faremedia and cash reimbursements?

A6: Transit quarters are determined by fiscal year as follows:

October – December (1st Quarter)

January – March (2nd Quarter)

April – June (3rd Quarter)

July – September (4th Quarter)

Q7: What if my faremedia is lost, stolen, or damaged?

A7: Lost, stolen, and/or damaged faremedia will not be replaced.

Q8: What if I have faremedia left over from a previous quarter due to annual leave, extended sick leave, and/or travel?

A8a: If you are located in the NCR, you should inform the DOT on-site representative that you need less than your allotment indicated in the database (tell the representative the exact amount you need). Full benefits will resume next quarter.

A8b: Participants in the field should inform their Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator. They will in turn inform the DOT Account Manager of the adjustment prior to ordering to avoid overpayment in future months or quarters, whichever applies.

Q9: In the NCR, how do I replace demagnetized faremedia (the Metrochek)?

A9: You may inform a METRO station attendant, go directly to the Metro Center Sales Office for a replacement, or contact METRO directly on 202-637-7000 for additional guidance.

PROHIBITIONS

Q1: What are the prohibitions related to the Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefit Program?

- A1:** Employees must not give, sell, transfer, discard, and/or destroy their fare media. All used and/or unused fare media for the remainder of the quarter must be returned to the Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefit Coordinator whether expired or not for appropriate disposition;
- A2:** Employees must not continue to accept and/or receive fare media if they are no longer eligible for the benefit. They must cancel from the program and return faremedia for the remainder of the quarter to the Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program Coordinator whether expired or not for appropriate disposition.
- A3:** Benefits must not be used for commuting back and forth to agency-sponsored training, meetings, and/or other events that require the use of public transportation. This also includes commuting to and from USDA buildings. Employees must apply for reimbursement through “local travel” procedures.
- A4:** Employees are prohibited from enrolling in the program if they do not plan to commute round trip each day to and from work. This also applies to employees who opt not to commute during the winter months, for example. Employees should cancel from the program. Although the program allows for occasional driving to and from for doctor’s visits, parent/teacher conferences, etc., the intent of the program is daily commuting to and from the residence to the official duty station
- A5:** Employees must not be a member of a carpool and/or receiving a disability or executive parking privilege.

LAWS AND AUTHORITIES

Q1: What authorities allow commuter transit subsidy benefits to be provided to eligible employees?

A1: Departmental Regulation 4080-811-04, Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program dated December 7, 2004

A2: Public Law 102-486, Section 1911, Treatment of Employer Provided Transportation Benefits, effective December 31, 1992.

A3: Public Law 103-172, Federal employees Clean Air Incentives Act, effective January 1, 1994.

A4: Public law 105-178, Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century, dated June 9, 1998

A5: Executive order 13150, dated April 21, 2000

A6: 26 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1, and 602, Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefits dated January 11, 2001.