



COMMUTER CONNECTIONS RIDEMATCHING COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

Tuesday, December 15, 2020
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street, N.E.
Virtual Webex Meeting

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

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

1. Introductions

The meeting was brought to order by Hugh McGloin, WHS/DoD. Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, asked attendees to introduce themselves when their jurisdiction was announced. The meeting took place virtually via Webex.

2. Minutes of the September 15, 2020 meeting

Approval was sought for the September 15, 2020 Ridematching Committee Meeting minutes. An initial motion to approve was made by George Clark of Tri County Council for Southern Maryland and a second was made by Alan Doran of Harford County. All were in favor. The minutes were approved as written.

3. Upcoming Fairs and Promotions

Harford Commute Smart

- Still pushing workforce transportation
- Working with employers to make sure they are still served by local transit

PRTC

- Participated in a virtual transportation fair held at NAVSEA

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

- Participated in a virtual transportation fair held at NAVSEA

North Bethesda Transportation

- Working with Montgomery County to host a telework webinar in January

Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland

- Promotions with Calvert and Charles County newspapers as well as their digital service for Commute with Confidence
- Promoting a mobile app for ridesharing with a don't drink and drive campaign
- Ads within the Calvert and Charles Chamber of Commerce to come out in January

Washington Headquarters Services/Department of Defense

- Upcoming meeting to improve ridesharing listserv

4. Magic Bus

Isabelle Ji, MagicBus, introduced herself to the Committee and confirmed that this presentation is available on this Committee's meeting page on the COG's website for viewing.

Ms. Ji then introduced MagicBus, explaining that the company is a software partner aiming to improve the vanpooling experience for the public in a real-time, flexible, and sustainable and way.

Ms. Ji then reviewed the agenda within her presentation and began a detailed introduction of MagicBus. She reviewed current challenges of the existing vanpool experience such as inflexible schedules, non-compatibility with future arrangements, difficulty with outreach to future riders, and suggested that vanpooling is not meeting its potential and is underutilized. Ms. Ji then transitioned to how MagicBus aims to solve this problem by allowing part-time and casual riders to book empty vanpool seats. She then reminded those in attendance that they are only a software partner and do not have drivers or a fleet of vehicles. Key features to focus on were then reviewed, including booking empty seats, geo-targeted ads, and a data and metrics dashboard.

Ms. Ji then transitioned to detail the feature of booking an empty seat. She began by describing how a text messaging system utilized by permanent subscribed riders has been effective. A chatbot that converses with riders to fill empty seats is available. Ms. Ji then showcased images of the user interface and explained that riders can search, select, and book a trip that fits their schedule. This feature also includes a digital payment option and if no route is found, a user can "advocate" for a new route.

A video was then shown to demonstrate the user interface. Ms. Ji explained that a rider is given a receipt upon booking a trip and the driver is notified via email and text message.

Ms. Ji moved on to detail the second key feature earlier mentioned, geo-targeted ads. She explained that the strategy is to learn more about specific demographics, invest in ads on popular digital platforms and then analyze data to optimize future messaging.

Ms. Ji then transitioned and presented the beta of their data and metrics dashboard. Key data is collected such as vanpool ridership, daily attendance logs, vehicle utilization rates and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) reduction. Data can also be collected via users' booking information and from text message conversations between subscribers and the chatbot. She then listed the targeted outcomes of their marketing and data collection efforts: grow ridership, track and analyze program data, reduce Single-Occupant Vehicle (SOV) rates, improve equity within communities, adapt to staggered or flexible schedules, and provide users with an enhanced digital experience that feels familiar.

Ms. Ji then presented data on customer success, including a 46% increase in seats filled within the past 6 months. She then reviewed a case study from UCLA to finish her presentation.

Hugh McGloin, WHS/DoD, thanked Ms. Ji for her presentation and opened the floor to the Committee for questions and comments.

Joe Stainsby, PRTC, thanked Ms. Ji for her presentation and commented that he believes that this is the direction vanpooling should be taken to grow and adapt to the current environment. Mr. Stainsby also noted that previous work conducted by Vanpool Alliance found vanpools to be resistant to "dynamic" flexibility and that it could be difficult for such a product to

find traction in the current market, but reiterated his prior comment about the need to improve vanpool flexibility in order to attract a wider audience.

