

Commuter Connections Strategic Plan Update

January 17, 2023

This draft strategic plan incorporates contributions from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, state funding agencies, and local stakeholders.

For sections 4 through 11, which correspond to specific Commuter Connections activities, the plan specifies the objectives, acceptable performance levels (APLs), and which of the network members are responsible for achieving the objectives.

1. Mission Statement

Commuter Connections assists and encourages people in the Washington region to use alternatives to the single-occupant automobile.

2. Definition of Commuter Connections

A network of public and private transportation organizations—including the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, state funding agencies, and local organizations—that work together to achieve the mission.

3. Overall Objectives

Program objectives

- 3.1. Provide programs and information that reduce vehicle trips, miles traveled, and trip lengths.
- 3.2. Assist the region in improving air quality and mobility.
- 3.3. Foster cooperative program planning and operations with network members and funding agencies.
- 3.4. Enhance the Commuter Connections “brand” by increasing awareness that will lead to changes in travel behavior.
- 3.5. Provide excellent and reliable customer service to employers, employees, and other stakeholders.

Operating objectives

- 3.6. Foster open and direct cooperation, communications, and coordination between Commuter Connections network members, including committee procedures that foster full participation
- 3.7. Provide COG/National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) staff support for the Commuter Connections Subcommittee
- 3.8. Ensure responsiveness and accountability to funding agencies’ direction and guidance for program focus and goals
- 3.9. Ensure that all network members (e.g., funding agencies, local jurisdictions, MWCOG, local contractors, and others) hold each other accountable for fulfilling program objectives.
- 3.10. Monitor cost effectiveness for Commuter Connections individual programs to help ensure optimal use of resources.
- 3.11. Provide an open forum for sharing information and status on TDM projects in the region, whether implemented through or outside of Commuter Connections, with all network members.

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Network Responsibilities:

These objectives refer to the program as a whole and are the responsibility of all network members.

4. Commuter Operations Center

Objectives

- 4.1. Provide ridematching services to commuters online and through a central toll free number (1-800-745-RIDE). Online ridematching should work automatically, but customers should also be able to send an e-mail and obtain matches that way.
- 4.2. Maintain and upgrade on a regular basis the Commuter Connections TDM system website, software, hardware, and regional database for the on-line and smart phone and tablet accessible TDM system and related mobile applications.
- 4.3. Provide network members with 24/7 online access to database.
- 4.4. Host a technical committee of users will meet quarterly to determine new software needs.
- 4.5. Maintain a help line (202-962-3333) and help e-mail for local stakeholders who have database questions.

Acceptable Performance Levels

- 4.6. Provide ridematching services to commuters online (24/7) and via telephone service (8 hours per day) Return phone messages within two hours (or the next morning if after 3 PM). Determine and implement web site best management practice(s) with regard to frequency of maintenance and amount of time site is not available. Provide transportation information services to the general public.
- 4.7. Update and maintain Commuter Connections database weekly. Provide ridematching coordination and technical assistance. Maintain the software, hardware and regional database for the on-line and smart phone and tablet accessible TDM system as well as all related mobile applications.
- 4.8. Maintain and update local information for transit, telework centers, park and ride lots and bicycle route information.
- 4.9. Provide network members with 24/7 access to database.
- 4.10. COG will respond within three months as directed by funders to specific software requests.
- 4.11. Provide quarterly summary reports within 10 business days following end of quarter on the operations and effectiveness of the ridematching program (with effectiveness measured by percentage of riders matched and how long the matches last).

Network Responsibilities:

Fulfilling Objective 4.2 requires regular uploads and downloads by the local jurisdictions, while Objective 4.3 requires that COG provide the appropriate maintenance and service for 24/7 access. COG will convene the required meetings under Objective 4.4, and local jurisdictions and

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funding agencies will provide input. COG will maintain the helpline in Objective 4.5. All network members are expected to meet the service standards in APL 4.6.

5. Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH)

Maximize the use of alternative modes by providing fast and reliable transportation in the event of an emergency.

