

NEWS RELEASE

Commuter Connections celebrates 50 years of serving DC area commuter

Oct 2, 2024



COG Executive Director Clark Mercer accepts "Commuter Connections Day" proclamation from District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser.

Today, officials from across the region gathered at the National Press Club to celebrate Commuter Connections' 50th anniversary and reflect on its strong track record of helping commuters find smarter ways to work, while reducing traffic and air pollution.

The program, coordinated by the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, was originally created to assist commuters during the OPEC oil embargo in the 1970s. The embargo caused a gas supply shortage and a steep uptick in costs for consumers, making the need to increase carpooling a priority for area leaders.

Over the past half century, Commuter Connections has grown to offer a wide range of free services, including a system that matches people with similar commutes together for carpools and vanpools, the Guaranteed Ride Home program, which provides commuters with a free ride home in the event of an unexpected emergency, personal illness, or unscheduled overtime, as well as several incentive programs that reward commuters when they choose alternatives to driving alone or avoid driving during peak hours of traffic.

“We are grateful to have partners like Commuter Connections innovating to meet the needs of residents, workers, and visitors,” said District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser, who provided the keynote speech at the event. “We know that Washington, DC is a world class city, and world class cities have world class transportation options. Together, we will continue to expand our transportation network, protect the environment, and grow our economy.”

Commuter Connections also helps employers establish commuting benefits and assistance programs, including telework programs, and organizes major events like the region’s Bike to Work Day—in partnership the Washington Area Bicyclist Association—which has grown from 1,100 registrants in 2001 to 14,000 in 2024.

Taking into account all of its programs and services, Commuter Connections reduces 119,500 daily vehicle trips, which results in 2.1 million fewer vehicle miles of travel and more than half a ton fewer pollutants impacting the region’s air quality each day.



District of Columbia Mayor Muriel Bowser speaks at the Commuter Connections 50th Anniversary Celebration

COMMUTERCASH PREVIEW

The anniversary event also looked ahead to Commuter Connections’ next featured program, the CommuterCash mobile app, which will be available to commuters later this year. CommuterCash is the enhanced version and rebranded name of the incenTrip app, a successful pilot project that was developed in partnership with the Maryland Transportation Institute at the University of Maryland. The app incentivizes commuters through its gamification and meaningful rewards system, serving as a trip planner and also providing real-time traffic predictions to help commuters avoid heavy traffic. CommuterCash users will be able to earn up to \$600 within a calendar year.

“Throughout Commuter Connections’ 50-year history, our program has always sought to harness the latest technology to promote sustainable transportation options,” said Council of Governments Executive Director Clark Mercer. “CommuterCash will help people find alternatives to driving to work alone, or, before they head out the door, the best time to leave. And by changing their travel behaviors, participants will improve their quality of life and help our region reduce traffic and clean the air.”

EMPLOYER AWARDS

Employer Awards 2024



At the ceremony, Commuter Connections also recognized employers that offer top-notch commuter benefits, demonstrating a strong commitment to sustainable transportation and improving employees' work life balance and well-being.

Horizon/McDonald's, in North Bethesda, Maryland, was awarded the Incentives Award. The employer provided incentives by developing a work schedule system that allows store managers to adjust for employees' public transportation schedules when planning and assigning work hours. Employees also received a monthly transit subsidy of up to \$50 (\$25 for part-time employees), administered through Metro's SmartBenefits.

Comstock Companies, a leading asset manager, developer, and operator of mixed-use and transit-oriented properties, residing in Reston, Virginia was honored with the Marketing Award. Comstock provided \$50 SmarTrip® cards through the Plu\$50 program and employees who started taking public transit regularly were provided with a \$100 match from the company per month.

Groundswell, a technology company, residing in McLean, Virginia was awarded the Telework Award. In 2022, The business grew significantly, acquiring three companies within a short period of time. The company's telework program was created to support both business and work-life balance needs of its rapidly growing employee base.



