



**Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments  
FY2012 Second Half Marketing Campaign Summary  
Draft Report March 20, 2012**

## **Introduction**

Traffic congestion costs the average commuter almost \$1,500 annually in fuel burned (37 gallons) and time lost (74 hours) sitting in traffic. Commuter Connections' focus is on returning that money to the commuter's pocket. And, depending on the alternative chosen, the commuter could save considerably more.

The region's transportation challenges are well reported and discussed. They are at the forefront of most commuters' minds as they make the trek to and from work. Commuter Connections' mass marketing campaign reinforces commuters' options and the positive benefits offered by Commuter Connections' Rideshare and Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) programs.

Teleworking is no longer simply a commute option, it is a cornerstone of the new "intelligent working" method being adopted by many public and private employers in the region. Whether it's an earthquake or snowstorm, teleworking allows businesses to keep on working even if the office is not accessible. Increasingly employers and employees are recognizing the benefits afforded by teleworking.

The FY2012 Marketing Campaign has had a strong start, the bar has been raised high, and Commuter Connections is well poised to continue to encourage and support the region's commuters and employers with solutions to the commuting challenges they face. A new umbrella campaign was launched in February advocating commuters to rideshare as an easier way to keep their money. Commuters who rideshare, take public transit, bicycle, or walk to work, were reminded to register for the GRH program.

The Commuter Connections' marketing campaign continues to build on the organization's wealth of extensive research and campaign experience. The FY2012 Marketing Communications Plan and Schedule, distributed to network members in August 2011, laid the foundation for FY2012's marketing efforts. The strategies behind the FY2012 marketing campaign reflect the current state of events for the regions' commuters and build upon the research and findings of the following reports:

- [2010 State of the Commute Survey Report](#)
- [2010 Commuter Connections Guaranteed Ride Home program Survey Report](#)

- [2010 Bike To Work Survey TERM Analysis Report](#)
- [FY 2009 Commuter Connections Applicant Database Annual Placement Survey Report](#)
- [2008 Commuter Connections Transportation Emission Reduction \(TERM\) Analysis Report.](#)
- Commuter Connections Stakeholder Attitudes and Opinions, April 2007.

Research, campaign experience, current economic factors and transportation challenges, all contribute to the strategy for FY2012 - to convert single occupant vehicle (SOV) commuters to alternative transportation by raising awareness of:

- GRH as a commuter safety net, and;
- Ridesharing as an easy way to save money.

The campaign's efforts for the second half of FY2012 include the following:

- The launch of a new umbrella marketing campaign in February 2012 that continues to explore new messaging and media to most effectively communicate solutions to the region's transportation challenges.
- Extension of the 'Pool Rewards program to include vanpools as well as carpools.
- Marketing initiatives tied to specific event planning to keep alternative commuting options front of mind. This includes Bike to Work Day and the Employer Recognition Awards.
- Communication outreach such as the employer newsletter and earned media efforts.
- Diligent efforts of network members to forge and leverage relationships with commuters throughout the region.

## About Commuter Connections

Commuter Connections is a regional network of transportation organizations coordinated through the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOCG). Commuter Connections offers free services to those who work in the metropolitan Washington area. Major services include ridematching for carpools and vanpools and administration of the GRH program in both Washington and Baltimore. Through its Employer Outreach Representatives, Commuter Connections also helps employers establish commuter benefit programs for their employees, including teleworking.

Organizations represented in the Commuter Connections' Regional Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Marketing Group include:

City of Alexandria	ARTMA	Fairfax City
Fairfax County Office of Transportation	National Institutes of Health (NIH)	Mass Transit Administration (MTA)
Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC)	Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC)	Virginia Department of Transportation Northern Virginia District Office
TYTRAN	Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)	LINK
Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation	Dulles Area Transportation Association (DATA)	Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland
Virginia Railway Express (VRE)	Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA)	Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)
Arlington County	Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)	VPSI
General Services Administration (GSA)	District Department of Transportation (DDOT)	Loudoun County Office of Transportation Services
Maryland State Highway Administration	Montgomery County Ride On	Montgomery County Commuter Services
Northern Neck Rideshare/PDC	Rappahannock Area Development Commission (RADCO)	Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission

## **Cornerstones of the Marketing Program**

The key products and services that are featured in the marketing program include the GRH and Ridematching programs. Both of these programs are critical to growing the regional database and making it easier for commuters to find and maintain shared ride arrangements. Other areas included in marketing outreach include transit, bicycling and teleworking.

