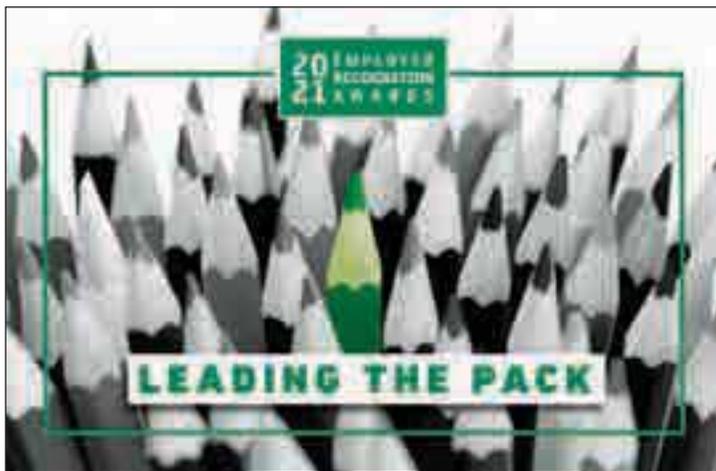


The Commuter Information Source for Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia



## EMPLOYER AWARD WINNERS LEADING THE PACK

For 24 years, the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) through Commuter Connections have honored employers who are "Leading the Pack" in commute programs. And in a year that saw teleworking soar, many DC region employers faced new challenges.



The winners of the 2021 Commuter Connections Employer Recognition Awards were the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), GEICO, and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). These employers have responded to challenges through good communications, planning, and open minds. All have designed and implemented innovative and successful commuter and telework programs.

The Commuter Connections Employer Recognition Awards annual program acknowledges employers who offer outstanding commuter benefits, amenities, and tools to facilitate the use of alternative commuting methods such as ridesharing, transit, teleworking, bicycling, and walking.

Charles Allen, District of Columbia Councilmember and chair of the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board, congratulated the winners and provided key insight, "We hope that through their example, other organizations will embrace similar initiatives, creating more opportunities to help maximize the efficiencies of shared commutes," he said.

Qualified applicants within the Washington, DC region were evaluated by a Selection Committee of industry experts and professionals from the Washington, DC metropolitan region and moderated by a third party. Winners were chosen for their ability to track performance metrics for their commute programs such as a decrease in vehicle trips and miles traveled. Winners also implemented policies that have improved the lives of their employees and those within the National Capital Region.

### Employer Award Winners

#### Incentives Award

#### National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases



l to r: Judy Quasney, NIAID; Pamela Sebesky, City of Manassas (TPB Vice Chair); Lando Cox, JBG Smith; Misti Hensley, JBG Smith.

The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) is a scientific organization within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that advances research used to improve the health of millions of people around the world. Started over 130 years ago in Staten Island, NY, NIAID research led to increased knowledge of addressing public health crises caused by infectious disease outbreaks.

NIAID features an array of commuter amenities such as reserved carpool and vanpool parking, a bus shelter,

electric vehicle charging stations, display monitors showing public transit information, secure bike parking, showers and lockers, and an eight-foot-wide bike trail.

Of NIAID's 4,500 employees in the Washington, DC metropolitan region, 40 percent (1,800) telework up to eight days monthly. Employees using transit have a short half mile walk from the Metrorail Station, and 37 percent receive a subsidy up to the federal limit. There is also a shuttle between NIAID and the main NIH campus in Bethesda.

NIAID also supports flexible scheduling. These schedules stagger arrival and departure times and are strongly encouraged. Approximately 40 percent of NIAID employees participate in alternative work schedules, helping ease commuting and improving work/life balance.

NIAID also offers employees classes on health and wellness, nutrition, and mental health balance. Employees are encouraged to use the on-site fitness areas, and many enjoy daily walks around the campus. An onsite cafeteria and coffee shop as well as two outdoor eating areas provide a reason not to drive off campus for lunch.

As a result of its various commuter benefits and amenities offered, NIAID has saved an average of 11.7 million employee vehicle miles and an estimated 534,000 gallons of gasoline annually.

**Marketing Award  
GEICO**



l to r: James Mount, GEICO; Pamela Sebesky, City of Manassas (TPB Vice Chair).

One of the fastest-growing auto insurers in the U.S., GEICO employs more than 3,100 in the Washington metropolitan area, holds more than 18 million auto policies nationwide, and covers more than 28 million vehicles. Ever committed to providing outstanding community and customer service, GEICO also views environmental responsibility as a top value.

