



FY 2016 Final Marketing Communications Plan and Schedule

Mission: Commuter Connections is a regional network of organizations providing commute services and information to area residents and employers in the Washington metropolitan region in order to help reduce traffic congestion and emissions caused by single occupant vehicles (SOVs).

As part of the Regional Mass Marketing Transportation Emission Reduction Measure, the Commuter Connections Marketing program will provide frequent promotion of Ridematching services, Guaranteed Ride Home, and 'Pool Rewards, in addition to special events such as Bike to Work Day, Car Free Day, and the Employer Recognition Awards. These various services and special events promote alternative commute options including: ridesharing, teleworking, bicycling, walking, and mass transit. The FY2016 marketing program will raise awareness of commuting choices available in the Washington metropolitan region and support Commuter Connections network members in educating area workers and the general public to help them find and use alternatives to driving alone for both work and non-work trips.

Marketing Input: The background for this marketing brief was derived from the following sources:

- [2013 State of the Commute Survey Report](#)
- [2013 Commuter Connections Guaranteed Ride Home \(GRH\) program Survey Report](#)
- [FY 2015 Commuter Connections Applicant Database Annual Placement Survey Report](#)
- [FY2012-FY2014 Commuter Connections Transportation Emission Reduction \(TERM\) Analysis Report](#)

These reports and surveys are the cornerstone for the FY2016 Marketing Communications Plan. They provide quantitative and qualitative measurement of commute behavior by workers and Commuter Connections program applicants throughout the Washington metropolitan region and the impact of this behavior on air quality and congestion.

In addition to comprehensive data provided by these reports, the marketing team has considered performance data from past campaigns as well as information gathered through industry reports, surveys, and trends, and how it might be applied to the Commuter Connections mass marketing campaign efforts. This information is used to support the development of the media and/or messaging strategies.

Increases in gas prices have had a measured effect on ridesharing over the past several years. In the DC/Virginia/Washington area, gas prices now average about \$2.75 per gallon. Although the cost per gallon has overall decreased slightly since last year, the price at the pump should continue to be an important issue for commuters. The economic benefit of ridesharing remains a strong, simple message that resonates and will continue to be emphasized.

In addition to gas prices and the economy, other regional events may impact this year's messaging and strategy. The I-95 Express Lanes, part of VA Megaprojects was recently completed in Northern Virginia. Several other construction projects to improve highways in the region are either underway or halfway through completion. Commuter Connections has an opportunity to team up with VDOT and Transurban to provide commuters with project updates and ride to work alternatives such as Ridesharing, which has benefits and incentives including Guaranteed Ride Home and 'Pool Rewards. In the 2013 State of the Commute Survey, awareness of commute options is shown to correlate positively with awareness of Commuter Connections, and commute advertising has been shown to influence consideration of commute alternatives. Continuing a partnership between Commuter Connections and VA Megaprojects would stand to greatly benefit both parties toward a common goal. Train commuters also exhibit the highest level of alternative commute awareness, as well as a relatively high level of satisfaction with their commutes, particularly compared to those who drive alone. The satisfaction disparity can be leveraged as part of the Mass Marketing campaign.

DC residents are reported to have the third longest work week. According to the 2015 Annual Survey, the average one-way commute distance is 36.2 miles and 66 minutes. Many commuters rely on the Metro system to get to and from work. The Metro Proposal released July 7, 2015 outlined goals of setting the gap between trains at 8 minutes apart, as well as making trains 8 cars long instead of six. The Washington metropolitan area offers multi-modal transportation choices, particularly within the inner core where transit, bike/carsharing and apps to navigate it are robust. A new shuttlebus service was recently launched called Bridj. This first of its kind bus service operates with no fixed routes – rather trips are tailored to meet customer travel needs. For these reasons, the DC area lends itself to an ideal location to continue to promote events and programs centered on alternative modes of transportation.

Carpooling continues to receive growing national and regional attention through social media and mobile apps. Social media and digital presence are important aspects of a campaign that aims to reach a growing demographic. For Commuter Connections, competitions would be more exciting and interactive with the use of hashtags and social media postings. Not only will users be excited to incorporate hashtags into their competition, but since the postings reach an audience, even more people will become aware of the mission. With those under twenty-five years and under \$30,000 annual income groups most likely to use commute alternatives, the attention that newcomers give to carpooling is positive news for Commuter Connections. Increasing awareness provides an opportunity to address the advantages Commuter Connections has offered to the region for forty years, while building the customer base.

