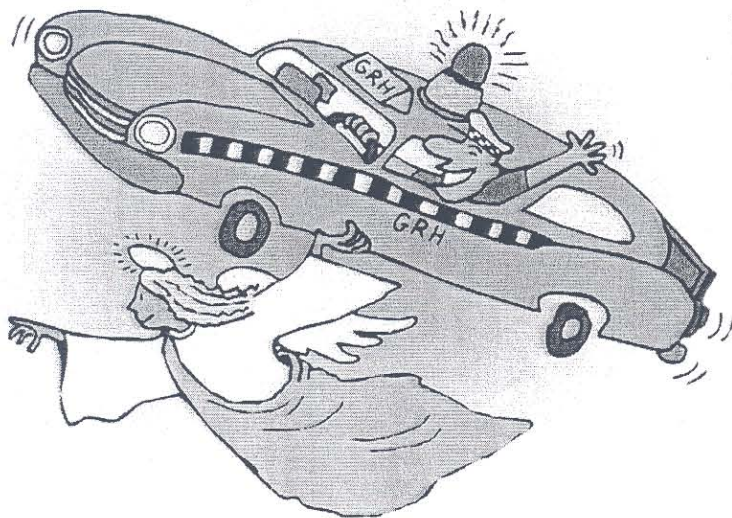


Guaranteed Ride Home
Customer Satisfaction Survey Results
Fiscal Year 2004
FIRST DRAFT



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THE COMMUTER INFORMATION SOURCE FOR MARYLAND,
VIRGINIA AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



Background and Exposition

Guaranteed Ride Home

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' (COG) Commuter Connections program, under the auspices of its funding entities, has operated the Guaranteed Ride Home program (GRH) since January 1997. A "commuter insurance" program, GRH is designed to encourage ridesharing and transit usage by providing a way home for qualifying commuters in the cases of personal emergency or unexpected overtime when their normal alternative commute mode is not available. Many commuters are concerned about being "stranded at work" if they unexpectedly have to leave work before or after their normal time if they carpool, vanpool, or take transit to work. By providing this incentive, GRH eliminates this concern, and therefore encourages ridesharing, transit use, bicycling and walking to work as an alternative means of transportation. Commuters' use of these transportation modes in place of driving alone serves to reduce the number of cars on the road and help the region attain its federally mandated air quality goals.

A full listing of the program's qualifications, limitations on its usage, and a more complete description of the process involved in registering commuters for the program may be obtained online at the Commuter Connections Web site, <http://www.commuterconnections.org>.



We'll Get You Home. Guaranteed.

Figure 1 | Guaranteed Ride Home's promotional slogan

Customer Satisfaction Survey and Report

The customer satisfaction survey for GRH is conducted monthly on a year-round basis and encompasses all commuters who obtain a free ride home under the program's guidelines. Every commuter who used the program receives a survey response card for each ride received, allowing individual evaluation for each ride taken. The accompanying cover letter (*see* Figure 2, following page) informs commuters of the purpose and voluntary nature of the survey, and the postage-paid, self-mailing response card (*see* Figure 3) allows for quick and easy submission of responses on the part of survey respondents. The same questionnaire has been used every year since the program's inception in 1997, allowing for a direct comparison with all fiscal years. The survey card allows respondents to rate the GRH service and provide comments and suggestions with complete anonymity. Despite the ability to remain anonymous, some respondents have provided their name and telephone number with their responses. In some instances these respondents have been featured in local and regional newspaper

articles on the benefits of GRH. This report, published annually, takes advantage of the aforementioned consistency of the survey design over all fiscal years to provide comparisons to previous fiscal years in addition to in-depth analysis of the current fiscal year's results.



June 1, 2003

Dear Commuter:

Thank you for using the Commuter Connections Guaranteed Ride Home program. We are surveying all of our customers to determine the level of satisfaction with our Guaranteed Ride Home program. This will help us to improve our program and to better serve our customers.

Please take a moment and complete the enclosed survey card. After you have completed the survey, just drop the card in the mail, no postage necessary.

Your answers to the survey should reflect ONLY your May 2003 GRH trip. If you have used the GRH program since May 2003, you will also receive a survey card for that trip. Please return the enclosed survey card within 10 days.

