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POOL PARTY



Celebrating a major milestone, the State of Michigan's fleet team shares an inside look at how they implemented a motor pool program, built a culture of vehicle sharing, and optimized fleet utilization.

By Carla Kalogeridis



Members of Michigan's Department of Technology, Management and Budget (DTMB) team (l to r): Joel Scott, Dan Hough, Gerald "Bernie" Bullock, David Hofmeister, Jamie Mathews, Amy Hough and Scott Martin.

The State of Michigan recently hit the 1 million completed reservations milestone with its motor pool program — an impressive accomplishment.

Michigan manages more than 10,000 vehicles, including state police motorcycles and Class 8 and 9 semi-trucks, specialty equipment, sedans, vans, trucks, and SUVs. There is an excellent story about recognizing utilization challenges and addressing them through vehicle sharing. Benefits of the program (launched in 2010 using Agile Fleet's FleetCommander platform) include vastly improved fleet utilization and satisfied drivers.

The Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget Vehicle & Travel Services (DTMB VTS) analyst Scott Martin emphasizes the importance of taking a statewide, holistic approach to fleet management. "In addition to assigning vehicles to individual departments, we use a rental system to reduce the number of vehicles needed by a department," he explains.

About 238 vehicles are part of the motor pool program but the 1 million completed reservations mark comes from the team's work across the other state departments. They have shown departments how to properly share vehicles and demonstrated that vehicle sharing is what makes the difference.

Joel Scott, analyst for DTMB VTS, knows what it took to get where they are today. "When I got here in 2005, it was a paper-intensive manual process," he says. "We had an in-house database where people would go in and reserve vehicles, and then they'd get handed a piece of paper when they came to pick up the vehicle. When they brought it back, they'd turn in the paper with the ending odometer. We would then manually type in all those odometer readings."

When the state started vehicle sharing, it had four motor pools — two in Lansing and one each in Detroit and Grand Rapids. Since then, pools have been added in Flint, Escanaba, and Traverse City. In addition, the fleet team trained the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) county offices to use the new platform. "The entire program is paperless, which allows us to manage a lot more reservations," says Scott.

“The most important part is listening — whether it’s feedback from surveys, emails, or phone calls — and not just fixing issues but continuously improving the experience.”

— David Hofmeister, Motor Pool/Consulting Manager

Replace Fuel Card
Before Inserting Key
Please Close Keybox

Area Under Surveillance

After Use,
Please Close Door

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David Hofmeister, DTMB VTS motor pool/consulting manager, oversees the state’s seven motor pools — five of which are unmanned. All motor pools use an automated kiosk and key box and are managed remotely online. “We’ve supported departments across the state by giving them access to the vehicle-sharing system so they can manage their own reservations,” he says. “It started with one county expressing interest, and word spread from there. Now, 28 DHHS county locations and eight Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy locations are using motor pools.”

The State of Michigan fleet team operates almost like a commercial business working within the confines of a state. The state’s employees are colleagues, but they treat them like customers. A critical part of keeping these internal customers happy is communication.

“We send out surveys every month,” says Hofmeister, noting that anyone who uses a motor pool vehicle that month will get a survey. “Many people make requests and come up with some great ideas. We read every single survey and respond to them.” The team also sends out a motor pool newsletter that shares the ideas that have been implemented. (See box, “Two Bonus Ideas for Your Fleet.”)

Martin points out that the surveys are also a great source of ideas to bring back to the platform’s developer. “I know it’s supposed to be about us and the service we provide, but it’s also Agile Fleet’s opportunity to listen,” he says. “I’ve had

many conversations on the developer side where we’ve taken feedback from the surveys and thrown ideas back and forth. Usually there’s something that comes out of these conversations.”

Martin has also found significant value in attending Agile Fleet’s annual fleet user conference. “The technology

has evolved through collaboration among fleet users,” he says. “It’s less about any one organization driving innovation and more about listening to ideas and experiences from the people actually using the systems. These events bring everyone together to share approaches to vehicle sharing, compare data, and learn from one another.”

When asked how many of the new platform features have come as a result of a fleet team giving feedback, Agile Fleet’s Michael Hicks supports Martin’s perception. “Well, it’s 100% of it,” Hicks says. “We can’t pressure test the platform the way our users would, especially a group like the State of Michigan with this big, dynamic environment. They’re like a test bed. Who better to ask what works and what doesn’t than a client that’s been around for 16 years and had 1 million successful reservations?” As examples, Hicks says Michigan’s fleet team has given valuable input on billing back, chargebacks, and ease of use.

