

# METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS



## Commuter Connections Subcommittee

### MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, September 23, 2003

**CHAIR: Mr. Ronald Mitchell, District Department of Transportation**  
**VICE CHAIR: Robin Briscoe, Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland**  
**STAFF CONTACT: Nicholas Ramfos (202) 962-3313**

#### **Item #1      Introductions (see attached attendance sheet)**

Mr. Ronald Mitchell, Chair of the Subcommittee, called the meeting to order at 10:10 am and each attendee made introductions.

#### **Item #2      Minutes of July 23, 2003 Meeting**

The Subcommittee approved the minutes as written.

#### **Item #3      Announcement of New Vice Chair** *Announcement of the new Vice Chair for the Subcommittee.*

Mr. Mitchell stated that the Nominating Committee met in July by conference call and announced that Ms. Sharon Affinito with Loudoun County was nominated as the Commuter Connections Subcommittee new Vice Chairperson. The Subcommittee approved the nomination.

#### **Item #4      Change of Chairperson**

Ms. Robin Briscoe, Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland announced that she will be the new Chair for the Commuter Connections Subcommittee. Ms. Briscoe presented Mr. Mitchell with a certificate of appreciation expressing gratitude and appreciation for exemplary service during his term as Chair of the Commuter Connections Subcommittee, September 2002 through August 2003 on behalf of Commuter Connections and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

Mr. Mitchell expressed his sincere gratitude in receiving the certificate and stated that it was a pleasure in chairing the Subcommittee over the past year, and wish the new Chair and Vice Chair great success.

**Item #5 Regional Mass Marketing TERM Update**

***Mr. Douglas Franklin, COG/DTP, briefed the Subcommittee on the progress of the Regional Mass Marketing TERM.***

Mr. Franklin stated that at the July 15<sup>th</sup> Subcommittee meeting the Subcommittee had Dudnyk Advertising agency join the meeting and Dudnyk played the three rough-cut radio commercials that were used during the focus group testing for the Subcommittee. The Subcommittee helped in part to narrow the concepts down from six to three. The three that were tested was Change your Day, The Testimonial Campaign, and the Emergency Commuter Technician (ECT). The Testimonial Campaign was the favorite spot of the focus group participants. The three concepts were played at the Special TPB Work Session held on July 16<sup>th</sup> for feedback from the TPB. The feedback received was consistent with the feedback from the focus group in favor of the Testimonial format. The recommendation of the TPB was to proceed with the Testimonial Campaign. The TPB asked Commuter Connections to conduct further research of a quantifiable nature on the testimonial campaign. The TPB recommended expanding the commercials into several spots carrying the same related testimonial theme and to include a variety of alternative transportation modes (transit, ridesharing, telecommuting) and reflect the metropolitan area's diversity. The TPB also asked staff to come up with several new tag lines for the campaign and test those as well.

Commuter Connections was asked to come back with a wrap up in September at the TPB Work Session. At the second TPB Work Session on the Mass Marketing Campaign held on September 17<sup>th</sup>, changes were made to one line in two spots. Before going into final production, staff wanted to make sure that the message was on track with the target audience to validate the testimonial campaign. An online survey was conducted of 100 commuters within the Washington DC Metropolitan area, who had to be commuting at least three times per week and they had to be commuting 10 miles or more. Survey participants included both SOV and alternate mode commuters. The tag line resonating real well with consumers was "Flexible Solutions for a Better Commute," which packages well the message that Commuter Connections is trying to convey. The "Flexible Solutions" brings the alternative options that Commuter Connections provides (ridematching, etc.) and "The Better Commute" relays the benefit to the consumer. Throughout the entire process, the state DOT funding agencies worked very closely with staff to position the campaign and helped develop the scripts for the radio commercials prior to the focus group testing and for the final production of the radio commercials. Mr. Franklin then played the radio commercials for the Subcommittee.

The Television spots will begin airing next week. The television commercial was filmed the week of September 15<sup>th</sup> and will be a 30-second spot. Mr. Franklin handed out the storyboard for the television commercial to the Subcommittee for review. Mr. Franklin added that the TPB had comments and as a results the Mass Marketing group went back and edited two of the radio commercial scripts based on the TPB's comments.

