![COMMUTER CONNECTIONS. A SMARTER WAY TO WORK]

COMMUTER CONNECTIONS RIDEMATCHING COMMITTEE
MEETING NOTES
Tuesday, September 19, 2023
2:00 p.m. – 4.00 p.m.

1. **Introductions**
The meeting was brought to order by Lindsey Morris, Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (RRRC). Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, asked attendees participating virtually to introduce themselves when their jurisdiction was announced and meeting attendees that were attending the meeting in-person introduced themselves afterwards.

2. **Minutes of the June 20, 2023 Meeting**
Approval was sought for the June 20th, 2023 Ridematching Committee Meeting minutes. An initial motion to approve was made by Ryan Kivinski, Harford Transit LINK, and a second motion was made by Holly Morello, PRTC. All were in favor and the minutes were approved as written.

3. **Change of Chairpersons**
Maritza De La Vega, Montgomery County Commuter Services is now the new Chairperson replacing Lindsey Morris, of RRRC. Leigh Anderson, GWRideConnect has been appointed as the new Vice Chairperson. Lindsey Morris received a plaque of recognition for her outstanding leadership qualities and abiding commitment to the Council of Government, and the people of this region.

4. **Upcoming Fairs and Promotions**
COG/TPB staff and clients provided information on recent and upcoming transportation fairs and promotions.

Bethesda Transportation Solutions
Preparations were made for Car Free Day at Bethesda Metro Station. Planning and coordination efforts are underway for the Walk/Ride Challenge.

DRPT
Efforts to promote Discover Transit Month are ongoing. The campaign is a way to inform everybody about transportation options, particularly local transit. Items associated with the campaign include use of a transit pledge, which will permit pledgers one entry into a contest to win Virginia Breeze and Amtrak northeast regional tickets, and a $100 Gift Card drawing for those who enter a commute record for ridesharing. Media ads will be placed in theaters, gas pumps, cable, and streaming TV.

North Bethesda TMD
Preparations are underway for Car Free Day. A return to conventional CID's seems to be gaining momentum. Some employers located within the TMD are starting to roll out their benefit fares.

Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission
Staff attended an event at the County Farmer's Market and West Farm and plans to attend "Festival Leaves" in October to promote RideSmart around the region. The Commission is getting input from

commuters and people who travel in the area through a survey.

MDOT
Preparations are underway for Car Free Day. MCDOT will be distributing commuter program information including the incenTrip app at the Maryland State Fair.

DDOT
DDOT's employer team is convening a couple of local business focus groups to try to reach employers in the low wage and shift worker sector to get a better understanding of their transportation needs.

Prince George's County
Preparations are underway for Car Free Day. The County is utilizing LinkedIn as their primary source of paid digital media outreach. An event at Six Flags is scheduled and will promote transportation services. The program's website and the parking lot materials, including maps, are being updated.

Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission
RRRC is currently engaging in different types of marketing with Facebook as the anchor outlet.

VDOT
Preparations are underway for a Career Fair in October where applicants can learn about transportation planning.

DOD-WHS
Preparations are underway for a transportation options workshop.

Harford County
Harford County Transit Link is running Car Free Day for an extra week. There will be free buses connecting local colleges. There is a budget of $400 for this fiscal year for this campaign.
Harford County is in the process of finding a new operating facility and looking to purchase new vehicles for the fleet. Also, the County is hosting workshops quarterly on commuter benefits trying to reach out to local business with the purpose of raising the number of Maryland employer partners.

Transit IT Services of Frederick County
Frederick County is planning a Community Mobility Clinic and on September 22nd will be hosting a senior drive safety event. The County's ridesharing page on their website is in the early stages of a redesign. The County is also working with their employer outreach team to enhance their program.

Montgomery County Commuter Services
Preparations are underway for the Walk and Ride Challenge.

Prince William County
OmniRide staff are preparing for some events in Tysons, a conference with resource managers, and an annual HR summit.

Loudoun County OTS
Loudoun County is doing bus surveys, which seek to capture some insight on the local transit routes in the County for suggestions commuters might have. Additionally, events are in-the-works with the Workforce Resource Center. Loudoun County is hosting a biking event with Public Libraries on October 14th.

Baltimore Metropolitan Council
BMC is preparing to rebrand. Metro rideshare of Baltimore is becoming Go Smart Maryland. There will be a new website. Social media outreach communicating these changes is scheduled for the next 3 to 4 weeks.

Additionally, BMC will continue marketing at farmers markets and businesses.

5. **Flextime Rewards Refresher**

   Dan Sheehan, COG/TPB staff, presented information on the Flextime Rewards program. He shared that the purpose of this program is to encourage commuters to take advantage of flexible work schedules offered by their employer. The program incentivizes commuters to avoid notoriously congested corridors within peak commute periods.