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— Scott Martin, Analyst



Creating a Sharing-Based Culture

The Michigan fleet team acknowledges that building a culture of vehicle sharing can be challenging. When the program was first introduced, vehicles were removed from individual departments and reassigned to create a localized motor pool, which led to significant pushback — especially from employees who had viewed those vehicles as “their” own. Many departments were initially resistant to the change.

Hofmeister recalls a time when drivers were hesitant to embrace motor pools. “The technology can feel a bit overwhelming at first, using a kiosk, entering information, and having the system direct you to a specific key,” he notes. However, survey results show a strong shift in perception, with seasoned users reporting high levels of satisfaction and appreciation for the system.

Building that culture took time. Consistently listening to feedback — and acting on it — continues to be a key part of the strategy.

“We send newsletters, collect feedback, and take it seriously,” says Martin. “We also provide an after-hours helpline so drivers know someone will be there to answer their call. Ongoing communication with drivers is what ultimately drives a strong, sustainable culture.”

Challenges of a Sharing-Based Culture

Communication is critical, but it’s not always easy. Martin says, “Even though we’re regularly engaging with drivers, it can be difficult to break the habit of always wanting the newest vehicle. But if everyone chooses the newest car every time, the older vehicles never cycle out. The system only works when it’s used as intended, helping maintain or even reduce the average age of the fleet over time.”

Another challenge is coordinating maintenance and upkeep for vehicles at five unmanned locations across the state. “Escanaba is about six-and-a-half hours away, so we can’t always respond as quickly as we would at staffed sites,” he explains. “We rely on community vendors, maintenance companies, and dealerships to keep vehicles serviced and get drivers back on the road as efficiently as possible.”

Early on, some drivers were concerned that vehicles wouldn’t be available when needed or that the right type of vehicle wouldn’t be accessible. “Over time, by focusing on delivering strong customer service and responding to those concerns, that perception began to change,” Hofmeister says. “The most important part is listening — whether it’s feedback from surveys, emails, or phone calls — and not just fixing issues but continuously improving the experience. As we consistently provide

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— Joel Scott, Analyst



that level of service, word spreads, and more people begin to buy into the program.”

Hofmeister says survey scores are now consistently strong. “When someone shares feedback in a survey and then sees that we’ve acted on it, it reinforces that their voice matters,” he says. “That experience gets shared, and over time, it helps shift the culture.”

He adds that maintaining high-quality vehicles is a priority. “We focus on providing well-maintained, clean, and up-to-date vehicles whenever possible. As part of that, we look to cycle motor pool vehicles out of service earlier, either integrating them into the broader fleet or repurposing them for seasonal use, and replace them with newer vehicles when we can.”

Measuring and Metrics

Benchmarking against other fleets has been an important part of Michigan’s strategy.

“When we first implemented vehicle sharing, we connected with a large rental fleet provider because we still needed options for employees outside of local motor pool areas,” Scott recalls. “They helped us think about managing our fleet more like a rental operation, and we used that as a benchmark.”

One key takeaway was around utilization. “There’s a misconception that you want to be at 100%,” Scott explains. “But if you’re always at full capacity, you’re turning people away. The goal is to find the right balance, enough utilization to be

efficient but with enough availability to handle demand as it fluctuates.”

He notes that Michigan ultimately adjusted its target to about 70% utilization. “We focus on the five standard workdays and aim for around 70%,” Scott says. Some periods are higher, some are lower, it really depends on the season.” Across the broader fleet, replacement schedules vary but generally follow a 10-year or 100,000-mile guideline.

However, Michigan takes a different approach with motor pool vehicles to support consistent availability and utilization goals. “As a fleet, we’ve aligned around the idea that motor pool vehicles should represent our highest standard,” Hofmeister says. “We replace those vehicles earlier than the rest of the fleet to ensure reliability and minimize downtime. That’s especially important at our unmanned locations, where maintenance can be more difficult to coordinate. Keeping those vehicles newer helps us maintain availability and deliver a consistent level of service.”

As a data-driven operation, the Michigan fleet team regularly benchmarks shared motor pool vehicles against assigned vehicles to evaluate overall operating costs and efficiency. Staff vehicle consultants and analysts review the full fleet and provide departments with quarterly and annual reports to support informed decision-making. They also track personal mileage reimbursements and identify instances where employees rent vehicles instead of using available motor pool options.

Hofmeister notes that this often highlights opportunities for better alignment. “We provide departments with clear comparisons, what was spent on personal mileage versus what it would have cost using a motor pool vehicle,” he says. “In some cases, if an employee is traveling frequently, assigning a vehicle may be the more cost-effective option. The goal is to give departments the data they need to make the best decision, whether that’s using motor pool or assigning a vehicle.”