**Q.** Who was actually in attendance at the TPB Special Work Session?

- A. The Chair, Mr. Peter Shapiro was in attendance, Mr. Ronald Kirby, COG'S Director, Transportation Planning was also in attendance. Mr. Franklin stated that it was probably the same number of members in attendance as was at the first work session.
- Q. What is the target audience for the Telework spot? Should the ad be pointed towards another form of commuter since the Teleworker has already found a solution in Teleworking?
- A. The teleworker used in the spot was an SOV driver who got frustrated and went on ahead and looked into telecommuting and now has the opportunity to telework 1-day a week and takes the train on the days that he does not telecommute. This is the essence of what the message is trying to convey. All of the spots are former SOV drivers who have now found alternative solutions.

Mr. Franklin replayed the telework radio ad for the Subcommittee for clarification. He reported that the radio spots will start running the week of September 29<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Item #6      Employer Outreach Update**

***Mr. Mark Hersey, COG/DTP, briefed the Subcommittee on recent Employer Outreach TERM activities, including the FY04 conformity verification.***

Mr. Hersey handed out a sheet showing the final Employer Outreach conformity statement for FY2003 (***enclosed***). Mr. Hersey stated that the Employer Outreach program is nearing the 400 mark for companies that have TDM programs. The Employer Outreach program has been significantly successful. The groups in general have made great strives to get their programs off the ground. Mr. Hersey stated that the time for the Employer Ad-Hoc Group Meetings has been changed from 8:30 am till 2:00 pm and that the Ad-Hoc Group has a new Chair. The items that will be discussed at the Employer Outreach Ad-Hoc meeting will be the conformity report and the draft report of the FY03 Satisfaction Survey on Employer Outreach services, an update on Bike to Work Day, and the draft Bike to Work Day Report for 2003. Mr. Hersey added that there will be training coming up. The week of September 22<sup>nd</sup> there will be sales support calls occurring and on October 9<sup>th</sup> there will be a training work session with Sheila Lewin. She will be conducting a session on selling TDM.

Mr. Ramfos stated that in the meeting packet mailout to Subcommittee members, a copy of the Resolution on Amendment to the FY2004 Commuter Connections Work Program was sent to them for their information of the revision of the funding of the Employer Outreach Program Element for Northern Virginia. The TPB Program Committee approved the Resolution on September 5<sup>th</sup>. Adjustments are now being made to the budget.

- Q. Why is the Employer Outreach Ad-Hoc Group Meeting being changed from 8:30 am to 2:00 pm?
- A. Because Commuter Connections has to cut certain costs, part of the reason for changing the meeting time is due to cutting the cost for the morning continental breakfast and the other reason is that many members were not showing up for the meeting in a timely

fashion. More focus will be put on the training aspects for Employer Outreach versus having meetings.

**Item #7      Telework Resource Center Update**

***Ms. Danette Campbell, COG/DTP, updated the Subcommittee on Telework Resource Center activities including a briefing in the draft report of the FY03 Employer Telework Seminars.***

Ms. Danette Campbell stated that the Telework Resource Center has been working to get the expanded Telecommuting project up and running. The purpose of the expanded TERM is to provide direct assistance to target employers located in Northern Virginia and Maryland. Through a coordinated Outreach Program, the consultant for the project will provide information that will assist COG with its regional assessment of the impact of the Employer Telework program outreach efforts on vehicle travel and air quality through a comprehensive program of monitoring and evaluation.

Staff has conducted several preliminary conference calls with the selected consultant. The consultant, “The Telecommuting Advantage Group” has met with staff on this project and timelines have been put into place for achieving the goals. COG, GSA, OPM and Telecommuting Advantage will be meeting on September 25<sup>th</sup> to discuss the timeline, the goals and the reporting for this project. A preliminary meeting with GSA was held to discuss this TERM and a strategy for implementation. In addition, the staff met with one of TAGs’ member, OPM and GSA at the ITAC conference in Baltimore. During the conference the staff presented information regarding the expanded TERM at the Federal session roundtable discussion. In addition, staff and the consultant will be meeting with the Board of Trade to discuss partnering on the project.

