

COMMUTER CONNECTIONS RIDEMATCHING COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

Tuesday, March 15, 2022
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street, N.E.
COG Board Room

Chairperson: Andrew Dempster, HHS/FDA
Vice Chairperson: Kristin Lam Peraza, RRRRC

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.

2. Minutes of the December 21, 2021 Meeting

Approval was sought for the December 21, 2021 Ridematching Committee Meeting minutes. An initial motion to approve was made by George Clark, Tri County Council for Southern Maryland, and a second motion to approve was made by Mark Sofman, Montgomery County Commuter Services. The minutes were approved as written. All were in favor.

3. Upcoming Fairs and Promotions

North Bethesda TMD

- Employer Transportation Management Plan Annual Report.
- NIH virtual CIDs to assist employees with transit and carpool/vanpool information when they return to the office
- Earth Day
- Bike to Work Day

Prince William County

- A new 15 passenger vanpool formed from Gaithersburg to an aerospace company in Manassas called Mu-Del Electronics
- Economic Development Breakfast
- Virtual Transit Fair at Navy Yard
- USPTO Earth Day even on April 21st
- Bike to Work Day

Prince George's County

- Commuter Fair Earth Day at PTO on April 21st
- Chamber events monthly
- Announcement of a new pilot program providing a \$300 subsidy per van per month to encourage vanpooling in the Tri-County area.

4. Best Practices Review – Purge Process

Darlene Nader, NBTMD, began presenting the process she uses to generate the purge process report. Every month she receives a purge report from COG. It is a list of commuters whose records need to be updated or will expire within the next month.

She converts the list from a PDF file to Excel sheet to make it easier to work with. After that she sends an initial e-mail to those commuters with a checklist form for them to complete/update and be returned. The commuter information checklist is a fillable PDF with a button to e-mail back to NBTMD. Anyone returning the checklist is entered into a drawing for a \$25.00 gift card. Commuters can request new information for transit or a new matchlist and that information will be updated in the database in the notes section.

Ms. Nader sends a mid-month follow-up e-mail for those who did not respond to the initial request. She also offers commuters and employers virtual meetings and Commuter Information Days (CIDs) to discuss safety protocols with carpool & vanpools as well as Metro and bus riders who are returning to the office following telework.

At the end of the month, all commuters' records are updated. Records are deleted if commuters request to be removed from the database. This typically happens when commuters are no longer working in the area, have retired, or simply are no longer interested. Darlene can also obtain the occupancy numbers of carpool or vanpool which are still operating. A winner is drawn from the commuters who returned the checklist form and they are sent a gift card and a letter thanking for updating their information.

Ms. Nader finished her presentation by providing her personal contact information for anyone who may have questions.

Victoria Bailey, TransIT Services of Frederick County, raised the question about how to proceed with commuters who don't respond either by e-mail or phone. Ms. Nader explained that in that case she prefers to mark the record as inactive instead of deleting them permanently.

Following Ms. Nader, Leigh Anderson, GWRideConnect, started her presentation on follow-up best practices with commuters.

Commuters reach GWRideConnect through Commuter Connections, the GWRideConnect website, or call directly at 540-373-7665. Ms. Anderson reported that numbers have been up in the last month. After commuters sign-up, they receive a welcome packet that contains information tailored to their commute, including a list of vanpools and buses going to their general commuting area.

GWRideConnect will follow-up with new commuters between two to three weeks after the initial contact. They receive an e-mail link to a simple Google form with 10 questions, such as confirming whether they found a ride, etc. Commuters who do not respond to the e-mail request get a letter in the mail.

After the above steps are taken, the commuter is considered established. GWRideConnect will send an e-mail twice a year providing further assistance or asking about changes to a commuter's information or situation.

GWRideConnect staff purges records using the "delete" status when commuters specifically ask to be removed or categorize them as "inactive" when they are unresponsive to correspondences.

Ms. Anderson finished her presentation offering her contact information for anyone who might have more questions.

Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, reminded those in attendance of the importance of keeping the database clean and current for commuters using Commuter Connections services. He explained that all of the rideshare coordinators should act on the list received by COG every month to make sure those commuters are still interested have accurate information, and to deactivate commuters who wish to be removed from the program. Commuter Connections is expecting increased commuter interest due to increases in regional traffic congestion and an upcoming marketing effort to register or re-register commuters who have returned back to the office.

5. TDM System Update

Stephen Finafrock, COG TPB staff, briefed the Committee about new updates in the TDM System. The first update is related to correspondence templates. These changes are coming soon and are in line with Commuter Connections' current branding style. He specifically referred to the welcome letter that the commuter receives upon creating an account by themselves or with the help of an administrator. The password information isn't revealed in the letter. Also, links for CarpoolNow and Commuter Connections apps at the Apple App Store or Android Google Play are included in the letter.

Mr. Finafrock then highlighted the new matchletter template. He reminded everyone that agencies can have their logo displayed on top of the letter if they wish.

