



Strategic Plan

2023-2024

Background

The Commuter Connections Strategic Plan was developed through a cooperative effort by the Maryland Department of Transportation, Maryland Transit Administration, Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, Virginia Department of Transportation, and the District of Columbia Department of Transportation, with the Commuter Connections network members (Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore Metropolitan Council, Bethesda Transportation Solutions, City of Alexandria, Fairfax County, US Department of Defense – Pentagon, US Food and Drug Administration, GW RideConnect, Frederick County, Harford County, Howard County, Loudoun County, Montgomery County, National Institutes of Health, North Bethesda TMD, Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission, Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission, Prince George’s County, Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission, and Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland).

The Commuter Connections Strategic Plan:

- Serves as a framework for decisions and gaining support for the Commuter Connections program
- Provides the basis for more detailed planning and the development of the annual Commuter Connections Work Program
- Assists with benchmarking and performance monitoring by completing the activities described in the Monitoring and Evaluation program element in the annual Commuter Connections Work Program.
- Defines the roles and responsibilities of the Commuter Connections network members and stakeholders

Mission Statement

Commuter Connections assists and encourages people in the Washington region to use alternatives to the single-occupant automobile.

Definition of Commuter Connections

A network of public and private transportation organizations – including state and local transportation agencies, regional/metropolitan planning organizations and transportation management associations – that work together to achieve the mission of encouraging the use of alternatives to the single-occupant vehicle.

Network Objectives

Program Objectives

- Provide programs and information that reduce vehicle trips, miles traveled, and trip lengths.
- Assist the region in improving air quality and mobility.
- Foster cooperative program planning and operations with network members and funding agencies.
- Enhance the Commuter Connections “brand” by increasing awareness that will lead to changes in travel behavior.
- Provide excellent and reliable customer service to residents, employers, employees, and other stakeholders.

Operating Objectives

- Foster open and direct cooperation, communications, and coordination between Commuter Connections network members, including committee procedures that foster full participation.
- Provide COG/National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) staff support for the Commuter Connections Subcommittee.
- Ensure responsiveness and accountability to funding agencies’ direction and guidance for program focus and goals.
- Ensure that all network members (e.g., funding agencies, local jurisdictions, COG, local contractors, and others) hold each other accountable for fulfilling program objectives.
- Monitor cost effectiveness for Commuter Connections individual programs to help ensure optimal use of resources.

- Provide an open forum for sharing information and status on Transportation Demand Management (TDM) projects in the region, whether implemented through or outside of Commuter Connections, with all network members.

Commuter Operations Center

Objectives

- Provide ridematching coordination and technical assistance.
- Maintain a network member help desk telephone line and e-mail support.
- Provide COG/Transportation Planning Board (TPB) staff support for the Ridematching Committee.
- Provide transportation information services to the general public.
- Maintain and upgrade the Commuter Connections TDM system website, software, hardware and regional database for the on-line and smart phone and tablet accessible TDM system and related mobile applications.
- Maintain 24/7 access to TDM software system for network members and the general public.
- Maintain and update local information for transit, telework centers, park and ride lots and bicycle route information.

Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH)

Objectives for the Washington and Baltimore Metropolitan Regions

- Provide users of alternative commute modes up to six free rides home per year in a taxi, rental car, transportation network company (TNC), or on transit (or appropriate combination).
- Maintain and update the GRH database on a regular basis; renewal should be automated; provide automatic reminders when people's annual registration expires.

- Maintain and update GRH rules and guidelines as needed
- Provide access to the Operations Center for GRH services for the general public
- Provide yearly analysis of GRH program.

Marketing of Alternative Commute Options

Objectives

- Provide and promote an umbrella branding for Commuter Connections which reflects the participation of Commuter Connections members and funders and allows members to use the umbrella marketing materials and advertisements in a co-branded manner without forgoing their individual identity and branding.
- Develop and implement an annual regional marketing program which supports the TDM alternatives and special events offered or sponsored by Commuter Connections.
- Coordinate marketing approach with regional and local marketing efforts and reflect policies of state agencies.
- Ensure marketing programs reflect the market turnover by balancing awareness and action goals to achieve conversion of single occupant vehicle trips to other modes as well as retention of existing alternative mode users.
- Ensure the promotion process includes adequate opportunity for member input, review, and approval at appropriate stages of planning, budgeting, production, and execution.
- Ensure message continuity and retention within budget parameters by scheduling promotions that are seasonally adjusted to market demand (need) to achieve the greatest return on investment, with a goal of maintaining continuous awareness of Commuter Connections programs and services.
- Provide member organizations break-downs of marketing costs by individual programs and events within programs. Include estimated budgets and timelines by campaign which can be evaluated and adjusted on a quarterly basis.

- Provide member organizations quarterly summary report of expenditures versus budget.
- Provide member organizations options for periodic program area marketing messaging adjustments.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Objectives

- Review and update methodology to link monitoring and reporting of program results to obtaining program goals and objectives and the development of future plans and actions.
- Collect and analyze data every three years as well as provide quarterly program tracking and monitoring reports for each program area as defined in the Evaluation Framework and Methodology.
- Provide results of State of the Commute Survey, Placement Rate, Retention Rate, and other surveys at regional, state and local jurisdiction levels.
- Provide summary of carpooling demographics.
- Incorporate funding agencies' input into development of guidance for survey.
- Establish action items as a result of surveys. Link survey results and action items to future goals and objectives for Commuter Connections program.
- Provide monthly, quarterly, and annual progress reports on results of the Commuter Operations Center, Guaranteed Ride Home, Employer Outreach, and Marketing program elements.
- Provide analysis of Commuter Connections TDM program element measures, including the Operations Center, Guaranteed Ride Home, Marketing, and Employer Outreach and the program impacts on transportation and emissions.

- Incorporate Commuter Connections program analysis results into the Congestion Management Process.

Employer Outreach

Objectives

- Increase the number of employers providing alternative transportation programs and incentives to their employees.
- Increase the number of alternative transportation options provided by participating employers.
- Increase the number of participating employees at existing employer programs.
- Increase the number of employee surveys conducted.
- Integrate participating local jurisdictional efforts under one umbrella program to provide quarterly reports on results of employer outreach.
- Provide support to participating local jurisdictions in the form of updated marketing materials. Assess marketing materials and training needs for entire program (not individual jurisdictions) and develop a plan. Provide marketing materials and training to sales representatives as described in the plan.
- Maintain and update on a regular basis the employer outreach database.
- Provide participating local jurisdictions and funding agencies ready accessibility to regional employer outreach database.
- Reassess and revise the goals for each participating jurisdiction on a regular basis.
- Assess, identify, and overcome the barriers to cooperative efforts for sales and maintenance of employer outreach programs.

Telework

Objectives

- Provide information to employers on the benefits of teleworking and assist them in setting up new telework programs, or expanding existing programs, for their employees.
- Provide services to assist participating employer outreach staff in local jurisdictions set up new or expand existing telework programs.
- Determine needs and provide training on telework programs.
- Increase number of teleworkers in the region.
- Increase the number of employers with a telework program.

Improving Existing Programs and Exploring New Initiatives

Objectives

- Identify efficiencies in operations of existing programs.
- Identify cost savings options in operation of existing programs.
- Evaluate and develop new TDM strategies
- Research innovative ideas in other regions to determine their viability for the Washington, DC region.
- Evaluate the efficiency of offering assistance for non-commute trips.
- Participation in partnerships on various transportation projects