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D.C. Area Employers Recognized for Reducing Traffic Congestion and Carbon Footprint Through Innovative Commuter Programs

Washington, D.C. –Winners of the 2015 Commuter Connections Employer Recognition Awards have achieved a collective reduction of more than 3.5 million vehicle miles traveled this year—equivalent to more than seven trips to the moon and back—through transportation benefits packages their firms offer employees in the metropolitan Washington region. Award winners Opower Inc., WeddingWire, and Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative were announced at the 18th Annual Employer Recognition Awards held at the Grand Hyatt Washington.

“The Annual Employer Recognition Awards recognize and support the important role of employers in promoting commuter transportation alternatives in the region,” said Nicholas Ramfos, Director of Commuter Connections. “Transportation benefits programs also help attract and retain highly qualified employees, improve regional mobility, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improving the quality of life for everyone in our region.”

On-hand for the awards ceremony were representatives from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments’ Commuter Connections program and local elected officials including City of Alexandria Councilmember and Vice Chairman of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) Timothy Lovain and District of Columbia Councilmember and TPB Board member Charles Allen as well as Transurban’s Senior Corporate Relations Associate Michael McGurk, Caroline Hull, Director of Salesforce Automation at comScore, Inc., and Peggy Schwartz, Executive Director, Transportation Action Partnership.

“The employers we are honoring have implemented innovative and successful commuter benefit programs. We hope that through their example, other employers will embrace these practices, creating more workplaces where increased commuter benefits yield motivated, productive, and less stressed employees,” said Phil Mendelson, District of Columbia Council Chairman and TPB Chairman.

Applications for the Employer Recognition Awards are accepted each year in three categories: Incentives, Marketing, and Telework to showcase companies that demonstrate exceptional commitment to advancing employee use of alternative commute methods to help mitigate traffic congestion and contribute to cleaner air through reduced auto emissions.

Incentives Winner, Opower Inc. of Arlington, VA has offered employees a wide range of green transportation incentives since 2012, supporting the company’s core mission of reducing energy use, cost, and carbon emissions. Opower offers all employees a \$100 per month transportation subsidy, regardless of commute preference. This subsidy is used to offset travel costs ranging from transit fare to walking shoes and bicycle maintenance. In addition, the company partnered with WageWorks, allowing employees to contribute up to \$130 per month on a pre-tax basis towards mass transit. The monthly transit subsidy is loaded directly onto employee SmarTrip® cards.

To accommodate the needs of those who bike, walk, or run to work, Opower provides on-site bicycle storage, shower facilities, and towel service. Opower employees are supplied with laptop computers and remote company-server access, allowing them to telework on a sporadic basis to balance work/life needs. Of its 560 employees in four countries, 325 work at the Arlington headquarters, and two-thirds of those (66 percent) have found environmentally-friendly solutions for their commute.

Marketing Winner, WeddingWire of Chevy Chase, MD promotes alternative commuting options to employees through an intranet page where transit maps and schedules are posted, as well as company incentives and benefits given for using alternative transportation. An

internal Facebook page was also created for employees to comment about preferable commuting methods through survey links. The social media also informs employees by posting commute related topics such as travel alerts, transit delays, and links to web sites such as Commuter Connections, Metro, and Capital Bikeshare.

In addition, WeddingWire produces an internal newsletter that provides information on various commuting options and promotes contests related to commuting. One such contest is “The Biggest Loser” competition which motivates employees to walk as a healthy means of commuting and traveling. Sixty-eight employees participated and winners received gym memberships and equipment.

WeddingWire employees who ride transit are given a monthly pre-tax benefit up to \$130 per month, plus a \$50 subsidy to help with commuting costs. Of its 340 employees, approximately 228 (67 percent) participate in alternative forms of commuting.

Telework Winner, Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative (SMECO) of Charles County, MD

launched its telework program in 2006 offering a work-from-home option for Emergency Response Contact Center employees with a history of dependability, independence, and a high level of professional knowledge. Participating employees are supplied with all necessary equipment to successfully do their jobs from home, including laptops, headsets, and software. SMECO covers the complete cost of the installation of a dedicated data line, and half the monthly internet or cable costs. IT support is available for home setup of equipment and when technical issues arise. Telework is promoted by the Contact Center’s management and the potential opportunity to telework is discussed as part of the interview process.

With the intention of promoting a flexible environment for its employees, improving productivity, and supporting work/life balance, in 2013 a flexible workplace program was implemented. This program allows 87 employees to create a work schedule that flows best with lifestyles and needs. Employees can work 40 hours in four ten-hour days, with the fifth day off;

or work 80 hours in nine days, with the tenth day off. Employees may also adjust start and end times, provided that core hours are worked.

“Employers that support daily commuting transportation alternatives such as ridesharing, bicycling, public transit and teleworking help create a better quality of life for their employees,” said James R. Sebastian, a transportation planner for the District Department of Transportation, who serves as Commuter Connections Chairman. “The Commuter Connections Employer Services program is a comprehensive regional network dedicated to assisting employers set up and expand commuter benefit initiatives.”

Commuter Connections Employer Services provides free assistance to employers on a host of transportation solutions that help reduce gasoline consumption, ease traffic congestion and the stress that long commutes place on employees from transit subsidies or pre-tax benefits to telework and ridesharing programs. These benefits provide employees with a better work-life balance and flexibility, which reduces absenteeism and improves morale and productivity, makes their organization more successful, and improves the economic vitality and quality of life of the entire National Capital region.

For more details on the Employer Recognition Awards Program visit:

<http://www.commuterconnections.org/employers/employer-awards/>

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Commuter Connections is a program of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and is funded by the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia Departments of Transportation as well as the U.S. Department of Transportation. Commuter Connections provides free ridesharing services and promotes alternatives to drive-alone commuting, and offers the free Guaranteed Ride Home program.

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