The Incentive Pilot Programs, the TPE (Telework Partnership with Employers Programs) currently has 29 participating employers and there are three pending companies for TPE. Telework Virginia currently has ten participants and seven pending companies. To assist with marketing, the Telework Virginia Pilot project, staff will be manning the Telework Virginia display at upcoming health fairs. This initiative is in conjunction with the Fairfax County Employer Outreach team.

Focus groups for the Telework Virginia project took place in Fairfax on July 29<sup>th</sup>. This research was performed for the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit and COG to assess experience of employers and others with the Telework Virginia program funded by VDRPT. VDRPT and COG will use the results of this research to document the progress this program and identify possible areas for program enhancements. The research conducted for this project focused on four distinct groups of interest that included participating employers, inquiring employers, employers withdrawing from the program, and large employers.

Staff also conducted meetings with the Alexandria Employer Outreach representative to discuss an employer luncheon showcasing the Telework Virginia pilot program. The luncheon will take place on November 5<sup>th</sup> in the Windsor Room of the Embassy Suites, located at 1755 Duke Street, directly across from the King Street metro station. A panel comprised of participating employers will speak on the impact that Telework Virginia has had on their individual organizations.

The Draft Employer Telework seminar report was completed in June 2003 and has been presented to the Telecommuting Ad-Hoc committee for review.

In FY2003 four Telework seminars were conducted for employers in the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia and Suburban Maryland. Although five seminars were budgeted for 2003, the seminars scheduled for Rockville were canceled due to a lack of enrollment. There were two seminars held at COG's offices and two were held at local hotels at Arlington and Vienna, VA. The seminars received high ratings from 2003 respondents, with 97 percent giving a rating of excellent or very good, 95 percent gave the seminar content a rating of excellent or very good, 97 percent reported that the information would be useful to them. 100 percent indicated that the seminar met or exceeded their personal expectations. 100 percent indicated that the seminar was the right length. Eighteen percent of 2003 respondents indicated that they had structured Telework programs in place with a written policy.

As in previous years, the majority of respondents indicated that it was likely that they would be starting or expanding a Telework program within the next six months. For the past five years, the majority of attendees have come from organizations with 100 or more employees; however, the percentage of representatives with 100 or more employees has increased from 33 percent in 1998 to 76 percent in 2003.

In conclusion, the average number of attendees at the Employer Seminars has remained relatively constant over the past four years and participants have consistently given the seminars high praise, however, while the participants' remarks were exemplary, attendance declined in 2003 and the average number of participants per seminar has dropped dramatically. Staff feels that this can be attributed to a variety of factors such as current economic conditions and the evolving level of education regarding Telework among the business community. The Employer Seminars will be conducted again in 2004 based on the 2003 evaluation forms; changes will be made to the seminar content. Additionally, changing the scheduling of the seminars is being considered. Ms. Campbell asked the Subcommittee to review the report and submit edits to her no later than Wednesday, October 1st. The Subcommittee can submit their edits via Ms. Campbell's email at [dcampbell@mwcog.org](mailto:dcampbell@mwcog.org), and in addition Ms. Campbell added that staff attended two conferences, one was the ITAC conference in Baltimore and the other was the ACT conference in Salt Lake City.

**Q.** How many people do you need to have registered in order to have a seminar?

**A.** If we don't have more than 10, we would cancel. For the Rockville seminar, there was virtually no interest, so those people that had expressed interest in that week were filtered to other locations.

**Q.** Is there a limit on the number of participants that you can have on the TPE program due to funding?

**A.** At this point, staff has not been given any indication that there is a cap for this.

**Item #8            TDM Fall Regional Marketing Campaign and Strategic Marketing Plan Update**

***Mr. Douglas Franklin, COG/DTP, updated the Subcommittee on the recent regional TDM Marketing activities.***

Mr. Franklin updated the Subcommittee on some of the highlights of marketing activities for the other TERMS, which include Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) and Telework. Commuter Connections received several opportunities for Public Service Announcements offered by MTA and WMATA. MTA has given Commuter Connections an ad in their MARC rider guide for GRH and WMATA has provided Commuter Connections with 10 diorama's available in the Metro stations for the month of November, valued at \$14,000. Commuter Connections pays only for the installation and the printing of the transparency panels.

