COMMUTER CONNECTIONS
RIDEMATCHING COMMITTEE
MEETING NOTES

Tuesday, December 17, 2019
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 and sign the attendance sheet.

2. Minutes of the September 17th, 2019 meeting

Approval was sought for the September 17th, 2019 Ridematching Committee Meeting minutes. An initial motion to approve was made by George Clark of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland and a second was made by Nancy Huggins, MDOT. The minutes were approved as written unanimously.

3. Upcoming Fairs and Promotions

Anne Arundel County Office of Transportation
- Anne Arundel County will be implementing monthly transit passes beginning February 2020
- Holiday Challenge – commuters who sign up for CCRS or GRH receive a gift (insulated cup / lunch bag)
- Movie theater advertising in all three major theaters in Anne Arundel County - Jan 3rd through Feb 12, 2020
- Mayor of Annapolis toy drive on 12/24
- Outreach Fair on 01/24
- One Annapolis community engagement fair on 01/30

Arlington Transportation Partners
- ATP annual champions recognition event on 02/06

Baltimore City DOT
- GRH on the weather channel
- GRH on LinkedIn
- Rebranding of Charm City Circulator – new busses, new logo, new slogan
- Working with new apartment buildings to promote programs

Bethesda Transportation Solutions
- Commuter information day on January 8th
- Finishing up commuter surveys

NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION TRANSPORTATION PLANNING BOARD, 777 NORTH CAPITOL STREET, N.E., SUITE 300, WASHINGTON, DC 20002-4239

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

WWW.COMMUTERCONNECTIONS.ORG   1-800-745-RIDE

GWRideConnect
- Attended Ft. Belvoir commuter fair
- Outreach to Community College
- Outreach to University of Mary Washington
- Outreach to area realtors
- Began a YouTube campaign
- Held a holiday open house
- Vanpool Alliance vanpool forum

Harford County Commute Smart
- TAM 2020 legislation session on 01/21
- Project Homeless Connect Resource Fair on 01/24
- Highland School – getting there with Harford transit travel training session on 01/06
- School for the Blind – getting there with LINK travel training session on 01/07

North Bethesda Transportation
- Commuter information day at FDA/NIH
- Wrapping up employer and residential survey process
- Working with companies to sign up for revised fare share, Montgomery County's transit benefit subsidy
- Planning winter events with ETC's

PRTC
- Asset Loot (property management) transit tabletop on 09/11
- Economic development series lunch on 09/12: Amazon town hall (event sponsor – tabletop presence plus two minutes of podium time)
- Access Tysons transportation fair on 09/17
- Car-Free Day outreach and Manassas farmers market on 09/21
- Quantico welcome aboard brief on 09/23
- Chairman's debate at Manassas NOVA campus on 10/08
- PWSHRM HR/Law summit on 10/11
- Military retiree appreciation day at Quantico on 10/18
- Navy Yard commuter fair on 10/23
- Salute to the armed forces event at Quantico on 10/28
- Chamber of Commerce Future of the Region event at the Hilton Performing Arts Center on 11/07
- Alexandria TMP summit on 11/08
- Ft. Belvoir Newcomers Orientation on 11/12
- NGA Transportation Event on 11/13
- Quantico welcome aboard brief on 12/02

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
- NGA transportation fair
- Wellness Fair at Engendered Health

Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland (TCCSM)
- Began promoting new online advertisements in November
- Running a new TV advertisement created by the TCCSM
- Press release during November on the TCCSM website
- TAM legislation session in January 2020

4. TDM System Update

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB, began his presentation by addressing an update to the GIS navigation network for the Commuter Connections Ridesharing program. Mr. Finafrock mentioned that this update includes new methods of routing that should improve the quality of matches provided to users and administrators running matchlists.

Mr. Finafrock then gave a basic explanation of how the new system will work, beginning with the first step, computing geographic coordinates for the origin and destination of a user's commute. After the computation is made, the system

then sends a request to the ArcGIS 10.7 server for the best route between the origin and destination. The server computes the points using a navigable street network COG has built from NAVTEQ/HERE streets data. Next, the server receives the response and parses out a simplified list of points that are encoded by Google to maintain backwards compatibility. This will serve as a "failover" and allow for information to continue to be provided should the ESRI server be unreachable.

Mr. Finafrock then mentioned that these changes will not affect the look and feel of the TDM System and should go largely unnoticed by users and administrators. Mr. Finafrock then mentioned that these improvements are an important steppingstone in completing the Commuter Connections GIS Depot project, which will serve as a one-stop geodatabase for all geospatial data associated with the Commuter Connections program.

