



**Guaranteed Ride Home
Customer Satisfaction Survey**
Results for Fiscal Year 2005
Draft Report

We'll get you home. Guaranteed.

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments



TITLE: Commuter Connections Guaranteed Ride Home Customer Satisfaction Survey Results for Fiscal Year 2005

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AGENCY: The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the region, and plays an important role as the regional forum for transportation planning. The TPB prepares plans and programs that the federal government must approve in order for federal-aid transportation funds to flow to the Washington region. The TPB became associated with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) in 1966. COG was established in 1957 by local jurisdictions to address regional concerns including growth, housing, environment, public health and safety, and transportation. Although the TPB is an independent body, its staff is provided by COG's Department of Transportation Planning.

Commuter Connections is a regional network of transportation organizations coordinated by the TPB. Established in 1974, Commuter Connections offers free commuter services to help both businesses and their employees find the best available commuting options to improve traffic congestion and improve air quality through lower auto emissions. Primary services of Commuter Connections include ridematching for carpools and vanpools, administration of the Guaranteed Ride Home program, coordination of an employer outreach program including telework, marketing of alternative commute options, and maintaining informational commuter kiosks throughout the region.

Funding for Commuter Connections is provided by :

District of Columbia Department of Transportation
Maryland Department of Transportation
Virginia Department of Transportation
United States Department of Transportation

ABSTRACT:

This report presents the results of a survey of all Guaranteed Ride Home trip recipients during fiscal year 2005 (July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005). The survey was designed to gauge the level of satisfaction of commuters who utilized the GRH service. Specifically, with regard to their experience with the reservations staff, taxi or rental car service, response time and overall service.

The GRH program was started in 1997 to eliminate a key barrier to using alternative modes, commuter fear of being stranded without transportation in the event they need to get home due to an unexpected emergency or unscheduled overtime.

PUBLICATION:

The final adopted report will be published on the Commuter Connections website at www.commuterconnections.org under the Resources, Publications section.

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Background

Guaranteed Ride Home Program Description

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) through its Commuter Connections program, under the auspices of its funders, has operated the Guaranteed Ride Home program (GRH) since January 1997. A “commuter insurance” program, GRH is designed to encourage ridesharing and transit usage by providing a way home for qualifying commuters in the case of a personal emergency or unexpected overtime when their normal alternative commute mode is not available. Many area workers who consider switching commute modes from SOV to carpools, vanpools, and transit are concerned about being “stranded at work” if they unexpectedly have to leave before or after standard work hours. GRH eliminates this concern, and encourages ridesharing, taking transit, bicycling and walking to work. Commuters who use these transportation modes twice a week are provided with four free rides home per year. Alternative mode commute practices reduce the number of automobiles on the road and help the region toward air quality goals.

The GRH program’s Participation Guidelines used during FY 2005 are provided in the Appendix of this report, and a full listing of the program’s current qualifications, limitations on its usage, and a more complete description of the process involved in registering commuters for the program may be obtained online at the Commuter Connections website, <http://www.commuterconnections.org>.

Customer Satisfaction Survey and Methodology

The customer satisfaction survey for GRH was conducted as an ongoing study for each month throughout the fiscal year. All commuters who obtained a free ride home through the program received a survey response card for each ride taken. The accompanying cover letter (*see* Figure 1) informed commuters of the purpose and voluntary nature of the survey, and the postage-paid, self-mailing response card (*see* Figure 2) allowed for quick and easy submission of responses on the part of survey respondents. The same questionnaire has been used every year since the program’s inception in 1997, allowing for a direct comparison with all fiscal years. The survey card allows respondents to rate the GRH service and provide comments and suggestions with complete anonymity. However, despite the ability to remain anonymous, some respondents provided their name with their responses. In some instances with their consent, these respondents have been featured in local and regional newspaper articles and some of their comments have also been placed onto the Commuter Connections web site.

