



FY 2027

Marketing Communications Plan and Schedule Final

Mission

Commuter Connections is a regional network of 25 transportation organizations that work together to promote and facilitate alternatives to driving alone to work. Shifting Single-Occupant Vehicle (SOV) commuters into sustainable methods of transportation produces societal benefits of improved air quality and roadway mobility. Personal benefits include saving time and money, and reduced stress.

Our public mission is to help improve commutes through the assistance and operation of all-free programs and services. Our ridematching system helps individuals with similar commute routes and work hours find others to carpool and vanpools with. We administer the regional Guaranteed Ride Home program, which provides commuters with a free ride home in the event of an illness, emergency, or unscheduled overtime. In addition, we offer incentives through the CommuterCash app, that reward commuters for using sustainable commute methods. We also promote special events such as Bike to Work Day, the goDMV Commuter Competition, and the Employer Awards. Lastly, a network of representatives provides free TDM guidance and consulting services to employers.

Overview

The fiscal year 2027 (FY 2027) Marketing Communications Plan and Schedule provides a strategic blueprint for Commuter Connections' regional marketing campaigns. This targeted, year-round effort builds awareness and drives action for core carpool services and the Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) program through the new Commuter Connections TDM platform. Additionally, marketing initiatives will expand usage of the CommuterCash app, support high-impact regional events, and employer outreach activity.

Collectively, these programs encourage commuters to use transportation options other than driving alone, such as carpooling, vanpooling, transit, bicycling, walking, and scootering. They also promote hybrid telework when it is an option. The team will use ongoing data to refine our targeting and make the most efficient and effective use of the marketing budget.

Current Environment & Core Strategies

The Travel Landscape

The regional travel landscape features a continuing return of workforce segments to physical worksites, causing heightened traffic congestion across the metropolitan region. However, hybrid schedules remain standard for non-federal corporate employees, keeping the commuter landscape dynamic. Transit ridership continues to show upward momentum, supported by expanded transit agency service hours and infrastructure updates.

Concurrently, micromobility options (bikesharing and electric scooters) have experienced strong utilization, acting as critical first-and-last-mile linkages. Amid varying economic conditions and fluctuating consumer costs, highlighting the cost savings of sustainable commuting modes is an essential thematic pillar for the FY 2027 cycle.

Core FY 2027 COG Strategic Shifts

- **Modernized Measurement Via Micro-Surveying:** transitioning away from long-form triennial data collection to active, rolling "micro-surveying." This includes deploying the Placement Rate Survey on an ongoing basis to enable real-time snapshots and allow for more responsive campaign adjustments from year to year.
- **Upgraded Reporting Ecosystem:** Replacing traditional monthly narrative summaries with a specialized, interactive Commuter Connections activity dashboard for network members and a streamlined program highlights document for regional funders.
- **App Integration:** Integrating previously standalone incentive efforts such as the Carpool Bonus (formerly 'Pool Rewards) and Flextime Rewards into the CommuterCash mobile app platform to streamline user adoption.

FY 2027 Program & Campaign Breakouts

1. TDM Marketing and Advertising (Carpool & GRH)

- **Program Overview:** Spring and fall regional umbrella branding and promotions designed to drive baseline behavioral shifts away from SOV commuting.

- **Objectives**

- Elevate awareness of alternative commute modes (primarily carpooling).
- Acquire new applicants for the regional ridematching database.
- Position Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) as a free safety net that alleviates the worry of being stranded at work during illness, personal emergencies, missed carpools/vanpools, bike breakdowns, or unscheduled overtime.

Note: Starting February 1, 2027, the cap on total GRH trips provided per commuter each year will be lowered from six trips to four; no more than 2 trips every 30 days.

- **Target Audiences**

- **Carpool Target Audiences**

- Target market (from FY24 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%)

- **Guaranteed Ride Home Target Audiences**

- Target market (from 2025 Guaranteed Ride Home Participant Survey Report (Washington, DC region))
 - Ages 35-44 (19%), 45-54 (28%), 55-64 (35%); only 10% are under age 35
 - Non-Hispanic White (58%), Non-Hispanic Black (21%), Asian (10%), Hispanic (6%), Other/Mixed (4%)
 - Female (49%) and male (44%), with 6% identifying as another gender or preferring not to answer
 - Annual household income \$60,000+ (92%), \$100,000+ (77%), \$120,000+ (66%), \$160,000+ (46%), including 27% earning \$200,000+
 - Long-distance commuters, with 55% commuting 30 miles or more and