If you would like an update of the Guaranteed Ride Home participation guidelines, or if you would like information about other Commuter Connections services, please visit our web site at www.commuterconnections.org, or call us at 1-800-745-RIDE.

Thank you for your participation.

Happy Commuting!

COMMUTER CONNECTIONS

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www.commuterconnections.org



1-800-745-RIDE

Figure 2 | Cover letter sent with survey response forms to commuters who had used the program within the given month

Survey Design

The survey consists of four multiple-choice questions, each relevant to a specific aspect of GRH, and a section for the respondent to write their suggestions. The four questions provide insight into customers' opinions regarding the different operational functions of GRH, and—as will be analyzed later in this report—the section for suggestions is often used to make miscellaneous comments about these functions, as well as, the service in general (*see* Written Responses, p. 7). The multiple-choice questions ask the respondent to rate the different aspects of the service by circling one of four responses—“Poor,” “Fair,” “Good,” and “Excellent.” Some respondents choose to write in “N/A,” do not circle a rating, or add a qualifier to the response, such as “very,” a plus symbol (+), or a minus symbol (-). Qualifiers were ignored in tabulating the survey results, and responses marked “N/A” were treated as non-responses.

The operational aspects of GRH addressed by the four multiple-choice questions are reservations staff, transportation service, response time, and overall service. “Reservations staff” refers to the operators who answer telephone calls from commuters requesting GRH service, verify the request in accordance with the official GRH participation guidelines, and arrange the ride for the commuter. These operators are employees of Diamond Transportation Services, Inc., an entity under contract with COG to provide this service. “Transportation service” refers to the transportation modes (e.g. taxi, rental car, transit, or a combination thereof) and service providers used to provide the commuter with his or her ride home. The transportation services used for the GRH trip are selected by Diamond Transportation and the service providers have contracts with COG for reimbursement of GRH trip expenses.

By asking questions specific to operational functions within GRH, those aspects of the program which need improvement can easily be identified, and since the survey design is consistent to all previous fiscal years, year-to-year performance can also be measured.

Thank you for using our Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH).
We want to know how you feel about our GRH Program.

Please take a moment and complete this card. Your response is greatly appreciated. Mail this card to us or fax it to 202-962-3218

Please circle one response for each question.

How would you rate the service you received
from our GRH trip reservations staff? Poor Fair Good Excellent

How would you rate the taxi or
rental car service? Poor Fair Good Excellent

How would you rate our response time? Poor Fair Good Excellent

Overall, how would you rate our
GRH service? Poor Fair Good Excellent

What suggestions do you have to improve our GRH
service?

Visit our web site at www.commuterconnections.org

COMMUTER CONNECTIONS
A SUSTAINABLE WAY TO WORK
Guaranteed Ride Home Program

1-800-745-RIDE

We'll Get You Home. Guaranteed.

Figure 3 | Sample survey response form

Response Rates

Of 2,916 surveys distributed in fiscal year 2004, 786 were received, making for a 27% response rate.

Response rates have fluctuated over the years, however in the past two years, the response rate has remained almost the same. This fluctuation can be due to a number of factors, such as delays between trips taken and surveys sent out due to staff shortages, and the survey not reaching the GRH user because of incomplete home or mailing address information, due to the omission of needed information (i.e. apartment number, PO Box, etc.) on the part of the GRH registrant.

Fiscal Year 2004 Survey Results

This section shows the survey results from the fiscal year 2004 GRH users only. Upcoming sections of this report will provide a comparison of results with previous fiscal years (1997 through present). For further clarification of the "Survey Design," please see page three for the rationale behind each question, explanation of some of the terms used, as well as an example of the survey response form that was used to submit the results that follow.

Although 786 responses were received, a small number of respondents did not answer all four questions. As a result of this, the sum of the responses to some of the following questions will not equal 786.

Question One: Reservation Staff

How would you rate the services you received from our GRH reservation staff?

Question Two: Transportation Service

How would you rate the taxi or rental car service?

For questions one and two, the combined percentage of “Good” and “Excellent” ratings was 94% for question one and 93% for question two; and that of “Fair” and “Poor” was 5% for question one and 8% for question two.

