

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS



Commuter Connections Subcommittee

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, October 21, 2003

CHAIR: Robin Briscoe, Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland

VICE CHAIR: Sharon Affinito, Loudoun County

STAFF CONTACT: Nicholas Ramfos (202) 962-3313

Item #1 Introductions (see attached attendance sheet)

Ms. Sharon Affinito, Vice-Chair of the Subcommittee, called the meeting to order at 10:14 am and each attendee made introductions. The Chair, Robin Briscoe, was unable to attend the Subcommittee meeting.

Item #2 Minutes of September 23, 2003 Meeting

The Subcommittee approved the minutes as written.

Item #3 FY03 Employer Satisfaction Survey Draft Results

Mr. Mark Hersey, DTP/COG, presented the draft results of the FY03 Employer Satisfaction survey.

Mr. Hersey started his presentation with distributing handouts for the PowerPoint presentation (*enclosed*) to Subcommittee members on the Draft FY03 Commuter Connections Employer Satisfaction Survey results. On June 28, 2003, staff mailed the FY03 Commuter Connections Employer Satisfaction Survey to get feedback on the Outreach representatives' efforts in the Employer Outreach program. The survey was sent out to 3,137 employers. 221 responses were received which is about a 7 percent response rate, though this is a lower response rate than for previous years, the total number of responses is the largest ever recorded for the satisfaction survey. At least one survey was returned from each of the jurisdictions. DC employers received the bulk of the surveys this year instead of Montgomery County. Commuter Connections tried to hit as many employers as were viable in the database. Surveys were sent to companies that have level 1 through 4 programs.

Q. What do levels 1 through 4 mean?

A. They are based upon the evaluation criterion for employer-based TDM programs, for instance, a company who has a level 1 program is a company who has contacted us and

has completed a commuter survey. A level 2 program is a company that has shown a little bit more interest and appointed an Employer Transportation Coordinator (ETC) or they have implemented some type of informal telework program or have put in bicycle racks. A Level 3 program involves implementing a Metrochek program, having transit benefits, whether it be pre-tax or subsidy or some combination of both. A Level 4 is a combination of the Level 2 and Level 3 programs.

Mr. Hersey then went over the responses by jurisdiction with Montgomery County receiving the most responses. The response rate by jurisdiction is on page 6 of the FY03 Commuter Connections Employer Satisfaction Survey draft report.

Mr. Hersey then went over the questions that were asked in the survey beginning with question number 1 which asked the respondents how long have they been involved with helping their company employees with their daily commutes? The majority of ETCs have been in their position for at least one year or more. The more than three year number has actually increased. Last year it was twenty-six percent. Between the two, there are fifty-four percent that have been in an ETC position for at least two or more years. Several factors contributed to this percentage; one being that the hiring is not as robust so people are not changing jobs as frequently and another is that people actually like being an ETC.

Question 2 asked the respondent if they knew of someone or an organization that can assist them in developing or in implementing a commuter transportation program. Essentially, the question was asking if they knew who their local rideshare agency was. 62 percent said yes. Last year, 68 percent responded. There was a 90 percent response rate to this question.

Questions 3 and 4 asked how often were the ETCs contacted by a representative who could assist them in developing a program and how often were they contacted by phone. Question 4 asked how often were they contacted in person or with a face-to-face meeting. The options were one to two times per year, three to five, six to ten, greater than ten, never, and not sure. It seems that the phone contact over the course of the year was fairly good. The face-to-face meetings were up compared to last year's when responses were in the forties. Sixty-three percent of the respondents said that they actually had a meeting with Commuter Connections Outreach staff at least one or two times. The disappointing number is the "never" in being contacted by phone or by staff person. Seventy-two of the respondents said that they were contacted at least 1 or 2 times by phone or by email. Mr. Hersey stated that if any one of the Subcommittee members would like to review the results from last year's survey, to please contact him and he would get last year's report to them.

Question 5 asked how responsive was their employer representative to their question and request for information and/or assistance? It was a 50/50 split between not responsive or never asking them or very responsive, or at least responsive to a certain degree. The numbers are lower for the "I never asked" category. Last year it was 58 percent, this year it is 48 percent. The "very responsive" category went down, last year it was 42 percent this year it is 41 percent. The "somewhat responsive" category is at 9 percent and that is about the same as last year's, which was at 8 percent. The one percent "non-responsive" category has been consistent over the history of the survey.

