



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Transportation Planning Board Technical Committee  
**FROM:** Nicholas Ramfos, Commuter Connections Program Director  
**SUBJECT:** Enhancements to Commuter Connections Services  
**DATE:** June 5, 2020

---

The regional travel demand management program, Commuter Connections (funded by the state Departments of Transportation), in consultation with its participating public agencies, has planned a few new activities and able to advance the implementation of a few of its previously planned enhancements in response to the changing mobility landscape in the region during the current coronavirus pandemic. This memo briefly describes these enhanced services and tools.

### GETTING READY TO COMMUTE

The actions taken by the governments and employers in the region has significantly changed the pre-COVID-19 employment and commute arrangements for many commuters in the region. The stay at home order, drastic cut backs in transit service and capacity on transit vehicles, suspension and/or reluctance to use shared travel modes (motorized and non-motorized), among other actions, has changed the need to commute, the mode of commute used and the timing of the commute. As the region begins a gradual and phased re-entry into workspaces and business activities, even as efforts to address the health emergency remain underway, commuters will need to reassess their commutes considering changes in their own preferences or changes in the commute services available.

Commuter Connections is working to launch a new information clearinghouse on its website for the re-entry/reopening phases from the coronavirus pandemic while we all adapt to new ways of commuting and accessing essential transportation and to provide support during the transition back to the workplace. The Commuter Connections coronavirus pandemic commute clearinghouse will provide the following information and is anticipated to be launched in the next month or so:

Public Transportation – Overview of the various public transportation services in the National Capital region (local buses, commuter rail and Metro services) and links to the return to service plans of these various public transportation operators. Tips and recommendations will be provided to commuters on using public transportation during the transition period.

Bicycling and Bikesharing – Safety tips and precautions to take while bicycling or using a bikeshare service will be included.

Carpools/Vanpools – Commuting by carpool or vanpool will be included as well as safety measures and tips on how to carpool and vanpool during the transition period. A new employer-based matching capability from the Commuter Connections ridematching system will also be featured. The Commuter Connections CarpoolNow mobile app will also be promoted and has a new feature which

shows park and ride lots with significant carpooling activity as well as afternoon carpool pick-up points (see additional information under the Commute Tool section below). Safety precautions will be outlined on how to properly use these services.

Telework and Flexwork – These strategies will also be emphasized and messaging will encourage commuters that have been working from home to continue to do so, but if they need to go to the office to consider using flextime, staggered work hours, or compressed work week schedules.

Walking- Safety recommendations and precautionary tips on walking to and from work will be provided.

Drive Alone – Tips and recommendations on Eco-driving will be provided in order to curtail the recent increases in motorists speeding due to lower congestion levels.

Guaranteed Ride Home – The Guaranteed Ride Home will also be featured as a safety net in the event a commuter using an alternative mode experiences an unexpected emergency or unscheduled overtime.

## **COMMUTE TOOL**

Commuter Connections had previously launched (about 2 years ago) a smart phone app called CarpoolNow which provides the user carpooling services on-demand, connecting drivers offering a ride with passengers seeking a ride. The CarpoolNow app makes carpooling convenient for both passengers and drivers going the same way and displays routes, estimated pick-up times, and confirms pick-up and drop-off locations. Drivers using the CarpoolNow app can also sign up to receive an incentive payment (maximum of \$10 per ride and \$600 per year) for picking up a passenger using the mobile application so long as a portion of the trip occurs in the Washington DC Metropolitan Region.

With the well-established carpool and vanpool travel patterns disrupted at present for some period as the region gradually return to a new normal way of business, the CarpoolNow app which also for ad-hoc or on-demand carpool formation has been enhanced by adding a locations feature. Based on the real-time location of the users, CarpoolNow will suggest popular carpool pickup points throughout the Washington, DC region. The suggested locations could be traditional Park & Ride locations identified in the map with a “P” icon, or “P+” icon indicating a formal Park & Ride lot that is also a hotspot for casual carpooling/vanpooling OR “+” icon indicating a location that any locations known as a hotspot for carpool pickup and drop-off.

## **TELECOMMUTE DATA COLLECTION**

In response to socially distance and stay at home to help reduce the rate of spread of COVID-19, many employers have adopted work from home arrangements for their employees. Commuter Connections has been promoting and aiding employers and employees interested in teleworking since 1995 through a few different programs. Commuter Connections conducts several surveys, at periodic intervals, to assess its many services. Recognizing the significant increase in teleworking during the current coronavirus pandemic, Commuter Connections will be adding a few questions to

its surveys to specifically gauge the use of teleworking during the current pandemic as well as plans/interests by employers and employees to continue teleworking on a limited or extended frequency under post COVID-19 conditions.

The surveys shown below will be asking a few additional questions about telework during and plans for teleworking post COVID-19 pandemic. This information will be of interest and assistance to employers, transit agencies and transportation departments in planning for potential changes in travel patterns and demand.

Employer Telework Survey – This is a survey of about 2,000 plus employers in the region who registered with Commuter Connection’s and have active alternative commute programs or services at their work sites. This survey was launched in the final week of May 2020 and will remain open till mid to late June of this fiscal year. Highlights from the data collected will be available in July 2020.

Applicant Placement Rate Survey – This is a survey of the commuters who contacted Commuter Connections for assistance or information about commute options in the region during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the year (July – September). On average Commuter Connections receives about 30,000 inquiries about commuting each year. This survey is planned for late fall of 2020. Additional questions will be asked on the survey regarding travel behavior changes related to COVID-19 including the use of Telework and flexible work schedules.

Retention Rate Survey – This is a survey of those commuters who were previously registered with Commuter Connections and did not renew their free membership. The purpose of the survey is to estimate the share of past service users who made shifts to alternative modes and who continued to use alternative modes years after receiving the services. This survey is planned for late fall 2020. Additional questions will be asked on the survey regarding travel behavior changes related to COVID-19 including the use of Telework and flexible work schedules.

State of the Commute (SOC) Survey – The SOC survey is conducted every three years and documents regional trends in commuting patterns, such as commute mode shares (including telework), distance traveled, and prevalent attitudes about transportation services. The survey examines how commute alternative programs and marketing efforts might influence travel behavior and explores commuters’ opinions about and interest in current transportation initiatives. The resulting data is used to estimate the impacts of several Commuter Connections program services. This is a large regionally significant and regionally representative random sample survey of workers in the region and aims to get approximately 7,000 completed survey responses and is conducted every three years. The next survey is scheduled for early part of 2022. This survey will ask about commute changes (any mode of commute, not just telework) during and post COVID-19 pandemic.