   Mr. Sheehan explained that all corridors eligible for rewards have the same peak hours, and anyone can sign up to get congestion alerts even for different routes. The program is also available to solo drivers, not only commuters who rideshare. Mr. Sheehan offered the Committee some history/context of the program. The program officially launched in March 2019. The initial incentive was set at $8 for the specific corridors. The program was merged into the incenTrip mobile application in December 2022 to gain more exposure. Mr. Sheehan showed the slide in incenTrip on how a commuter can take a flexible trip to earn extra points. The points earned are roughly the equivalent of $8.00.

   Fatemeh Allahdoust, VDOT asked about the reimbursement. Mr. Sheehan explained that participants can choose their rewards via check, PayPal, gift card, or any other incentive option available in the app.

   Mr. Sheehan talked about the new eligible corridors as of FY2024. He explained that to be eligible a participant needs to travel to at least a portion of that segment. The most notorious congested corridor added to this fiscal year is the I-95 North and South at VA-123/Exit 160. A complete listing of the corridors and a map can be found on the [Flextime Rewards](#) webpage.

   Fatemeh Allhdoust, VDOT, inquired if the driver needs to be a commuter. Mr. Sheehan clarified that the incentive is only for commuters who flex their trips during peak hours, and they must be registered with Commuter Connections. Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, made clear that the program is only for those who flex their time while commuting to or from work. Also, he cited that many employees could flex their commuting time, but a high percentage of them don't do it. The notification to get alerts of heavy traffic only occurs if the commuter joins the program.

   Mr. Sheehan reminded everyone that incenTrip is a real-time tracking application. Finally, Mr. Sheehan ended his presentation explaining what types of promotions Commuter Connections uses to advertise the app. He said that social media advertising like Facebook and Instagram are usually conducted in Spring.

6. **Employer Management Process Update**

   Dan Sheehan, COG TPB staff, briefed the Committee on a new tool for employer consolidation within the TDM system. Mr. Sheehan talked about the process when a commuter registers on their own. They will select their work location which gets filtered through the existing work locations that could be matched. Commuter Connections encourages commuters to select from a drop-down list of existing employers in the database. This allows them to search for ridesharing based on that company, and they can now participate in the employer rewards program.

   Ideally, having one company associated with many commuters makes that process easier and those features mentioned above become operational. On the other hand, having two different records in the database for the same employer won't get robust matching results. Also, commuters won't qualify for the incenTrip rewards if they are not assigned to the right employer. That's why Mr. Sheehan pointed out the necessity to better manage our employer database and pay close attention to data entry for both commuters as well as local coordinators.

   Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, emphasized that the whole idea behind this is really cutting down

on duplicates and making the system as uniform as possible for each of the employers. He mentioned the example of some large federal agencies that can be in the system multiple times with many abbreviations and different names as well.

7. **Major incenTrip Changes**

Dan Sheehan, COG/TPB staff, began presenting the most recent changes for the incenTrip app. He began by providing context about the origins of the program, which was developed by the University of Maryland Transportation Institute. They partnered with Commuter Connections back in 2019, and the program has been continuously enhanced. Commuter Connections was awarded a federal grant for 3 years and this coming November the program is going to be completely transferred to COG so it can be managed "in house." Commuter Connections will develop an entirely new app which is essentially a copy of the existing incenTrip application; however, the code and network assets associated with the app will be housed under COG's jurisdiction. The name for the new app is expected to be "incenTrip Plu$."

COG/TPB staff are working to secure domains and reserving them in the app store. In the meantime, Commuter Connections will inform users of the changes and the need to download the new app, as incentives in the old app are basically going away.

Mr. Sheehan indicated that November 11 is the target day for the transfer and Commuter Connections will be very clear with commuters about what to expect from this transition.

Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, added that this is a huge milestone for Commuter Connections although he recognized that some glitches may occur, and COG/TPB staff is working with the entire development team to come up with a solid implementation plan.

Fatemeh Allhdoust, VDOT, asked about what's going to happen with the current incenTrip program. Mr. Ramfos explained that Commuter Connections has a license agreement with UMD for 5 years to use the data source code for the app. Basically, UMD will not be competing with Commuter Connections, and vice-versa.

Leigh Anderson, GWRideConnect, raised the question if Commuter Connections can do some kind of sponsorship in the app store so our brand is showing higher than other competing products. Mr. Ramfos said that branded marketing will be used to ensure the product is prominent.

Finally, Leigh Anderson, GWRideConnect, asked about the best way to keep members of this Committee informed as to how the process is going since the next meeting is not scheduled until December 19th. Mr. Ramfos pointed out that Commuter Connections Subcommittee meeting in November, members will get more updates about the new app.

8. **Fourth Quarter Progress Report & Annual Report**

Dan Sheehan, COG/TPB staff, summarized the Fourth Quarter FY2023 Progress Report for the Committee. He began by mentioning the new features of the incenTrip program and the employer rewards program released in May. He also discussed the new Enhancing Mobility Innovation program. This new program, in partnership with the Federal Transit Administration, was launched over the summer and intends to develop technology that better fosters flexible vanpooling.