Commuter Connections has an established, trusted brand across the region and boasts a database of 15,000 commuter accounts. The Ridematching service offered by Commuter Connections allows commuters to easily find and establish carpools to meet their day-to-day commuting needs. Cost savings, desire for back up transportation (GRH), and commuting choices from a trusted source can also help establish a lasting carpool, which is a message to be explored in this year's regional TDM marketing campaign. Additionally, regional commuters have access to the Ridematching system through a new mobile platform, which was unveiled in FY2014. Commuter Connections' mobile Ridematching app allows the region's commuters easy access to finding carpool partners, and locating park-and-ride lots. Increasing interest in more and easier ways to find a shared ride should work in favor of promoting the use of the Ridematching app.

In addition to the personal benefits of ridesharing — the most important of which are saving commuters time and money, environmental awareness, and responsibility — are impacting the way people use transportation. More drivers are taking road trips and commuting to the office after 3.1 million people gained jobs last year, the most since 1999. Americans are increasing their fuel consumption and burning more gasoline on their daily commutes. This recent increase in gasoline consumption has been glaringly apparent to many people, particularly millennials. The sharing economy has greatly increased the interest in alternative fuels and modes of transportation. Fewer people own cars, more people are renting them — and more people are sharing them.

Societal benefits like saving energy and reducing pollution and congestion rank among the top motivators for those who use commute alternatives. Trends point toward people actively working to improve their commutes and willingly trying alternative commute options. Many people are increasingly aware of their own impact on environmental quality and are familiar with ways to positively impact our current environmental situation, including the use of public and alternate transportation. There is also a connection between health and transportation that should be considered as part of the message.

For commuters who rideshare, the Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) program provides a valuable service in securing a ride home in case of an unexpected personal or family illness or emergency, or unscheduled overtime. To increase GRH awareness and drive applications, the most receptive areas need to be targeted, both geographically and demographically. This year's campaign will continue to promote GRH registration within the inner core for those switching to or already using transit, bicycling, and walking to and from work. For commuters in the middle and outer rings, the campaign will focus on positioning GRH as a service provided to those who convert from SOV driving to other mobility modes or who already use alternative modes such as ridesharing and public transportation. The overall message will remain focused on registration for the program and positioning it as a safety net to ease the transition for those switching from driving alone to using transportation alternatives to and from work.

In addition to paid and earned media, the regional effort will include Car Free Day and Bike to Work Day events. The mission of these events is to encourage SOV drivers to try alternative transportation modes. The intention is to change behavior so that individuals will choose to incorporate such alternatives as part of their regular, or at least occasional, commute or lifestyle patterns.

Marketing Strategies: The marketing strategy will focus on achieving the following:

- Emphasize the cost savings benefits of ridesharing, specifically through the use of simple, direct messages that communicate how sharing a ride saves money.
- Capitalize on the Commuter Connections mobile Ridematching capabilities to position Commuter Connections as the trusted, convenient regional provider of Ridematching services for forty years.
- Draw on the additional savings of 'Pool Rewards as another incentive within Rideshare ads.
- Drive inner core commuters who use public transportation, bicycling, or walking to register for GRH.
- For middle and outer ring commuters, leverage carpooling and vanpooling by positioning GRH as a safety net for ridesharing and public transportation use, available to commuters in case of unscheduled overtime or an unexpected personal or family emergency or illness.
- Increase the number of participants in special events and promotions such as Car Free Day and Bike to Work Day based on set committee goals.
- Promote employer efforts to ease regional commuting issues through earned media placements and highlight the Employer Recognition Awards; incorporate human interest stories of commuters using alternative commute modes and/or employers offering commuter benefits that have higher than expected engagement levels.
- Increase reach to younger demographic, Spanish, and African American audiences in radio and print messages.
- Focus more on 'Pool Rewards.
- Explore opportunities to advertise with transit and/or bus wraps.
- Reduce work trips.

Media buying strategies will be selected based on Scarborough Research reports for the specific target audiences for each program and event: Ridesharing, Guaranteed Ride Home, Employer Recognition Awards, Car Free Days, Bike to Work Day, 'Pool Rewards, and any other program or event. These reports identify specific media that are best suited for each target audience. The report information is considered along with the cost of each media option and results from previous Commuter Connections campaigns.

