



**COMMUTER CONNECTIONS
RIDEMATCHING COMMITTEE
MEETING NOTES**

**Tuesday, September 21, 2021
2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

**Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street, N.E.
WebEx**

**Chairperson: Hugh McGloin, WHS/DOD
Vice Chairperson: Andrew Dempster, HHS/FDA**

COG Staff Contact: Stephen Finafrock, 202/962-3385 or sfinafrock@mwkog.org

1. Introductions

The meeting was brought to order by Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff. Attendees were asked to introduce themselves when their jurisdiction was announced. The meeting took place virtually via WebEx.

2. Minutes of the June 15, 2020 meeting

Approval was sought for the June 15, 2021 Ridematching Committee Meeting minutes. An initial motion to approve was made by Darlene Nader of the North Bethesda TMD and a second motion to approve was made by Leigh Anderson of GWRideConnect. The minutes were approved as written. All were in favor.

3. Announcement of New Ridematching Committee Vice Chair and Change of Chairs

Andrew Dempster, HHS/FDA, replaced Hugh McGloin, WHS/DOD, as the new Committee Chairperson. Kristin Lam Peraza of the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission was appointed as the new Vice Chairperson. Mr. McGloin was recognized for his role as outgoing Chair. Commuter Connections presented Mr. McGloin a certificate and plaque mentioning his outstanding qualities of leadership shown during his term as Chair and expressing its gratitude and sincere appreciation on this 21st day of September 2021.

4. Upcoming Fairs and Promotions

City of Alexandria

- Promoting Car Free Day in social media channels
- Informing the public about new changes with local transit (DASH) bus routes
- Promoting Employer Incentive Programs to entice employees back to the offices who are using transit

Loudoun County

- Promoting Car Free Day on social media, transit, Park and Ride lots and bike shops
- Virtual and in person presentation on how to use the new App for local transit and the smart benefits app in a partnership with the workforce resource center

Montgomery County Commuter Services

- Promoting Car Free Day at various transit stops and social media platforms
- Creating “Car Free Day Swag Bag Contest” to encourage alternative transportation
- Walk and Ride Challenge

North Bethesda TMD

- Promoting Car Free Day at Westfield Montgomery Transit Center
- Virtual meetings scheduled with employers to help to get employees back to the office
- Walk & Ride Challenge for the County begins on October 3rd for 3 weeks

Prince George’s County

- Social Media Promotions for Car Free Day
- Promoting incentives and CarpoolNow in MVA locations including Park & Rides and Farmer Markets
- Planned and employer focus presentation for the Prince George’s County Chamber of Commerce

5. TDM System Cosmetic Refresh

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, began his presentation showing the features of the beta version of the TDM System website. The production URL is tdm.commuterconnections.com/mwcog. Mr. Finafrock noted how the updated design of the TDM System homepage now matches design aesthetics of the primary CommuterConnection.org website. The images on the page have been refreshed with a more local feel. Another improvement of the new homepage is that several of the programs offered by Commuter Connections are displayed “above the fold” (Ridesharing, Guaranteed Ride Home, Incentrip and Flextime Rewards). Also, the mobile applications are displayed at the bottom of the page. At this time, the new redesign only affects the public site. The administrative site will have a few smaller changes. Mr. Finafrock added that the new updates offer better resolution and easier-to-read information. The website also shows statistics with real numbers about ridesharing trips, CO2 reduction and miles saved based on Commuter Connections progress reports. Mr. Finafrock finished his presentation highlighting one of the more significant features created with the new web site, which is called “One click matching.” Commuters can search for matches on the first page. In order to see the results, however, commuters will need to log in or create a new account if they are new to Commuter Connections.

6. Flexible Vanpool

Daniel Sheehan, COG/TPB staff, began his presentation briefing the Committee about the concept of Flexible Vanpooling. The project goal is to introduce technology that aids in finding vanpool riders who may be interested in a flexible arrangement, perhaps riding infrequently or one-time riders. Mr. Sheehan explained that the notion of Flexible Vanpool was conceived in part because of the challenge to fill vanpool seats in a non-traditional manner during the pandemic. As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, workplace policies generally appear to be offering more flexible, thus making it more difficult to get a set roster of individuals in a vanpool.

A flexible vanpool workgroup was created by Commuter Connections in February 2021 with the idea of developing flexible vanpool technology. Mr. Sheehan continued his presentation, showing the two different models of flexible vanpools: Real-time ticketing and traditional ticketing. Real-time ticketing is nested within CarpoolNow. Some of the vanpool enhancements include:

- New ability to register vanpools/link with TDM System
- “Start vanpool” button to be added. Only available to registered vanpools drivers/coordinators
- Drivers can offer seats to nearby riders who are currently searching in the mobile app.
- Cost per seat (flat rate)
- Riders can accept or reject offers from vanpool drivers/coordinators
- Payment facilitated externally of mobile application.

These new enhancements were detailed in a flow chart to explain how this process will work. Mr. Sheehan then added that, regarding payment, Commuter Connections hopes that an external solution such as PayPal will be preferable instead of a monthly invoice to make the transaction more instantaneous and independent from Commuter Connections. Mr. Sheehan then transitioned to the second model of flexible vanpool, which he referred to as the traditional ticketing. One of the main features of this model is the new generic “Vanpool Operators” role within the TDM System. It will permit operators to program vanpool routes into the database, which can appear on ridematch searches. A single operator can create and manage multiple routes, which is not currently available to TDM System administrators. Potential riders can request to “book a seat” in the van and specify, date, stop, and route. Drivers/coordinators will be notified 24 hours in advance. Payment again is externalized outside of the TDM System.