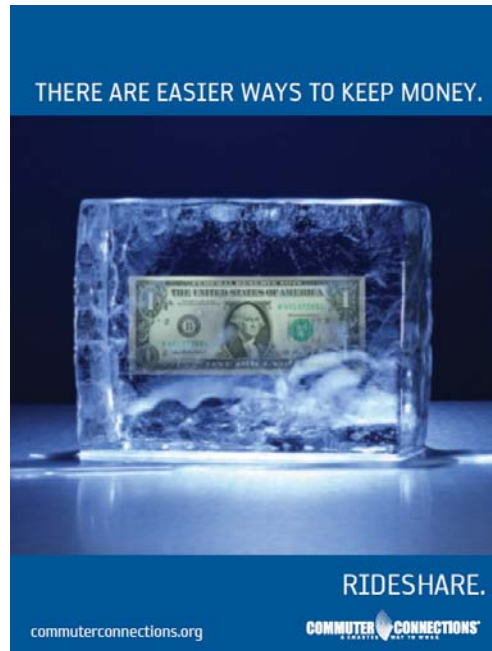
The objectives of the program include the following:

- Create a platform that promotes all network products and services individually while reinforcing the support provided by the umbrella program of Commuter Connections.
- Raise awareness of the Commuter Connections network and position the group as the region's first resource for alternatives to driving alone.
- Promote awareness of Ridematching services among commuters and increase applications for the program.
- Promote awareness of the GRH service among commuters and increase applications for the program.
- Use special events such as Bike to Work Day to encourage commuters to try an alternative form of transportation.
- Promote the growth and adoption of new carpools and vanpools in the region through innovative incentive programs like 'Pool Rewards.
- Recognize outstanding TDM practices of employers in the region through the Employer Recognition Awards.

## **Messaging Strategy**

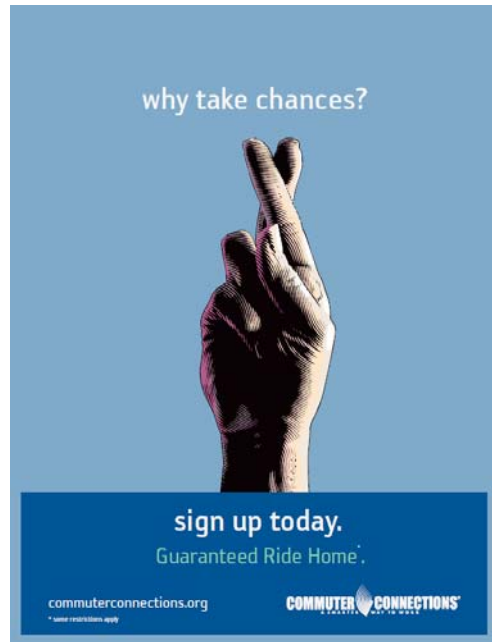
The FY2012 spring campaign Ridematching message is very direct, reminding commuters of the money to be saved through ridesharing.

As indicated in past surveys and supported by the market research, commuters are motivated to switch to alternative transportation primarily in order to save money. Over the years, consumers have developed numerous cost-cutting, penny-pinching ways to save money. This year's Rideshare campaign takes a light-hearted approach contrasting some extreme ways to save money with the simple one of sharing a ride. The visuals provide extreme examples of hiding money under a mattress or in a freezer, contrasting those ideas to sharing a ride, and reminds commuters "there's easier ways to keep your money". The call to action is to visit [commuterconnections.org](http://commuterconnections.org).



The radio spots paint extreme money-saving scenarios and capture the listeners' attention through the use of over-the-top sound effects to draw them in to Commuter Connections' message, sign-up to rideshare, save on gas, and keep their money. They are directed to [commuterconnections.org](http://commuterconnections.org) to sign up.