Question 6 was split up into six categories and respondents were asked if they were satisfied with explanations of their Commuter Connections programs or ridesharing products? The series of questions represented the heart of the survey and were included to measure employer satisfaction across a range of topic areas including: explanation of local rideshare products, knowledge of local traffic mitigation, traffic congestion strategies, willingness to help, and enthusiasm and overall quality of their local employer services programs. More than forty percent of respondents reported that they were “Very Satisfied” in three out of the six topic areas. Forty-three percent of respondents indicated that they were “Very Satisfied” with the overall quality of employer services. Respondents were “most satisfied” with outreach representatives’ willingness to help and enthusiastic with which the representative’s communicated the Commuter Connections message with forty-five percent and fifty percent of respondents choosing the highest level of satisfaction.

Question 7 rated the materials for Commuter Connections. 43 percent of the respondents reported that the informational brochures are helpful. Overall, a large number of respondents are pleased with the printed materials or the website.

Q. Is the web site new or is the question on the questionnaire in reference to the web site new?

A. The question itself on the website is new.

Q. How long has the website been around?

A. Since 1997.

Question 8 asked a series of questions to measure the use of the commuter survey and the outreach representative’s use of the statistical reports of the results. Twenty-four, or forty percent of the sixty responses to this question show that the commuter survey was used at the worksite. The table on page 14 of the FY03 Commuter Connections Employer Satisfaction Survey summarizes the results. The results suggest that the majority of employers are not being surveyed, or they are unaware of their most recent completed survey.

Question 9 asked what types of informational seminars employers need to help them better assist their employees. The three most popular topic areas were Commuter Connections programs, Transit Incentives, and General ETC Training. In addition, telecommuting is fast becoming a major component of consideration for employers.

Question 10 asked how effective was their ETC representative in helping them and their organization in developing and implementing employee commuter programs? The pie chart on page 15 of the FY03 Commuter Connections Employer Satisfaction Survey illustrates that fifty-four percent of respondents reported that they had “no opinion.” Twenty-four percent indicated that their representative(s) “are very effective.” Fifteen percent said that their representative was “somewhat effective.” The combination of these two groups demonstrates that the majority of

respondents, forty percent responded that the efforts of their outreach representative are effective in helping them implement commute programs at their worksites.

Questions 11 and 12 asked for suggestions on improving the Commuter Connections' effectiveness to promote commuter programs and in assisting organizations in developing commuter programs and for comments on products, services, etc.

Question 13 asked how many people are employed at their worksites. The majority of respondents were within the 50 to 99-employee range at their worksite. The numbers of 100 or more went up from last year. It went up by about 10 respondents.

The addendum shown in the draft report shows the amount of responses broken out by the jurisdictions in regards to percentages of the 221 responses, twenty-two percent came from Montgomery County, seven percent from DC, and eleven percent from Arlington County.

Mr. Hersey then went over the Addendum that addressed the break down by numbers of the survey, surveys sent to each particular jurisdiction, the responses, the actual returns, the percentage versus the responses and the percentages versus the returns.

Q. What are the typical responses in past years compare to the 7 percent who responded this year?

A. Typical percentage rates have been 10 percent or higher. The first two years were in the 8 ½ percent rate to 9 percent rate. Last year the response rate was 10 percent.

Q. What was the free gift?

A. The free gift was a small portfolio with the Commuter Connections logo on it.

Q. What was the cost to perform the survey?

A. The overall cost was a little under \$400.00.

Q. Once the data is received, will it be used to make the program more effective?

A. Yes, the data will be used to address problems and also enhance things that Commuter Connections is doing well. The November Commuter Connections meeting will focus on the final version of the report. Overall, the results are positive with few areas for improvement.

Mr. Hersey concluded his presentation with stating to Subcommittee members that if anyone wanted more information on a specific employer to send him a written formal request and he would send the information to them. The Subcommittee was asked to review the draft report and forward any edits or comments to Mr. Hersey within the next week. The Subcommittee will be asked to endorse the report at the October meeting.

Item #4 Regional TDM Marketing Update

Mr. Douglas Franklin, DTP/COG, briefed the Subcommittee on the recent activities of the Regional TDM Marketing Group.