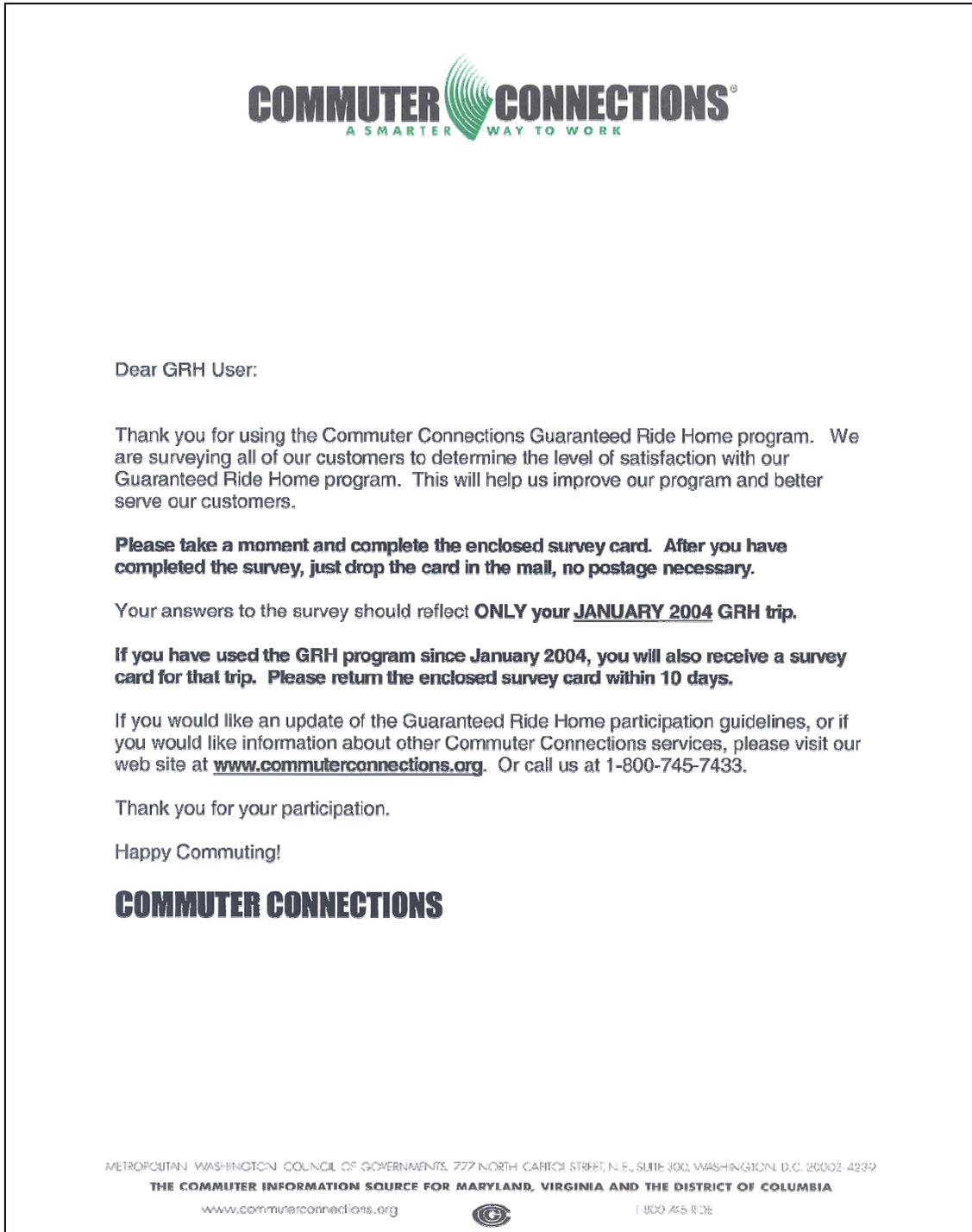


Figure 1 | Sample cover letter sent with survey card

Survey Design

The survey consisted of four multiple-choice questions, each relevant to a specific aspect of GRH, and a section for the respondent to write suggestions on improving the service. The four questions provide insight into customer opinions regarding the different operational functions of GRH, while the section for suggestions provides an open ended area to comment about these functions or to offer general feedback. The multiple-choice questions ask the respondent to rate the different aspects of the service by circling one of four responses—“Poor,” “Fair,” “Good,” or “Excellent.” Some respondents chose to write in “N/A,” did not circle a rating, or added a qualifier to the response, such as “very,” a plus symbol (+), or a minus symbol (-). Qualifiers were ignored in tabulating the survey results.

The performance areas of GRH were addressed by four multiple-choice questions are: reservations staff; transportation service; response time and overall service. “Reservations staff” refers to the operators who answered telephone calls from commuters requesting GRH service, verified the request in accordance with the official GRH participation guidelines, and arranged the ride for the commuter. These operators are employees of Diamond Transportation Services, Inc., which provided this service under a contractual arrangement with COG. “transportation service” refers to the modes of transportation (e.g. taxi, rental car service) and the affiliated organizations (e.g. xyz cab company, Enterprise Rent-a-car) who provided the trip from the workplace to the final destination. The transportation services used for the GRH trip were selected by Diamond Transportation based on the severity of the emergency, distance traveled and customer preferences. By asking questions specific to certain functions of the GRH program, areas can be easily identified and measured as either receiving high service marks or areas that are in need of greater improvement.

**Thank you for using our Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH).
We want to know how you feel about our GRH Program.**

Please take a moment and complete this card. Your response is greatly appreciated. Mail this card to us or fax it to 202-962-3218

Please circle one response for each question.

<p>How would you rate the service you received from our GRH trip reservations staff? Poor Fair Good Excellent</p> <p>How would you rate the taxi or rental car service? Poor Fair Good Excellent</p> <p>How would you rate our response time? Poor Fair Good Excellent</p> <p>Overall, how would you rate our GRH service? Poor Fair Good Excellent</p>	<p>What suggestions do you have to improve our GRH service?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
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Visit our web site at www.commuterconnections.org



COMMUTER CONNECTIONS
A SMARTER WAY TO WORK

Guaranteed Ride Home Program

1-800-745-RIDE

We'll Get You Home. **Guaranteed.**

Figure 2 | Sample survey response card

Response Rates

Of the 2,924 surveys distributed in fiscal year 2005, 1,050 completed surveys were received, for a 35.9% response rate. This represents the highest number of surveys sent and received.

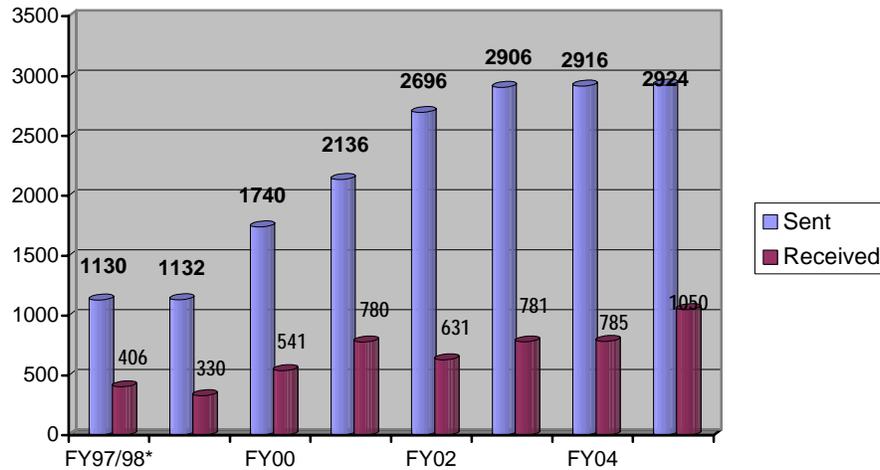


Figure 3 | Number of surveys sent and received since program inception

Response rates typically fluctuate from year to year, but did remain steady at about 27% over a two year period between FY03 and FY04. Response in FY05 increased significantly by nine percentage points to nearly 36%. The large drop in response rate for fiscal year 2002 surveys was due to postal service disruptions following September 11, 2001 events which resulted in the temporary closing of the Brentwood Post Office facility in Washington DC.

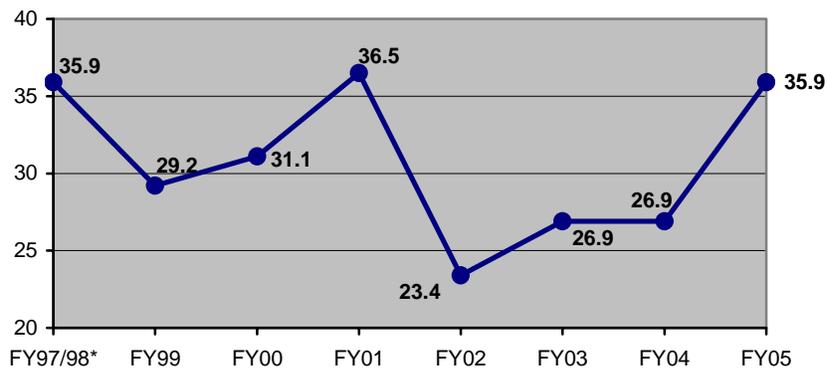


Figure 4 | Response rates in percentages over all fiscal years.