Mr. Finafrock then moved on to review the incenTrip application programing interface (API). Mr. Finafrock described the registration process, mentioning that it is simple and that those who opt to receive incentives will automatically have a Commuter Connections account created for them. Pre-existing Commuter Connections members can sign into incenTrip using their Commuter Connections credentials.

Mr. Finafrock then mentioned that new Commuter Connections accounts created through incenTrip must be reviewed by an administrator. This requires the admin to check the ad source, which will be automatically set to "APPIT1" and to assign the appropriate appcode.

Leigh Anderson, GWRideConnect, asked if users will be asked to join Ridesharing or Guaranteed Ride Home when a Commuter Connections account is created for them. Mr. Finafrock reiterated that this is not currently how the system works but it will be considered for future enhancements.

Mr. Finafrock then moved on to display recent enhancements made to the route-based ridematching algorithm. Examples included the differences between route-based and radial matching from origins such as Arlington, Va.; Southern Pennsylvania; Newport News, Va.; and Cumberland Md. Mr. Finafrock also mentioned that results are limited to the top 15 matches and that the enhancements are working well on the test server and will soon be available on the production version of the TDM System.

Mr. Finafrock then introduced the scoping and goals of implementing a chatbot within the Commuter Connections website and/or TDM System. Mr. Finafrock described the chatbot as a way to increase the level of comfort for users and to serve as a self-serve helpdesk for those who have basic questions. Mr. Finafrock mentioned that there will be an escalation process for more complex questions that may result in connecting the user to a Commuter Connections staff member to obtain a satisfactory answer.

Joe Stainsby, Virginia Vanpool Alliance, suggested that it be disclosed to the user that they are interacting with a chatbot, mentioning that it can be frustrating or that the user may feel deceived if they are left to figure that out.

Leigh Anderson, GWRideConnect, mentioned that GWRideConnect activates a chatbot feature when staff is unavailable, after business hours or during Holidays. Ms. Anderson also mentioned that it was typical for users to interact with the chatbot when they had more bizarre or complicated questions.

Mr. Finafrock then continued to present a slide depicting the various levels of service available with chatbots. The evolution of the process was presented as follows: basic scripted responses based on key phrases, intent recognition from extracting meaning from parts of speech and how words relate, dialogue manager to maintain past conversations and help the bot further understand language, intelligent advisor to help understand what a human is trying to achieve and to advise on better paths, and finally, a human advisor if necessary.

George Clark, the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland, asked what the timeline for implementation would be if COG decides to use a chatbot. Mr. Finafrock confirmed that it would be within the fiscal year.

Next, Mr. Finafrock presented an example of current chatbot technology by displaying screens of users ordering flowers, booking flights and grocery shopping through chatbot interaction.

Mr. Finafrock then moved onto the last subject of the agenda item, scoping for a more streamlined registration process. Mr. Finafrock mentioned that COG has recently received some feedback that the registration process feels long and

cumbersome. Mr. Finafrock then mentioned that COG is thinking of ways to simplify the process while still capturing all the required information for folks to participate.

Mr. Finafrock presented a simplified registration process that only requires a username and password and has a graduated program structure that requires additional information from applicants as they work through the application. Mr. Finafrock reiterated the importance of balancing the process by making it simple while still capturing all the required data.

Dan Sheehan, COG/TPB staff, urged those in attendance to send thoughts on the subject and any relevant examples of registration processes.

5. incenTrip/CarpoolNow/CC Mobile

Dan Sheehan, COG/TPB staff, began the agenda item by presenting updates made to the Commuter Connections mobile application. Mr. Sheehan explained that staff has confirmed the application's compatibility with the new iPhone 11 Pro Max, including the new dark mode feature. Mr. Sheehan's presentation also included a photo and a reminder of the ability for users to log a verified trip for the Flextime Rewards program through the mobile application. Mr. Sheehan also included download statistics for the mobile app, which are 4,942 lifetime and 419 for Q1 FY2020.

Mr. Sheehan then moved on to discuss the CarpoolNow mobile application. Mr. Sheehan mentioned that the CarpoolNow application has also been confirmed to work on Apple's new iOS, including dark mode. It was also that reiterated that the CarpoolNow driver incentive is live and drivers can earn $10 per qualifying trip. CarpoolNow has received 3,926 lifetime downloads and 170 for Q1 FY2020.

Mr. Sheehan continued his presentation by discussing user interface enhancements made to the incenTrip mobile application, including the removal of the option to arrange an Uber Pool trip. Members of the Committee had previously voiced some concerns of users receiving incentive money by arranging a trip through the sole private provider.

