

**COMMUTER CONNECTIONS
RIDEMATCHING COMMITTEE
MEETING NOTES**

**Tuesday, March 16, 2021
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**

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

**Chairperson: Hugh McGloin, WHS/DOD
Vice Chairperson: Andrew Dempster, HHS/FDA**

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

1. Introductions

Attendees were asked to introduce themselves when their jurisdiction was announced by Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff. The meeting took place virtually via WebEx and was then brought to order by Hugh McGloin.

2. Minutes of the December 15, 2020 meeting

Approval was sought for the December 15, 2020 Ridematching Committee Meeting minutes. An initial motion to approve the minutes was made by George Clark of Tri County Council for Southern Maryland and a second motion to approve was made by Mark Sofman, Montgomery County. The minutes were approved as written. All were in favor.

3. Upcoming Fairs and Promotions

Harford Commute Smart

- Bike to Work Day virtual event; local bike shop in Bel Air is the pit stop to pick up a t-shirt.
- Promoting rideshare through Harford local transit buses.

Montgomery County

- Bike to Work Day; changing pitstop format to a local bike shop where participants can get their t-shirt.

Prince George's County

- Hosting Bike to Work Day.
- Increasing activity on social media to promote commuter benefits.

Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland

- Bike to Work Event. The main pit stop will be in Waldorf.
- Run ads for Bike to Work Day and Commute with Confidence.

4. CarpoolNow Update

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, updated the Committee on the status of the CarpoolNow program and the recent changes made to CarpoolNow.

Mr. Finafrock started out discussing three recent enhancements to the CarpoolNow app. First, Park and Ride lot information and directional travel information; second, the privacy policy update; and third, cross-platform matching. CarpoolNow has incorporated new iconography for the Park and Ride Maps. The "+" icon indicates a location that is a hotspot for carpool pickup and drop-off points. The "P+" icon indicates a formal Park and Ride lot that is also a hotspot for casual carpool activity and there are also traditional locations identified on the map with a "P" icon by itself.

Mr. Finafrock presented an example of the Park and Ride locations using his home address. There is now an entire page dedicated to the privacy policy because of the requirements for processing updates to applications in Apple Store and Google Play in order to expedite changes in the application when needed. Mr. Finafrock continued with his presentation explaining that a glitch was found over the summer preventing users from different mobile operating systems, such as iOS and Android, from matching. This problem has now been solved.

5. TDM System Update

Dan Sheehan, COG/TPB staff, updated the Committee on the changes to the TDM System. The listing selection for commuter programs is expected to be expanded. At this time, only Guaranteed Ride Home and Ridesharing are programs that commuters can select from the menu. Before the next fiscal year, the incenTrip program should be incorporated into the list. If this proves successful, other incentive programs like CarpoolNow, Flextime Rewards, and Pool Rewards will be added to the listing.

Mr. Sheehan went on to discuss the ongoing employer duplicate records cleanup. At this time more than 30,000 records have been removed and more than 18,000 have been merged into clean records. This process aims at trying to improve effectiveness of Employer-Based Ridematching. The need for cleanup is specific to this new feature, and to ensure a high-level of data integrity. COG/TPB staff will be reviewing new records as they come in to make sure they have a correct address and in case of conflict they will assign the record to the employer with the most employees in the database. The concept of a strong and healthy database is necessary for commuters who want to find accurate matches.

Mr. Sheehan then transitioned to the vanpool enhancements. The idea behind that is to improve vanpool functionality within the system. All vanpool enhancement specifications are still considered a draft at this time. A new administrative level called "Vanpool Operator" is expected to have the ability to create and manage multiple vanpools under one account. At present, vanpool operators must create several unique accounts to explore different routes to find matches. Mr. Sheehan also mentioned a new change which incorporates vanpool symbols on matchletters and a vanpool match-finding instructions page which includes information describing what a vanpool is and how it works. The last item discussed in this segment was a potential "flexible vanpool" enhancement. A work group of this Committee is currently exploring feasibility. More information will be provided in future meetings to understand how it works and how to market it for registrants in TDM system.