Fiscal Year 2005 Survey Results

This section indicates survey results received from 1,050 respondents for the fiscal year 2005. Upcoming sections of this report will provide a comparison of results with previous fiscal years (1997 through present). For further clarification of the “Survey Design,” please see page three for the rationale behind each question, explanation of some of the terms used, as well as an example of the survey response card that was used.

Some respondents did not answer all four questions. As a result, response totals to some questions may not equal to the total number of survey respondents. Furthermore, percentages may not add up to 100, due to rounding.

Question One: Reservation Staff

How would you rate the service you received from our GRH trip reservation staff?

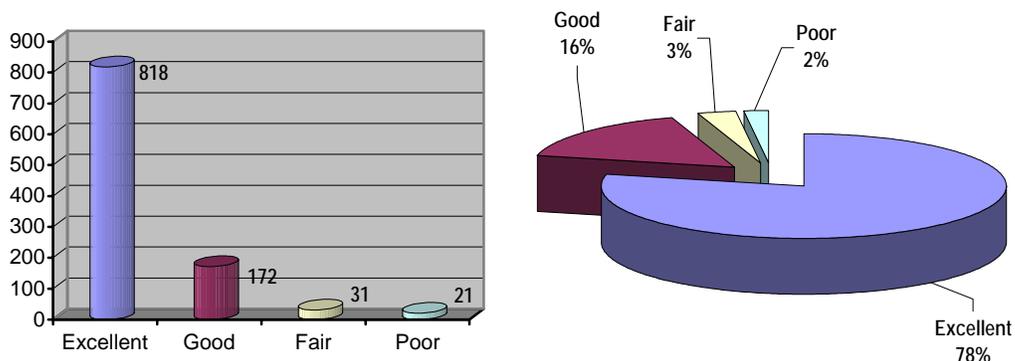


Figure 5 | Number and percentage of responses received for Question One

Question Two: Transportation Service

How would you rate the taxi or rental car service?

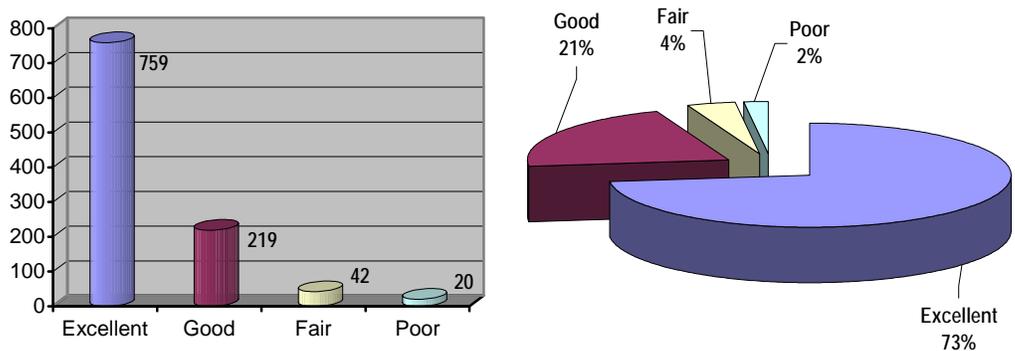


Figure 6 | Number and percentage of responses received for Question Two

Question Three: Response Time

How would you rate our response time?

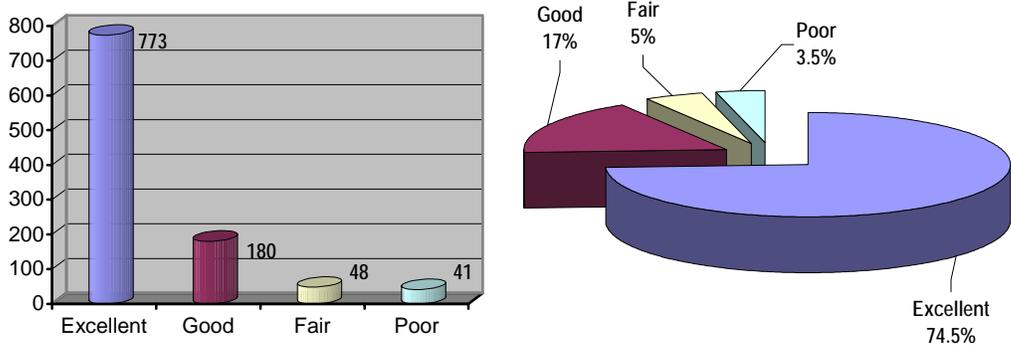


Figure 7 | Number and percentage of responses received for Question Three

Question Four: Overall Service

Overall, how would you rate our GRH service?

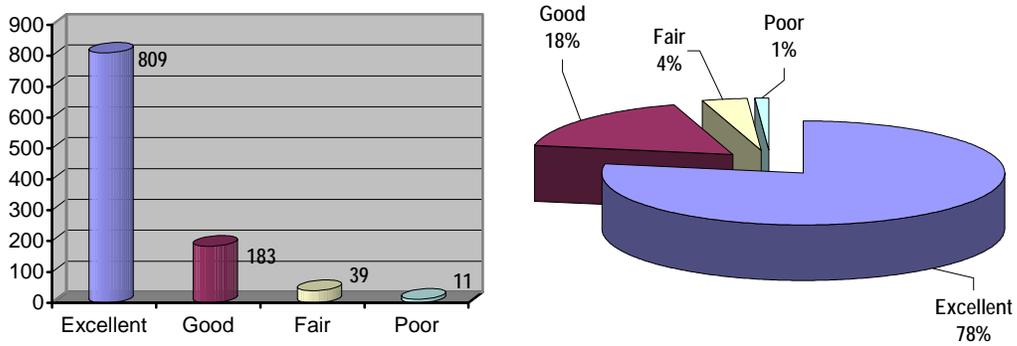


Figure 8 | Numbers and percentages of responses received for Question Four

Excellent/Good vs. Fair/Poor: All Questions

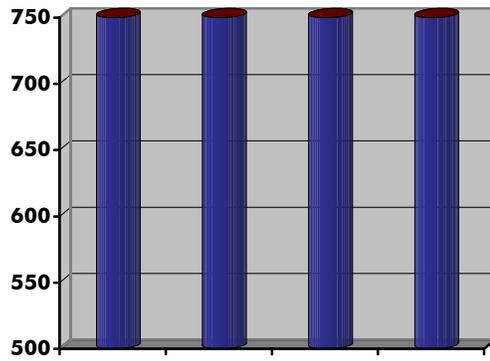


Figure 9 | Number of responses based on combined satisfaction levels

Written Responses

In addition to four multiple-choice questions, survey respondents were asked “What suggestions do you have to improve our GRH service?” This open ended comments area generates a wide array of compliments, complaints, suggestions as well as a few comments. This feedback is valuable for assessing customer attitudes in general and attitudes regarding specific service areas. 434 of the respondents, 41% provided written responses in FY05. The compliments outweighed the complaints by a 2.5 to 1 margin, 60% to 24%.