Three new radio spots for GRH will begin to air the last week of October into mid-December (except for the week of Thanksgiving). The radio spots will be picked up again in the spring. Mr. Franklin then played the radio spots for the Subcommittee. Most of the GRH requests are for unexpected emergencies during the afternoon and less are for unscheduled overtime reasons. Commuter Connections has two spots that address emergency needs and one for working late. Commuter Connections will also be doing a GRH direct mail campaign that will go out in late October early November to select Regional Activity Centers in heavy SOV commuter corridors with HOV accessibility. The direct mail pieces will address the concern that makes SOV commuters hesitate to take alternative transportation, based on the fear of being stranded; this is basically the core of the message. Commuter Connections is also looking at sending a mailing to the Rideshare database customers that are not on the GRH database.

Regarding Telework, a new radio spot will air in November to promote use of Telework Centers and again in January 2004. The Telework seminars will be promoted via radio once more starting in late winter through spring. Commuter Connections will have some live air readings to promote on the seminars as well.

- Q.** Are the Rideshare database customers automatically registered for GRH as well? Isn't the Rideshare database and the GRH database the same?
- A.** The customers in the Rideshare database aren't necessarily registered for GRH because these are customers who are interested in learning about their commuting options. In order to be registered for GRH, the customer has to be actually in one of those commuting options. Example, the customer would come back and state that they did get into a car pool and then Commuter Connections can register them for GRH if requested.
- Q.** Do the customers receive information on GRH in their match letters and the different services that Commuter Connections provides?
- A.** The customers receive their transit options but they have to request GRH information specifically.
- Q.** At the time the customers are registering for the Rideshare program, shouldn't Commuter Connections promote registration for GRH?

A. GRH information is provided when applying for a carpool or vanpool but they still have to actually fill out a GRH form to register for the GRH program. They can receive information about all of their options like Telework, bicycling and transit, etc.; the GRH registration is not automated.

Q. Is the goal for GRH not being met? Is the GRH goal realistic?

A. The goal is based on an eight-year buildup and we have two more years to go. We are only on year six right now. By the year 2005 we will reexamine the program but we are getting closer to the goal.

Q. Is the direct mail to the activity centers only to the Rideshare database or is Commuter Connections doing outside addresses as well?

A. Outside addresses will be used as well. The mailings will be in done in late October and early November.

Mr. Franklin stated that The TDM Resource Guide and Strategic Marketing Plan, which comes out in October every year, is in draft format and was sent out to Regional TDM Marketing Group members in August and changes and edits were received up until mid-September by all the local jurisdictions and transit agencies. This will be the seventh year that the TDM Resource Guide has been issued. The purpose of the guide is to share TDM information, marketing activities, budgets of all the partners and agencies. There are about twenty research summaries in the guide including five new added reports conducted in 2003. There is also a new section on Car Sharing, Zipcar, and Flexcar services. A Bailey's Crossroads regional activity center was added as a new target area with a heavy Hispanic population where Commuter Connections will be able to send the direct mailers.

**Item #9      FY05 Work Program**

***Mr. Nicholas Ramfos, COG/DTP, briefed the Subcommittee on the upcoming preparation of the FY05 Commuter Connections Work Program.***

Mr. Ramfos passed out a handout (timeline) to the Subcommittee members (*attached*). Mr. Ramfos stated that it is that time of year when staff begins work on the FY05 Commuter Connections Work Program (CCWP) needs to be and the timeline that starts with October of this year. Staff will verify all of the program elements with the State funding agencies and project components listed within each of program elements. Typically by the end of November, a draft Work Plan will be distributed to the Subcommittee for its review and comments. At the December Subcommittee meeting members will be asked for feedback and in January staff will seek approval on the Work Program from the Subcommittee. In January 2004, the draft Work Program will also be distributed to the TPB Technical Committee for their review and comments and then a short presentation will be done in February for the Board and final approval will be sought in March from the Technical Committee and the TPB. If all goes well, implementation will begin in July 2004. The FY05 CCWP timeline is based on COG's fiscal year. Mr. Ramfos asked that Subcommittee members take a look at the current fiscal year's Work Program and if

there are any specific issues in a program element or a reason that need to be addressed, please let him know as soon as possible.