Mr. Sheehan shared data points with the Committee. Commuter Connections served 12,825 commuters registered in the Ridematching program throughout the quarter. Also, technical work pertaining to converting the operating systems for Commuter Connections technology programs from Windows to Linux is now done. On page 7 of the report, Commuter Information System, Mr. Sheehan noted an update occurred for the Regional Park and Ride Map, especially in Loudon County. The map displays parking lot information, including parking spaces at a particular property, whether there are bike racks or not, and what transit connections there are. Mr. Sheehan emphasized the importance of

alerting Commuter Connections of any updates or changes in each jurisdiction about Park and Rides so the new data can be entered as soon as possible on our web map and eventually in the paper format.

Mr. Sheehan went on to talk about the Regional Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) Program. Between the months of April and June, there were 240 applications received. A total of 228 new applicants were registered and 363 commuters were re-registered. As of June 30th, a total of 2,138 commuters were registered in the GRH database, which is relatively consistent with what was experienced last quarter. Also, 330 trips were provided throughout the quarter. For the Baltimore GRH program, total enrollment as of June 30th was 101 commuters. There were 13 Baltimore GRH trips provided throughout the quarter.

He then switched to Table 1 which summarizes the program-wide quarterly activity. He noted that there were noticeable jumps in the total number of applicants from the database compared to the previous quarter. Page 20 through 48 of the report are the TDM services by jurisdiction. This is basic interaction data in relation to ridematching letters sent, number of contacts with employers etc.

Mr. Sheehan continued with Table 2 found on page 47 that summarizes Commuter Connections application activity by each network member. He briefly mentioned the SchoolPool table, and a summary of technical assistance requests received from our members by Commuter Connections, and finally the Employer Outreach Committee Activity that shows the interaction with employers by jurisdiction in the last quarter.

Mr. Sheehan pointed out growth for all our services across the board. He said that this is a positive trend in the right direction. Mr. Sheehan cited a significant growth in our web traffic, an increase of 25% over the year due in part to our marketing efforts that are generating more interest in our programs. Commuters are traveling again so they are thinking about what options are there for them. Commuter Connections is in the process of redesigning the website to make it easier to navigate and hopefully register more people.

Fatemeh Allahdoust, VDOT, brought up the challenge Commuter Connections faces with commuters not using our resources as much as in the past. The message is not only that people are getting back to their offices. They need to start looking again for alternatives to driving alone such as transit, ridesharing etc.

Mr. Sheehan ended his summaries with the FY 2023 Annual Progress Report by appreciating everyone for promoting Commuter Connections this past year. Commuter Connections as an entire program processed over 6,100 rideshare applications and about 14,000 matches throughout the fiscal year. The program showed that Commuter Connections reduced over 800 daily vehicles trips in the region, which is a real-world impact from the Committee's work. Also, Commuter Connections has completed several enhancements for technology platforms. In addition, Mr. Sheehan mentioned major accomplishments that occurred throughout the fiscal year, such as launching the supplemental vanpool module software, a server migration from our TDM System, redesigning the new Commuter Connections mobile application, and new features for our incenTrip program.

Mr. Sheehan continued talking about The Regional Guaranteed Ride Home Program. There are around 2,200 new registrants and re-registrant users. Commuter Connections provided 630 trips throughout the year. For the Baltimore Region Commuter Connections has 101 applicants and 63 trips were provided.

Mr. Sheehan highlighted the high numbers of applicants in December and June as a reflection of the extensive mass mailer campaign. On page 51, he talked about Table 2 that shows the total number of new and re applicants for Commuter Connections: 6,809 in total throughout the year. On page 85, He referred to Table 6 showing how Commuter Connections recorded the calls that come into the Operations Center and how registrants learn about us. He indicated that Table 6A is similar, and he

clarified that this is data reported and submitted by local jurisdictions. Then in Table 6B he explained that the data is generated from the system and includes a representation of how users heard about Commuter Connections by local jurisdictions.

Mr. Sheehan briefly mentioned the FY2023 Monthly Web Visits. Mr. Sheehan compared data from other years in figure 35. Where GRH registrants live, in figure 37, where they work in figure 40, what is their mode of transportation in figure 40, and finally Guaranteed Ride Home Trips FY 1997 to 2023. Mr. Sheehan ended his presentation affirming that the Commuter Connections program is providing more trips than in recent years past. The program is being utilized more and Commuter Connections continues to see positive growth since bottoming out in 2020.

9. **Roundtable**

Leigh Anderson, GWRideConnect, asked if anybody in the conference room or those connected virtually wanted to share a program update. Holly Morello, PRTC, brought up the issue of new addresses in her area not found in our TDM database. Dan Sheehan, COG/TPB, explained that the update for this issue was completed several weeks ago and, after testing, Commuter Connections found a solution.

10. **Other Business/Upcoming Items**

Leigh Anderson, GWRideConnect, asked if anybody wanted to request an agenda item for the next meeting. Nobody responded and the meeting was adjourned.

The next meeting of the Commuter Connections Ridematching Committee will be held on December 19, 2023 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
.