Objectives

- 5.1. Provide users of alternative commute modes up to four free rides home per year in a taxi, rental car, transportation network company (TNC), or on transit (or appropriate combination) in the Washington and Baltimore metropolitan regions.
- 5.2. Online applications for GRH and rideshare should be processed within one business day.
- 5.3. Maintain and update GRH rules and guidelines as needed.
- 5.4. Provide access to the Operations Center for GRH services for the general public.
- 5.5. Maintain and update on a regular basis the GRH database; automated and manual renewals; including automatic reminders when people's annual registration expires should occur regularly.
- 5.6. Provide yearly analysis of GRH program

Acceptable Performance Levels

- 5.7. Refer to the standard in the contract with the contractor. If a commuter cannot reach a person by phone, the message should be returned within 10 minutes. If the caller is determined to be eligible, a cab should arrive within 15 minutes of trip arrangement. The system will be available weekdays from 6 AM to 10 PM
- 5.8. Process all applications within one business day.
- 5.9. Update the database bi-weekly. Send reminders about registration within 30 days of expiration date and measure response back.
- 5.10. Provide quarterly summary report of proposed Guarantee Ride Home activities and utilization within 10 business days following end of quarter, or for the month if a monthly report is needed.
- 5.11. Provide yearly analysis of Guaranteed Ride home Program within 20 business days following the end of year

Network Responsibilities:

COG is responsible for ensuring that applications can be made online (Objective 5.2); if there is a heavy volume of hard-copy applications due to interest generated by a transportation fair or other marketing promotion COG may take several days to enter them. COG is responsible for Objective 5.3.

GRH Providers are supposed to meet the following performance measures:

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“Respond to the pick-up site location to pick-up registered GRH commuter (for taxi cab , TNC’s, and shuttle service providers) or deliver the rental car (for rental car providers) within 10 to 15 minutes of notification of the need for emergency transportation service.”

The daily operations contractor is supposed to meet the following standard:

“Response to the participating commuters shall be immediate with no more than two telephone rings. Calls directed to COG’s “800” Commuter Connections phone line will be directly transferred to the CONTRACTOR through a phone menu selection. The CONTRACTOR shall be required to use live attendants and/or dispatchers to answer all incoming calls. There are approximately 50 calls that are received each month. Recorded messages or placing the caller(s) on hold are not acceptable working practices.”

6. Marketing of Alternative Commute Options

Objectives

- 6.1. Provide and promote an umbrella branding for Commuter Connections which reflects the participation of Commuter Connections members and funders and allows members to use the umbrella marketing materials and advertisements in a co-branded manner without forgoing their individual identity and branding.
- 6.2. Develop and implement an annual regional marketing program which supports the Transportation Demand Management (TDM) alternatives and special events offered or sponsored by Commuter Connections.
- 6.3. Coordinate marketing approach with regional marketing efforts and reflect policies of State agencies.
- 6.4. Ensure marketing programs reflect the market turnover by balancing awareness and action goals to achieve conversion of single occupant vehicle trips to other modes as well as retention of existing alternative mode users.
- 6.5. Ensure the promotion process includes adequate opportunity for member input, review, and approval at appropriate stages of planning, budgeting, production, and execution.
- 6.6. Ensure message continuity and retention within budget parameters by scheduling promotions that are seasonally adjusted to market demand (need) to achieve the greatest return on investment, with a goal of maintaining continuous awareness of Commuter Connections programs and services.
- 6.7. Provide member organizations break-downs of marketing costs by individual programs and events within programs. Include estimated budgets and timelines by campaign which can be evaluated and adjusted on a quarterly basis.
- 6.8. Provide member organizations quarterly summary report of expenditures versus budget
- 6.9. Provide member organizations options for periodic program area marketing messaging adjustments

Acceptable Performance Levels

- 6.10. Provide an annual promotion plan including campaign(s) focus, timing, and estimated budget, production and presentation timelines.
- 6.11. Sustain commuter awareness of alternative commuting options.

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- 6.12. Provide quarterly break out of marketing costs by line areas and events within line areas within 10 business days following the end of the quarter
- 6.13. Provide quarterly summary report within 10 business days following the end of the quarter of expenditures verse budget
- 6.14. Provide program area marketing adjustments when requested and justified.