Mr. Franklin stated that at the September 23rd Commuter Connections Subcommittee meeting the group listened to the audio of the radio spots for the Mass Marketing Campaign and that he also handed out the storyboard for the television spot. He then proceeded on showing the 30-second television spot to the Subcommittee members. The television spot compliments the radio spot well and consists of the “testimonial theme.”

Mr. Franklin then discussed the status of the Regional TDM Resource Guide and Strategic Marketing Plan (SMP), which is updated annually. It is a 140-page document and essentially it gives an overview of TDM products and marketing activities within the region. The SMP was put together by staff and Pathways Strategic Communications. Seventy individuals were involved in providing input on the plan from thirty-three agencies and organizations. The distribution will go out to the Regional TDM Marketing Group and anyone who was involved in putting the plan together. If any Subcommittee member would like a copy, please send Mr. Franklin email at dfranklin@mwkog.org. The document is divided into four sections; the first section is the Executive Summary and there is a Mission Statement, and the plan outlines the targeted regional activity centers. One target regional activity center was added this year, Bailey’s Crossroads, and the products and services were reviewed in this particular center. It has a high concentration of Hispanic commuters and it is along Columbia Pike so they will have access to Arlington County’s Pike Ride service. Commuter Connections is looking at sending direct mail as part of its limited English proficiency initiative.

Section two of the SMP, outlines the products and gives a profile of the various products that are available, for instance, carpools and vanpools, a section on HOV lanes and Park and Ride lots, and all of the various modes, mass transit, etc. Carsharing was added as a new product this year. Section two also contains information on support programs such as Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) and commuter benefits such as Metrochek. There is also a section on Clean Air Partners.

Section three outlines the marketing strategies and the budgets of the regional transit partners. There is a calendar of regional events and a section that provides a current profile by regional activity center which is grouped into three categories: central which includes the District and Arlington, Alexandria; then the other Northern Virginia suburbs, and then suburban Maryland.

The fourth section contains twenty-four TDM research summaries. Summaries that were over 10 years old were eliminated. The Springfield Interchange research was included this year.

Mr. Franklin then distributed a draft campaign summary (*enclosed*) on the marketing campaigns which included all the radio stations the mass marketing commercials are airing on, the weeks the commercials are running, and how much is being spent on each radio station. The summary covers the added value opportunities received and TERM marketing initiatives for GRH and Telework.

Mr. Franklin then briefed the Subcommittee members on the Internet advertising stating that it has been a success. The advertising agency recommended that banner advertising be used on some web sites that are frequented by commuters. For example, washington post.com has a traffic page that commuters use, and a Commuter Connections banner was placed on that site. In addition, key word sponsorship on some of the major search engines was used and has done really well. The average visits to the Commuter Connections Home page is about 5500 per month. Over the last twelve months the high was last October 2002 at around 6300 visits. This October, we received about 12,500 visits to the Commuter Connections home page. Visits have doubled over the last 12 months. It is a combination of the key word sponsorships and the banners. It is a good balancing act of the type of media being purchased over the Internet.

Q. Any idea about how many of the visits came from the media ads?

A. If you take the 12,000 and subtract the average of what Commuter Connections receives in given month which is about 5500, then you can contribute the balance of it to the interactive campaign because we know exactly how many hits we got from each of these sites that we placed banners on. It is about 50/50. The grand total so far is about 5900 hits specifically attributed to Internet advertising that was purchased and then the balance would be the Mass Marketing.

Next, Mr. Franklin reviewed the public relations elements of the campaign. In Tuesday's, October 21st edition of *The Washington Post*, Commuter Connections was featured in the Metro Section. The press release from COG went out on Monday, October 20th. The press release promoted the regional mass marketing campaign. Spokespeople were lined up to endorse the campaign. Mr. Peter Shapiro, the Chair of the Transportation Planning Board (TPB), taped interviews with WMAL and WMAU on Monday, October 20th, endorsing the campaign. Also, Mr. Rick Rybeck with DDOT was on WTOP and that segment ran twice on Monday, October 20th. On Monday night, there was an in-studio interview on Montgomery County Cable with Nancy Floreen who is on the Montgomery County Council and also a Board member. Mr. Ramfos also mentioned that Commuter Connections also got some coverage on News Channel 4.