For FY2016, radio is recommended as the anchor medium for the program. Radio has the ability to reach a large portion of the Commuter Connections target markets (90 %) with significant frequency, especially when commuters are engaged in potentially stressful, frustrating, costly, and time consuming commutes.

Visual creative is important to provide reinforcement of messages delivered through radio spots, as well as brand awareness. FY2016's marketing strategy will include well-placed visuals across the geographical region. Outdoor print such as bus signage and shelters, and cable TV will be evaluated as potential visual elements for the campaign.

Internet advertising is also visual and closer to one-to-one selling than any other form of media. Optimized placement of banner ads on websites targeted to key counties, news, weather, television affiliates, and job sites may be used to reach commuters who are just a click away from Commuter Connections' online Ridematching service or GRH registration.

Opportunities to involve retailers and local businesses in sponsorship or promotion of Commuter Connections programs such as GRH Rewards, Bike to Work Day, and Car Free Day will be considered. We aim to identify businesses interested in both encouraging people to explore the use of sustainable, healthy transportation and benefiting from the patronage of those commuters. Retailers could provide sponsorship through giveaways or discounts for events such as Car Free Day, or could be involved in co-promotional opportunities.

In addition to traditional media, the marketing team will look to further expand the use of social media, mobile apps, smart phones and tablets. Building upon Commuter Connections' existing pages on Facebook (Commuter Connections, Telework, Bike to Work Day, and Car Free Day) and accounts on Twitter (Bike to Work Day and Car Free Day), which have received increasing attention over the last year, the marketing team will investigate additional strategies to increase engagement and integrate social media activities with other marketing approaches.

The marketing team will examine opportunities to provide improved smart phone access to Commuter Connections resources and commute option information and benefits. Quick Response (QR) codes may be used on marketing creative to provide smart phone users with immediate access to Commuter Connections' information and registration or pledge pages. This would also improve Commuter Connections' digital presence and help us to reach our newly targeted younger demographic.

Existing creative developed in FY15 will be used for the FY16 fall campaign; results of the complete FY2015 campaign will be studied and best practices will be carried forward for the FY2016 campaign. The creative team will consider the results of the FY2015 campaign along with area transportation trends and additional exploration to help identify the most effective messaging strategies for implementation for spring 2016.

The marketing team will investigate format and layout options for print pieces, including the Commuter Connections newsletter, direct mailer, and the Employer Recognition Awards nomination brochure. New formats or layouts will look to one or more of the following objectives: decrease print costs, increase usability and response rates, and provide a fresh, new look.

Focus Group sessions held in the fall of 2014 with stakeholders, specifically: network members, funding organizations, and the general public provided valuable insight to enhance the Commuter Connections overall marketing efforts. The final results will be considered in planning FY2016 media plans and print materials.

The Marketing Communications Plan will effectively and efficiently reach its target markets based on a review and analysis of third party media data from Strata, Scarborough, and Arbitron as monitored by a professional media buying firm. Reach and frequency of the target demographic will be calculated using a cost/value proposition for each media option.

Guaranteed Ride Home

Objective: Increase the number of applicants in the GRH database by promoting GRH as a rideshare benefit, eliminating a barrier to using transit, carpooling, vanpooling, bicycling, and walking to work.

Target market (from [2013 Commuter Connections Guaranteed Ride Home \(GRH\) program Survey Report](#)):

- 35-64 years old (86%)
- Caucasian (73%) and African-American (16%)
- \$80,000+ annual household income (84%), \$120,000+ annual household income (53%)
- Commute of more than 30 miles / 45 minutes (45% of current GRH registrants)
- Live in Virginia (60%) or Maryland (36%) or District of Columbia (2%), with emphasis on Prince William (19%) and Fairfax Counties (12%); work in D.C (61%), Maryland (11%) and Virginia (28%)

Tactics:

- Focus will be to target commuters in the Washington DC metropolitan statistical area, encouraging them to register for GRH.
- Radio advertising will focus on district radio stations serving the inner core. Radio may also be used to reach the region's Hispanic and African American commuters.
- Evaluate web advertisement (banner ads) and interactive ads geared directly toward generating registrations.
- Incorporate web with print media through interactive media such as QR codes, to increase web traffic and reach a younger demographic.
- Evaluate print and/or transit signage to increase awareness of the GRH program.
- Leverage human interest stories on social media e.g. a quick video to be used on the Commuter Connections website
- Update website images to integrate with the campaign.
- Direct Mail (Allocation equals 5% of Work Program budget).
- Explore new ideas for Direct Mail pieces.