The message for this year's GRH campaign is to remind commuters that GRH exists as their safety net. No chances need to be taken, no luck is involved, commuters just sign up for GRH and have a ride home if they need it. Simple but powerful illustrations are used in the visuals to compare risk and chance versus the safety net of GRH.



Radio spots use unlikely but humorous situations of workers relying on luck or survival skills to avoid the chance of having to work late and miss their carpool. The level-headed colleague grounds the spot in reality with Commuter Connections' GRH message to register today for GRH to be prepared for the unexpected emergency or unscheduled overtime.

### Spring FY2012 Media Flowchart

MEDIA	FEB			MAR				APR					MAY				JUN				
			27	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	21	28	4	11	18	25	
Rideshare																					\$149,851
GRH																					\$134,511
<b>Total Radio</b>																				<b>\$284,362</b>	
TV																					\$125,003
ONLINE																					\$39,950
Transit Signage*																					
Tyson's																					\$0
Fairfax																					\$0
<b>NET TOTAL</b>																				<b>\$449,315</b>	

- Rideshare
- GRH
- Rideshare & GRH

\*Donated Ad Space

### Media Objectives: Guaranteed Ride Home

The Guaranteed Ride Home program campaign utilized drive time radio to raise GRH awareness among commuters and increase applications for this program. GRH leverages alternative transportation by removing one of the perceived barriers, how to get home in case of an emergency.

**Target market** (from [2010 Commuter Connections Guaranteed Ride Home \(GRH\) program Survey Report](#)):

- 35-54 years old (63%)
- Caucasian (68%) and African-American (20%)
- \$80,000+ annual household income (80%), \$120,000+ annual household income (50%)
- Commute of more than 30 miles/45 minutes
- Live in Virginia (65%) or Maryland (32%), with a special emphasis on Prince William (17%) and Fairfax Counties (13%); work in D.C (63%) and Virginia (26%)

### **Geographic Targeting**

Washington D.C. DMA

<b>GRH Spring Budget</b>	<b>Gross Dollars</b>	<b>COG Cost</b>
Radio	\$158,248	\$134,511
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>\$158,248</b>	<b>\$134,511</b>

## Media Objectives: Rideshare

The campaign to promote the Rideshare program uses a mix of traditional approaches to maintain awareness among commuters and increase applications.

**Target market** (from [FY 2009 Commuter Connections Applicant Database Annual Placement Survey Report](#)):

- 25-54 years old (82%), 35-54 years old (63%)
- Caucasian (64%) and African-American (20%)
- \$80,000+ annual household income (68%)
- Commute of more than 20 miles/30 minutes
- Live in Virginia (65%) or Maryland (33%); work in D.C. (49%) or Virginia (34%)
- Work for employers with 100+ employees (71%), work for employers with 1000 or more employees (41%)
- Work for federal agencies (50%) and private sector (31%)
- Professional (37%), Executive/managerial (30%), and administrative (16%)

## Geographic Targeting

Washington D.C. DMA

<b>Rideshare Spring Budget</b>	<b>Gross Dollars</b>	<b>COG Cost</b>
Radio	\$176,295	\$149,851
Television	\$147,062	\$125,003
Internet Banners	\$47,000	\$39,950
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>\$370,357</b>	<b>\$314,804</b>



## Brand Character

The Commuter Connections network wishes to be perceived as a network of organizations working to improve commutes. Through Commuter Connections' online ridematching system, commuters registering for the service will be given direct access to other commuters who are looking to carpool, as well as access to commute routes and options. As more people share the ride to work, they collectively affect the commute in a positive manner for the region through less traffic congestion and cleaner air.

The Washington D.C. metropolitan region and the area media are turn to Commuter Connections for information and answers to the region's commuting challenges. Commuter Connections is positioned as an innovative leader in transportation services and a major resource for transportation information.