Mr. Franklin stated that at last month's Subcommittee meeting he had talked about the dioramas for GRH with WMATA but unfortunately at the last minute it fell through due to space availability. Staff has requested bus vinyl space for the spring for GRH in lieu of missing out on the diorama space this fall.

The radio commercials that were played at the last meeting will begin to air the week of October 20th, GRH commercials will run through Thanksgiving and then pick up again in January 2004.

A GRH direct mail campaign will also be implemented and postcards will be sent out to targeted zip codes throughout the region. A prizm analysis was conducted with the GRH database. We did a profile of who that customer is that is most likely to take alternative transportation and take advantage of the GRH program. We were able to create a profile of who that target customer is and then look at the entire region and try to find pockets or zip codes of customers that match that profile. The GRH program is being marketed to those that hesitate to try alternative transportation, because they think that they are going to be stranded. We are trying to let them

know about the GRH program and that they can take alternative transportation that is flexible because of this program.

In regards to the Telework initiative, there is a new radio spot that has not yet been produced, and it will be recorded later this month. Mr. Franklin then handed out the draft script to Subcommittee members. The Telework commercial will promote the Telework Centers throughout the region. The Telework radio spot will be a 60 seconds long. The radio spots will air in November and then again in January 2004. The Employer Telework seminars will be taking place in March through June of 2004 and we are in the process of putting together advertising for the seminars.

Item #5 Commuter Operations Center Update

Mr. Christopher Arabia, DTP/COG, updated the Subcommittee on the recent activities of the Commuter Operations Center.

Mr. Arabia updated the Subcommittee on the Rideshare program and the clients that have the Rideshare software. The Operations Center is nearly completed with updating everyone's local machines with the new Street file data and the Transit data; we have about three to four sites left. Everyone should be up and running within the next week or so with the latest data. The Operations Center is having more jurisdictions use FTP as a way to transfer their data rather than using the phone lines and modems. A new FTP server has been put into service for that process here at COG, and it is being tested with Montgomery County. For those jurisdictions that are currently using FTP, settings will be updated so that data can be retrieved from the COG server. The new COG server will eliminate the current web site host provider.

Mr. Arabia stated that during the last few weeks there were several technical problems with the modems and that most of the problems were due to aging equipment. The problems did not affect overall operations. Clients were notified that there were technical problems and that they were being addressed.

Mr. Arabia is also working on providing an on-site customer service training session for client-members who are answering phone calls on a daily basis and dealing with customers service issues. The training session will probably be a half-day session and will be scheduled for sometime in November.

Mr. Arabia stated that the E-communicator system is up and running and some problem areas have been identified. There are some improvements that need to be made by the software contractor.

Item #6 Telework Resource Center Update

Ms. Danette Campbell, DTP/COG updated the Subcommittee on recent Telework Resource Center Activities. The Subcommittee was asked to approve the FY03 Draft Employer Seminar Report.

Mr. Nicholas Ramfos filled in for Ms. Campbell who was attending the FRPA Conference and stated that at the September 23rd Commuter Connections Subcommittee meeting Ms. Campbell

presented the FY03 Draft Employer Seminar Report. Minor comments were received back and those changes will be incorporated into the report. The Subcommittee approved the FY03 Draft Employer Seminar Report for release with the changes.

Mr. Ramfos briefed the Subcommittee members on the Expanded Telecommuting TERM that started this fiscal year. A firm has been brought on board by the name of Telecommuting Advantage Group. They started working with Commuter Connections about two months ago and will target employers of 1000 or more employees in Maryland and Virginia and work with GSA and OPM on targeting 10 to 15 Federal employers. All of these employers already have some type of Telework program. The goal is to expand the number of Telework participants at these worksites. There are a number of different partnerships that have been formed, one of them being with the Greater Washington Board of Trade. We have joined The Board of Trade in order to start promoting this effort with their larger employees and will hold a kick-off to encourage more employers to get involved in Telecommuting.

Commuter Connections will be participating in the Washington Business Journal Business Expo that is occurring at the Convention Center in Washington, DC on October 22nd-23rd. Commuter Connections will have an exhibit focusing on the Telework initiative and other Commuter Connections programs. The Telecommuting Advantage Group will be there and we have invited some of our DC Employer Outreach representatives along with Ms. Deborah Skea who is the Chair of our Employer Outreach Group and Ms. Robin Briscoe who chairs the Subcommittee.