Mr. Sheehan then moved to the last slide announcing the completion of the incenTrip update where trip logs are now automatically imported into the TDM System. The data is now in the TDM system where users can have access to it in one place.

Other upcoming features include the Commuter Connections home page and login page design refresh, as well as user geocode alerts. A new screen will ask users to verify their address if geocodes are not found on a map.

Mr. Hugh McGloin, DoD/WHS, inquired about how these vanpool changes could affect individuals who use their mass transit benefits to join a traditional vanpool. Mr. Sheehan explained that it would be a non-issue for traditional vanpools, but for flexible vanpools Commuter Connections is trying to collaborate with WMATA develop a solution that will permit the use of SmartBenefits to pay for the ride. Mr. Sheehan acknowledged the difficulties associated with this particular task and couldn't confirm its feasibility.

6. Best Practices

Kendall Tiffany, Frederick County TransIT Services, began her presentation explaining marketing techniques she uses to capture ridesharing and Guaranteed Ride Home applicants and gave an overview of the reports her agency uses in the database.

She briefly described Frederick County TransIT Services as a division of the Frederick government broken into 3 segments: Public Transit, Paratransit and Commuter Services. Her focus is on Commuter Services which includes the Ridesharing and Employer Outreach programs.

Ms. Tiffany went on to explain the tactics she uses to capture applicants for Ridesharing and Guaranteed Ride Home Programs. The most frequent channels to market the services include:

Radio, print, events (brochures in person), social media, native online advertising, and pre-roll video with Comcast Spotlight. The idea is to call the attention of commuters in a simple way. Brochures announcing Ridesharing and Guaranteed Ride Home programs are displayed on all local buses.

Ms. Tiffany explained how she uses the TDM system ridematching database for success-measuring and grant reporting. New applicants and re-applicants are reported monthly for MTA grant purposes. The county uses the monthly management report to track how many times she and her team interact with commuters from month to month (like sending a matchletter). Also, she uses the notes report tool found in the TDM database system to record all contacts with commuters.

Ms. Tiffany ended her presentation offering her e-mail and work telephone contact information for any questions that may come up.

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, went on to share a few examples with the Committee on how to produce results by jurisdiction using a query in the TDM database system.

7. Quarterly Progress Report

Steve Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, began presenting data points for the second quarter. The first item was found on page 4. Mr. Finafrock reported that COG and its members served 14,337 commuters registered in ridematching. This was a decrease of 1,089 from 15,426 at the end of September 2020. Year over year there was a decrease of 3,465 from 17,802 at the end of December 2019. He moved on to explain that the purge process for SchoolPool account holders was instituted. An initial correspondence alerting account holders of the new purge process was sent out on October 6th

Mr. Finafrock continued referring to page 6. He revealed that COG/TPB staff monitored and maintained the GRH database and server. Between the months of October and December there were 42 GRH applicants received. During the same period the GRH program provided 38 GRH trips. "Family Emergency" accounted for the largest portion of the GRH trip reasons followed by "Overtime". As of December 31st, a total of 2,882 commuters were registered in the GRH database.

Mr. Finafrock provided a few data elements concerning the GRH Baltimore program. Numbers shown were down because of the current coronavirus pandemic situation, but GRH trips offered were up from last quarter totaling 38, up from 23 in the Washington, DC area last quarter, and 12 trips for the Baltimore program, up from 1 trip last quarter.

Mr. Finafrock finished his presentation suggesting members of the Committee to check their report to make sure the data entered was correct.

8. Other Business/Upcoming Agenda Items

Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, encouraged members of the Committee to bring any ideas to the next meeting. He also asked if anyone would like to volunteer to give a presentation on best practices to share with the Committee.

The Next meeting of the Commuter Connections Ridematching Committee will be held on June 15th, 2021 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.