## Radio

During the spring umbrella campaign, radio was used as an anchor medium for the campaigns. Focus was on exurb stations supplemented with D.C. news and sports stations and Total Traffic Network live traffic reads. The campaign also reached out to Spanish-speaking commuters with spots running on Romantica (WILC). The following stations were used during the campaign:

ESPN 980 (Sports)	Total Traffic Network (Clear Channel)	WAFY-FM (Key 103, Adult Contemporary) / WVEG-FM (106.9 The Eagle, Classis Hits)
WBQB (B101.5, Adult Contemporary)	WFLS-FM (93.3, Country)	WFRE-FM (99.9, Country) / WFMD-AM (930, News/Talk)
WILC-AM (Romantica 900 AM, Spanish Contemporary)	WNEW (All-News 99.1 FM)	WTOP (News/Talk 103.5 FM)

WNEW and ESPN promoted Commuter Connections' GRH program only. WTOP promoted Commuter Connections' Ridematching program only. The exurb stations and Total Traffic Network promoted both programs on alternating weeks.

The following spots promoted the Ridematching program this spring:

### ***Ridesharing*:30—"Easier Ways to Keep Your Money 1"**

A dry tone is used to set the stage for Ridesharing as an easier way to keep your money, as opposed to more extreme measures such as freezing it, placing it under your mattress, or hiding it under a litter box.

***Ridesharing::30—“Easier Ways to Keep Your Money 2”***

A spirited announcer contrasts Ridesharing as the easier way to keep your money as opposed to radical ideas such as extreme couponing, discount dentistry, or reality show contestants. Over-the-top sound effects catch the listeners’ attention and add humor to the spot.

The following spots promoted GRH this spring:

***Guaranteed Ride Home::30—“Why Risk It”***

A worker inventories his good luck charms he has amassed in order to avoid having to work overtime and miss his carpool. His co-worker reminds him there’s no need to rely on good luck charms when he has GRH.

***Guaranteed Ride Home::30—“Why Chance It”***

A worker surveys the survival gear he has prepared in case he needs to work late and misses his ride home. His co-worker reminds him there’s no need to rely on survival gear when he has GRH.

**Television**

A television commercial has been produced for FY2012 spring’s Rideshare campaign. The commercial features a carpool singing the virtues of ridesharing while driving through downtown D.C.



The lyrics to the jingle are:

Good mornin' sun, love to see you shine (*see you shine!*)  
Lightin' up the highway as we're headin' down the line (*down the line!*)

Bye bye stress; hello to a buck or two  
When we pull together, there ain't nothin' we can't do

Life is rich when we're sharing the load (*together!*)  
Ridin' on down the road (female vocalist goes NUTS)

Voice over: "You may never make it big singing on reality tv... but you can still bring home big money when you Rideshare. Rideshare...at [commuterConnections.org](http://commuterConnections.org)"

The commercial is going to run on Fox TV's WTTG and ABC7 WJLA during the morning and evening news.

### **Internet Advertising**

An aggressive Internet component utilizing a number of local media sites that have performed well in the past is part of the spring campaign to promote the Ridematching program. The following sites are being used in the spring campaign:

- WUSA9.com
- WJLA.com
- NBCwashington.com (NBC4)
- WashingtonTimes.com
- Run-of-Site/Run-of-Network (ROS/RON) pop-under ads served to select websites of iii-interactive's publisher list

Ads are being placed on the home page and news section of the Washington Times; the home page, weather, traffic, and business pages of WJLA; the news, weather, and traffic pages of NBC4; and run-of-site on WUSA. Ad sizes include leaderboard (728x90), medium rectangle (300x250), wide skyscraper (160x600), and pop-under (720x300). The ads will run for four months with performance monitored throughout the campaign. Ad placements may be modified during the campaign to optimize performance.

The ads use the Rideshare visuals with a call to action to visit [commuterconnections.org](http://commuterconnections.org).


## Member Donated Placements for Signage

Donated bus tail space on Fairfax Connector buses will promote Commuter Connections' GRH program. Both Rideshare and GRH will be promoted in Tysons Corner Center parking garages on donated poster spaces.

### Fairfax Connector Bus Tails



THERE ARE EASIER WAYS TO KEEP MONEY.



**RIDESHARE.**

commuterconnections.org  
800.745.RIDE

**COMMUTER CONNECTIONS**  
A SMARTER WAY TO WORK

why risk it?



sign up today.