Mr. Sheehan continued the presentation by mentioning an upcoming pilot employer challenge being done through the incenTrip mobile application. As of now, the pilot is looking to launch around Spring of 2020.

Mr. Sheehan began to explain the administrative development process, mentioning the incentives dashboard and that all checks being redeemed by users are being audited by COG staff. So far, approximately 1,400 accounts have been created since August 28th and approximately $10,000 - $13,000 have been distributed in rewards. Mr. Sheehan noted that the diminishing points model is anticipated to begin showing for some early users.

Heidi Mitter, Virginia Department of Transportation, asks if it would be possible to do a presentation and review metrics of the incenTrip application.

Mr. Sheehan mentioned that the University of Maryland had just unveiled a new dashboard, which presents data such as the total number of users, emission reductions, fuel reductions, and several other categories that would interest the committee. The possibility of including this data in the Quarterly Progress Reports was discussed.

Taylor Corydon, Arlington Transportation Partners, asked if it is possible to know how many users are tracking manually versus passively and mentioned experiencing inaccuracy while using the application's manual tracking feature. Currently, COG does not have access to that information.

6. SchoolPool

Sara McGowan, Dulles Area Transportation Association (DATA), began her presentation with a brief introduction and an overview of the SchoolPool program. Ms. McGowan explained that SchoolPool is used for school-specific matches and described the program as being easy to use and perfect for private and/or magnet schools.

Ms. McGowan then continued to inform those in attendance about the grant they receive and how it helps DATA create a "roll-out" plan for schools to provide technical assistance to parents, help schools join the program and to help offer some incentives to parents participating. Incentives are $25 gas cards per carpool, four per school.

Ms. McGowan explained the various outreach methods used by DATA to drive participation in the school. Efforts include open houses, South Lakes' Back2School Bash, Virginia Association of Independent Schools' conferences and using www.greatschools.com.

Jessica Charles-Allen, Anne Arundel County, questioned how drivers are found to participate in the program and asked about the security of the program. Ms. McGowan mentioned that it is between the parents to make that determination and that neither the school nor Commuter Connections has liability.

Ms. McGowan then began to elaborate on the "roll-out" plan and mentioned that it begins with communicating and coordinating with a school's principal and spreading the word via email social media, PTA meetings and newsletters.

Ms. McGowan then elaborated on the technical assistance provided to parents when they sign up. Parents will receive an instructional "how-to" email, as well as a visual "how-to" one pager. DATA staff is also available for assistance over the phone when questions and/or technical difficulties arise.

Ms. McGowan then began presenting examples of various marketing materials being used, such as: promotional flyers, how-to-register flyers and conference tabletop displays.

Elizabeth Denton, Arlington Transportation Partners, asked about marketing materials and if sustainability has been a common theme for marketing efforts or amongst its users. Ms. McGowan mentioned that sustainability hasn't been at the root of their marketing, but some parents do appreciate it.

Ms. McGowan then continued to show an example of the gas post card that parents must complete to acknowledge receipt of their incentive.

Ms. McGowan then presented a slide showing the results of the efforts made by DATA staff. So far, six schools have joined, 134 families are in the database, four carpools were formed in the first year (9 families), 6 carpools in the second year (12 families) and during the second year 325 VMT reduced each day while 11,588 pounds of GHG emissions reduced per quarter.

7. January 2020 TDM Resource Directory

Steven Osborn, COG/TPB staff, mentioned that the January 2020 TDM Resource Directory is currently in the works. He urged those in attendance to promptly respond to emails requesting updates to information and to provide COG staff with any updates to park and ride lots or local transit routes.

8. Client Site Status | Round Table

Holly Morello, Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission, began this item by reading upcoming fairs and promotions on behalf of North Bethesda Transportation Solutions, whose representative was unable to attend the meeting.

Thomas Hamed, Alexandria City, *floated* the idea of adding water taxis as a transportation mode within the TDM System and mentioned adding them as an option to the incenTrip mobile application and asked if it is possible to provide commuter benefits for those using it as a commute mode.

George Clark, the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland, stated that there can be some difficulties in establishing it as a regular mode of transportation, adding that its mostly only popular around Old Town Alexandria and mainly used for tourism and shopping. Mr. Clark also noted that there are several winter months where the taxi will not be able to operate. Mr. Hamed noted that it is expected to grow and is operational 10 months of the year.

9. Quarterly Progress Report

The Quarterly Progress Report was presented by Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff. Mr. Finafrock mentioned the beginning narrative and ask those in attendance to review the progress report, paying special attention to Table 6A, which has undergone some recent updates and changes.

The Next meeting of the Commuter Connections Ridematching Committee will be held on March 17, 2020 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.