Many respondents provided feedback that fell into more than one category. For example, a respondent wrote that “My cab did not show up as expected, but the GRH staff was friendly and helpful.” This response included both a complaint and compliment and was recorded in both categories. Therefore, the number of responses attributed in each category will add up to more than the total number of surveys that had a written response.

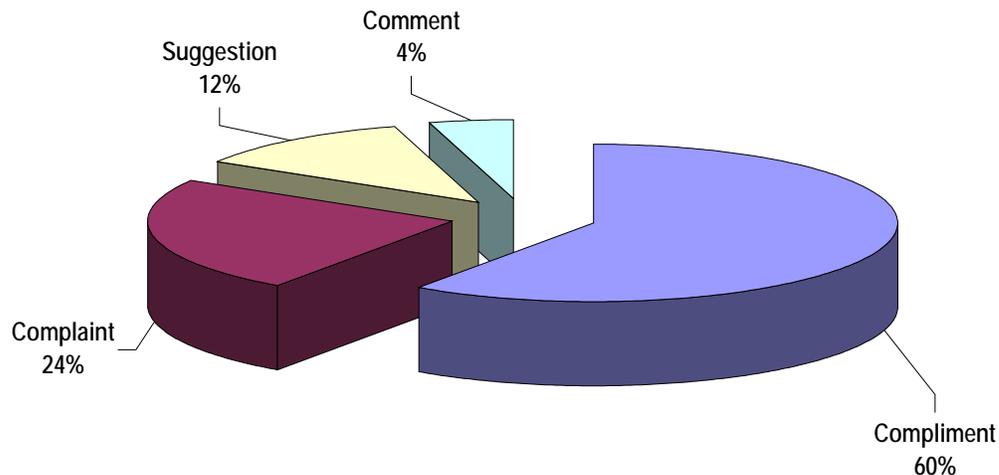


Figure 11 | Percentage of written responses

Compliments

Positive feedback was by far the most common type of written response. Many were expressions of gratitude for the GRH service. Some commuters explicitly listed GRH as the main reason which allowed them to utilize an alternative commute mode. Many of the respondents provided personal stories about how GRH helped them during a crisis situation. Of the 277 compliments received, 85% or 236 of the responses were about the GRH service in general. Of the specific comments, 26 were regarding quick response times, 17 were about the great reservations staff, and 32 compliments were pertaining to the kindness and courteousness of the taxi drivers.

Samples of Actual Compliments from FY05

- *"It surprised me how quick and easy Guaranteed Ride Home was."*
- *"Very impressed- it's the first time I used it and it was exactly as advertised. "*
- *"I used GRH twice now and each time the service was timely and easy to use. The cab drivers were pleasant and helpful. They even waited until I was in my car and it started."*
- *"I was so impressed with the girl I spoke with on the phone. She was helpful and comforting. The taxi arrived in 15 min and I was on my way home. The taxi driver was very courteous and friendly."*
- *"The program is perfect as it is. The gentlemen who took me to my car was like an angel! He kept me talking and let me talk and cry on the day my mother had died."*
- *"My wife went into labor and I needed to get home fast. I was home 1/2 hour after I called GRH. Thank you!"*
- *"Came through in a clutch situation. Great work."*
- *"I would have been lost w/o it. I broke my ankle- the driver got me a wheelchair at the hospital. He was great. The nurses at USDA were great and have a good relationship with your service."*
- *"This was my first use of GRH and I was completely impressed and satisfied with the service."*
- *"You were there when I needed you! (family emergency) Thank you!"*
- *"When I called GRH, the woman I spoke with was so nice and the taxi came right away. I have recommended GRH to other commuters on my bus and metro. What a service!"*
- *"Thank you! My daughter was rushed to the hospital and my car was at the Park and Ride"*
- *"Your service is a vital part of the commute; without it, persons like me would be forced to drive another car into DC."*
- *"Great service. One of the main reasons that I take mass-transit to work."*
- *"Great first experience. Worked exactly as advertised"*
- *Great service. Without a service like this I don't know if I would continue to use my van pool. Thanks again*
- *this is truly a wonderful service. Knowing you can get home in case of emergency makes vanpooling a wonderful alternative for getting to work.*

Complaints

A total of 110 complained about their experience with the GRH service. However, eleven respondents who lodged a complaint also gave a compliment. A common type of complaint relates to "curt" reservations staff, 29 complaints centered on this area. Often this comes about when the staff has to ask some probing questions to determine whether one qualifies for the trip. Most commuters understand this as one of the necessary steps of the program, while some are put off by this process. To keep costs down, the reservation staff may also lean the commuter toward a rental car instead of a significantly more expensive taxi fare. They may also ask the commuter to supplement the trip with Metrorail for part of the distance. These recommended suggestions sometimes do not sit well with commuters who perceive their situation as one of vital importance. The staff however must differentiate between a "common emergency" and a "crisis emergency" when making such judgments.

39 complaints were centered around the service received from the various transportation services and included confusion about when the cab would arrive, where to pick it up and problems with identifying which cab was part of the GRH program. Additional issues included the attitude of the drivers, cab cleanliness, and the lack of knowledge the cab drivers had of the GRH program. Unfortunately, many of the taxi companies do a poor job of communicating the program to their drivers and some taxi drivers do not possess common sense customer service skills. Although problems and issues are discussed between the GRH contractor and the taxi companies, the filtering down of information to the drivers can be less than ideal. Ultimately, the taxi companies are responsible for the training of taxi drivers and Commuter Connections has little direct control over this aspect of the service.

Lastly, 29 respondents mentioned that the response time was inadequate, and 26 had general comments about their lack of stellar GRH service overall. Although some of these matters are out of COG's direct control, they are communicated to the presidents of the taxi companies when a series of complaints about that company are received. Progress has been made in the area of cab driver's understanding of the GRH program, but there is obviously more to be done.