Guaranteed Ride Home.

commuterconnections.org  
800.745.RIDE

**COMMUTER CONNECTIONS**  
A SMARTER WAY TO WORK

\* some restrictions apply

## 'Pool Rewards

The 'Pool Rewards program is being expanded to include vanpools operated by vanpool companies under contract with MWCOG that originate in Maryland or the District of Columbia. The 'Pool Rewards for Vanpools is a service operated by Commuter Connections and is designed to reduce rush hour congestion and improve air quality in the region. Newly formed commuter vanpools receive a monthly financial incentive that helps to offset monthly lease costs.



In order to support the expansion of the program, the 'Pool Rewards logo was revised to encompass vanpools as well as carpools. Initial concepts have been developed for a magnet or decal to be placed on vans to designate them as part of the program. A double-sided rack card will be designed to promote the program. One side of the card will promote carpools and the other will target vanpools.

Media options have been recommended and a 'Pool Rewards campaign is scheduled to begin at the end of April or beginning of May.

# 'POOL REWARDS

it pays to rideshare

Join or start a new carpool and  
claim your 'Pool Rewards today!\*

Just 2 days a week to cash in!

If you drive alone to work,  
sign up to carpool 2+ days a week  
for three months, and you may qualify!

Get \$2/day for each day  
in an eligible carpool (max \$130 pp).  
Registration required.

Apply online!  
(we can help with partners)

\* Additional rules and limitations apply.



commuterconnections.org 800.745.RIDE

'pool together, get more.





## Special Events

### Bike to Work Day

On May 18, area commuters will leave their cars at home to participate in the Bike to Work Day event. In preparation for the event, a sponsorship drive helped reach our goal to pay for 11,000 event T-shirts. In-kind sponsorships were also secured through Whole Foods to provide food and beverage for many of the pit stops.

Commuter Connections will be hosting a new Bike to Work Day website, [biketoworkmetrodc.org](http://biketoworkmetrodc.org), which will be launched in March.

Posters and rack cards will be sent to employers and employees through various distribution channels in order to create awareness and encourage registration. A Spanish version of the poster was also created.



Radio advertising will target adults ages 25-49, slightly skewed toward men, with a household income above \$30,000. Facebook and Twitter will be used to engage with commuters and drive registration to the website.

## Fifteenth Annual Employer Recognition Awards

The Commuter Connections Annual Employer Recognition Awards program recognizes employers who voluntarily initiate worksite commute programs to assist their employees. Winners and nominees will be honored at an awards ceremony on June 26th at the National Press Club. A Selection Committee of TDM professionals throughout the region met in mid March to review employer nominations. The meeting was moderated by Arch Street Communications. An invitation and program agenda will be produced for this event. After the event, a ¼ page advertisement will be placed in the Wall Street Journal (Washington/Baltimore edition).

Efforts continue to provide award winners with year-long recognition for the work they are doing to address some of the region's commute challenges. Beginning this year, winners will receive a digital landmark that can be placed on print material or their website identifying their organization as a winner of a Commuter Connections Employer Recognition Award.



## Additional Marketing, Outreach, and Earned Media

### Commuter Connections Newsletter and Federal ETC Insert

A Winter edition of the Commuter Connections Newsletter was produced during the second half of FY2012. The six page 4-color newsletter was distributed to approximately 5,000 employers. It was also placed in .pdf format on the Commuter Connections web site. Newsletters with a black and white federal ETC insert were distributed in PDF form to federal Employee Transportation Coordinators via GSA and also placed online at [www.federaletc.org](http://www.federaletc.org).

Issue 1, Volume 14, Winter 2012

WHAT'S INSIDE

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- 2 Make the Most of Your Transit Card and Cardholder
- 3 RealWorld Experts in Transit

**COMMUTER CONNECTIONS**  
A SMARTER WAY TO WORK

The Commuter Information Source for Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia

**BIG CHANGES TO METRO'S SMARTBENEFITS® PROGRAM**

In January, Metro's SmartBenefits® program began following IRS requirements to separate parking and transit benefits to restrict commingled use (Internal Revenue bulletin 96c, Rul. 2006-57).

This means that employees no longer need to wait in line to load SmartBenefits® onto their SmartTrip® cards at farecard machines. Through Autoload, SmartTrip® cards access accounts and deduct fare or parking fees when tapped to a Metrorail faregate, bus farebox or Metro parking target.

