



MEMORANDUM

TO: Transportation Planning Board Technical Committee
FROM: Dan Sheehan, Program Director, Transportation Operations Programs
SUBJECT: Commuter Connections 50th Anniversary Recap
DATE: September 30, 2024

Regional stakeholders gathered at the National Press Club on October 2, 2024, to celebrate the 50 Year Anniversary of the Commuter Connections program. The program featured speakers who attested to Commuter Connections' valuable contributions across the region, including Hon. Muriel Bowser, DC Mayor; Hon. Christina Henderson, DC Councilmember and TPB Chair; Angel Deem, VDOT Chief of Policy; Geoff Anderson, MDOT Chief of Planning, Programming, and Project Delivery TSO; Hon. James Walkinshaw, Fairfax County Supervisor and TPB 1st Vice Chair; Holly Arnold, MTA Administrator; and Clark Mercer, COG Executive Director.

RETROSPECTIVE

The winding journey of Commuter Connections began in 1974 when the TPB formed Commuter Club in partnership with the General Services Administration and the Greater Washington Board of Trade to help identify carpool solutions as fuel supplies dwindled due to the oil embargo. In the late 1980s, Commuter Club changed its name to Ride Finders as the network grew to include local jurisdictions throughout the National Capital Region. The program rebranded to Commuter Connections in 1996, which reflected program's growing portfolio beyond carpool ridematching to include regional assistance and information on transit, bicycling, and telework. A timeline detailing the program's 50-year evolution is attached to this memo. A [news highlight](#) and [video](#) were also developed.

2024 EMPLOYER RECOGNITION AWARDS

Winners of the annual Commuter Connections Employer Recognition Awards were announced. These awards honor employers in the metropolitan Washington region that offer outstanding commuter benefits and support sustainable transportation. Award categories include Incentives, Marketing, and Telework. Award winners, the program booklet, and videos honoring the award winners are posted on the [Commuter Connections website](#).

NEW PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commuter Connections' role in the region continues to evolve. With assistance from a federal grant, the popular incenTrip program will be rebranded as CommuterCash and will engage commuters with enhanced real-time travel information, gamification and meaningful rewards. CommuterCash is expected to launch in December 2024. In addition, Commuter Connections received a second federal grant to develop a flexible vanpooling program, VanHoppr, to restore under-capacity vans due to post-pandemic hybrid work schedules. VanHoppr is expected to launch in spring 2025.



1950s

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

1970

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

1973

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

HOV lanes open to carpools.

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



1984

Maryland Area Rail Commuter (MARC) begins operation.

1985

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



1986

Commuter Club changes name to Ride Finders.

1997

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

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

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

1998

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

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

2009

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



2010

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

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

2012

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

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

2019

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

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



1950s / 1960s

1964

Completion of the Capital Beltway.

1965

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) established.

1966

TPB becomes associated with COG.

1969

COG and TPB help launch Capital Flyer Express bus service.

1970s



1974

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

1976

WMATA opens Metrorail system.

1977

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

Commuter Club hosts vanpooling workshops for employers.

1980s / 1990s

1992

Virginia Railway Express (VRE) begins commuter rail operation.

1993

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

1994

Ride Finders begins employer outreach program.

1996

Ride Finders rebrands name to Commuter Connections.

1990s / 2000s



2001

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

Commuter Connections publishes first State of the Commute triennial survey.

2008

Commuter Connections brings Car Free Day to the region.

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

2000s / 2010s

2014

Commuter Connections launches mobile-friendly website and mobile apps.



2017

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

Dockless bikesharing and e-scooters introduced.

2010s / 2020s

2020

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

2024 & BEYOND

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

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