George Clark, TCCSM, asked if MagicBus would be joining Commuter Connections and have access to the Ridematching database. Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, responded that consideration has been given to promoting MagicBus and that COG/TPB staff is looking for feedback from members of this Committee as to whether an informal partnership should be established. He indicated that MagicBus will not be permitted access to the Commuter Connections database but there could be room for collaboration in some way.

Nicole Huntington, NIH, mentioned that many workers in the medical field have differing schedules and wanted to confirm that a user could book a trip with two separate vans within the same day. Ms. Ji confirms that a user could do that, and she compared van routes to small transit routes.

Mr. Clark then asked if users are paying twice, once for each trip. Ms. Ji confirmed that the user pays for each booked trip individually. Mr. Clark then followed up and asked if trips are a flat fee. Ms. Ji responded by mentioning that there is a base fare plus cost per mile. So, there is a slight variation. Mr. Ramfos asked if the cost is known upfront before they get into the van. Ms. Ji confirmed that a user can see what they are paying while making their reservation.

Ms. Huntington then asked how MagicBus handles vanpools accessing secure campuses or military bases. Ms. Ji mentioned that when users search for a vanpool they can see where the drop-off location is. Ms. Ji mentioned that MagicBus does have the option to organize private networks of people traveling to a specific employer.

Committee members were asked to contact COG/TPB staff with regards to whether this type of service would be of benefit to the region. Alternatively, a follow-up message would be going out with information on how to get in touch with MagicBus if they are interested in using their services.

5. IncenTrip

Dan Sheehan, COG/TPB staff, updated the Committee on the status of the incenTrip program and provided a refresher on the Commuter Connections program within incenTrip. Those in attendance were reminded that Commuter Connections and incenTrip are independent and that users will need an account for both programs. Mr. Sheehan also shared that upcoming enhancements are designed to offer users a seamless means of engagement with both programs. This enhanced design should directly address feedback received regarding confusion for users when trying to understand the connections between incenTrip and Commuter Connections.

Mr. Sheehan then continued to discuss his first item, registration enhancement. Mr. Sheehan explained that when users register for incenTrip they are now prompted to register for Commuter Connections simultaneously. This should be straightforward and clear that users must have a Commuter Connections account to receive incentives from Commuter Connections.

Mr. Sheehan then introduced the new Employer Application Programming Interface (API). Mr. Sheehan reminded those in attendance that eligible trips logged as part of the Commuter Connections Incentive Program must be between home and work and occur during the morning and evening peak periods. Therefore, each user must be affiliated with a legitimate employer record in the TDM System. The new Employer API will search for existing employer records in the TDM system and suggest them as options for the registrant. One of the primary purposes of this effort is to reduce the number duplicate employer records entered into the TDM System to bolster the effectiveness of the new Employer-Based Ridematching feature; therefore, commuters need to be coded to unique employer records in order for this feature to function properly.

Mr. Sheehan then presented a new enhancement for users looking to connect an existing incenTrip account with a new Commuter Connections account. Users can create a Commuter Connections account within the incenTrip app and directly port all their information over to it.

Mr. Sheehan then transitioned to the final account creation enhancement, signing up and signing in with current Commuter Connections account information. The way usernames and passwords flow between databases has been enhanced. Mr. Sheehan presented a workflow diagram created in tandem with UMD and explained that username and password changes will affect login credentials for both programs, e.g., changing your Commuter Connections password will also change your incenTrip password.

Mr. Sheehan continued to update the Committee on the park and ride lot integration enhancement. The app will now direct users to a park and ride lot and inform them of details about the lot.

Mr. Sheehan mentioned that a Trip Log API enhancement has been made. Now when a user logs a trip, the trip information automatically gets ported to the Commuter Connections database. Mr. Sheehan mentioned this is done because Commuter Connections staff must review every trip log record to confirm its legitimacy. This data may also be important for program analysis and evaluation.

Mr. Sheehan mentioned that these enhancements are likely to be released in early January.