Autoload works on Metrorail, as well as Metrobus and the following regional bus systems: ART, OJE, DASH, DC Circulator, Fairfax Connector, Loudoun County Transit, PRIC, OneRide, Ride On and TheBus. Transit benefits may also be reallocated for Metrolinks, MARC, VRE, MTA commuter buses, registered vanpools and independent bus services.

Employers determine what happens to any unused benefits, which are either credited back to the employer's account or rolled over to the employer's accounts for future use.

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**ELECTRIC VEHICLES WITH SOLO DRIVERS ALLOWED ON MARYLAND HOV LANES**

Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley, in an effort to "spur early consumer acceptance of electric vehicles," has signed two bills into law that contain important consumer incentives to purchase electric vehicles.

The first is a bill that will allow drivers of plug-in electric vehicles to use the Maryland HOV lanes, regardless of the number of passengers. Drivers will need to obtain and display a special HOV permit on the vehicle, which can be applied for and issued by the dealer at the time of purchase.

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Winter 2012

**FEDERAL ETC UPDATES**  
Employee Transportation Coordinator

**FEDERAL COMMUTER TRANSIT BENEFIT UPS AND DOWNS**

Established in 1993 as part of the federal tax code section 132, Qualified Transportation Fringes (commuter benefits) were put in place to provide tax incentives to employees in order to encourage their use of mass transportation and reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality. The law provided for monthly maximums on the amounts that could be excluded from gross income and were therefore not taxed as ordinary income.

In 2008, transit and vanpool expenses increased to \$115. In January 2009, the maximum cap increased to \$120 per month. In February 2009, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) temporarily raised the transit benefit statutory limit to \$230 per month. While the ARBA amount was not intended to be permanent, hopes were on extending it for another year. Needless to say the transit/parking parity expired on December 31, 2011, reducing the transit benefit thousands of federal employees had come to rely on to get to and from work.

Transit advocates having not given up are trying to include the transit benefit parity of \$240 back into negotiations of future payroll tax holidays. Regardless, it's still a good idea to let your employees know that even at the lower benefit of \$125, transit and vanpool use is still cheaper than driving alone by car.

Despite a push by transit advocates and a group of legislators, as of January 1st commuter transit benefits dropped from the maximum of \$230 per month to \$125. The new figure reverted back to \$120 with a \$5 adjustment for inflation. As Congress focused over whether to extend the payroll tax cut at the end of last year, the higher commuter tax benefit quietly expired. Separately, the parking benefit increased by \$10 a month, to \$240. During the last two years transit benefits had finally been given equal footing with parking benefits in the federal tax code.

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### Commuter Connections Website Home Page Flash

To provide a fully integrated user experience, the home page flash on [commuterconnections.org](http://commuterconnections.org) will be revised to match the visuals from the new Rideshare and GRH campaigns.

## **Earned Media**

During the second half of FY 2012, earned media efforts continued to enforce and build on Commuter Connections' leadership role as an expert in addressing the region's transportation challenges. The regional media was supplied with a steady stream of information using both traditional and social media outlets, creating new contacts and enhancing existing relationships with key members of the media as well as with COG/TPB's Commuter Connections' program partners and stakeholders.

Commuter Connections' rideshare application rates have shown a 21% increase in calendar year 2011 over 2010. To identify and develop earned media opportunities for Commuter Connections to leverage the increase in applications, a comparison was conducted of the rate of Rideshare applications by month with the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index and Average Prices for the Washington-Baltimore, DC-MD-VA-WV region including:

- Housing (monthly cost of shelter including fuel and furniture)
- Transportation (monthly cost of transportation, including gas and maintenance)
- Gallon of Milk (national average)
- Gasoline

As a result, a press release was drafted identifying the economic factors that effect ridesharing participation.

## Performance Results

### Web Visits to Date

Month	2011 Web Visits	2012 Web Visits	+/-	+/- %
January	9,849	9,521	(328)	-3.33%
February	20,325	8,730	(11,595)	-57.05%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30,174</b>	<b>18,251</b>	<b>(11,923)</b>	<b>-39.51%</b>
March	12,013			
April	13,140			
May	11,079			
June	13487			

GRH and Rideshare application data and phone call counts will be included in the next issue of this report.