Sample of Actual Complaints from FY05

"Taxi went to wrong work address. Had to call back to get taxi rerouted to correct address."

"Some of the drivers tend to use a lot of profanity which is very offensive."

"Reservation staff needs customer service training."

"Both times I've used GRH the taxis have been dirty and smelly. Additionally, the cab driver wasn't a very good driver."

"The taxi was late to arrive and then got out of the HOV lane to get gas."

"Please train your reservation staff on customer service. They were rude at times."

"Taxi drivers with less attitudes, I've used the program twice and each time I've had a driver with a bad attitude."

"The GRH program is very good but the response time of taxi was over an hour"

"The cab service took over an hour to arrive after the call. I'm thankful you exist, but the cab companies are a weak link."

"No A/C"

"Cab driver was at the wrong side of the street. I don't remember if he had the wrong address or what?"

Suggestions

Fifty-six suggestions were received, representing 12% of all written responses. Suggestions covered a wide variety of topics. Examples of suggestions included better communication about when and where to pick up the taxi, increasing the number of trips given, improving the cab company/driver's knowledge of the GRH program, better customer service etiquette for the reservations staff and drivers, providing better understanding that tips are not included, eliminating the need for commuters to pay the tip, eliminating the need to take Metrorail for a portion of the trip, expanding service past 10:00 p.m., allowing for departure from sites other than the workplace, and to send emails indicating renewal notice for the GRH program.

Sample suggestions:

- *"It would be nice to not have to take the train to the taxi."*
- *"The only improvement would be to increase the number of GRH offered per rider. Thanks!"*
- *"Allow departure from other than workplace."*
- *"They could be a little more polite on the phone. Otherwise, very good experience."*
- *"Please advise participants that taxi gratuities are NOT included"*
- *An email indicating renewal time would be helpful."*
- *"Have GRH driver call office upon arrival"*
- *"Arrange something so we don't have to pay the tip. Otherwise, everything was great."*
- *"Allow later pick up times from work due to OT"*

Comments

Only 20 (4%) of the written responses were general comments. "Comments" were defined as responses relatively benign in nature that did not identify any positive or negative aspect of the service, nor did it fall under the description of a true constructive suggestion. Most of the comments conveyed the message to "keep offering the service."

Sample comments:

Please let more people know you are available."

"Maintain the level service you are providing currently."

"All I can say is keep lobbying to ensure this benefit remains available."

Comparison to Previous Fiscal Years

Question One: Reservations Staff

How would you rate the service you received from our GRH trip reservations staff?

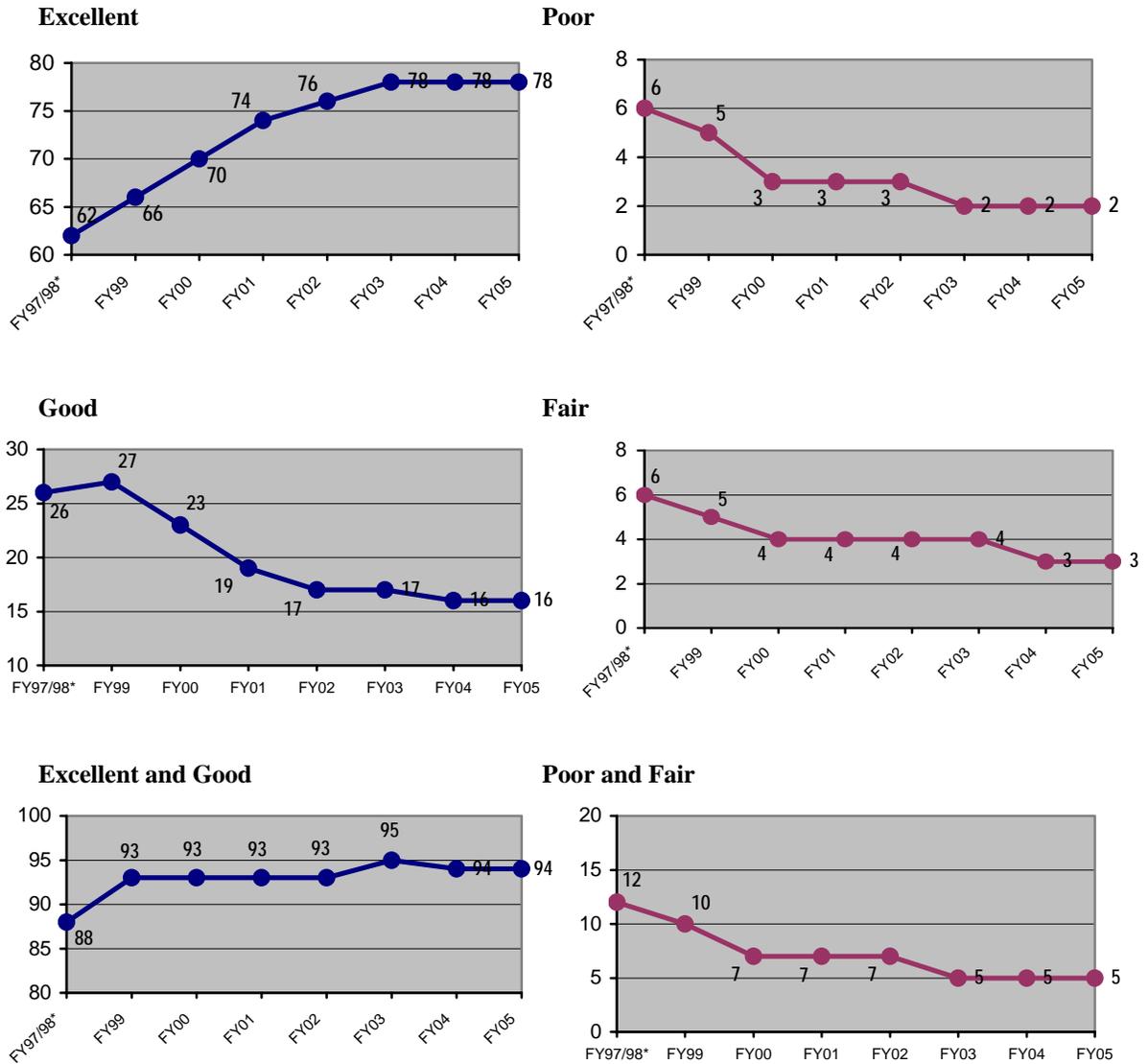


Figure 12 | Percentages of responses received for Question One over all fiscal years

Question Two: Transportation Service

How would you rate the taxi or rental car service?