Next, Mr. Sheehan presented charts to display the reduced incenTrip user activity and registrations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, an average of 400 new incenTrip accounts were created per month. Just over 2,500 new accounts have been registered since the app launched to the public in late August 2019. Monthly trip logs peaked around 13,000 in February 2020; there are now just under 1,000 monthly trips being logged by users. Incentive redemptions also peaked in February 2020 at 221 requests; the pandemic average is currently sitting at 30 average monthly requests. Commuter Connections suspended all incenTrip marketing efforts in March due to the coronavirus pandemic but intends to restart marketing efforts once the coronavirus pandemic subsides.

Lastly, Mr. Sheehan presented background information on the Advanced Transportation and Congestion Management Technologies Deployment (ATCMTD) grant that COG has recently received which will be used to expand incenTrip. The \$5.95 million grant application was submitted in August 2019, the award was announced in June 2020 and the agreements were finalized as of November 2020.

6. Quarterly Progress Report

Stephan Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, began presenting some data points for the first quarter of FY2021, stating that Commuter Connections had 15,426 commuters registered for Ridematching as of September 30, 2020. Mr. Finafrock asked those in attendance to look at Table 2, which lists new applications, reapplication and follow ups. Mr. Finafrock noted that the same two members (North Bethesda and GWRideConnect) are responsible for most of the activity in this table and urges others to reach out if they have any questions or need guidance for how to improve their numbers.

Mr. Finafrock continued by mentioning that the July 2020 edition of the TDM Resource Directory has been published and distributed. Among other updates, this edition of the Directory contains an updated Park and Ride Lot listing.

Mr. Finafrock then presented current data regarding the Guaranteed Ride Home program. As of September 30, 2020, 46 new applications were approved for the quarter, 503 re-registrants were processed and a total of 4,755 registrants are "active" in the database. Mr. Finafrock then stated that Commuter Connections provided 23 trips in Q1, and that the Baltimore program has remained at a total of 195 registrants. The GRH Baltimore program provided one trip for the quarter. Mr. Finafrock then noted that the data has been moving in a more positive direction since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nancy Huggins, MDOT/MTA, asks about GRH data from the previous quarter (Q4 FY2020). Mr. Finafrock answered that last quarter's data is available for review on the regional summary sheet on page 18.

Mr. Finafrock then moved on to present additional notable metrics for the quarter, displaying a bar graph with the number of calls comparing FY19, FY20 and the first quarter of FY21. Finally, Mr. Finafrock displayed a bar graph comparing new applicant and re-applicants for the same timeline. While activity has dipped as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, there are still commuters seeking assistance from Commuter Connections as evidenced by the data.

7. Other Business | Upcoming Agenda Items

Hugh McGloin, WHS/DoD, mentioned that he was interested in agenda items for future Committee meetings. Mr. McGloin asked those in attendance to share strategies on promoting ridesharing in the current environment.

George Clark, TCCSM, mentioned that a point of discussion during a prior meeting he had attended was to investigate if employers can require their employees to get a vaccination shot. He mentioned that some companies can require a vaccine for their employees, mainly those in the healthcare industry. This may be able to coincide with the Commute with Confidence initiative. Mr. McGloin remarked that travelers in Europe from certain countries are required to show a negative COVID test, taken within the last 72 hours. In the future, it is possible that travelers may have to present some proof of vaccination.

Lillian Bunton, Baltimore Metropolitan Council, stated she is looking for email and newsletter content to send to employers. Mr. Clark mentioned that he is reducing the telework information being sent out because it has been so heavily marketed

lately. Mr. Clark mentioned that he is working on trying to promote more carpool and vanpool options. Nancy Huggins, MDOT/MTA, suggested that Ms. Bunton also attend the Commuter Connections Regional TDM Marketing Group meeting immediately following the Ridematching Committee meeting for ideas pertaining to newsletter content.

Steven Osborn, COG/TPB staff, mentioned that work has begun on the January 2021 edition of the Commuter Connections TDM Resource Directory and urged those in attendance to provide COG with any pertinent updates to information contained within.

The Next meeting of the Commuter Connections Ridematching Committee will be held on March 16, 2021 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.