GEICO promotes its commuter benefits to new hires and existing employees; and partners with Montgomery County Commuter Services to promote participation in events such as the Walk and Ride Challenge and Bike to Work Day. GEICO distributes commuter-related digital eblasts, and has commuter brochures within its cafeteria and break rooms, keeping employees up-to-date. The company promotes the use of bike paths and walking trails around the office and bike education classes have also been offered to employees.

Since last winning an award from Commuter Connections in 2000, GEICO has significantly expanded its facilities to encourage more bike commuting, installing 20 bike racks, 60 lockers, and 10 showers. GEICO also has a telework policy, which had employees working from home 1-2 days per week prior to the pandemic.

GEICO is conveniently located within a short walking distance to the Friendship Heights Metrorail station and matches employee contributions to SmartBenefits, up to \$110 per month. This amount demonstrates its increased commitment to commuter incentives; in 2000, GEICO provided employees with just \$28 per month. Priority parking is also given to carpools and electric vehicle cars.

The marketing of GEICO's commuter programs to its employees has helped reduce employee vehicle miles by 1,384,000 and save an estimated 62,910 gallons of gasoline annually.

**Telework Award  
American Speech-Language-  
Hearing Association**



The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is a national professional, scientific, and credentialing organization for 218,000 members and affiliates who are speech and hearing professionals. Its membership includes speech-language pathologists; audiologists; speech, hearing, and language scientists; and students. ASHA is committed to making effective communication accessible to everyone.

A previous Commuter Connections award winner in 2004, ASHA has since grown its program from 1 of every 6 employees, to 1 of every 2 employees teleworking. Prior to the pandemic, slightly more than half (51 percent) of ASHA's 292 staff members in the Washington, DC region teleworked up to 66 percent of their total workdays. The organization also has a flextime program that provides staff a lot of control over when they work, and offers compressed workweeks during the summer months.

During the pandemic, the organization moved to an entirely remote workforce. To help employees cope, ASHA added two weeks of emergency sick leave and

accommodated various scheduling challenges posed by the pandemic. To ensure that employees had all needed equipment at home, ASHA provided laptops to employees, and allowed them to take monitors and desk chairs home. ASHA’s “Wellbeing Navigator” provided ergonomic sessions so employees can remain comfortable within a home/office setting. At the end of 2020, ASHA gave each employee \$500 to offset the costs of outfitting their home offices.

Employees commuting by transit are provided a monthly subsidy of \$130; carpools are given preferred parking; and those who bike to work may use lockers, showers, and bike racks. Points are awarded to carpoolers, bicyclists, and walkers for round trip commutes, which are redeemable for gift cards.

ASHA’s telework and work schedule alternatives programs help to reduce employee vehicle miles by 700,650 and save an estimated 31,848 gallons of gasoline annually.

**Employer Services Award Winners**

The TPB also gave awards to two organizations who support employers by starting or expanding commute benefits and telework programs.

**Employer Services Sales Team Achievement Award**



l to r: Will Pearson, Steer; Julia Wean, Steer; Danelle Carey, goDCgo; Charles Allen, DC Councilmember (TPB Chair); Marina Budimir, DDOT; Shana Johnson, Foursquare ITP.

The Employer Services Sales Team Achievement Award is given to the Commuter Connections Employer Services sales team that has most successfully partnered with employers to develop and expand their commuter programs. There are 10 Employer Services sales teams and 31 sales representatives in the Washington, DC metropolitan region.

During the past year, with three full-time sales representatives, the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) made more than 3,200 contacts with employers in the District of Columbia; and its goDCgo staff held

88 webinars and virtual meetings. Selection of the award was based on information provided by the sales teams as part of their required monthly reporting to COG and TPB; and through ongoing database verifications. DDOT’s goDCgo program is proudly supported by Foursquare ITP, Steer, and Clark Concepts.

**Employer Services Organization Achievement Award**



l to r: Anna Nissinen, Fairfax DOT; Charles Allen, DC Councilmember (TPB Chair); Marcus Moore, Fairfax DOT.