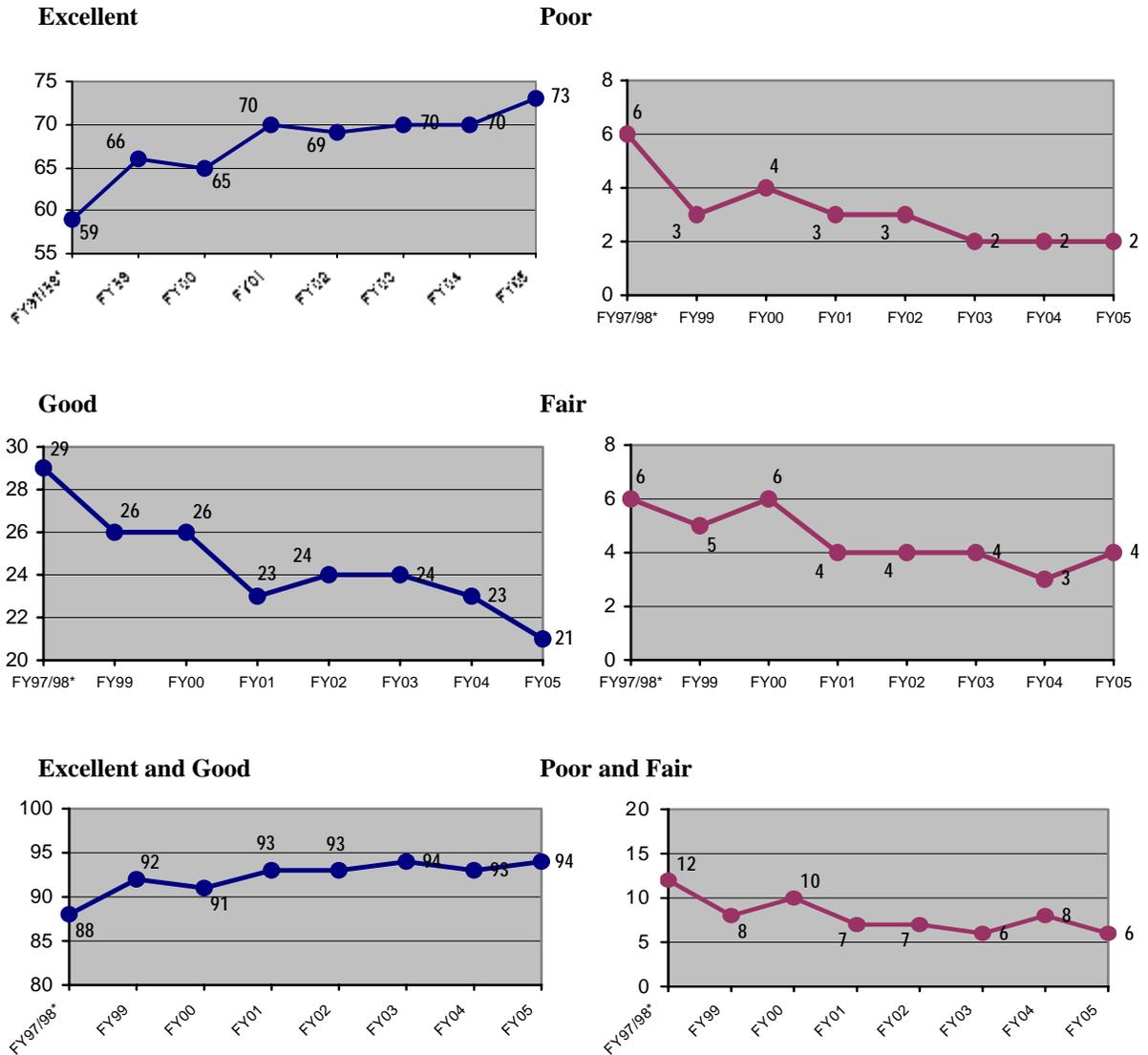


Figure 13 | Percentages of responses received for Question Two over all fiscal years

Question Three: Response Time

How would you rate our response time?

