

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS



COMMUTER OPERATIONS CENTER SUBCOMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, July 15, 2003

12:30- 2:30 p.m.

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

777 North Capitol Street, N.E.

First Floor, Training Center

Chairperson: Gary Sightler, Howard County

Vice-Chairperson: Shauna Brown, City of Alexandria

COG Staff Contact: Christopher Arabia, (202) 962-3385

Items addressed and issues discussed were as follows:

1. **Introductions** (see attached attendance sheet).

2. **Minutes of the May 20, 2003 Meeting**

The minutes of the May 20, 2003 meeting were approved as written.

3. **Nominations for Vice Chairperson**

Ms. Huntington and Ms. Washington were nominated for Vice Chairperson of the Subcommittee. The Subcommittee members will vote on the new Vice Chairperson at the next meeting, Tuesday, September 23, 2003.

4. **New Commuter Connections Web Site**

Mr. Arabia distributed a memo regarding the new Commuter Connections Web site. Mr. Arabia explained that current links for the GRH and rideshare applications will terminate after next week. As of July 1, the Commuter Connections Web site has a new application that combines the rideshare and GRH applications. Mr. Arabia asked the Subcommittee members that have a Web site that currently links to, or are planning to link to the rideshare or GRH application in the Commuter Connections Web site to use the link, <http://commuterconnections.com/cgi-bin>.

5. **Update on the e-Communicator System**

Mr. Rafique briefed the Subcommittee on the status of the e-Communicator system. Mr. Rafique explained that the new application combines the rideshare and GRH applications.

The new system is only used by COG staff to process applications. COG staff reviews the information for validation. The application information is then imported into the CCRS and GRH databases. Mr. Rafique explained that the new application for the commuter is a five-step process. Each step will ask for the appropriate information, such as, home address, current commute mode, jurisdiction, and how they would like to be contacted. The client will receive e-mails to follow-up with commuters who applied for rideshare information.

- Ms. Briscoe asked if the commuter will be able to select a landmark for the application. Mr. Rafique explained that the landmark field is not on the application form. The software will automatically select a landmark if the system does not recognize the address.
- Ms. Huntington asked if the client will be able to change the radius once the application is in the database. Mr. Arabia said that once the application is in the database, the client will be able to change the radius, landmark and other information.
- Ms. Adams asked who will do follow-up for clients who do not have representation. Mr. Arabia stated that COG will look into staff time regarding COG staff doing follow-up for clients without representation.
- Ms. Bunton asked if the commuter will receive transit information if it is requested. Mr. Arabia said commuters will still receive requested Metrobus/Metrorail information from WMATA, and clients should send other requested transit data when they open the commuter's record.
- Ms. Washington asked if the commuter will be able to select how they heard about us. Mr. Rafique said the field for how the commuter heard about us will be added to the application.
- Ms. Briscoe asked if a breakdown of the total number of applications will be forwarded to the jurisdictions. Mr. Arabia explained that application numbers will be shown in the monthly Performance Data report.
- Ms. Bunton suggested that the matchletters give the commuter notification that their local jurisdiction will contact them for follow-up. Mr. Ramfos stated that COG will add a statement to that effect to the matchletter.
- Mr. Sightler asked when would the jurisdiction receive the e-mail regarding the commuter. Mr. Rafique explained that the client will receive the e-mail before the matchletter is sent to the commuter.
- Ms. Briscoe stated that she does not have time to do follow-up with commuters. Mr. Ramfos stated that the e-Communicator system allows clients to have more time for follow-up considering that e-Communicator eliminates manual entry for applications from the web site.

- Mr. Ramfos stated that COG staff is continuing to update the software and asked the Subcommittee to contact COG for feedback regarding the new e-Communicator system.

6. CCRS Software Data Files Update

Mr. Balsamo briefed the Subcommittee on the status of updating the CCRS street centerlines and transit data files. Mr. Balsamo explained that street file data for Montgomery County, Prince George's County and the District were updated with new 2003 jurisdiction centerline data. Virginia COG member jurisdictions were updated to 2001 jurisdiction data. Street data for jurisdictions in Baltimore Metropolitan Council's service area were updated with 2003 data purchased from BMC. All other jurisdictions were updated with TIGER 2000 files. COG staff is waiting on more updates from VDOT for Northern Neck.

Transit file updates were completed for WMATA including related bus service for Ride-On, PRTC, Fairfax connector, CUE, The Bus and DASH. Updates for the MTA bus routes were completed. Mr. Balsamo stated that park & ride lot data has been updated and asked the Subcommittee to inform COG staff of any further updates. Mr. Balsamo has completed transit updates for Frederick TransIT.

