

The George Washington University Pre-tax Transportation Benefit Plan Questions and Answers

What is the Pre-tax Transportation Benefit Plan?

This benefit allows full time and/or benefit eligible part time employees to have a maximum of \$230 per month deducted from their pay on a pre-tax basis for the purchase of “**SmartBenefit Vouchers**” or for adding transportation credits to your Metro **SmarTrip** card. **SmarTrip** cards may be used for Metrorail, Metrobus, Metro Parking and various area transit providers who accept the **SmarTrip** card as a payment option. The **SmartBenefits vouchers** can be used as fare exchange for regional transit systems that **have not** adopted the **SmarTrip** payment option.

What Deduction Amounts Are Available?

The current maximum amount is \$230 per month. Payroll deductions are \$10 increments starting at a minimum of \$40 to a maximum of \$230 per month.

How Do I Receive My Deduction?



If you choose to participate in this program, you will receive either “SmartBenefit Vouchers” or a credit to your Metro’s **SmarTrip** card. For example, if you chose the \$60 denomination, you will receive \$60 credit to your **SmarTrip** card or **two** \$30 SmartBenefit vouchers.

If you receive your benefit by automatic credit to your **SmarTrip** card, GW transmits your credit information to Metro each month. Anytime after 12:01am on the first of the month (but before 11:59 pm on the last day of the month) you can claim your benefit by swiping your **SmarTrip** card at any Metro **SmarTrip** farecard machine anytime, 24 hours per day.

If you receive your benefit in **SmartBenefit** vouchers, you must pick them up and sign a receipt at the Ticketmaster Office located on the ground floor of the Marvin Center.

If you do not claim your **SmarTrip credit within the same calendar month as it is issued, or pick up your **SmartBenefit** vouchers in the same month it is issued, your benefit **WILL** be forfeited to the plan.**

Can't I Receive My Benefit in Cash?

Internal Revenue Service regulations require that when an area-wide “voucher” program exists, such as the one offered by WMATA, regulations do not allow GW to offer cash reimbursement.

How Are Payroll Deductions Handled?

Deductions are twice a month for employees paid on a bi-weekly basis and once a month for employees paid on a monthly basis.

When should I sign up?

New enrollment or changes to existing accounts must be received by Payroll Services by the **first week** of a month in order to be effective for the 1st of the following month.

How Do I Purchase My Fares?

If you use Metrorail, Metrobus or Metro Parking and various area transit providers who accept the SmarTrip card, your payroll deduction will be sent to Metro and you will receive an automatic credit to your *SmarTrip* card. You claim this credit by passing your *SmarTrip* card over the *SmarTrip* machine in any Metrorail station. You must claim your benefit each month between the 1st and last calendar day of the month. If you do not claim your benefit during this time, you will forfeit your benefit for that month. If you aren't familiar with Metro's *SmarTrip* program, please go to Metro's Internet site at: <http://wmata.com/riding/smartrip.cfm>

If you do not ride Metrobus or Metrorail, but use other public or private transportation such as Virginia Railway Express (VRE), MARC Train Service, MTA commuter buses (Eyre, Dillon's, and Keller) and MetroAccess, you will receive *SmartBenefit vouchers* which will be available for pick up at the TicketMaster office located in the Marvin Center, ground floor.

How Do I Get a SmarTrip Card?

If you do not already use a *SmarTrip* card, you may purchase one directly from Metro or at their Internet site: <http://wmata.com/bus2bus/smartbenefits/pages/wheretobuy.cfm>. The cost of the card is \$5.00. If you do not have a card and this is your first time enrolling in the program you will receive a **free** *SmarTrip* card!

What Happens If I Lose My SmarTrip Card or SmartBenefit Vouchers?

Because your *SmarTrip* card must be registered with Metro to participate in this program, if it is lost or stolen, just notify Metro and they will issue you a replacement with the full value on it at the time you reported it lost or stolen. (Less a \$5 replacement fee).

You must then notify Payroll Services and give them your new *SmarTrip* card number so that your record can be updated. If you lose or misplace a *SmartBenefit vouchers*, it's the same as losing or misplacing cash and can not be replaced.

I'm Going on Vacation or Long-Term Leave, Can I Cancel My Deduction?

You can remain in the program but suspend your monthly deduction once per quarter or at any time if you move or change your commuting patterns. Remember: Under current program guidelines *SmarTrip* cards and *SmartBenefit vouchers* never expire!

What if There's An Error in My Deduction

If you have your properly completed enrollment form into Payroll by the 1st of each month, and have chosen the *SmarTrip* option, there's little chance of error. If you've submitted your enrollment paperwork late, or there was some problem with it, because of Metro's cut-off deadlines for GW to order *SmarTrip* or *SmartBenefit vouchers*, there is a small possibility you may have a payroll deduction but not receive *SmarTrip* credit or your *SmartBenefit vouchers*. If this is the case, simply contact Payroll Services.

Can I Use SmartBenefit vouchers or SmarTrip Cards Only When I Commute to Work?

This program was created to provide a pre-tax transportation benefit for employees commuting to and from work. Once you receive *SmarTrip* credit, or Metrocheks, they are subject to the acceptance rules of either Metro or the non-Metro transportation company you selected.

What If I Quit and Leave the Area?

Unfortunately, if you move out of the area, Metro will not provide a cash refund for the unused balance on your *SmarTrip* account or for unused *SmartBenefit vouchers*. IRS regulations forbid cash refunds on tax-deferred deductions. If you remain in the area, you may continue to use your *SmarTrip* card or *SmartBenefit vouchers* until their balance is exhausted.

I Park then Ride, What Do I Do?

If your commute requires you to pay for parking at a Metro or other commercial parking lot, you may elect to participate in the pre-tax parking program. This is a separate program from the pre-tax transportation program. The pre-tax parking program allows you to set aside up to \$230 per month for qualified parking expenses. This is in addition to the pre-tax transportation benefit. If you are not familiar with this program, please pick up an informational brochure from the on-campus Payroll Office, Academic Center, Rome Hall – T101.