Staff has been working with our contractor, WorkLife Performance on the implementation of the Employer Telework Seminars. The dates set for the seminars are in March, April, May and June. All of the workshops will be here at COG. The seminars will be centralized in order to save on costs. The tentative dates for the seminars are March 4th, March 11th, and March 23rd. In April, it will be April 21st and April 27th. In May it will be May 4th. In June it will be June 2nd. The workshop curriculum will be based on the employer seminar evaluation reports. The seminars have been conducted since 1997. The seminars have been focused on "Teleworking 101," which goes over how to set up a program, how to evaluate the program, and issues associated with the program on the management end as well as the worker end. The contractor has developed a new curriculum which is in a tiered approach. One of the seminars will be on Telework Technology issues, choosing and using the right type of technology for your organization, and this will be a half-day session. Another seminar will focus on management; how to manage teleworkers and remote teams. There will also be a seminar that will focus on training; how to train your teleworkers for anywhere, any time performance. These seminars are based on feedback from prior seminar participants and what is occurring in the industry. For Subcommittee members, who are interested in attending any one of the Telework seminars, please inform Ms. Campbell.

Next, Mr. Ramfos stated that Commuter Connections is working with the City of Alexandria on the implementation of a Telework event on November 5th that will be taking place from 11:30 am till 1:30 pm at the Embassy Suites hotel. Ms. Shauna Brown has put this event together. It is primarily targeting employers in the City of Alexandria to get them involved in the Telework VA Incentive program. There will be a panel of existing Telework Virginia program participants from Alexandria and they are going to be discussing their overall experience with the initiative

and how it has improved their business strategy. It will be a testimonial for other businesses in the area.

MATAC, will be holding their first awards ceremony at the Old Ebbit Grill, at 675 15th Street, NW, on Friday, November 7th, at 11:30 am. There is a call for nominations for awards and staff will be assisting in judging the awards and logistics for this event.

For those Subcommittee members who are interesting in the MATAC Awards, the categories are: Best Company for Teleworkers, this award is going to recognize an employer who is currently implementing a result oriented Telework program focusing on Telework as a best business practice. The second award will be the Most Innovative Technology Company; the award is going to recognize a business or organization that has developed and implemented an innovative and efficient technology telework support system. The third award for a Regional Telework Champion, a company or organization that recognizes that private or public company or organization that promotes and supports Telework in the Mid-Atlantic region. The last award is the Regional Telework Champion, this will be geared towards an individual who promotes and supports Telework in the Mid-Atlantic region. Information on the awards can be obtained from MATAC's web site.

Mr. Ramfos stated that the Telecommuting Ad-Hoc Group met in October and the new Chair for the Telecommuting Ad-Hoc Group is Mr. Ronald Mitchell from DDOT. The planning for the 2004 Washington Area Conference on Telework will begin soon. Commuter Connections will be looking for a location in Northern Virginia.

Q. Are the Telework Seminars all going to be half-days?

A. The Choosing and using the Right Telework Technology and the Managing Teleworkers and remote teams sessions will be half-day, but they will be on the same day, and there will be one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The Training your Teleworkers for anywhere, any time performance, will be a full-day session. All the information will be coming out in a brochure and on the Commuter Connections web site.

Item #7 FY05 Work Program

Mr. Nicholas Ramfos, DTP/COG, discussed the upcoming preparations of the FY05 Commuter Connections Work Program.

At the last meeting a timeline was distributed to Subcommittee members for development of the FY05 Work Program. Next month's step is to prepare each of the Work Program Elements. Staff would like to get feedback from anyone who has project specific items that they would like to be considered for the Work Program. Staff is in the process of verifying all of the information. In November, the Subcommittee will get a draft version of the Work Program for FY05. Staff will give a presentation on their particular section and a comment period will be established at the December Subcommittee meeting.

We are not expecting any major changes to the Work Program as far as the program elements themselves. Last year we had quite a few changes because of the addition of TPB adopted TERMS, such as the Expanded Telework TERM to the Work Program. There was also the Mass Marketing TERM which was integrated into the Work Program. Most of the TERMS are in maintenance mode, other than Mass Marketing. There is another year on the GRH initiative until the eight-year build up mark is reached.

