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Fleet Service & Management

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Forsyth County Fleet Maintenance



Kevin Rogers, Forsyth County Fleet Manager

Vehicle sharing initiative produces savings for Forsyth County

By ED SMITH | President Agile Fleet

DESPERATE TIMES CALL FOR DESPERATE MEASURES IN municipal government settings. This was true during the financial crisis of 2008, and it is true as we face unprecedented challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Forsyth County, N.C., is a shining example of an agency that made tough decisions during the troubled times in 2009 and turned a negative into a positive. And, the beauty of it is that the savings from changes made more than 10 years ago continue to accumulate to this day.

Forsyth County implemented automated vehicle sharing technology that facilitated a dramatic reduction in its fleet size and a massive cut to personal mileage reimbursements while still meeting all of its needs for safe, reliable vehicles. To date, the relatively simple change in business practices has saved the taxpayers of the county money while delivering other big benefits to county employees. The changes have helped introduce safer, greener vehicles to the fleet, which created great reductions in the county's carbon footprint. Drivers now have access to newer vehicles and more types of vehicles in the shared motor pools.

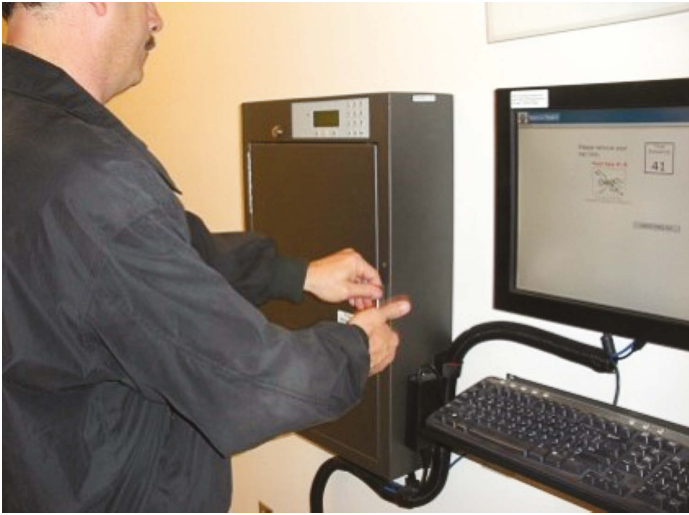
According to Ed Smith, president of Agile Fleet, "The same approach that Forsyth County took many years ago is now helping organizations of all sizes cut costs in these pandemic times. The benefits to the county and its taxpayers are indisputable, and that same model is

being used in federal, state and local governments as well as colleges and universities."

Kevin Rogers, the county's fleet manager, said, "In 2008, every county organization was being asked to cut costs. When the fleet was analyzed, the first thing that struck us was that we had very limited data to measure fleet utilization. When we'd look in the parking lot, we thought we had a utilization problem, but we lacked the metrics to prove it. We knew that if we could clearly understand our fleet utilization situation and we could efficiently share vehicles, we could eliminate underused vehicles. The key was to have vehicles available when we removed an assigned or otherwise underused vehicle."

By increasing utilization through vehicle sharing, underutilized vehicles could be eliminated. So, that's exactly what Forsyth County did.

The technology was easy to implement. In only 100 days, Forsyth County implemented an automated vehicle sharing initiative to help right-size its fleet. The new technology, which consisted of an online vehicle reservation system and self-service vehicle kiosks for picking up and returning vehicles 24/7, was an instant success. The system enabled the county to immediately eliminate 30 vehicles. From those initial cuts alone, the county has realized a substantial savings annually due to the elimination of depreciation, maintenance, administrative and other costs associated with those vehicles.



A Forsyth County employee uses a self-service vehicle kiosk to pick up keys. The kiosk is available 24/7 for picking up and returning vehicles. (Photo provided)



Forsyth County runs three motor pools with 24/7 self-service dispatching, and one with a staffed dispatching process. Thanks to the Agile Fleet fleet management information system, the county has cut 30 vehicles from its fleet. (Photo provided)

Rogers said working with the budget office making a business case for spending money on vehicle sharing technology was one of the easier cases to make. “It’s one of those rare cash-positive projects. When we began the process, we estimated we could eliminate at least 30 vehicles in the first year if we had an efficient way for county employees to share rather than having vehicles assigned to individuals or departments. We achieved that goal. Additionally, we would generate revenue by selling unused vehicles,” said Rogers, adding in less than one year, all expectations were exceeded relative to cost savings.

Some other benefits of vehicle sharing technology were actually a surprise. The county soon realized the vehicle sharing technology gave easy access to vehicles for county employees, who previously had to use personal vehicles to perform their jobs. County policy was implemented that required employees to use shared, pooled vehicles instead of their personal vehicles for official business as much as possible. This helped the county to reduce reimbursements to employees who used personally owned vehicles, or POVs, for county business by more than 50%, saving another \$60,000-plus per year. Using a county vehicle is roughly 35% cheaper than reimbursing an employee for using their vehicle.

Rogers said, “Before our motor pool implementation, our yearly expenditure for POV was approximately \$125,000. We cut it to approximately \$57,000. I hadn’t anticipated that.”

In 2018, Rogers was named Professional Manager of the Year for a public fleet by the American Public Works Association, which recognized him for his outstanding performance managing the county’s maintenance operations, monitoring fleet maintenance costs, purchasing vehicles and equipment, advising other departments of potential replacements, all while maintaining best practices in the areas of right-sizing and efficiency. APWA also recognized Rogers’ efforts researching new technologies and serving on committees in the county to further improve the efficiencies and safety of the employees.

Forsyth County Fleet Quick Facts

- 620 vehicles.
- Serves 2,000 employees.
- Runs three motor pools with 24/7 self-service dispatching, and one with a staffed dispatching process.
- Immediately cut 30 vehicles from its fleet while meeting the needs of its fleet users, enabling the county to decrease budget by \$300,000 for nonemergency vehicles in the following budget year.
- Cut personal mileage reimbursement by more than 50% annually.
- Reduced vehicle administrative costs for departments and standardize cleaning, maintenance and other processes by transitioning vehicles from departments to centralized motor pools.

Forsyth County expanded the use of motor pools and automated the entire vehicle sharing process using the Agile Fleet fleet management information system, or FMIS.

“When we first started to try to share vehicles without modern technology, we shared 25 vehicles. It took two people to manage the process because everything was all manual — reservations were handwritten on spreadsheets,” Rogers said. “We handed out and collected keys manually. Drivers had to come to our facility during business hours to get keys and we had a staff member dedicated to handling it.” Now it is all automated, and vehicles are available 24/7. M

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