



COMMUTER CONNECTIONS RIDEMATCHING COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

**Tuesday, March 17, 2020
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**

**Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street, N.E.
COG Board Room**

**Chairperson: Allison Kemp, Bethesda Transportation Solutions
Vice Chairperson: Yolanda Creal, WHS/DOD**

COG Staff Contact: Stephen Finafrock, 202/962-3385 or sfinafrock@mwcog.org

1. Introductions

The meeting was brought to order by Chairperson Allison Kemp of Bethesda Transportation Solutions. Attendees were asked to introduce themselves. The meeting took place virtually through WebEx.

2. Minutes of the December 17th, 2019 meeting

Approval was sought for the December 17th, 2019 Ridematching Committee Meeting minutes. An initial motion to approve was made by George Clark of Tri County Council for Southern Maryland and was seconded by Darlene Nader of the North Bethesda TMD. The minutes were approved as written. All were in favor.

3. Upcoming Fairs and Promotions

No updates to provide.

4. CarpoolNow

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, began his presentation by briefing everyone on updates made to the CarpoolNow mobile application.

There are a couple of changes to the program which are still in production. Mr. Finafrock confirmed the compatibility of the application with the new iPhone models including X, Xr, Xs, 11, 11 Pro/11 Max. Android devices compatibility has been maintained and new models will be addressed as they are released.

Mr. Finafrock announced that new features are being finalized to help promote popular pickup/dropoff points for casual carpooling. The application will include carpool pickup points not located in traditional park and ride lots, such as the Pentagon. Enhanced search features will include new symbology that help identify the primary purpose of each lot or pickup point. As a result of these changes, CarpoolNow can be maximized in areas with significant carpool activity where drivers and riders agree to commute both on the way in to work and back home.

The driver incentive as of today is \$10 per ride. There is a likely possibility that riders will get money in the future as well to incentivize the use of CarpoolNow.

In this regard, Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, reminded everybody that CarpoolNow will be promoted during WMATA'S platform improvement project, although the dates may be rescheduled due to current events. Commuter Connections is partnering with marketing programs to promote CarpoolNow in Fairfax, Urbana (in Frederick) and Gainesville (in Prince William County).

5. IncenTrip

Dan Sheehan, COG/TPB staff, updated the Committee on the status of the incenTrip program and provided administrative guidance. He mentioned a lot of activity has occurred since the last meeting. In addition, there are new guidelines. The peak hours are still the same, and the program is still rewarding trips from Monday through Friday. A maximum of one trip may be used to earn points per AM/PM period. Points range from 10 to a maximum of 100 points. There is a link to learn more about point allocation structure visiting commuterconnections.org/incenTrip-app

Points are now more dynamic and fluctuate according to the diminishing points model. The Commuter Connections check program is exclusively available to commuters in MWCOG's non-attainment area. The program is now highlighted under MDOT's web site.

Mr. Sheehan went on to remind everyone that the waiting period to get a check may take up to 90 days. Commuter Connections is looking to find ways to shorten that time. A new FAQ was developed and posted to the Commuter Connections website to help avoid confusion for users.

Mr. Sheehan continued explaining the procedures for the rideshare coordinators in order to ensure incenTrip users are using the correct app code, for example XINTP. Ridematching coordinators should:

1. Update commuter status
2. Review and evaluate account for possible additional information
3. Follow up with user if additional Commuter Connections services may be beneficial

Mr. Sheehan pointed out that this creates a good opportunity to interact with users encouraging them to sign up for other programs such as the Guaranteed Ride Home Program.

Finally, he concluded his presentation addressing instructions for incenTrip related questions.

Program rules and guidelines can be found on the Commuter Connections website. Points balances are displayed in incenTrip. For more specific questions, to check status points, or to report app glitches Ridematching Coordinators can use ridematching@mwcog.org.

The program continues to grow significantly at a rate of 100 new users per month. Mr. Ramfos added that the money needed to fund the incentive portion of this program has a budget of around \$75,000.

6. Best Practices

George Clark, Tri County Council for Southern Maryland (TCCSMD), began his presentation with a brief history of TCCSMD.

The organization was formed on Dec 6th, 1964, as a cooperative planning and development agency to foster the social and economic development of the Southern Maryland Region. The Council brings together local, state and federal resources to address issues in economic development, environmental protection, and regional resource management, which includes transportation, workforce, utilities, urban growth and development.

TCCSM's transportation programs are funded by Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's (COG), the Commuter Connections program and the Maryland Department of Transportation's (MDOT) Maryland Transit Administration (MTA).