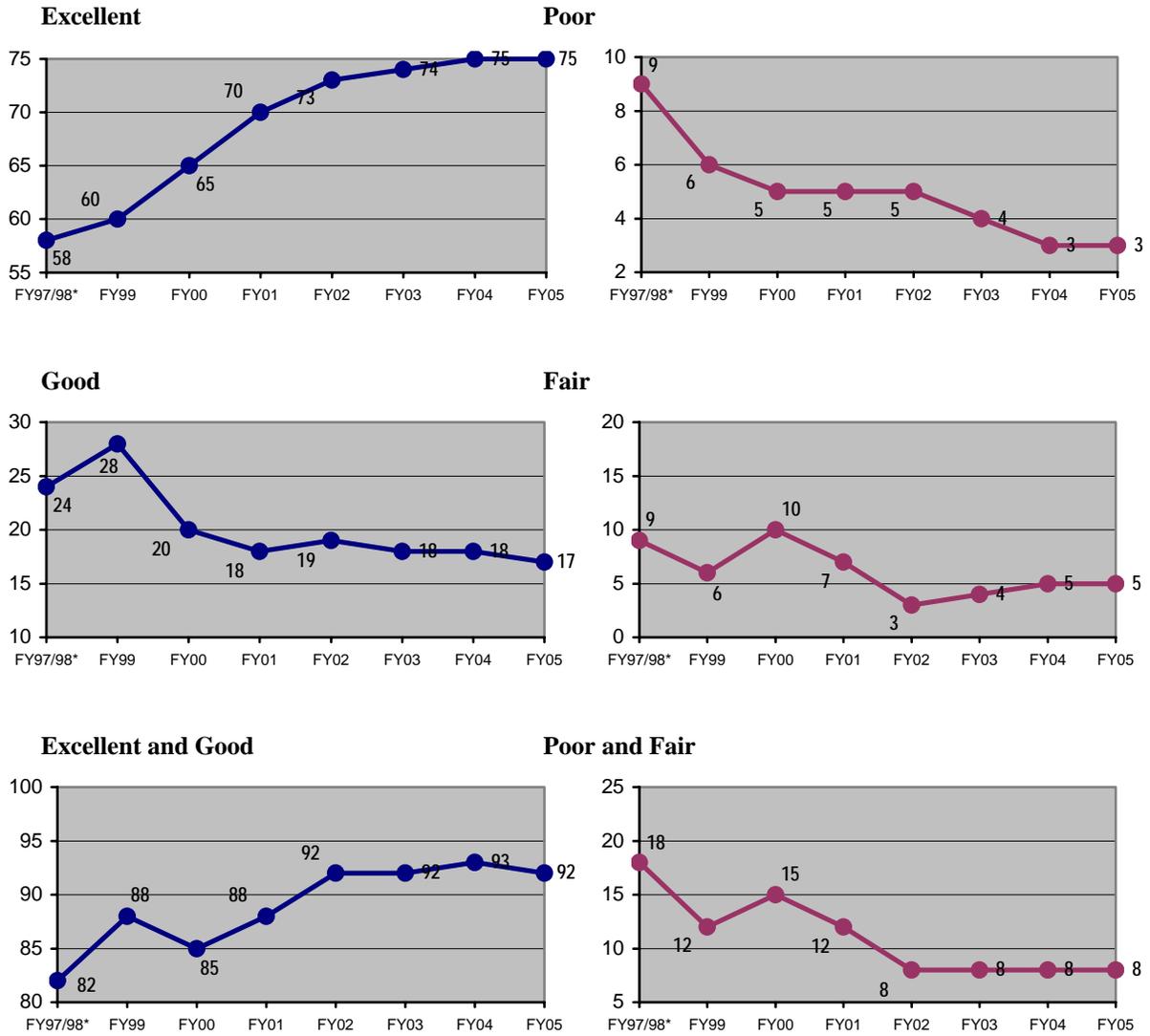


Figure 14 | Percentages of responses received for Question Three over all fiscal years

Question Four: Overall Service

Overall, how would you rate our GRH service?

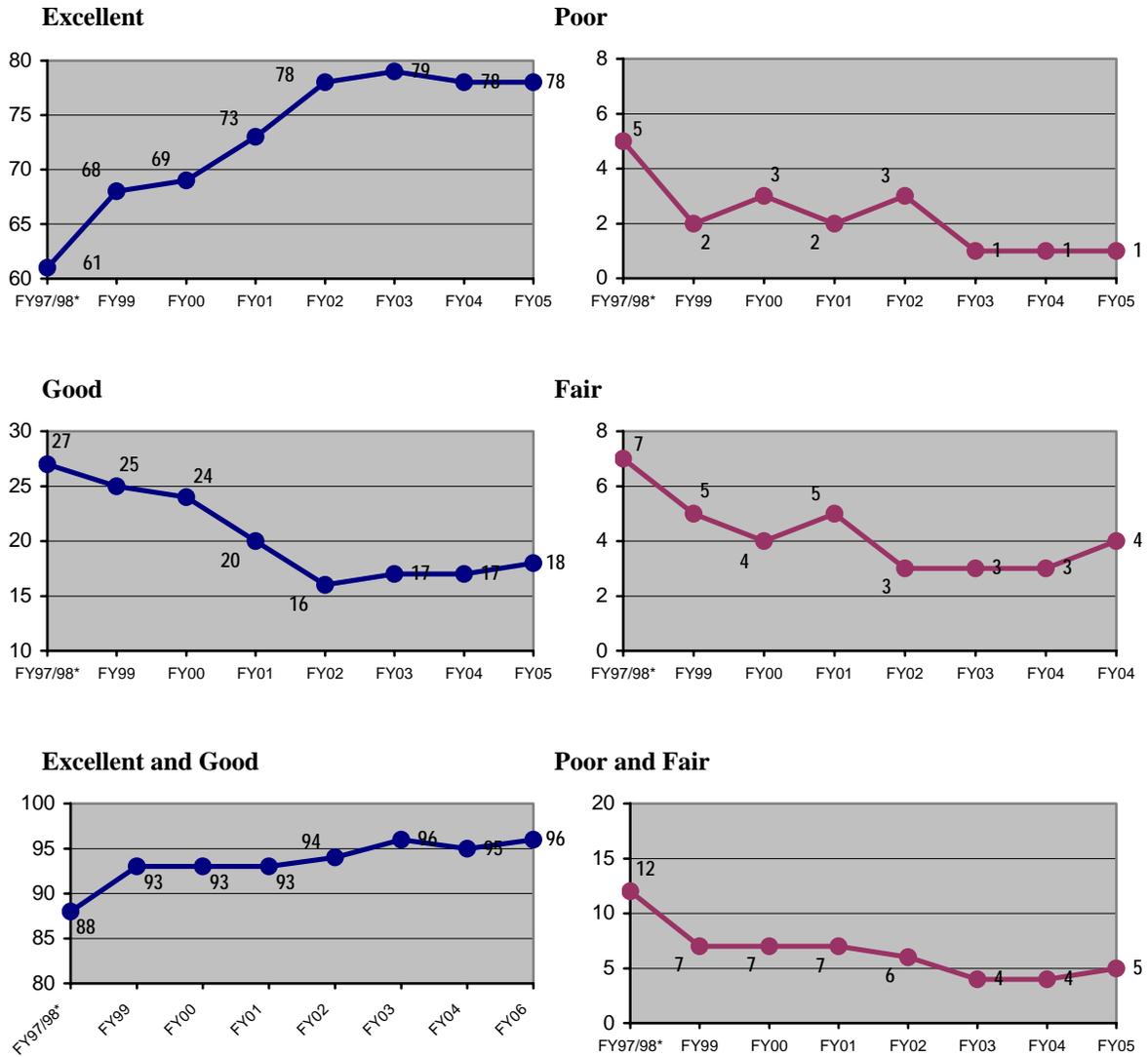


Figure 15 | Percentages of responses received for Question Four over all fiscal years

