

Volunteer Driver 02-25-2020

I am a volunteer. Specifically, a volunteer driver. Mostly long distances.

I take people on necessary trips, primarily medical and dental, using my own car, following the appointment schedule provided. As a volunteer I am not paid for this but my mileage is reimbursed.

I drive for two adjacent rural Minnesota counties and have for several years. I REALLY enjoy it.

The trip begins, to me, with a phone call, email or perhaps a text message from the transportation or volunteer coordinator. Sometimes there is two or three weeks lead time, sometimes almost none. I get a name, address and phone number of a passenger plus a destination with appointment time and date. Someone else has approved the trip and now it is my task to see to the passenger's safety, comfort and timely arrival. I look at weather predictions, road construction delays and maps, calculate travel times and call the rider. Double checking address, phone numbers and schedule we agree upon a pickup time.

That day begins with a re-checking of weather. If the weather looks questionable I might call the rider and add some time. Ominous, we might consider a cancel and reschedule. It depends upon the destination, the rider and the circumstances. Having driven for years, frequently I know today's rider and have some idea of what the trip might be like. When you drive up do they come right out? Or take several minutes then remember a forgotten item and turn around and take several more minutes? Everyone is a little different. So... they get in, buckle up (people are very good about seat belts now), and off we go. Usually they ride in front and sometimes we talk, or listen to country or classic rock. Maybe a book on CD. Sometimes they submerge into headphones.

We will usually have a stop or two: coffee, bathroom, smoke break, stretch. And hopefully, if I have planned and guessed right on delays and traffic we arrive 10 to 15 minutes ahead of their appointment.

Then I wait. Sometimes hard to predict the duration of today's appointment, so I don't go far. And when they are done, we go back.

I find that the riders are just people. We usually get along fine, and 99 percent of the riders are very grateful for the help getting to a needed appointment.

I drove nearly 30,000 miles last year on behalf of others. I was not paid. I am a volunteer.

Joel Ward

Bemidji MN