Mr. Clark explained the way he uses and manages the ridematching database:

- He checks the data base daily
- He maintains correct data: such as e-mail, app code, program and home jurisdiction

- Keep notes, checks bi-weekly reports, review reports from MDOT/MTA quarterly reporting
- He adds special events in his region.
- He ensures commuter information is kept confidential.
- He reports suspicious accounts.

Mr. Clark illustrated to members of the Committee a ridematching search from one of his commuters in his database. He made note of where the commuters are coming from. Proper app codes are important whether commuters are signed up for the Ridesharing or Guaranteed Ride Home Program. He sends a matchletter to commuters, regardless of whether the commuters have matches. If no matches are identified, commuters can find alternative commuting options such as transit and telework locations.

Mr. Clark continued with his approach to bi-weekly and purge reports. He keeps a commuter's "account status" listed as "under review" for those accounts that haven't provided enough information and he will follow up with them to determine their program of interest.

Mr. Clark pays close attention to the vanpool drivers home and employment location reports, any suspicious accounts, and the commuters whose records are about to expire as well as commuters that can be marked as inactive.

For administrative reports, Mr. Clark utilizes the application summary by jurisdiction tool in the TDM System to obtain the numbers of registrants for the three counties he is responsible for and report this information later to MDOT. He also interacts with the special events administration page to manage and search for new events.

Finally, Mr. Clark spoke about the marketing used to promote commuting services in Southern Maryland, mainly Ridesharing and Guaranteed Ride Home. There are ads on Comcast, multiple internet sites, marketing signs on highways, billboards, print ads in 5 county newspapers, 2 online news feeds, and all 3 county's Chamber of Commerce's directories. In addition, rideshare brochures can be found in government buildings, 3 Chambers of Commerce, in 3 visitor centers, employers throughout the tri-county region, and in all the 11 tri-county libraries (which are considered a good source of information). Also, Mr. Clark participates actively in all the important Commuter Fairs that take place in the Metropolitan Washington Area.

7. TDM System Update

Steven Osborn, COG/TPB staff, presented the new updates and changes to the web based TDM System. A recent ridematching enhancement allows users and administrators to find alternative locations in our search for commuters from our home to work such as daycare centers. Mr. Osborn then discussed the chatbot which will be used for some of the customer support services. The new feature has been modified following the December Ridematching Committee feedback. Bot functionality and human interaction will be integrated. Common questions incorporated with bot functionality include things like password reset, re-registration or GRH trip dispatch.

The programming is designed to answer basic questions without human intervention. The example demonstrated during the presentation is of a user visiting the site asking to change their password. Icons will be identified depending on who is answering the question.

An update to the Commuter Connections registration process is also in the works. The revamped registration process intends to simplify the user experience by requiring the least amount of necessary information to create an account as possible, such as username, password, and contact information. A graduated program structure then will require additional information from applicants.

The key in this improvement is to maintain a balance requiring only the data necessary to operate each program offered by Commuter Connections. Mr. Osborn demonstrated an example of how to create an account following the new simplified process. After entering the detailed personal information, the employer selection process has been redesigned to prevent duplicates. Following the employer selection, commuter details are entered and a program selection is generated with a cleaner look. The application process is completed with the disclaimer where the user can accept to receive additional information and agree to the terms of use and privacy policy of Commuter Connections. Additional information is only required for specific programs and will be added on as "as-needed" basis.

8. Client Site Status | Round Table

No new topics were proposed for the next Ridematching Committee meeting.

9. Quarterly Progress Report

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, discussed the FY2020 Second Quarter CCWP Progress Report. Mr. Finafrock reminded members of the importance of submitting table 6A regularly, so that the data is reflected in the Annual Progress Report as "calls received at client programs".

Mr. Finafrock asked members to read through the document and to spot check the calculations to see if there is any discrepancy with the numbers entered.

Mr. Finafrock pointed out that ridematching coordinators need to send in the report when they receive calls directly, so that the information will be counted.

Table 6A will be available via SharePoint and will contain a memorandum with instructions/recommendations on how to complete the form.

Mr. Ramfos reiterated the importance of the reporting process and that the annual reports assist in dollar allocations in funding many of the local program ridesharing grants.

Nancy Huggins, MTA, added that her organization must report data to the Maryland Department of Transportation in order to qualify for grant applications, including employer outreach data.

10. Other Business | Upcoming Agenda Items

Nancy Huggins, MTA, reported that the State Highway Administration is increasing ridesharing opportunities with new signage in Park and Rides. In addition, there are 60 new signs across Maryland to promote the Guaranteed Ride Home program in order to illustrate the importance of data and how monies are allocated based on data.

The Next meeting of the Commuter Connections Ridematching Committee will be held on June 16, 2020 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.