Network Responsibilities:

Objectives 6.1, 6.3, 6.4, and 6.6 are the responsibility of all network members. Development of the annual marketing plan in Objectives 6.2 and 6.5 should be led by COG with sufficient input from local organizations and state funding agencies. Objectives 6.7, 6.8, and 6.9 are COG's responsibility.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Objectives

- 7.1. Review and update methodology to link monitoring and reporting of program results to obtaining program goals and objectives and the development of future plans and actions.
- 7.2. Collect and analyze data every three years as well as provide quarterly program tracking and monitoring reports for each program area as defined in the Evaluation Framework and Methodology.
- 7.3. Provide summary of results of "State of the Commute Survey"
- 7.4. Provide summary of carpooling demographics
- 7.5. Incorporate funding agencies' input into development of guidance for survey
- 7.6. Establish action items as a result of surveys. Link survey results and action items to future goals and objectives for Commuter Connections Program
- 7.7. Provide monthly, quarterly, and annual progress reports on results of the Commuter Operations Center, Guaranteed Ride Home, Employer Outreach, and Marketing program elements
- 7.8. Provide analysis of Commuter Connections TDM program element measures, including the Operations Center, Guaranteed Ride Home, Marketing, and Employer Outreach and the program effects on transportation and emissions

Acceptable Performance Levels (APLs)

- 7.9. Collect data monthly and provide quarterly reports quarterly program tracking and monitoring reports for each program area.
- 7.10. Provide summary of results of the "State of the Commute Survey" and relationship to current goals and objectives. Based on the results of the survey establish action items to facilitate development of future program goals and objectives.
- 7.11. Provide summary of carpooling demographics
- 7.12. Incorporate funding agencies inputs for the development of guidance for survey

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- 7.13. Provide a report within 30 business days outlining results of commuter awareness surveys to establishing future goals and objectives for the Commuter Connections Program
- 7.14. Provide summary report within 10 business days following the end of quarter on results of employer database
- 7.15. Provide yearly report within 20 business days following the publishing of the regional TDM Evaluation program results in contributing efforts to meet Emissions Reduction Standards
- 7.16. Incorporate results into Regional Air Quality Conformity Analysis and Congestion Management Process as needed

Network Responsibilities:

Objective 7.1 is led by COG with input from the members of the TDM Evaluation Group. Objective 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.6, 7.7, and 7.8 are led by COG. Objective 7.5 should be performed by the TDM Evaluation Group.

8. Employer Outreach

Support outreach and marketing efforts by local jurisdictions to the region's employers to encourage use by their employees of alternative commute modes such as ridesharing, transit, telework, bicycling, and walking.

Objectives

- 8.1. Increase the number of employer-based alternative transportation programs and incentives by increasing the number of participating work sites.
- 8.2. Increase the number of alternative transportation options provided by participating employers through an increase of options provided within a particular work site.
- 8.3. Increase the number of participating employees at existing employer programs.
- 8.4. Increase the number of employee surveys conducted.
- 8.5. Integrate participating local jurisdictional efforts into one umbrella program to provide quarterly reports on results of employer outreach.
- 8.6. Provide support to participating local jurisdictions in the form of updated marketing materials. Assess marketing materials and training needs for entire program (not individual jurisdictions) and develop a plan. Provide marketing materials and training to sales representatives as described in the plan.
- 8.7. Maintain and update on a regular basis the employer outreach database.
- 8.8. Provide participating local jurisdictions and funding agencies ready accessibility to regional employer outreach database.
- 8.9. Reassess and revise the goals for each participating jurisdiction on a regular basis.
- 8.10. Assess, identify, and overcome the barriers to cooperative efforts for sales and maintenance of employer outreach programs.

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Acceptable Performance Levels

- 8.11. Increase the number of employer-based alternative transportation programs and incentives by an appropriate percentage established by state funding agencies in conjunction with local jurisdictions within a particular year. (Note: To be determined at the start of each Commuter Connections regional TDM evaluation cycle)
- 8.12. Expand existing employer-based alternative transportation programs by X percent set by the evaluation period.
- 8.13. Survey employers contacted in each jurisdiction pursuant to goals outlined in the Employer Outreach contract Scope of Work between the local jurisdiction and COG and produce a report with the results within one month.
- 8.14. Provide quarterly reports to include results of any action plans (commute program recommendations) developed and coordination efforts by jurisdiction.
- 8.15. Provide training/orientation for new sales staff as needed. Provide specialized training upon request from local jurisdictions in accordance with training plan within one month of request. Assess marketing materials required and produce them in a timely manner. Assess progress towards plan.
- 8.16. Update and maintain Commuter Connections database weekly.
- 8.17. Provide network members with 24/7 access to database.
- 8.18. Evaluate and reassess goals annually. Monitor progress towards goals quarterly.
- 8.19. Assess barriers and boundaries on a yearly basis; propose plan to reduce barriers.