Mr. Balsamo stated that the CCRS data files will be updated annually. Mr. Arabia said that COG staff will schedule site visits to give new street data, park & ride and transit data to COG member jurisdictions. Mr. Arabia also mentioned that the park & ride lot for the Carter Barron should not be published. A representative from the National Parks Service stated that although commuters park on the lot it is not an official park & ride lot.

7. Upcoming Fairs and Promotions

The City of Alexandria will participate in a fair next month for the U.S. Patent Trademark Office whose office is moving to the area. The City also participated in the Alexandria Birthday Celebration that was held on Saturday, July 12th.

Harford County will participate in the Farm Fair from July 24th through July 27th.

Tri County Council will host an Airport Shuttle Fair on Thursday, July 31st. Ms. Briscoe requested that COG staff participate. Since the Fair is geared to employers Mr. Ramfos suggested that Mr. Hersey, COG's TDM Specialist, attend.

- Ms. Capelli stated that Ms. Bouse usually will send letters to clients regarding future transportation fairs. Ms. Capelli asked what is the most effective way to contact the Subcommittee for future transportation fairs and how soon should they be notified. Mr. Sightler suggested using e-mail to contact the members.

Ms. Briscoe suggested that the members be contacted three weeks before an event.

8. Membership Fee

Mr. Ramfos said staff has discussed and is recommending to discontinue billing for telephone charges and postage for FY04, however, the annual membership fee will remain as is. Mr. Sigtler asked why COG members, pay a lower annual fee than non-COG members. Ms. Adams stated that the higher fee for non-COG members seems unfair because they receive the same service as COG members who pay less. Mr. Ramfos explained that the current fee structure has remained the same for more than ten years. The Commuter Connections Subcommittee developed the fee structure, and decided that non-COG members should pay more because COG members pay for COG overhead and administration support and other COG organizational expenses through their COG membership fees.

Ms. Adams asked for an explanation of the four hundred dollars per site visit fee. Mr. Arabia stated that the four hundred dollar fee is for CCRS software installation and when COG staff must make a site visit to repair problems caused by the client. Ms. Adams stated that she thinks some clients have been charged four hundred dollars for site visits that did not include installation. Mr. Ramfos asked Ms. Adams to send him the invoices for review and COG would credit the client if any fees were charged incorrectly.

Ms. Stewart-Byrd asked if the twenty-seven hundred dollar non-COG member Commuter Connections membership fee is for just one computer. Mr. Arabia explained that the jurisdiction is charged the fee per computer. Ms. Stewart-Byrd stated the fee for non-COG members is more than half of what COG members pay and requested a breakdown of the current fee structure. Mr. Ramfos stated that at the next meeting COG will provide a detailed breakdown of the services clients receive from COG for their Commuter Connections annual membership fee. Mr. Ramfos stated that the fee includes services for COG's staff time for application data entry, the 1-800 and Help phone lines, technical support, software programming, maintenance of the CCRS server and master database, and other services. Mr. Rafique stated that technical support is provided for three computer operating systems used by clients. Ms. Snead replied that COG staff has not fulfilled her request over the past year regarding a font change for her local matchletter. Mr. Hall stated that Ms. Sandoval contacted Ms. Johnson on 7/11/03 regarding a problem with missing commuters and has not received a response. Ms. Johnson stated that she was out of the office on 7/11/03 through 7/14/03 and has not received a voicemail or phone call from Ms. Sandoval. Ms. Bowles stated that she contacted Ms. Johnson regarding several commuters that were missing. Ms. Johnson stated that Ms. Bowles was contacted regarding her missing commuters and requested that she reenter the commuters. Ms. Washington stated that her requests have been handled promptly by COG and that she received good customer service. Mr. Arabia reminded clients to call the Help Line and not staff's personal phone numbers, because staff may not be in the office and no one can access a staff personal voice mail. Whereas, the Help Line voice mail can be accessed by all COG Commuter Connections staff. Mr. Arabia stated that those clients not happy with the customer service they receive should call him and let him know about the situation, or call Mr. Ramfos. Mr. Sigtler stated that in the interest of time the meeting must come to an end. The Membership fee issues will be continued at the next meeting, Tuesday, September 23, 2003.

9. Client Site Status

Mr. Arabia distributed the Client Status Report. Mr. Sightler said in the interest of time, unless anyone had any questions regarding the status report, the information from the hand out was sufficient.

10. Hot Topics/Other Business

In the interest of time the Subcommittee did not have further discussions on hot topics or other business because issues were discussed during other agenda items.

11. Set Agenda for Next Meeting

Attendees were encouraged to contact Mr. Arabia to request agenda topics for the next meeting.

Mr. Sightler requested that the discussion of membership fees be continued as an agenda item for the next meeting.

The next meeting of the Commuter Operations Center Subcommittee will be on Tuesday, September 23, 2003 at 12:00 p.m.