The Employer Services Organization Achievement Award recognizes an entity that has instituted a program that makes it easier for employers to introduce or expand commuter benefits in the workplace. COG recognizes the Fairfax County Department of Transportation’s (FCDOT) tireless efforts in aiding Fairfax County employers through the impacts of the Metrorail Platform Reconstruction Projects. FCDOT coordinated with local, regional, state, and federal partners to engage with more than 1,400 Fairfax County employers in its customized planning to help prepare essential employees and vulnerable transit users to rethink their commutes during the service disruptions.

**2021 Honorable Mention Award Nominees**

Commuter Connections would like to acknowledge the following employers with honorable mention:

- Ameritel Communications Corp - Rockville, MD
- Assedo Consulting - Columbia, MD
- Charles County Government - La Plata, MD
- DLH Corporation - Silver Spring, MD
- George Mason University - Fairfax, VA
- GTM Architects - Bethesda, MD
- Intelligent Automation, Inc. - Rockville, MD
- ITegrity, Inc. - Silver Spring, MD
- Navnati Group - Arlington, VA
- Smoothstack, Inc. - Fairfax, VA
- Telos Corporation - Ashburn, VA
- Verizon - Ashburn, VA
- Yes& - Alexandria, VA

Car Free Day is a free international event celebrated every September 22 where residents, employees, students, and seniors are encouraged to get around without driving alone in cars and instead ride a train, bus, bicycle, scooter, walk, or telework. Two thousand cities in 46 countries celebrate Car Free Day. Commuters who take the free pledge to go car free or car-lite (carpool/vanpool) on September 22, 2021 will be automatically entered into a free raffle for prizes listed at [www.carfreemetrodc.org](http://www.carfreemetrodc.org). Also, all who take the pledge will receive a \$30 Nift Gift online promocode, good at local merchants.

Car Free Day is a great opportunity for employees to get back to the workplace if they haven't already. To relaunch your company's commuter program, contact your Commuter Connections Employer Services Representative for free assistance.

[www.commuterconnections.org/request-form/](http://www.commuterconnections.org/request-form/)

### Tips to Promote Car Free Day:



- Send an email to employees (sample email below)
- Hold an employee transportation fair
- Add a link on your company's intranet for Car Free Day and CarpoolNow
- Provide breakfast to employees who participate
- Place information about Car Free Day on your lobby or break room display screens
- Introduce the free incenTrip mobile commuter app to employees and they can earn up to \$600 a year while commuting at [www.commuterconnections.org/incenTrip.app](http://www.commuterconnections.org/incenTrip.app)

#### Sample email:

Drop the keys on Wednesday, September 22, 2021, for Car Free Day, or go car-lite and carpool/vanpool. Whether you're thinking about adopting a new commute method or already carpooling, vanpooling, taking transit, bicycling, or walking to work, celebrate Car Free Day. Instead of driving alone to work or traveling elsewhere by car that day, try getting where you want to go another way.

Take the free online pledge at [www.carfreemetrodc.org/the-car-free-pledge/](http://www.carfreemetrodc.org/the-car-free-pledge/) and receive a \$30 Nift Gift credit to local merchants; and be entered into a free raffle for a chance to win great prizes such as a Samsung Galaxy Tablet, Washington Area Bicyclist Association annual memberships, \$25 Giant Food gift cards, monthly SmarTrip cards, and more. Even if you're already car free, take the pledge and be part of the free raffle.

If you need a carpool companion, login or sign up for free employer-based ridematching at <https://tdm.commuterconnections.org/mwocog/>.

Take the **FREE** pledge (even if you're already car free) at **CARFREEMETRODC.ORG** and receive a \$30 Nift Gift credit to local merchants, and become eligible for great prizes!

The traffic is creeping back. As more employers require their employees to come back to the workplace, traffic in the region could return to pre-pandemic levels in the near future. It will depend on the number of commuting days per week and the method of traveling to and from the workplace.

Some are predicting that many employers will offer full-time employees a hybrid work schedule; telework 2 to 3 days per week and the balance of days at the worksite; or other forms of flexible scheduling to increase the number of non-commute days compared to pre-pandemic.

## Free Assistance is Available

The Commuter Connections network of Employer Services managers cover the entire Washington, DC metropolitan region and provide free services including:

[www.commuterconnections.org/request-form/](http://www.commuterconnections.org/request-form/)

- Site analysis to identify all available commute options at your site
- Design of a custom commuter program plan
- Telework program design, including policy development
- On-site transportation fairs to bring transit and carpooling experts face-to-face with employees
- Marketing materials, including web content
- Real-time carpool matching service, CarpoolNow
- Assistance setting up a commuter benefit program

Commuter Connections' Commute with Confidence webpage includes safe commuting tips and reopening plans for area transit providers.

