



FY 2026
Marketing Communications Plan and Schedule Final
September 16, 2025

Mission

Commuter Connections is a regional network of organizations providing commute services and information to area residents and employers in the Washington, DC metropolitan region to help reduce traffic congestion and emissions caused by single occupant vehicles (SOV).

Overview

Commuter Connections targeted marketing umbrella campaigns will provide awareness, benefits, and call to action for its ridematching services and the Guaranteed Ride Home program. In addition, marketing campaigns will promote the CommuterCash app and the following special events: Bike to Work Day, goDMV Commuter Competition, and the Employer Awards.

Marketing initiatives for these programs, services, and special events will collectively promote alternative commute options including carpooling, vanpooling, transit, bicycling, walking, scootering, and complement hybrid teleworking. The FY 2026 marketing campaigns will raise awareness of commuting choices available in the Washington, DC metropolitan region through paid and earned media. The marketing will support Commuter Connections network members in educating area commuters and employers on the benefits of using alternatives to driving alone for work trips and by providing assistance and rewards to facilitate such activity. The goDMV Commuter Competition event will support both work and non-work sustainable trips.

Market Research

Proprietary research gathered and analyzed for use as part of the marketing and planning approach include performance data from past campaigns, information gathered through industry reports, surveys, and trends as they apply to the Commuter Connections marketing campaign. The following reports were assessed as part of the planning process to help shape approaches and media selection for FY 2026.

- FY 2024 Applicant Database Annual Placement Survey Report
- 2023 TDM Analysis Report
- State of the Commute 2022 Survey Report
- 2022 Guaranteed Ride Home Applicant Survey Report for the Washington DC Region

- 2022 Guaranteed Ride Home Applicant Survey Report for the Baltimore Region
- 2022 Bike to Work Day Survey Analysis Report

These reports and surveys provide quantitative and qualitative measurement of commute behavior of the general public, program applicants, and event participants throughout the metropolitan Washington DC region, and indicate the impact of these actions on air quality and congestion.

Current Environment

The current commuter landscape in the Washington, DC region reflects a dynamic shift of federal employees returning to the physical workplace, which has contributed to a significant number of SOV activity onto already congested roadways—where commuters lose an average of 62 hours annually in traffic as compared to the national average of 43 hours. Yet the return to the workplace largely remains a hybrid one for non-federal workers, with 25% of metro DC job postings in Q1 2025 offering hybrid work, and even a larger percentage of white-collar positions.

While driving alone still dominates commute patterns, the metro DC area continues to achieve measurable progress with regard to more sustainable commuting methods. Transit ridership is rebounding, with Metro ridership up about 20 percent overall compared to 2024. In the region, 14 percent fewer employees worked from home due to return-to-office mandates, and with more people commuting, transit use jumped 35 percent over last year. Riders have reported an increased sense of safety and reliability, making transit more comfortable and practical to use. With Metro’s extension of weekend hours and the addition of more rush hour trains, Metrorail is now at 89 percent of 2019 ridership levels overall and more than 40 percent above pre-pandemic levels on weekends. Metrobus ridership is 8 percent above 2019 ridership overall, and its Better Bus Network system overhaul has provided for improved service and way finding to improve the customer experience. SmartBenefits have also seen a boost, and the IRS increased the transportation fringe benefit in 2025 to \$325 a month, to adjust for inflation.

In addition to gains in transit ridership, the DC area has experienced a roughly 30 percent surge in demand for micromobility options such as electric scooters and bikesharing, not counting the use of personal bikes and scooters. The region’s fleet of bikes and scooters has grown to more than 25,000, providing first-and-last-mile solutions that complement transit and help expand its reach.

In large part to its regional marketing efforts and programs, Commuter Connections has gained significant impact within the region, eliminating 119,500 daily vehicle trips, saving commuters 2,883 daily hours in traffic congestion, and producing a total daily cost savings of \$519,800 for commuters. As the region faces economic contraction, due to federal job losses and hiring freezes the continued promotion of alternative commute options as a method of savings will remain an important message.