Response Data by Year, Question and Rating

Survey Questions	Responses	FY97/98	FY99	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05
How would you rate the service you received from our GRH trip reservations staff?	Excellent	62%	66%	70%	74%	76%	78%	78%	78%
	Good	26%	27%	23%	19%	17%	17%	16%	16%
	Fair	6%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%
	Poor	6%	5%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%
How would you rate the taxi or rental car service?	Excellent	59%	66%	65%	70%	69%	70%	70%	73%
	Good	29%	26%	26%	23%	24%	24%	23%	21%
	Fair	6%	5%	6%	4%	4%	4%	6%	4%
	Poor	6%	3%	4%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%
How would you rate our response time?	Excellent	58%	60%	65%	70%	73%	74%	75%	75%
	Good	24%	28%	20%	18%	19%	18%	18%	17%
	Fair	9%	6%	10%	7%	3%	4%	5%	5%
	Poor	9%	6%	5%	5%	5%	4%	3%	3%
Overall, how would you rate our GRH service?	Excellent	61%	68%	69%	73%	78%	79%	78%	78%
	Good	27%	25%	24%	20%	16%	17%	17%	18%
	Fair	7%	5%	4%	5%	3%	3%	3%	4%
	Poor	5%	2%	3%	2%	3%	1%	1%	1%
Totals	Excellent	60%	65%	67%	72%	73%	75%	75%	76%
	Good	26%	27%	23%	20%	19%	19%	19%	18%
	Fair	7%	5%	6%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%
	Poor	7%	4%	4%	3%	4%	2%	2%	2%

Figure 16 | Percentage of responses

Conclusions

The vast majority (96%) of the fiscal year 2005 survey respondents were satisfied with the overall service GRH provides, a point higher than the previous year. More than half (60%) of the written comments were compliments. 24% of respondents who provided written comments mentioned dissatisfied with certain aspects of the GRH service they received. However, of the 110 respondents who noted a negative comment, 73 or two-thirds of them still rated the GRH program as being excellent or good overall.

The vast majority of complaints received involve aspects of the taxi service that are beyond COG's control. For the aspects of the service within greater control by Commuter Connections, namely the service provided by the reservations staff, continuous customer training and information is provided to the reservations staff and other employees at the contractor.

Appendix

WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA GUARANTEED RIDE HOME PROGRAM PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

Guidelines are subject to change without notice. Call 1-800-745-7433 or visit www.commuterconnections.org for current Participation Guidelines.

1. Commuters must call Commuter Connections and receive authorization from Commuter Connections prior to using the GRH service. The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) Commuter Connections staff will issue authorization number(s) to participating commuters and/or company Employee Transportation Coordinator's (ETC's) to certify a GRH trip. Commuters will not be reimbursed for trips not authorized by Commuter Connections. Depending on the commuter's employment site, an Employee Transportation Coordinator (ETC) may have to be contacted first in order to make the appropriate arrangements for this service. Please check with your personnel department as to whether or not your site has a designated ETC.
2. Commuters must be officially registered with Commuter Connections before using the GRH service. Registered commuters are those who have received an official registration letter and GRH ID card from Commuter Connections. Commuters who have not been officially registered may use the GRH service one time, providing they meet all other eligibility criteria. This is referred to as a "one-time exception." Any commuter granted a one-time exception must be officially registered before additional GRH trips are granted. Registered and one-time exception commuters must be carpooling, vanpooling, taking transit, bicycling, or walking to their site of employment at least two (2) days per week and on the day they use the GRH service.
3. Registered commuters may use the GRH program up to four (4) times annually from their official registration date. Commuters who received a one-time exception, then officially register with Commuter Connections may use the GRH service three (3) more times within 12 months from the date of their one-time exception GRH trip.
4. Commuters must re-register annually to maintain their GRH registration. Commuters must contact Commuter Connections to re-register and update their registration information.
5. The GRH program may only be used in cases of unexpected personal or family emergency, unexpected illness, or unscheduled overtime. Cases in which the GRH program cannot be used include, but are not limited to the following: previously scheduled medical appointments, trips to the hospital or emergency room for a commuter that needs medical attention, personal errands, transit service disruptions and/or delays, business related travel, working late without a supervisor's request, weather emergencies, any type of building closings or evacuations, and natural acts of God.

6. Requests to use the GRH program because of unscheduled overtime must be made before the commuter's registered work end time, and a supervisor's verification will be required at the time of the request.
7. GRH service is available between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays and unplanned Federal Government office closings. GRH TRIPS MUST BE TAKEN BEFORE 10:00 P.M. Holidays include: New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, Martin Luther King's Birthday, Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving Day, Day after Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day.
8. In order to be eligible, a commuter must be physically working in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as defined by the United States Office of Management and Budget. The MSA includes the District of Columbia, the Maryland counties of Calvert, Charles, Frederick, Montgomery and Prince George's, the City of Alexandria and the Virginia counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William and Stafford, and all cities within the aforementioned counties.
9. Eligible commuters can live anywhere inside the MSA or in any of the following areas: Allegany, Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Calvert, Carroll, Cecil, Charles, Harford, Howard, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, or Washington counties, the City of Baltimore, and any point along the Upper Eastern Shore in Maryland; and Caroline, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Frederick, King George, Lancaster, Northumberland, Orange, Page, Rappahannock, Richmond, Shenandoah, Stafford, Spotsylvania, Warren, or Westmoreland counties, the City of Fredericksburg, or the City of Winchester in Virginia; and Jefferson County in West Virginia; and Adams, or York counties in Pennsylvania. Any other destination points outside of the above-mentioned areas will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
10. All GRH trips must originate from the commuter's work location. Depending on the nature of the emergency, and home and work locations, a commuter using the GRH service may be required to use a taxi, car rental, transit, or any combination of these services to reach their destination point. COG's Commuter Connections staff and/or their designees will determine the type of service used and will issue a valid GRH authorization number at that time.
11. Commuter Connections will pay for one vendor service and/or one transit service per request. If the GRH trip is made by a taxi, COG's Commuter Connections program will pay for all charges, excluding gratuity, to the destination. The commuter is responsible only for tipping the taxi driver. Cancellation on the part of the commuter of a GRH trip may count as one of the four annual trips.

If a transit option is used for the GRH, the participant will be mailed a transit reimbursement voucher. The transit reimbursement voucher must be submitted back to COG within thirty days of transit use in order for payment to be made. Please allow 45 days for reimbursement.

If the GRH trip is made by rental car, the commuter is responsible for signing a standard rental agreement, showing a valid driver's license, proof of insurance, providing a credit card number for collateral, returning the rental car within a 24-hour period, and the following charges: gasoline refueling charges, taxes, purchase of insurance (if necessary), additional rental charges if auto is not returned within a 24-hour period (unless Commuter Connections has given prior approval for additional rental time). The commuter will be responsible for any loss or damage to the rental car.

12. GRH is a free service provided by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG). COG will use its best efforts to provide the Guaranteed Ride Home in accordance with the guidelines shown above. By requesting assistance from the Guaranteed Ride Home program, the participant in the program explicitly acknowledges that COG assumes no liability for the timeliness of the GRH participating vendor(s) or any accidents that may occur on the conveyance.