In addition, Commuter Connections honored Montgomery County Commuter Services with its Employer Services Outreach Team Achievement Award for its work partnering with employers to develop and expand commute benefit offerings. Commuter Connections also recognized the District Department of Transportation's goDCgo program with an Employer Services Organization Achievement Award for providing complimentary consultation to businesses interested in starting or enhancing their commuter benefits programs.

MORE:

- [News feature on Commuter Connections' history](#)
- [Commuter Connections 50th Anniversary Brochure](#)
- [2024 Employer Awards Booklet](#)



1950s

An expanding federal government and other factors led to booming job growth and housing for the region. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is formed by local cities and counties to coordinate on regional issues.

1970

Beginnings of environmental awareness, creation of Earth Day and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

1973

OPEC oil exports stoppage causes gas shortages and high prices at the pump.

HOV lanes open to carpools.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) consolidates four regional bus systems to form Metrobus.



1984

Maryland Area Rail Commuter (MARC) begins operation.

1985

Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT), a national Transportation Demand Management (TDM) trade association, is founded.



1986

Commuter Club changes name to Ride Finders.

1997

Commuter Connections enters the internet age by launching the commuterconnections.org website.

Commuter Connections expands beyond carpool ridematching services to include regional assistance and information on transit, bicycling, and telework.

Commuter Connections begins offering Guaranteed Ride Home program, a safety net for commuters in case of unexpected illness, emergencies, and unscheduled overtime.

1998

IRS expands tax incentives to allow employees to purchase pre-tax transit and vanpool expenses.

Commuter Connections hosts first awards event to recognize employers in the region that offer outstanding commuter and telework benefits to employees.

2009

IRS brings transit/vanpool commuter benefits on parity with parking benefits.

'POOL REWARDS
it pays to rideshare

2010

Commuter Connections tells commuters that it pays to rideshare with 'Pool Rewards.

Commuter Connections expands Guaranteed Ride Home to Baltimore region and St. Mary's County.

2012

Commuter Connections 'Pool Rewards expands to include monthly vanpool subsidy.

High Occupancy Toll lanes open along the Capital Beltway using dynamic congestion pricing.

2019

WMATA welcomes full-size bikes on Metrorail during peak periods.

Commuter Connections and the University of Maryland co-develop *incenTrip*, a multi-modal real-time trip planning app.



1950s / 1960s

1964

Completion of the Capital Beltway.

1965

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) established.

1966

TPB becomes associated with COG.

1969

COG and TPB help launch Capital Flyer Express bus service.

1970s



1974

COG and TPB forms Commuter Club, offering regional carpool ridematching services based on home and work locations.

1976

WMATA opens Metrorail system.

1977

Commuter Club emphasizes carpooling to Metrorail stations and Park & Ride Lots.

Commuter Club hosts vanpooling workshops for employers.

1980s / 1990s

1992

Virginia Railway Express (VRE) begins commuter rail operation.

1993

IRS provides tax incentives to employers to encourage use of transit and vanpools.

1994

Ride Finders begins employer outreach program.

1996

Ride Finders rebrands name to Commuter Connections.

1990s / 2000s



2001

Commuter Connections partners with Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) to organize first regional Bike to Work Day event.

Commuter Connections publishes first State of the Commute triennial survey.

2008

Commuter Connections brings Car Free Day to the region.

Bikesharing first introduced as SmartBike DC, the precursor to Capital Bikeshare, which launched two years later.

2000s / 2010s

2014

Commuter Connections launches mobile-friendly website and mobile apps.



2017

Commuter Connections introduces Flextime Rewards, providing cash rewards for delaying commutes along key bottlenecks.

Dockless bikesharing and e-scooters introduced.

2010s / 2020s

2020

Commuter Connections awarded an ATCMD federal grant to enhance *incenTrip* in partnership with the University of Maryland by improving the program's gamification elements and rewards system.

2024 & BEYOND

incenTrip relaunched as *CommuterCash* following completion of the ATCMD project.

Commuter Connections awarded federal grant to develop a flexible vanpooling program, *VanHopper*, to restore under-capacity vans due to post-pandemic hybrid commuting schedules.