GRH Media Allocation: Approximately 34.85 percent of media budget.

Ridematching

Objectives: Maintain and increase awareness of shared ride modes, retain current ridership on these modes; gain new riders; gain new applicants to the regional database.

- **Target market** (from [FY2015 Commuter Connections Applicant Database Annual Placement Survey Report](#)):
- 35-64 years old (84%)
- Caucasian (68%) and African-American (18%)
- \$80,000+ annual household income (71%)
- Commute of more than 20 miles/30 minutes
- Live in Virginia (60%) or Maryland (36%); work in D.C. (54%) or Virginia (27%)
- Work for employers with 100+ employees (80%), work for employers with 1000 or more employees (45%)
- Work for federal agencies (67%) and private sector (20%)

Tactics:

- Radio advertising to increase awareness of benefits and ease of ridesharing. Live traffic reads provide an ideal opportunity to make the association between traffic and solution and will be investigated for feasibility.
- A Spanish-speaking radio station may be included to reach out to the region's Hispanic population.
- TV will be considered as an opportunity to visually present the message that's conveyed in radio spots.
- Optimized online banner ads may be used on selective websites to drive users to the Commuter Connections website and/or new mobile Ridematching service for registration.
- Out-of-home components that make a direct connection between commuting options and saving money will be considered.
- Public relations/media communications to provide testimonials of ridesharing success stories and broaden awareness and registrations.
- Update website images to integrate with the campaign.
- Direct mail (Allocation equals 5% of Work Program budget).
- Explore new ideas for Direct Mail pieces.

Rideshare Media Allocation: Approximately 52.27 percent of media budget.

'Pool Rewards

Objectives: Recruit and retain commuters in carpools and vanpools through monetary incentives.

Target Market

- Rideshare demographics
- Younger demographics

Tactics:

- Media and public outreach will be used to build awareness of program and incentives.
- The primary message will be the cash incentive. Additional messaging will promote the environmental/health benefits of ridesharing , such as tons of CO₂ emissions reduced, gallons of gas saved, miles of commutes logged, vehicle trips saved, and/or social responsibility of reducing traffic congestion and improving quality of life through better health and fitness.
- To promote awareness, radio, Facebook ads, and optimized online banner ads may be used.
- 'Pool Rewards eligibility may be tied to Rideshare messages. For example, "...interested in Ridesharing? You may be eligible for 'Pool Rewards..."
- TV and live radio reads will be investigated to generate additional interest in the program and drive people to the website for more information.
- Value add from the mass marketing campaign may be used to expand the reach of 'Pool Rewards.
- Non-cost avenues such as Craig's List and the Commuter Connections bulletin board will be used.
- Consider opportunities to expand into Spanish radio.

'Pool Rewards Media Allocation: Approximately 4.1 percent of media budget.

Special Events

Objectives: Use special events, such as Bike to Work Day, Car Free Day, and the Employer Recognition Awards to highlight existing programs and encourage other employers and commuters to become involved, increase their ridership, or enhance their on-site programs; increase commuter participation in Bike to Work Day and Car Free Day.

Target Market

- Car Free Day 2015: SOV drivers; car-heavy families and individuals; students; not just commuters
 - Ages 16-65
 - Male and female
 - Caucasian and Hispanic
 - Live/work in DC metropolitan area
- Bike to Work Day 2015 (from [FY 2013 BTWD Evaluation Survey](#)):
 - Ages <35 29%, 35-44 22%, 45-54 28%, 55+ 21%
 - Male 66%
 - Caucasian 86%
 - HH income \$80k+ 74%
 - Works for federal agency 34%, private sector 34%, non-profit 21%
 - Lives in VA 44%, DC 28%, and MD 28%
 - Lives in Montgomery 20%, Fairfax 19%, and Arlington 12% counties
 - Works in DC 48%, VA 31%, and MD 21%
 - Works for employer size of 100+ 66%
- Employer Recognition Awards 2015: Level 3 & 4 Employers in Commuter Connections Network area