Marketing Strategies

- Position the brand as the trusted provider of ridematching services for more than 50 years.
- Position GRH as a safety net for alternative mode users, available to commuters in case of unexpected illness, emergencies, or unscheduled overtime.
- Recognize employers for having made a positive difference within the region for implementing workplace programs to help employees choose more sustainable commuting methods.
- Increase the number of participants in the goDMV Commuter Competition and Bike to Work Day events.
- Draw on the additional savings of CommuterCash rewards and the carpool bonus (formerly branded as 'Pool Rewards) within rideshare messaging.
- Increase the number of downloads and usage of the CommuterCash app
- Create a logo and brand guide for Guaranteed Ride Home.
- Launch a new Bike to Work Day website.
- Allocate a higher percentage of media dollars to more measurable digital media, while maintaining a healthy balance of traditional radio to reach stressed and frustrated drivers during the commute itself.
- Investigate “pixeling” opportunities to track a digital advertising’s ability to generate more meaningful action beyond a click to the website, such as signing up for Commuter Connections membership.
- Emphasize the cost savings of shared commute modes.

Digital Media

Digital advertising is visual (image and video) and closer to one-to-one marketing than any other form of media. Optimized placement of banner ads on targeted websites and mobile apps will be used to reach commuters in addition to streaming, on-demand media, and

podcasts. Paid social media networks and specific platforms such as Google, YouTube, Meta will complement the overall campaign.

Targeted Media Buying

Paid marketing campaigns will effectively and efficiently reach their target markets based on a review and analysis of third-party media industry data from Strata, Scarborough, and Arbitron as monitored by a professional media buying firm. Reach and frequency of the target demographics will be calculated using a cost/value proposition for each media option. Media buying strategies will be selected for specific target audiences for Ridesharing, Guaranteed Ride Home, GRH Baltimore, Employer Awards, goDMV Commuter Competition, Bike to Work Day and CommuterCash. The media industry data identifies specific media that are best suited for each target audience. The overall objective is to reach our target audience, with a comprehensive balance of optimal media properties, using a resonating message and call to action, in the most cost-effective manner; and trackable where possible.

Sponsorships

Opportunities will be sought to secure retailers, local businesses, and organizations for Bike to Work Day cash sponsorships for in-kind raffle prize donations for the goDMV Commuter Competition. These efforts aim to identify businesses interested in encouraging the use of more sustainable and healthy transportation methods and benefiting from awareness and patronage of event participants.

Creative

Creative visuals for the GRH and rideshare campaigns to run during the fall of 2025 will be a recurrence of the campaign that was newly developed for use in spring of 2025. New creative concepts will be shared with the State TDM Workgroup and the Regional TDM Marketing Workgroup for input and selection. Simultaneously, new creative will be developed for the spring 2026 rideshare and GRH spring campaigns. In addition, new creative will be developed for the spring 2026 Bike to Work Day event and shared with the Bike to Work Day Steering Committee for feedback. Other new creative will be developed as needed for other FY 2026 marketing initiatives.

Guaranteed Ride Home Washington, DC Region

Objective: Increase the number of applicants in the GRH database by promoting the commuter support service as a trusted and reliable transportation benefit, eliminating a barrier to using transit, carpooling, vanpooling, bicycling, scootering, and walking to work.

Target market (from 2022 Commuter Connections Guaranteed Ride Home Applicant Survey Report for the Washington, DC Region):

- Ages 25-34 (4%), 35-44 (19%), 45-54 (31%), 55-64 (39%)
- Non-Hispanic White (62%), Non-Hispanic Black (20%), Asian (9%), Hispanic (6%)
- Male (54%) and female (46%)
- Annual household income \$60,000+ (96%), \$100,000+ (80%), \$120,000+ (66%), \$160,000+ (42%)
- One-way commute more than 30 miles (63%)/more than 45 minutes (72%)
- Lives in Virginia (57%), Maryland (38%), DC (2%) or another state (3%), with emphasis on Prince William (15%) and Fairfax counties (11%)
- Works in DC (59%), Virginia (22%) and Maryland (19%).