Network Responsibilities:

Objectives 8.1, 8.2. and 8.3 are the responsibility of the local organizations in the network, with support provided by COG when requested. Objective 8.4 is the responsibility of the local organizations, and COG should provided training in the purpose of surveys and how to conduct them so that surveys are conducted in a standard format throughout the region. Objective 8.5 is shared responsibility between COG and local organizations. COG is responsible for Objective 8.6, with input from the Marketing Planning Work Group. Fulfilling Objective 8.7 requires regular on-line database updates by the local jurisdictions, while Objective 8.8 requires that COG provide the appropriate maintenance and service for 24/7 access. Objective 8.9 is led by COG, and local organizations should be actively involved with setting their sales targets. (General targets for the APLs will similarly be worked out through a collaborative process.) Objective 8.10 is a shared responsibility between all network members, and may require redefining the process through which local organizations take credit for signing up or expanding programs at area employers.

9. Telework

Objectives

- 9.1. Provide information to employers on the benefits of teleworking and assist them in setting up new telework programs, or expanding existing programs, for their employees.
- 9.2. Provide services to assist participating employer outreach staff in local jurisdictions set up new or expand existing telework programs.

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- 9.3. Determine needs and provide training on telework programs.
- 9.4. Increase number of teleworkers in the region.
- 9.5. Increase the number of employers with a telework program

Acceptable Performance Levels

- 9.6. If an employer requests information or assistance on telework, provide requested information or assistance within one business day (depending on type of assistance requested).
- 9.7. Respond to requests from employer outreach staff to support telework within one business day, by either providing requested assistance or providing them information so help them give the employer the requested assistance.
- 9.8. Include telework in training plan (see Objective 8.6) and provide training to sales representatives.
- 9.9. Increase the number of teleworkers in the region; establish reasonable objectives for individual jurisdictions.
- 9.10. Increase the number of employers with telework programs in the region by X percent per year; establish reasonable objectives for individual jurisdictions.
- 9.11. Provide quarterly reports within 10 business days following the end of a quarter on success of telework program

Network Responsibilities:

Objective 9.1 is primarily the responsibility of the local organizations, with COG providing support as requested. Objectives 9.2 and 9.3 are COG's responsibility. Objectives 9.4 and 9.5 are shared between COG and local organizations. Both local organizations and COG are responsible for meeting APL 9.7.

10. New Initiatives

Objectives

- 10.1. Identify efficiencies in operations of existing programs.
- 10.2. Identify cost savings options in operation of existing programs.
- 10.3. Evaluate and develop new TDM strategies
- 10.4. Research innovative ideas in other regions to determine their viability for the Washington, DC region
- 10.5. Evaluate the efficiency of offering assistance for non-commute trips.
- 10.6. Participation in partnerships on various transportation projects.

Network Responsibilities:

Objectives 10.1 – 10.6 are the responsibility of all network members and information regarding new TDM strategies and innovative ideas should be shared between members.

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No APLs were provided for this section because it relates to introducing new ideas as opposed to implementing specific ideas.

11. Project Timeline

Rough outline of planning cycle:

September	Meetings with stakeholders to review evaluation and verify program elements Identify project components within each program element Produce draft bullet points for review
Early September Early October	State TDM Group meets with COG staff to provide direction for the work plan COG staff presents draft of work plan to State TDM Group and refines program elements based on feedback
November	Present draft Work Program to Commuter Connections Subcommittee for review and comment. Refine program elements based on feedback in concurrence with STD M Work Group.
January	Obtain final approvals from the Commuter Connections Subcommittee and STD M Work Group.
February	Present draft Work Program to TPB Technical Committee and TPB for review and comment Refine program elements based on feedback in concurrence with State TDM Group
March May	Obtain final approvals from TPB Technical Committee and TPB Give status report to Commuter Connections Subcommittee

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June	Send funding commitment letters to funding agencies and identify any adjustments that need to be made to the TIP
	Implement TIP funding changes, if needed
	Obtain funding commitment letters from state funding agencies
July	Fiscal year begins and work plan is implemented

Committee Structure

The table below outlines the committee structure and meeting times:

Committee/Purpose	Members	Meeting Time
<p>State TDM Work Group An oversight group that provides administrative and programmatic oversight of the core program elements in the CCWP.</p>	State funding agency representatives and COG/TPB senior staff.	Every month or every other month, first Tuesday, 11 AM – 1 PM
<p>Commuter Connections Subcommittee Provides overall technical review of regional TDM program services.</p>	General Commuter Connections, as well as marketing and GRH (former GRH Ad-Hoc group, and High Tech Ad-Hoc Group)	Every other month (January, March, etc.), third Tuesday, noon – 2 p.m.
<p>Regional TDM Marketing Group Provides exchange of TDM marketing and promotional information and coordination of regional advertising and marketing campaigns.</p>	Regional marketing working group comprised of members from the Commuter Connections network, transit agencies, TMA’s and others interested in regional TDM marketing information.	Every quarter (Sept, Dec, March, and June), third Tuesday of the month at 10 a.m.
<p>Marketing Planning Work Group Working group composed of member from the Commuter Connections Subcommittee to work with the marketing contractor on the regional campaigns.</p>	Volunteer members from the Regional TDM Marketing Group	Twice yearly, in fall and spring to plan upcoming campaign, plus other meetings as needed
<p>Commuter Connections Ridematching Committee Provides technical review of regional ridematching system and overall network policies and procedures</p>	All ridematching agencies and organizations that are Commuter Connections ridematch system members (previously known as Commuter Connections Operations Center Subcommittee)	Every quarter (January, April, etc.), third Tuesday, 10 AM-noon; other meetings as needed during development and implementation of web-based ridematching system

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TDM Evaluation Group Provides overall direction and review of regional TDM Evaluation project methodology and results	Volunteer members from the Commuter Connections Subcommittee	As needed
Employer Outreach Committee Provides input and review of Employer Outreach efforts in the region.	Former Employer Outreach Ad-Hoc Group, TMA Advisory Group and Telecommuting Ad-Hoc group members	Every quarter (July, Oct, Jan, April), third Tuesday, 10 AM-noon
Bike to Work Day Steering Committee Organize Bike to Work Day	Comprised of local pit stop managers and colleagues as well as other interested bicycling enthusiasts	Five meetings prior to event in May beginning in September. Meets the 2 nd Wednesday every other month.
Car Free Day Steering Committee Organizes Car Free Day	Comprised of local jurisdiction, federal agency, TMA representatives and other interested organizations.	Four meetings prior to event in September. Meets the 2 nd Wednesday in the meeting month.

It may be possible to allow participation in meetings via conference call or by Webex, TEAMS, etc. Meeting calendar for 2023, showing the Tuesdays and Wednesdays of each week:

Jan. 10	State TDM	Feb. 14	State TDM	Mar. 8	Bike To Work Car Free Day
11	Bike to Work			14	State TDM
17	Employer Outreach CC Subcommittee			21	Ridematching CC Subcommittee Regional TDM Marketing

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Apr. 11 18	State TDM	May 9 10 16	State TDM	Jun. 13 20	State TDM
	Employer Outreach		Bike To Work Car Free Day		Ridematching Regional TDM Marketing
			Commuter Connections		

Jul. 11 12 18	State TDM	Aug.		Sep. 12 13 19	State TDM
	Car Free Day				Bike To Work Car Free Day
	Employer Outreach CC Subcommittee				Regional TDM Marketing CC Subcomm Ridematching

Oct. 10 17		Nov. 8 14 21	Bike To Work	Dec. 12 19	
	State TDM		State TDM		State TDM
	Employer Outreach		CC Subcomm		Ridematching Regional CC Subcommittee TDM Marketing

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12. Deliverables

12.1. Internal Reports

- **Commuter Connections program effectiveness summary**

Provide activity summary report with quarterly invoice. Summary report should include:

- Status of action items
- Future action items
- Suggestions for changes
- If any, complaints from customers and funding agencies
- Regional trends
- Status of working groups
- Breakdown of expenditures (Further discussion is required on the level of detail to be provided. In general, it should be sufficiently detailed so that expenditures can be tracked by program, perhaps by major categories.)
- **Commuter Operations Center quarterly summary report**
- **Commuter Connections Monthly Executive Summary**
- **Guaranteed Ride Home quarterly summary report**
- **Marketing quarterly expenditures report**
- **Employer Outreach quarterly report, to include ACT database and telework**
- **Marketing Plan**
- **Campaign Marketing Plan**
- **Annual work program, including program goals and objectives**

State funding agencies need to determine if their contractual arrangements allow quarterly reporting; some contracts may specify monthly reports with invoices. If this is the case, perhaps a shorter form of the quarterly report could be developed that would keep within contractual obligations but provide less detailed information.

12.2. External Reports

- **State of the Commute Survey Results (every three years)**
- **Trip and emissions reduction annual report (Regional TDM Evaluation Project)**
This should include cost effectiveness, and should be prepared at the interval necessary to meet federal requirements
- **Other reports as needed**