The analysts also calculate annual mileage and establish per-mile rates based on projected fuel costs, vehicle acquisition, and maintenance expenses, incorporating those factors into overall fleet cost models. Hofmeister notes that this level of analysis

Two Bonus Ideas for Your Fleet

1 QR codes for policies and quick answers. In the past, the State of Michigan distributed printed information packets in every vehicle whenever policies, procedures, or insurance documents were updated. With a large fleet, keeping those materials current in every glove box was a challenge. An employee suggested a simpler solution: QR codes placed on key tags. Each code links to a webpage with frequently asked questions such as: What's my fuel PIN? How do I get a car wash? Where do I go for maintenance? Who do I contact in the event of an accident? "When we share this at conferences, it really resonates," says Hofmeister. "It's a simple idea, but it makes a big difference."



2 Simplifying access with scan cards. Feedback from motor pool users highlighted the need for an easier check-in and check-out process, specifically, eliminating the need to remember user IDs and passwords. In response, Michigan's fleet team implemented scan cards, allowing drivers to access their reservations with a quick scan. "The response from drivers was overwhelmingly positive," Hofmeister says. "It removed a common frustration and made the process much more efficient. Instead of dealing with passwords, they can simply scan and go. It's been a significant improvement to the overall experience."



is key to maximizing utilization and making informed decisions across the fleet.

"We provide departments with a range of reports, including underutilization, standard utilization, and high-mileage tracking," he says. "That allows them to identify vehicles accumulating miles too quickly, as well as those that aren't being used enough. With that information they can make adjustments, shifting drivers into higher-use vehicles or reevaluating assignments to better balance the fleet and extend vehicle life."

Hofmeister emphasizes that the fleet team does not mandate specific actions. "Departments understand their drivers and operational needs better than we do, so we provide the data and allow them to make the decisions that work best," he says. "In some cases, what appears to be underutilization is completely justified. For example, in DHHS, vehicles may log fewer miles because staff are making shorter trips or spending extended time in court or at appointments."

He also notes that utilization is measured by more than just mileage. "We look at total usage, days in service and number of trips, as well as outliers," he adds. "Having the data is critical but sharing it is what allows the fleet to be managed effectively."

While data drives decisions, the team also takes a practical, flexible approach. "If utilization rises above our target, it may

be due to seasonal demand or temporary spikes," Hofmeister explains. "We monitor trends closely, reviewing reports each month and making adjustments as needed. That might mean adding a vehicle or two to a location to see how it impacts availability, but we're just as willing to remove vehicles if they're not being used. Letting vehicles sit idle and age out doesn't support the level of service we're aiming to provide."

Advice for Vehicle Sharing

Scott says the first step in implementing a motor pool program is having the data in place. "Whether it's leadership or front-line staff, you need to show why it makes sense, and you should know that before you move forward," he explains. "It starts with solid data. The culture shift comes after you've demonstrated the value."

Martin adds that having the right staffing is just as important. "You need people who can really dig into the data and understand the full picture," he says. "You can't simply implement a motor pool and expect it to run effectively without the right support and oversight. You need the right mix of skills on your team, people who can analyze the data and others who can translate it into operational decisions."

Hofmeister emphasizes the importance of learning from others. "If you're considering

a motor pool, connect with organizations that have already implemented one," he advises. "Ask about their challenges, their successes, and how they use their data. Real-world insight makes a big difference."

He also points to the importance of structure and consistency. "We've seen situations where keys were being passed around, vehicles were sitting unused without access, or drivers were holding onto keys 'just in case,'" he recalls. "Those kinds of issues are exactly why having a system, clear policies, and active management is so important. You have to use the system as intended and rely on your data to keep things running effectively."

The Road Ahead

Looking ahead, the focus is on continuing to strengthen and refine a fully integrated, data-driven statewide motor pool network, optimizing utilization, improving service, and setting the standard for vehicle sharing in government. This means building on the success of the program while continuing to strategically expand based on where demand exists across the state.

"At this point, growth is happening naturally," says Martin. "Employees who have used the program move to new areas and share their experience, which drives interest and helps identify where the need is."

That momentum, combined with lessons learned over time, has improved how the team evaluates and responds to demand. "Early on, expansion was a much more manual and time-intensive process," Martin explains. "Now, we're able to use data and experience to identify where motor pool services make the most sense and implement them much more efficiently."

Sustaining that progress will continue to depend on strong communication and responsiveness. "As the program grows, so does the challenge of reaching a large and mobile user base," says Hofmeister. "We're focused on improving how we communicate with drivers and departments, making sure they have the information they need, when they need it, so the system continues to run smoothly." **FS**

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