Question Three: Response Time

How would you rate our response time?

Response time received one of the largest proportions of unsatisfied ratings, which combined for 8% of “Fair” and “Poor” responses.

Question Four: Overall Service

Overall, how would you rate our GRH service?

Overall service received the highest percentage of satisfied ratings. “Good” and “Excellent” responses combined for 95% of the ratings.

Written Responses

In addition to four multiple-choice questions, survey respondents were asked to provide suggestions for the improvement of the GRH service. The phrasing of the question does seem to bias response toward suggestions and away from other comments, but the question provides a prompt to which the respondent can easily and naturally respond. The question engages the respondent, and ultimately 41% of respondents provided their comments, suggestions, compliments or complaints with the GRH service. Comments like “None” or “N/A” were not incorporated into this analysis. The request for suggestions was intended to obtain ideas that could be considered to improve the GRH service. However, as shown in this report, compliments and complaints are just as valuable for analyzing service areas that could be improved and those areas that do not need adjustments.

Compliments

By far the most common type of written response was positive remarks or expressions of gratitude for the GRH service. Some commuters explicitly listed GRH as the only reason for them utilizing an alternative commute mode. The most common compliments were along the lines of “Keep up the great work” or “Don’t change a thing,” while a few of the respondents provided personal stories of a time when GRH helped them during a crisis situation. Sometimes a respondent that provided especially positive feedback included their contact information written in blank space on the card, a good source for positive media coverage of the GRH program.

Of the 202 compliments received, only 31 pertained to one specific aspect of the service. These were response time (15 responses), reservations staff (6 responses), and transportation service (10 responses). A possible explanation for this is that when the program functions smoothly, no particular aspect seems to stand out.

Complaints

The smallest number of respondents, 53 (7% of all written responses) complained about five principal subjects: the attitude and/or rudeness of the reservations staff, the failure of the cab to arrive at the predetermined location, the waiting period for the cab to arrive, and the lack of knowledge the cab drivers had of the GRH program.

The complaints seemed more focused on the transportation end. The reservation staff received only 6 complaints, and none of which were directed at the overall service of the program. Response time had the greatest number of complaints with 15, and the transportation service had the second highest number of complaints with 10. Transportation service complaints involved failure of the taxi company to call the commuter for pickup, cleanliness/comfort of transportation service vehicles, and finally the friendliness, driving characteristics, English proficiency, and the directional knowledge of the drivers. There were also some issues encountered with the driver's familiarity with the GRH program, where the driver would expect a voucher as a method of payment. Ultimately, the transportation service is responsible for the training of taxi drivers, and while valid issues are discussed with the transportation service provider, COG has very little direct control over these aspects of the service.

Suggestions

Fifty-eight suggestions were received (7% of all written responses) and covered a variety of topics, especially increasing the number of trips available, improving the cab company/drivers knowledge of the GRH program, extending the hours of operations, working on proper customer service etiquette for the reservations staff, and improving the quality of cabs and drivers for the program.

Other suggestions included sending reminders when the time comes for re-registration, establishing agreement with DC to ensure a response time of fifteen minutes or better, and ensuring that the cab driver understands exactly where the GRH customer is going to be picked up.

Comments

The smallest category of written responses, 11 (1%) were general comments. "Comments" for the purpose of this survey were defined as responses relatively benign in nature- they did not identify any positive aspect of the service as would a compliment, nor did they necessarily express unhappiness with the GRH service as would a complaint, and neither did they suggest any new aspect of the GRH service or pose their comments in the form of a suggestion..

Most of the comments conveyed the message to "keep offering the service." A couple of respondents mentioned that the service was good, but commented on how the driver took longer routes than necessary. Overall, the comments were positive.

Themes of Written Responses

In the written responses, a few themes were consistent among several different responses that ranged from suggestion to comments to complaints. While no single issue stood in stark contrast to the others in terms of how many like-minded responses were received, some deserve more attention than others:

- Improve the driver's understanding of the GRH program

While the majority of respondents agree that the GRH program is beneficial, the majority of complaints and/or suggestions were related to the lack of knowledge that the taxi driver had for the GRH program.