The TDM System was updated to include the six maximum GRH trips permitted per registration year. Also, the togglable tooltips is now re-instated; the button is located in website footer. Blank spaces in usernames are now restricted. Finally, a new payment module created for COG staff is now in use to facilitate incentive payments as part of 'Pool Rewards, CarpoolNow, Flextime Rewards, and incenTrip.

Mr. Finafrock ended his presentation showing the Committee a screenshot of pending vanpool enhancements. This feature will provide more power to coordinators to offer matching for multiple vanpools using the same account. The final slide showed a ridematch result from a commuter perspective. Vanpools will be prioritized making them more obvious in the search.

Leigh Anderson, GWRideConnect, thanked COG staff for the work done with vanpools. She acknowledged that changing the database would make work easier for the people who are managing multiple vanpools.

Darlene Nader, NBTMD, asked when this enhancement would be available emphasizing the value of this tool in helping commuters of large employers such as NIH and HHS who are relying on vanpools. Mr. Finafrock estimated that this tool would be available around June 30th, 2022.

6. Roundtable

Darlene Nader, NBTMD, suggested an agenda item regarding Enterprise's approach for those commuters who are coming back to work only 2 or 3 days a week.

Andrew Dempster, FDA, pointed out that the FDA workforce still has telework as an option. He added that before the coronavirus pandemic, 180 vanpools were established with many employees depending on them.

Brian Lambert, DOD-WHS, remarked that employees who rely on vanpools cannot use the full subsidy if they are not riding the van into work on a regular basis. Commuters need to pay money out of pocket if they decide to commute only a few days a month. However, he added that Enterprise is trying to allow more flexible options for part time riders although the problem has not yet been solved. Nicholas Ramfos, COG/TPB staff, recognized that this issue represents a concern. Commuter Connections has convened a Flexible Vanpool workgroup to develop and launch a "flexible vanpool" feature within the TDM System and CarpoolNow app. He suggested inviting Enterprise to the next meeting to give an update on this matter.

Brian Lambert, DOD-WHS, brought up the status of DOD with more employees coming back to their offices. DOD has up to a 75% occupancy policy in its spaces. Employees who use mass transit benefits are able to park at the Pentagon even if they do not have a parking permit. This measure is going to be extended until April 30th; after that spaces available for parking will be reserved for carpools and vanpools only. Holly Morello, PRTC, asked Mr. Lambert how the transit benefits are deducted if a rider is using a vanpool half the time. Mr. Lambert pointed out that the commuter should calculate the daily rate, but in any case, everything above the subsidy will be paid out of pocket.

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, ended the roundtable discussion talking about the participation of COG/TPB staff using a virtual format with commuters for the next Transit Fair events including the USPTO in April.

7. Second Quarter Progress Report

Stephen Finafrock, COG/TPB staff, began by presenting data points for the Second Quarter Progress Report. Regarding the registration for ridematching, COG served 13,262 commuters who are registered in the database. Mr. Finafrock noted a slight decrease from those served in the prior quarter. Also, COG completed and launched a cosmetic refresh of the public-facing TDM System. New features included Quick Match, a social media feed, and upgraded program description. For incenTrip, COG added PayPal as a new incentive option to the app. The service area was expanded to the Maryland commuter shed by soft-launching the MDOT program.

Mr. Finafrock shared some data with the Committee related to the Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) program. 130 new applicants were registered to the program. 317 commuters decided to re-register. The program now has 1,687 total registrants. Numbers are still significantly low when compared to pre-pandemic registrants. Mr. Finafrock encouraged rideshare coordinators who have been invited to take part in transit fairs either virtually or in person to promote GRH as a way to increase participation in the program. Rideshare coordinators should mention all the benefits and, above all, that it is a free program. GRH provided 73 trips during the quarter. For GRH Baltimore, a total of 93 commuters

registered at the end of the quarter. Five trips were provided. Work commenced on the FY2022 GRH Baltimore Applicant Survey.

Mr. Finafrock finished by referring Committee members to the tables. Table 1 summarizes program-wide quarterly activity and impacts. Most numbers for the quarter dipped a bit when compared to Q1. Table 2, found on page 47, summarizes application activity by each network member. Mr. Finafrock emphasized on the importance of documenting follow-up contacts with commuters utilizing the "add notes" procedure in the TDM System so those numbers can be reflected in this dataset.

He briefly mentioned SchoolPool table on page 49 and the Technical Assistance to local agencies table on page 50. The Commuter Support line is the appropriate channel to address any issues related to TDM or inquiries about a report.

Table 6A is submitted at COG from some agencies but not all. Mr. Finafrock is willing to help those with questions to provide more accurate numbers which will result in a more robust data report.

8. Other Business/Upcoming Agenda Items

Nancy Huggins, MTA, reminded all Maryland rideshare agencies that the rideshare grant application submission was due today.

The Next meeting of the Commuter Connections Ridematching Committee will be held on June 21, 2022 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.