Mr. Sheehan concluded that the development project is scheduled to be ready for testing around fall 2021. Flexible Vanpool work group members will be asked to test the product first. Ridematching Committee members could be invited to test after the Flexible Vanpool workgroup first offers feedback.

Leigh Anderson, GWRideConnect, had a comment that drivers should not be encouraged to use the app while operating the vehicle. Mr. Sheehan replied that this issue will be appropriately addressed in the future and any reference given to the driver will be replaced by the Vanpool Coordinator instead.

Andrew Dempster, FDA, raised the question of using SmartBenefits to pay for the flexible vanpool. Mr. Sheehan mentioned that staff have been discussing SmartBenefits integration with the Flexible Vanpool working group and it will be considered for a potential update. There is likely an opportunity to collaborate with WMATA to apply SmartBenefits for flexible vanpools.

7. incenTrip Update

Steven Osborn, COG TPB staff, began his presentation updating the Committee about the new changes of incenTrip and a review of the program. Users still need both an incenTrip and Commuter Connections account in order to participate in the Commuter Connections check incentive program. New registrants entering the TDM System with an incenTrip ad source should contain the appcode suffix INTP. Commuter Connections still determines program guidelines, user eligibility, and furnishes incentive programs. Mr. Osborn reminded the Committee that the incentive structure was created by a workgroup back in 2018 and that Commuter Connections still follows the recommendations made.

Mr. Osborn continued to brief the Committee with a list of scheduled updates for the program within the next few weeks. The most significant will be the launch of the MDOT program expansion this fall, and the digital incentive payment via PayPal to modernize the way people receive payments. The new PayPal options will add a new level of convenience for end-users.

Travel planning will soon be available throughout an expanded service area. Commuters will be able to plan trips that originate in Virginia, Delaware, select counties of Southern Pennsylvania, Eastern West Virginia, as well the entirety Maryland. However, to receive points for their trips, commuters still need to work in the designated TPB non-attainment area or anywhere else in Maryland (once the MDOT program launches).

Auto trip logging will be removed temporarily because it was causing mishaps and bugs. The project team hopes to fix auto trip-logging and re-introduce it to the app at a future date.

Mr. Osborn described a few more points about the MDOT incenTrip program expansion. First, it has been integrated into the Fiscal Year 2022 CCWP. Secondly, operations and rewards will be like the Commuter Connections incenTrip Incentive Program administration.

Software test results of the most recent incenTrip beta version were promising. Mr. Osborn was able to successfully test several criteria, including a carpool trip from Washington, DC to Annapolis. The carpool

creation successfully created a code for passengers to join. The completion of the trip rewarded five points. A transit trip using real-time information from the app was tested as well. Bus arrival was consistent with what was displayed in the app.

Mr. Osborn suggested Committee members download of the app for testing purposes. Feedback is always welcome. Issues can be reported in app. Screenshots are helpful and the report should include the make, model and version of the phone.

Mr. Osborn concluded his presentation adding a few elements of the new digital incentive payment. PayPal has been identified as the vendor for digital payment distribution. A payment module is being developed and incorporated into the TDM system for COG staff. End-users will continue to have the option to request a physical check. COG/TPB staff is collaborating with WMATA to explore the option to apply points for SmarTrip credits. Monthly uploads would be facilitated by COG and WMATA. This is scheduled for Fall 2021.

8. Quarterly & Annual Progress Report

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, began presenting data points for the fourth quarter of FY2021. COG/TPB staff continued working on the Advanced Transportation and Congestion Management Technology (ATCMTD) grant incenTrip enhancements, and Flexible Vanpooling. Mr. Finafrock shared that geocoding data in the TDM System was cleaned and published to account holders who previously had improper geocodes. Commuter Connections, in coordination with the software development team, worked to expand the incenTrip street network and program all fixed-route transit services in the megaregion

The Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) program had a total of 1,659 registrants as of June 30, 2021. Commuters Connections provided 43 GRH trips for the DC program throughout the quarter.

Mr. Finafrock then moved on to talk about the next item the Annual CCWP Progress Report. The report formatting was updated to be in alignment with Transportation Planning formatting guidelines. Mr. Finafrock directed his focus on two specific items: First, the performance of the GRH program in Washington, DC and Baltimore; secondly the ridematching database.

The trip cost for the Washington, DC Region GRH program is historically within the same range. Meanwhile, Baltimore became more efficient in reducing the price cost of a trip to an average of \$54.53. During the pandemic, “unscheduled overtime” in the Washington, DC program has surpassed other reasons such as “family emergency” as a reason to use a GRH trip.

Regarding the ridematching database Mr. Finafrock referred all to page 33 to find figures and tables. Table 1 is the monthly activity and impact summary. On page 34 he talked about the ridematching database and applications processed in FY2021. Numbers are still lower than pre-pandemic. Mr. Finafrock advised to agencies with no data in the ridematching activity tables to request a training session for the TDM System in order to reflect data that affects the report. Mr. Finafrock finished his discussion referring members of the Committee to Table 6A, found on page 47. Table 6A is a self-reported table by local rideshare coordinators. He acknowledged the work of some jurisdictions by doing a great job providing data and utilizing the TDM system and following the notes procedure. Table 6A is where data entry is gathered like calls received at client programs.

9. Other Business/Upcoming Agenda Items

No items were discussed at this time.

The Next meeting of the Commuter Connections Ridematching Committee will be held on December 21, 2021 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.