Mr. Ramfos stated that this is a critical year for data collection activities. Next year much of the data collected will be published in the State of the Commute Report, and some new GRH applicant survey information will be available along with placement rate survey information, and we will also take a look at the Telework center occupancy rates. These are all critical components of including the data into the regional Air Quality Conformity analysis. This helps the region with attainment given air quality challenges in the region. Focus will put on the data collected this year in order for data analysis results to be used in 2005.

- Q.** Are the Telework Centers leased by the jurisdiction that they are in or does COG lease them?
- A.** Initially, there was a push to try to get COG into the Telework Center building arena and after it was reviewed and discussed with GSA, COG decided that it did not want to be in the construction business. COG has partnered with GSA to obtain occupancy rate results that are collected on a monthly basis. Every three years a survey is conducted to determine occupancy rates at the centers and then a comparison is done to see if there has been any growth in the rates. The region takes credit under the Telework TERM for the occupancy rate growth.
- Q.** Who pays for the overhead for the centers?
- A.** These are all GSA operated centers and the centers at some point and time need to be self-sufficient but they are continuing to get congressional dollars to support their operations. There is a user fee per seat. The current monthly occupancy rate is at about 62 percent at all the centers. There are a total of 440 seats that are available throughout the region.

Item #8 1st Quarter Budget Report

Mr. Nicholas Ramfos, DTP/COG, distributed and reviewed the FY04 CCWP 1st Quarter budget report.

Mr. Ramfos distributed to Subcommittee members a copy of the budget report (*enclosed*) and stated that the 1st quarter of our fiscal year is July 1 through September 30th. The report shows budget totals for each of the work program elements that were approved in the Work Program for FY04. This year COG has received a funding commitment from each of its funding agencies. There are some adjustments that are still being worked out, partly with funding for the State of the Commute report. The issue is that the survey is conducted every three years and there is an associated cost. The funds needed for the survey are not allocated in the Work Program. All three DOTs have been working to secure the funds. Some of the numbers will not match up on

the budget total with the Work Program mainly because \$180,000 was added for the State of the Commute report and the addition is documented under each of the asterisks at the bottom of the report.

Last year, the Mass Marketing program was implemented towards the end of the fiscal year and there were funds that were committed in FY03. Approximately \$875,000 was not spent in FY03 and will be spent during FY04. This amount is reflected in the Regional Mass Marketing budget. The FY03 funds will primarily be used for media purchases that were supposed to occur last year and for contractor support.

Item #9 Update on Regional Air Quality Conformity

Mr. Daivamani Sivasailam, COG/DTP, briefed the Subcommittee on the status of the Regional Air Quality Conformity Analysis.

Mr. Sivasailam handed out to the Subcommittee members the Regional Air Quality Conformity report (*enclosed*) which was presented to the Transportation Planning Board (TPB) at their October 15th meeting, at which time the Air Quality Conformity Report of the 2003 Constraints Long-Range Plan and FY2004-09 Transportation Improvement Program was released for public comment.

The document is out for public comment for one month and the TPB will act on it and approve it. One of the things that might hold it up is the region has submitted to the EPA what is called a State Implementation Plan with certain budgets that the transportation sector has to meet and the TPB cannot act on the plan and the program until EPA approves the budget.

Mr. Sivasailam then went over Exhibit 1 (on page 6 of handout) which shows the non-attainment area. Exhibit 2 shows the travel demand areas that are modeled. Exhibits 3 and 4 basically show Mobile 6 emission factors for the two big pollutants VOC and NOx. Exhibit 5 is the most important table; it shows the emissions from the plan and the program. It breaks it down into different components, some of them are modeled and some of them are done off-network. The EPA has not approved the SIP. Both VOC and NOx, came in under the budget, therefore, no new TERMS will be adopted. On Attachment D are the previously implemented TERMS for which we have taken credit. The TPB is waiting for EPA approval of the budget and once they do that then they can approve the plan and the program.

Item #10 Other Business/Set Agenda for Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 12:00 noon.

***The next meeting of the Commuter Connections Subcommittee will be held on
Tuesday, November 18, 2003***