Although GRH is a Commuter Connection program, it is not the responsibility of the Council of Governments (COG) to train the taxi drivers on the technicalities of the program. The cab company, in this case Diamond Cab, is given sufficient training on the program which they should then pass on to their employees.

- Providing the reservations staff with sufficient customer service training

Several of the complaints (32%) made reference to the lack of respect that the reservations staff had for the GRH users. Most of the complaints made reference to the rudeness and/or attitudes of the reservations staff. A couple of the respondents also commented on how, at times, the reservations staff was not clear on their instructions which led to miscommunication with the cab driver and an overall unpleasant GRH ride.

Commuter Connections provides an annual customer training program for the reservations staff at Diamond Cab Company. Also, if there is a need for a more extensive or further customer service training for the reservations staff, Commuter Connections will provide that as well.

- Establishing an agreement with DC to ensure a response time of 15 minutes or better

Several suggestions referred to the need for a quicker or guaranteed response time of fifteen minutes or faster. People's responses included the fact that if they were using the GRH program, it was usually for an emergency, in which case they

would not have time to wait 30 or 40 minutes for a cab or rental car to come and pick them up.

Commuter Connections, as well as the people at Diamond Cab Company, always strive towards the quickest response time possible. However, there are times when miscommunications occur, traffic is a problem, or other contributing factors do not allow for a quicker response time. Most of the time, these factors are out of the control of Commuter Connections. A quick response time has always been one of the main goals of the GRH program and there are steps being taken to hopefully improve the consistency of a fast response time.

Taxi Cab Issues

The major issues in most of the written complaints and comments had to do with the quality of the taxis and attitudes of the taxi drivers. While this is not a matter that COG can directly influence, it does seem to be of major concern to many GRH participants. Therefore, identifying the problem, and notifying the participating cab companies of these problems may be a step in the right direction.

One theme that came up was making sure drivers of cabs understand how GRH works. In some instances, the cab drivers did not know that they would not be receiving payment directly from the commuter. This led to delays as drivers had to radio their dispatchers to receive information on how the GRH program worked. Also, taxi drivers and riders should understand that tip is not covered under the GRH program, and any tip given will be out of the rider's pocket. Some cab drivers seem to believe that tips are mandatory when using our service. A recommendation for handling this issue is to create a pamphlet for taxi cab drivers of participating cab companies, which explains to them how the GRH system works. The payment of tips is explained in the contract between COG and the taxi companies, and in the participation guidelines provided to GRH registrants.

While not a major problem, the issue of driver attitude and knowledge was of concern to some GRH commuters. One related a story of a taxi driver who stopped to fill up the gas tank and left the engine running. Others related stories of having to give directions to cab drivers, or drivers simply not knowing where a destination was. While the former cannot really be corrected, the latter does need to be dealt with. Drivers not knowing the locations of specific hospitals and schools (two major reasons for using GRH) can create a discomfort in using the system and discourage repeated use. Again, using a pamphlet here might be useful, outlining emergency locations in a given region for a cab company.

A suggestion made by one commuter was to allow commuters to contact GRH staff from the Metro station instead of the commuter's office to arrange a cab.

This suggestion seems to imply a lack of understanding, on the part of some commuters, about the necessity of obtaining authorization for the GRH trip prior to the start of the trip home.

Drawing Conclusions

The vast majority (96%) of the fiscal year 2004 survey respondents were satisfied with the overall service GRH provides. Although the level of satisfaction is very similar to that of fiscal year 2003, the percentage of "Poor" and "Fair" ratings dropped, indicating that the service is improving.

More than half (59%) of the written comments were compliments. Nevertheless, a small number of the total number of respondents (7%) was not satisfied with certain aspects of the GRH service they received. The majority of complaints received concern aspects of the taxi service that are beyond COG's control. One of the main complaints had to do with the driver's lack of understanding of the GRH program. Commuter Connections continuously provides customer training and information to the reservations staff and other employees at Diamond Cab Company, as well as further training sessions when needed. Although these matters move out of COG's control, COG addresses related issues with the president of the taxi company when a series of complaints about that company are received. Progress has been made in the area of cab driver's understanding of the GRH program, but there is obviously more to be done. As far as other complaints, COG strives towards progression with all aspects of the GRH program and will continue to do so in the future.