Target Area:

- Commuters in the metropolitan Washington, DC region and its primary commuter shed.

Media Tactics:

- Traditional radio, streaming radio, podcasting, streaming video, digital display, and social media.

GRH Washington, DC Region Media Allocation: Approximately 31% of the overall FY26 media budget.

Guaranteed Ride Home Baltimore Region

Target market for Baltimore Metropolitan region (from 2022 Commuter Connections Guaranteed Ride Home Applicant Survey Report for the Baltimore Region):

- Ages 25-34 (9%), 35-44 (20%), 45-54 (25%), 55-64 (39%)
- Non-Hispanic White (52%), Non-Hispanic Black (38%), Asian (6%) and Hispanic (4%).
- Female (62%), male (38%)
- Annual household income \$80,000+ (73%), \$120,000+ (48%), \$160,000+ (22%)
- One-way commute 30+ miles (58%)/more than 45 minutes (52%)
- Lives in Maryland (87%), Virginia (6%), Pennsylvania (1%), DC (1%) Delaware (2%)
- Top home jurisdictions are Harford (21%), Baltimore City (19%), Baltimore County (18%)
- Works in Maryland (91%), DC (8%), Virginia (1%)

Target Area

- Commuters in the metropolitan Baltimore region and its primary commuter shed.

Media Tactics:

- Digital display, streaming radio

GRH Baltimore Media Allocation: Approximately 3% of the overall FY26 media budget.

Ridematching

Objectives: Increase awareness and use of carpooling, add new ridematch applicants to the regional database.

Target market (from FY 2024 Commuter Connections Applicant Database Annual Placement Survey Report):

- 35-64 years old (79%): <35 (16%), 35-44 (28%), 45-54 (27%), 55-64 (24%),
- Female (52%), male (48%)
- Non-Hispanic White (60%), Non-Hispanic Black (20%), Asian/Pacific Islander (10%), Hispanic (7%)
- \$100,000+ annual household income (71%)
- One-way commute of more than 30+ miles (48%)/more than 45 minutes (62%)
- Lives in Virginia (43%) or Maryland (39%); works in DC (49%), Virginia (19%), Maryland (23%)
- Works for employers with more than 100 employees (79%), works for employers with 1,000 or more employees (43%)
- Works for federal agencies (66%), private sector (22%)

Target Area:

- Commuters in the metropolitan Washington, DC region and its primary commuter shed.

Media Tactics:

- Traditional radio, streaming radio, podcasting, streaming video, digital display, and social media.

Rideshare Media Allocation: Approximately 48% of the overall FY26 media budget.

CommuterCash

Objectives: Increase downloads and usage of the CommuterCash app which awards points for commuting using alternative modes including transit, carpool, vanpool, bike, walk, and scooter during peak commute hours. Trips must be logged into the CommuterCash app to earn points that can be redeemed for cash via PayPal, Venmo, Visa cards, up to \$600 throughout the year. Other rewards options include credits toward SmarTrip cards and Capital Bikeshare. E-ZPass credits are also available to Virginia residents. Additional savings through the CommuterCash app include a carpool bonus (formerly branded as 'Pool Rewards').

Target Area:

- Commuters in the metropolitan Washington, DC region and its primary commuter shed.

Media Tactics:

- Traditional radio, streaming radio, podcasting, digital display, social media.

CommuterCash Media Allocation: Approximately 7.5% of the overall FY26 media budget.

CommuterCash MDOT

Objectives: Increase downloads and usage of the CommuterCash app which awards points for commuting using alternative modes including transit, carpool, vanpool, bike, walk, and scooter during peak commute hours. Trips must be logged into the CommuterCash app to earn points that can be redeemed for cash via PayPal, Venmo, Visa cards, up to \$600 throughout the year. Other rewards options include credits toward SmarTrip cards and Capital Bikeshare.

Target Area:

- Commuters living or working in the state of Maryland, outside of the Washington, DC region.

Media Tactics:

- Traditional radio, streaming radio, podcasting, digital display, social media.

