

ITEM 10 – Information
February 19, 2025

Commuter Incentives: Motivating Travel Behavior Change

Background: The board will be briefed on the concept of commuter incentive programs and how the TPB's Commuter Connections program utilizes incentives to encourage commuters to try non-SOV modes of transportation, which can reduce roadway congestion and improve air quality. Commuter Connections has operated various incentive programs for over ten years, and by the end of this month, will fully launch the new CommuterCash program that will eventually encompass several incentive programs within one mobile application.



MEMORANDUM

TO: Transportation Planning Board
FROM: Dan Sheehan, Program Director, Transportation Operations Programs
SUBJECT: Commuter Incentives: Motivating Travel Behavior Change
DATE: February 13, 2025

There are many commuter incentive programs in existence within the National Capital Region (NCR). These programs primarily exist to encourage motorists – particularly commuters – to avoid driving alone to-and-from work by instead choosing a more sustainable travel option, such as carpool, vanpool, transit, bike, or walk. Each single-occupant vehicle (SOV) removed from the road network as a result of a commuter incentive program helps optimize efficiency of the network, reduce vehicular congestion, and improve air quality. Examples of these programs currently available in the NCR include SmartBenefits (pre-tax and direct benefit), vanpool subsidies through Vanpool Alliance in Northern Virginia, the Commuter Tax Credit in Maryland, and High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes.

As [Return to Office](#) initiatives begin to materialize in the NCR, commuter incentive programs can play a key role in reducing vehicular demand on the region's roads during peak commute times.

USING INCENTIVES FOR INITIAL AND SUSTAINED CHANGE IN TRAVEL BEHAVIOR

For those who may be open to changing their travel behavior, commute incentive programs can be the final jolt needed to try something new.

Incentives can be deployed in two different phases: A beginning phase that motivates initial mode shift, and a second phase intended to sustain the shift. It is difficult for individuals to muster the motivation to break an existing habit; the same holds true for commuting. To initiate an initial shift, a strong, lucrative incentive can be used to help nudge a commuter out from a drive-alone commuting habit and into a more sustainable mode choice. After a new habit is formed, which is believed to take around 90 days, the incentive may shift focus to instead sustain the new travel behavior. This may require less financial investment in the incentive, as maintaining the status quo is the natural tendency of most people.

SUMMARY OF COMMUTER CONNECTIONS INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Commuter Connections, a program of the TPB, operates several commuter incentive programs available to commuters throughout the region. [Pool Rewards](#) incentivizes new carpool formation. Commuters can register their carpool their new carpool with Commuter Connections and receive up to \$320 over ninety days. Participants earn their reward by tracking their trips. Each commute trip that includes two or more occupants can earn \$2.50, or \$5 per day. For a limited time, while the [I-495 NEXT](#) project is ongoing in Virginia, VDOT is offering carpools with three or more occupants that travel along the I-495 NEXT corridor an additional \$100 bonus incentive.

Commuter Connections provides a \$200 monthly subsidy to newly-formed vanpools who have at least seven participants. The \$200 helps reduce the cost of a monthly vehicle lease for the vanpool. To maintain eligibility, the vanpool must track their trips in a manner consistent with the Federal Transit Administration's National Transit Database (NTD) requirements.

[CommuterCash](#) is a new incentive program designed by Commuter Connections to nudge commuters towards sustainable travel modes. The program is operated from a custom-built mobile application that gamifies commutes by offering reward points for commuters who use the app to track their trips. Program participants can use the app to explore their travel options; they will discover that that app awards a greater number of points for travel modes that are not driving alone. Participants accumulate points to be redeemed for financial rewards, such as cash, Visa gift cards, SmarTrip fare, or E-ZPass credits.

For a limited time, the [goDMV Commuter Competition](#) will be administered via CommuterCash. goDMV is a friendly competition between employers in the region. Employees of participating employers log trips in CommuterCash to earn credit towards leaderboards. The employer with the greatest amount of trip logs at the end of the competition will receive rewards; along with top-performing commuters.

Participants in Commuter Connections incentive programs can earn up to \$600 per year.