Tactics:

- Car Free Day (CFD) September 22, 2015
 - Secure corporate, retailers, and other sponsorships for CFD, with a focus on consumer retailers
 - Focus on teleworking and vanpool in addition to family-friendly messaging.
 - Use radio advertising to increase awareness of CFD and drive listeners to carfreemetrodc.org to pledge.
 - Provide marketing collateral such as posters.
 - Transit /outdoor signage (bus exterior and bus shelter ads).
 - Text messaging to past and new participants.
 - Email blasts and mailings to employers and past participants.
 - Engage Transportation Planning Board members through Proclamation and encourage jurisdictional partners to do the same.
 - Engage the community through social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

- Create challenges between universities and workplaces for most pledges.
 - Use an integrated approach, complimenting paid media with strong earned media plan and social media, as well as outreach to employers and schools.
 - Leverage “green” events in the region, including those of Network Members.
 - Newsletter articles
 - Reach 10,000 pledges
 - Provide stickers to promote the team concept
 - Include a real time pledge leaderboard by mode on the web site.
- Bike to Work Day (BTWD) Friday May 20, 2016
 - Secure corporate and other sponsorship.
 - Use radio advertising to boost registration.
 - Provide additional marketing collateral and advertising including t-shirts, posters, and rack cards.
 - Should additional sponsor dollars become available, provide additional marketing such as pit stop banners, print ads, various signage, and participation identifiers (e.g. BTWD rubber bracelets).
 - Email blasts and mailings to employers and past participants.
 - Earned Media.
 - Engage Transportation Planning Board members through Proclamation and encourage jurisdictional partners to do the same.
 - Use social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook to engage with commuters.
 - Goal set by Committee (approximately 10% above previous year’s number).
 - Employer Recognition Awards
 - Coordinate the Employer Recognition Awards ceremony, June 2016.
 - Provide brochure/nomination form in support of the nomination process; online application and email blast to potential nominees.
 - Marketing collateral for the event including invitations, program brochure, podium sign, video and promotional giveaways.
 - Print advertisement in major business publication(s) highlighting winning employers.
 - Earned media for the event and winners.

Special Events Media Allocation: Approximately 4.5 percent of media budget for BTWD, Approximately 3.6 percent of media budget for CFD, and less than 1 percent of media budget for Employer Recognition Awards event.

Employer Outreach

Objectives: Add new employer clients; expand participation and offerings in existing employer programs; recognize existing employers who have implemented successful employee commute benefit programs; increase the number of employers offering the tax free commute benefits; increase use of SmarTrip® offered through employer programs as well as other TDM strategies such as telework, flextime, and Ridematching.

Target Market (from [FY 2015 Commuter Connections Applicant Database Annual Database Annual Placement Survey Report](#)):

- Employers with more than 250 employees (69%)
- Private sector employers (20%)

Tactics:

- Update web content as required
- Update social media applications (e.g. Facebook) for Telework, such as Facebook
- Quarterly employer newsletter
- Quarterly Federal Employee Transportation Coordinator (ETC) newsletter insert
- Email marketing and mailings
- Continuously update Federal ETC website information
- Employer Case Studies.

Employer Outreach Media Allocation: 0 percent of media budget.

FY2016 Schedules

Creative Development Schedule

Review research and results from previous campaigns	June 2015
Develop Marketing Communications Plan	July 2015
Feedback on Plan from Regional TDM Marketing Group(SharePoint)	Aug 2015
Present conceptual approaches to Regional TDM Marketing Grp then creative concepts to Marketing Workgroup	Sept 2015
Refine and develop creative based on all feedback	Oct 2015
Finalize creative	Nov 2015
Produce creative	Dec 2015
Distribute creative to media vendors	Jan 2016
Campaign launch	Feb 2016

Marketing Campaign Schedule

Car Free Day	Aug – Sept 2015
Fall Campaign (repeat FY15 creative)	Oct – Dec 2015
Spring Campaign (new FY16 creative)	Feb – June 2016
'Pool Rewards	Jan - June 2016
Bike to Work Day	Apr – May 2016
Employer Recognition Awards	June 2016