CommuterCash (MDOT) Media Allocation: Approximately 3% of the overall FY26 media budget.

Special Events

Objectives: Use Bike to Work Day, goDMV Commuter Competition, and the Employer Awards events to engage with specific audiences through participatory activities in order to change long term commute behavior.

Target Market:

- Bike to Work Day (from 2022 Bike To Work Survey Analysis Report): Ages 25-55 (61%), 25-34 (14%), 35-44 (25%), 45-54 (22%), 55-64 (26%)
 - Male 65% and female 35%.
 - Caucasian 82%, Hispanic (6%), Asian (5%), African American (4%)
 - Annual household income \$80,000+ (86%), \$100,000+ (79%), \$120,000+ (69%), \$160,000+ (51%)
 - Works for federal agency (36%), private sector (35%), nonprofit (18%)
 - Lives in VA (45%), DC (27%), and MD (28%)
 - Lives in Montgomery (20%), Fairfax (18%), Arlington (13%)
 - Works in DC (48%), VA (32%), and MD (20%)
 - Works for employer size of more than 100 employees (62%), 1,000+ (31%)

Bike to Work Day:

- Coordinate the May 2026 event
- Secure sponsorships.
- Provide marketing collateral including T-shirts, flyers, posters, and rack cards.
- Provide template artwork for pit stop banners.
- Send email blasts to past participants, employers and committee members.
- Use earned media to reach minorities and women.
- Engage Transportation Planning Board members through regional proclamation and encourage jurisdictional partners to do the same.

Target Area:

- Commuters in the metropolitan Washington, DC region.

Media Tactics:

- Media buy to be determined.

Employer Recognition Awards

- Target level 3 & 4 employers in the Washington, DC region.

- Coordinate the Employer Awards ceremony, June 2026.
- Online nomination form and graphics in support of the call for nomination process
- Send email blast to employer database and other potential nominees.
- Manage Selection Committee meeting.
- Develop marketing assets for the event including video, e-invitation, program brochure, podium sign, and promotional giveaways.
- Ad placement in a major business publication, highlighting winning employers.
- Earned media outreach for winners.

Target Area:

- Employers in the metropolitan Washington DC region.

Media Tactics:

- Media buy to be determined.

goDMV Commuter Competition

Objectives: Friendly competition for employers across the Washington, DC region to encourage employees to log commute trips through competition and gamification, such as awarding badges for monthly challenges. Participating employees who use commute alternatives and log trips into the CommuterCash app earn rewards points that are redeemed for cash and can also compete to win prizes. Employers in each state with the highest employee activity in the competition receive recognition and a catered lunch for participating employees.

Target Area:

- Target employers and commuters in the metropolitan Washington, DC region.

Media Tactics:

- Media buy to be determined.

Special Events Media Allocation: Approximately 7.5% of the FY26 overall media budget: 4% for BTWD, 3% for goDMV, and 0.5% for the Employer Recognition Awards event.

FY 2026 Creative Development Schedule

Develop Marketing Communications Plan and Schedule	Aug 2025
Review research and results from previous campaigns	Aug 2025
Gather feedback through a Campaign Development Survey from Regional TDM Marketing Group	Aug 2025
Present creative approach at the Regional TDM Marketing Group meeting	Sept 2025
Present visual creative concepts to State TDM and Regional TDM Marketing Workgroups	Oct 2025
Refine and develop creative based on all feedback; finalize creative	Nov 2025
Produce creative	Dec 2025
Distribute creative to media vendors	Jan 2026
New campaign launch	Feb 2026

FY 2026 Marketing Campaign Schedule

CommuterCash & CommuterCash MDOT	Sep – Nov 2025
Fall Campaign (GRH, GRH Baltimore & Rideshare)	Oct – Dec 2025
goDMV Commuter Competition (via CommuterCash app)	Jan – Feb 2026
Spring Campaign (GRH, GRH Baltimore & Rideshare)	Feb – June 2026
Bike to Work Day	Apr – May 2026
Employer Awards	June 2026