[www.commuterconnections.org/covid19-commuting/](http://www.commuterconnections.org/covid19-commuting/)

WMATA has a Community Toolkit with information that can help reassure commuters about safety on its trains and buses. Part of the Toolkit describes the safety measures that Metro is employing to keep its trains and buses clean. For example, new air filtration systems on buses, trains, and in stations circulate fresh air from outside every three minutes. Hospital-grade sanitizer is used to scrub down seats and other surfaces on the buses and trains.

[www.wmata.com/service/covid19/doing-our-part/toolkit.cfm](http://www.wmata.com/service/covid19/doing-our-part/toolkit.cfm)

## Is Carpooling Safe?

Commuters can carpool safely by following the tips available at the Commute with Confidence webpage:

- Wear face coverings while in the vehicle
- Limit carpool size
- Limit physical contact and maintain appropriate physical distancing to the extent possible

The CarpoolNow app provides free on-demand carpooling services, connecting drivers offering a ride with passengers seeking a ride. The app displays routes, estimated pick-up times, and confirms pick-up and drop-off locations.

Use of CarpoolNow is free, and even includes an incentive for the driver: receive a payment of \$10 per trip (up to \$600 annually) for picking up passengers through the mobile app on weekdays from 6:30-9:30 a.m. and/or 4:00-7:00 p.m. Trips must originate, terminate, or pass through the Washington, DC metropolitan region and CarpoolNow app users must have a free account with Commuter Connections.

## Employee-Ready Web/Email Content for Employers

Use this web/email content in your communication with your employees:

### **SmarTrip for Android Available**

Metro has launched SmarTrip for Android in Google Pay. In addition to Metrorail, Metrobus and Metro-operated parking lots and garages, riders can pay with an Android phone anywhere SmarTrip is accepted, including all regional providers. [www.wmata.com/fares/MobilePay/GooglePay.cfm](http://www.wmata.com/fares/MobilePay/GooglePay.cfm)

### **Carpooling**

Commuters can carpool safely by wearing a mask in the vehicle, limiting carpool size and physical contact, and maintaining physical distancing where possible. Some restrictions apply. [www.commuterconnections.org/carpool-now-app/](http://www.commuterconnections.org/carpool-now-app/)

### **Incentive Programs**

In addition to CarpoolNow, Commuter Connections offers a number of incentive programs to commuters who carpool and vanpool, at no cost to employers. 'Pool Rewards provides cash to eligible commuters to form carpools and vanpools; incenTrip awards points for using transit, carpooling, bicycling, walking, etc., weekdays during peak commuting times. incenTrip points are redeemable for e-gift cards, cash payments, or transit fare, at \$10, \$25, and \$50 increments, up to \$600 a year. The free Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) program provides four free rides home per year for employees who commute by train, bus, carpool, vanpool, bike or walk during illness, unexpected emergencies, or unscheduled overtime. For more information on these programs, visit [www.commuterconnections.org](http://www.commuterconnections.org).



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800.745.RIDE [commuterconnections.org](http://commuterconnections.org)

For subscription information or to change your mailing address,  
 contact Commuter Connections at 800.745.RIDE.

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## MARC TRAIN, MTA COMMUTER BUS RUNNING AT FULL SERVICE

Maryland commuters return to find MARC trains and MTA commuter buses running at full service. Beginning August 30, 2021, MTA began providing pre-pandemic service levels to Maryland commuters once more. In addition, funds from the federal American Relief Plan will mitigate fare increases.

MARC has modified fare options for returning riders to help coincide with post-pandemic hybrid commute needs. New three and 10-day fare passes are available for local bus, light rail, Metro subway, commuter bus, and MARC train. Available through the CharmPass app, the passes may be used on consecutive or non-consecutive days, will be valid up to 12 months after the date of purchase, and will be discounted about 15 percent from a single day pass.

**LOOK AGAIN**  
 GLAD TO HAVE YOU SAFELY  
 BACK ON BOARD!

If you are ever in a jam or have an unexpected emergency, commuters can take advantage of Guaranteed Ride Home!  
 Learn how you can get a free ride home at [commuterconnections.org](http://commuterconnections.org) or call 800.745.RIDE.

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