

Spare Rides app brings carpooling into the 21st century

Vancouver service matches commuters with people going the same way

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Spare Rides co-founders Josh Andrews and Kristoffer Vik Hansen pose with driver Becca Koole, one of the 400 people who signed up for their new service this week. (Supplied)

The Vancouver team behind Spare Rides, a new ride-on-demand app that pairs drivers with riders along the Broadway corridor, had modest expectations when the commuter-share business launched on Monday.

"In the first two days we've had 400 people sign up, which is insane. We were hoping for 20 people," said CEO Kristoffer Vik Hansen, a UBC computer engineering grad who co-founded Spare Rides with university pals Josh Andrews and Alexey Indeev. "We were actually hoping for a quiet launch. Right now we are doing what we are calling a drivers' launch, we are trying to build up the mass of drivers who want to be using this app for their everyday commute."

Spare Rides available to both iPhone and Android users. The expectation that the app will only be used by drivers looking to share the cost of their daily commute is what separates Spare Riders from Uber.

With Spare Rides, the rider pays a \$1.50 base fee and 50 cent a kilometre after that. The driver receives \$1 of base fare and 35 cents a km. Uber charges its riders a base fare of \$2.75 in Edmonton, where it is allowed to operate, plus 85 cents a kilometres and 25 cents a minute.

Uber, a ride-hailing service available in 400 cities and nearly 70 different countries, is still looking to gain a foothold in B.C. where its approval has been blocked by the Passenger Transportation Branch,

“We are in a completely different industry than Uber,” said Vik Hansen. “Uber is a taxi service and we are more about sharing your commute. Our drivers are regular people going to their regular jobs ... and they are looking to carpool. We call it carpooling for the 21st century and we have coined the term commute-sharing to go with that.”

“Our rates are basically decided on what the average operating cost of a vehicle in Canada,” said Vik Hansen. “It’s impossible to earn a living with Spare Rides.”

The low rates, combined with the fact the service is for commuters only, is why Spare Rides is allowed to operated in Vancouver while Uber is not.

B.C.’s Minister of Transportation Todd Stone, in a statement to the Sun, said carpooling is allowed under B.C. Passenger Transportation Regulations as long as travel is to a common destination for the driver and passengers; and passenger charges do not exceed operating costs for the trip.

“Spare Rides has told us they intend to operate a carpool, not a commercial ride-hailing service like a taxi or Uber, so they do not require a commercial passenger transportation licence or commercial insurance,” Stone said in an statement. “Anyone charging more or if drivers wish to offer more than one return trip per day, they would be required to apply for a passenger transportation licence.

“The passenger transportation registrar will be monitoring the company, and the company has told us they will remove drivers that are found to be offering more than one return trip a day.”

Driver Becca Koole, a graphic designer who travels into Vancouver from North Surrey every day, joined the service Tuesday and made \$3.82 after sharing the final few kilometres of her commute with a fellow Spare Rider.

“It paid for my morning coffee and I feel like I made a friend,” she said.

All transactions are completed within the Spare Rides app. No money changes hands between driver and rider.

Right now the service operates exclusively in Vancouver from UBC to Commercial Avenue, between 1st and 16th avenues, during commuting hours only (weekdays 8-11 a.m. and 3-6 p.m.), but Vik Hansen says the company hopes to expand as more drivers come aboard.

sbrown@vancouversun.com[Twitter.com/Browniescott](https://twitter.com/Browniescott)

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