



COMMUTER CONNECTIONS RIDEMATCHING COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

Tuesday, June 16, 2020
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street, N.E.
COG Board Room

Chairperson: Allison Kemp, Bethesda Transportation Solutions
Vice Chairperson: Hugh McGloin, WHS/DOD

COG Staff Contact: Stephen Finafrock, 202/962-3385 or sfinafrock@mwkog.org

1. Introductions

The meeting was brought to order by Nicholas Ramfos of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. Attendees were asked to introduce themselves when their jurisdiction was announced. The meeting took place virtually through WebEx.

2. Minutes of the March 17th, 2020 meeting

Approval was sought for the March 17th, 2020 Ridematching Committee Meeting minutes. An initial motion to approve was made by George Clark of Tri County Council for Southern Maryland and a second motion to approve was made by Kelly Woodward of the Dulles Area Transportation Association. The minutes were approved as written. All were in favor.

3. Upcoming Fairs and Promotions

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, there were no fairs or promotions to report.

4. CarpoolNow

Steven Osborn, COG/TPB staff, began his presentation by briefing everyone on updates made to the CarpoolNow mobile application.

Mr. Osborn's first talking point was the addition of CarpoolNow+ lots and that the update is live on all major digital distribution platforms. Mr. Osborn then explained how COG staff researched various park and ride lots in the region to identify spots where casual carpooling is most likely occurring. Some lots were also chosen due to their proximity to an Express Lane, meaning carpooling is likely to occur.

Mr. Osborn then continued to explain the new iconography that is shown within the updated user interface (UI), referencing the image within the presentation. New icons within the app are marked with a "+" icon or with a "P+" icon. The "+" icon indicates a location that is a hotspot for carpool pickup and drop-off locations. The "P+" icon indicates a formal Park & Ride lot that is also a hotspot for casual carpooling activity. Mr. Osborn also mentioned that the iconography for traditional Park & Ride lots has not been removed and is still indicated by a "P" icon within the map.

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Mr. Osborn then explained how the icons, when selected, show specific information on the lot's location and makes a differentiation on being a popular morning or afternoon pickup spot.

Lastly, Mr. Osborn showed an update to the UI when requesting a ride through the app. Users will now be presented with nearby "+" and "P+" lots when asked to choose a starting point. The traditional method of finding drivers still remains, allowing users to select their home address, work address, or pick from map.

Gladys Hurwitz, Maryland Department of Transportation, asked if any "+" or "P+" lots have been added in the state of Maryland. Mr. Osborn explained that COG has added any lot where it is believed that casual carpooling is occurring or is likely to occur. Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, added that all traditional park and ride lots in the region have remained part of the app and that this update pays special attention to lots with existing carpool activity.

5. TDM System Update

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, began his presentation with an overview of the topics to be discussed, including: chatbot update, streamlined registration/password recovery, and employer-based matching.

Mr. Finafrock then introduced the progress COG/TPB staff has made in developing a chatbot for the public to use on the Commuter Connections website. Mr. Finafrock noted that Commuter Connections tracks its calls and the various reasons why people call. The top 10 reasons why users call Commuter Connections, in order based on number of requests, are:

1. Re-register
2. Program information
3. GRH dispatch trip
4. Username and password reset
5. incenTrip
6. Transit information
7. Commuter Direct
8. Matchlist request
9. Park & Ride information
10. State/local transit info

Mr. Finafrock then moved on to a slide showing a recent interaction with a test version of the chatbot. The question pictured was related to COVID-19 and the response from the bot was not satisfactory. Mr. Finafrock explained that the goal for the bot is intelligent response to whatever questions the public may have and that the bot will be "educated" through further testing. The more the bot is tested, the more it will learn and be able to provide satisfactory answers.

The chatbot is currently on Commuter Connections' clone server and is only available for COG staff to test. The bot is anticipated to be live in the coming months.

Mr. Finafrock then moved on to explain the streamlined registration process and highlighted the new progress bar at the top of the registration form. Registrants will also now have the option to use their email address as their username with intentions to make it easier for users to remember their credentials.

The next section of the registration process includes the user's first name, last name, phone number and home address. The home address widget has the ability to show a list of indexed addresses based on what the user is typing, prioritizing addresses within the region. This feature should help decrease the amount of invalid addresses input into the TDM system by its users.

The next step in the registration process is commute information, which remains the same except for the refreshed look and feel.

Mr. Finafrock then concluded the streamlined registration process presentation by displaying the employer information section. This section is largely unchanged but now has the ability to suggest an indexed list of addresses in the region as the user types. As a result, fewer duplicate and erroneous addresses should be input by the TDM system users.

The next topic discussed by Mr. Finafrock was the employer-based ridematching enhancement. This enhancement comes to the TDM system as a response to COVID-19 and should offer an increased level of confidence for those using the system as they rethink their commute. This option will appear as a green bar on top of any matchlists a user or administrator runs.

Mark Sofman, Montgomery County DOT, asked when this feature will be available to the public. Mr. Finafrock explained that the feature is a strong priority for Commuter Connections. Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, mentioned that it should be live in the coming weeks.

Fatemeh Allahdoust, Virginia Department of Transportation, asked if the streamlined registration process can be saved if not fully completed. Mr. Finafrock mentioned that this feature is not available because there isn't yet a solution for the records that are started and never completed. Mr. Finafrock also mentioned that it will become an item for further discussion with Commuter Connection's software development team.

Mr. Finafrock then continued his presentation to discuss the updated password reset function currently in progress. This function will be a more modern solution for recovering a password and may use a form of authentication such as SMS or email messaging.

Peggy Schwartz, North Bethesda Transportation Center, asked if there is going to be a page on the Commuter Connections website detailing all the changes that have recently been made to the TDM system. Mr. Finafrock stated that Commuter Connections will discuss ways to bring attention to all of these changes to its users.

Gladys Hurwitz, Maryland Department of Transportation, asked if Commuter Connections has the ability to address concerns with users carpooling with employees of competing business. Mr. Finafrock mentioned that Commuter Connections does not have a way to control that and that it would be up to the employer/employee to exercise good judgement. Mr. Ramfos added that for larger employers, such as NIH or FDA, the administrators have the ability to see the results of any matchlists that are run for their employees.

6. Client Site Status | Round Table

Steven Osborn, COG/TPB staff, mentioned that updates to the TDM Resource Directory have begun for the July 2020 biannual edition. Mr. Osborn encouraged all in attendance to respond to update solicitations for information if they have not already done so.

Mr. Osborn also asked that those in attendance with fairs and promotions to announce to please email that information to commutersupport@mwkog.org.

7. Quarterly Progress Report

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, reminded those in attendance to fill out information in table 6A and submit it to COG. Mr. Finafrock also reminded them that this can be done via fillable PDF and can be submitted by clicking a button on that form as well.

Mr. Finafrock then reiterated the need to leave notes on a commuter's profile as a way to detail the work that jurisdictions are doing. Notes also serve as "follow up" data for these reports.

Mr. Finafrock then explained the regional Table 6A summaries submitted by the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland, Anne Arundel County and North Bethesda as positive examples of good reporting.

8. Other Business | Upcoming Agenda Items

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, mentioned that a "best practices" standing agenda item will continue as part of the quarterly Ridematching Committee meetings and encouraged those in attendance to come forward with any topics they might want to discuss during the next meeting.

The Next meeting of the Commuter Connections Ridematching Committee will be held on September 15, 2020 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.