Mr. Ramfos also mentioned that the upcoming TIP will be out for public review at next month's TPB meeting, DC's and Maryland's sections are fine for the Commuter Connections TERMS but some of the information is missing for Virginia. Staff is working with on correcting the information.

**Item #10 Budget Reports and Annual Report**

**Mr. Nicholas Ramfos, COG/DTP, distributed the FY03 final quarter budget report and the FY03 Annual Report.**

Mr. Ramfos handed out to the Subcommittee members the Draft Final Budget for FY03 Progress Report (*Note: If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please contact Hilda Velez at (202) 962-3327*). There have been preliminary final invoices sent to the State funding agencies and there will be a final invoice sent out soon. Employer Outreach is at 75 percent of the budget, late invoices came in, so they may not be reflected on this particular budget report and these were from the local governments, we will probably be around the 80 percent mark for expenditures for Employer Outreach. For GRH, we came in right at 90 percent. We did go a bit over on the user subsidies. For the Operations Center, we are at 97 percent. Telecommuting, we did have some staff changes, and the budget was not spent completely, but we came in pretty close, at 95 percent. Integrated Rideshare is at 91 percent; we came in a little bit lower on our maintenance cost with kiosks. For Employer Outreach for Bicycling we are right at the mark. The Mass Marketing TERM got a late start, and we will continue spending down the allocated funding from FY03.

Mr. Ramfos also reported that COG's overhead rates did not come in where they had been projected and we got a lower rate back and this is why we have a bit of a surplus.

**Item #11 Other Business/Set Agenda for Next Meeting**

The next Subcommittee meeting will be held on October 21<sup>st</sup>. ACT Conference attendees gave a brief status report to Subcommittee members on the conference. Ms. Briscoe, who attended the conference, found the conference materials very helpful and useful. CDs were given out to ACT Conference participants who attended the conference with every session held at the conference on the CDs. Ms. Briscoe did get to attend the session on Colleges and Universities and Ridesharing Programs and TDM Management for those Universities. The material from this session would be useful for those who are going to be working with college and universities.

One of the conference participants who attended the conference suggested that session topics be more clearly defined. There were a couple of sessions that were informative but were not consistent with the program description. For example, a topic was about vanpooling and it looked like it was going to be about the comparisons of different vanpool programs and problems with vanpooling and what the session was really about was those agencies or groups that own vans and the associated issues.



Another participant commented that the carsharing session was very informative. Alexandria City has begun promoting carsharing along side transit use and teleworking and it was good to meet the folks that actually started the flexcar program and to find out how successful that concept has been in other countries.

Participants also enjoyed the ACT Award winners' ceremony because every award winner was showcased.

The Telework presentation went very well. Ms. Campbell had several inquiries about the Telework Resource Center's information and information has been sent out to ACT participants who requested the information.

The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation did win an award. They won the ACT TDM Research Award for their research on the Springfield Interchange. Ms. Gus Robey was there to receive the award.

There was also a session on alternative fuel vehicles and natural gas. There is a study out in California where they are talking about going to hydrogen power vehicles which is going on now. Also, Region 8 did have a chapter meeting and nominations are going out to ACT members for seats on the Chapter Board.

**Q.** Did the ACT Conference have speakers from the region?

**A.** Yes, there was a TDM Land Use Planning Session and it had to do with site-specific congestion management programs. Howard Jennings from the Jennings Group presented information on Arlington County, which was really interesting. There was also someone from the Center for Urban Transportation Research and they shared information on cost-effectiveness study from all of the trip production programs from across the country. Danette Campbell did a presentation on the Telework Resource Center. Mr. Ramfos presented a session on TDM Marketing. Loudoun County also did a presentation on their Telecommute Program; Cynthia Capelli did the presentation on that. There was really good representation from our Region. Both the Rosslyn and Crystal City Commuter Stores were represented as well as representatives from Fort Meade.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

***The next meeting of the Commuter Connections Subcommittee will be held on  
Tuesday, October 21, 2003***