71% commuting 45 minutes or longer

- Lives in Virginia (53%), Maryland (40%), District of Columbia (6%), or another state (1%), with the largest concentrations in Prince William County (12%) and Fairfax County (11%)
- Works in the District of Columbia (57%), Virginia (24%), and Maryland (19%)

- **Strategy & Tactics**

- Execute targeted paid media campaigns balancing broad-reach tactics with visual, data-optimized digital components (radio, streaming audio, podcasts, digital display, social media, “New Mover” mailer, and streaming TV (CTV/OTT)
- Integrate carpool bonus, free Express Lanes/HOV usage, and new TDM system benefits into spring campaign, where applicable

- **Measurement & Evaluation**

- Digital ad click-through metrics, monthly website and call center data
- Capture behavior shifts via the TDM Analysis Report
- Evaluate via data patterns from applicant tracking within the TDM system.
- Isolate service performance and perception using a customer satisfaction survey(s) sent directly to program users

2. Guaranteed Ride Home (Baltimore & St. Mary's Region)

- **Program Overview:** A localized extension of the core GRH program, funded exclusively by the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)
- **Objectives:**
 - Provide reliable emergency ride-home services to make it easier for commuters to adopt and maintain use of sustainable transportation within the Baltimore metropolitan area and St. Mary's County
- **Target Audiences**
 - Target market for Baltimore Metropolitan region (from 2025 Guaranteed Ride Home Participant Survey Report (Baltimore Metropolitan Region))
 - Ages 25-34 (14%), 35-44 (30%), 45-54 (12%), 55-64 (38%), with 6% age 65+
 - Non-Hispanic White (59%), Non-Hispanic Black (29%), Asian (6%), Hispanic (4%), Other/Mixed (2%)
 - Female (58%) and male (40%), with 2% identifying as another gender or preferring not to answer
 - Annual household income \$80,000+ (75%), \$120,000+ (65%), \$160,000+ (43%), including 19% earning \$200,000+
 - Average one-way commute of approximately 30 miles and 60 minutes, with 45% commuting 30 miles or more and 66% commuting 45 minutes or longer
 - Lives in Maryland (79%), District of Columbia (6%), Virginia (2%), or another state (15%), with the largest concentrations in Baltimore City (26%), Baltimore County (24%), Anne Arundel County (14%), Harford County (12%), and Howard County (12%)
 - Works in Maryland (91%), District of Columbia (6%), and Virginia (4%)
- **Strategy & Tactics**
 - Develop and deploy targeted digital display advertising, social media and/or streaming/traditional radio campaigns to Baltimore region and southern Maryland commuter sheds
 - Deploy a dedicated media buy funded directly by the MTA to maximize impressions across localized commuter channels
- **Measurement & Evaluation**
 - Digital ad click-through metrics, monthly website and call center data
 - Capture behavior shifts via the Guaranteed Ride Home Participant Survey Report for the Baltimore metropolitan region
 - Evaluate via data patterns from applicant tracking within the TDM system.
 - Isolate service performance and perception using customer satisfaction survey(s) sent directly to program users

3. Bike to Work Day (BTWD)

- **Program Overview:** High-profile regional event co-organized with the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) to promote cycling as a practical, healthy commute option
- **Objectives**
 - Create commuter excitement for the Bike to Work Day event as an opportunity to try bicycling as a practical, affordable, and fun way to get to work
 - Incentivize by offering a free event that gives away T-shirts, swag, raffle prizes, and snacks for registered participants
 - The COG team will conduct an assessment to determine the feasibility of promoting "Bike to Work Week"
- **Target Audiences**
 - Bike to Work Day (from 2025 Bike to Work Day Participant Survey Report)
 - Ages 25-55 (68%), including 25-34 (12%), 35-44 (21%), 45-54 (20%), 55-64 (27%), with an additional 20% age 65+
 - Male (65%) and female (30%), with 4% identifying as another gender or preferring not to answer
 - Non-Hispanic White (81%), Hispanic (6%), Asian (6%), Non-Hispanic Black (4%), Other/Mixed (1%)
 - Annual household income \$80,000+ (88%), \$100,000+ (79%), \$120,000+ (69%), \$160,000+ (61%), including \$200,000+ (40%)
 - Works for a private sector employer (34%), federal agency (32%), nonprofit organization (19%), or state/local government agency (15%)
 - Lives in Virginia (44%), District of Columbia (27%), and Maryland (29%)
 - Works in the District of Columbia (38%), Virginia (41%), and Maryland (21%)
 - Works for an employer with more than 100 employees (63%), including 32% employed by organizations with 1,000+ employees
- **Strategy & Tactics**
 - Development and placement of advertising and promotional materials including digital, social media, search, and radio as applicable
 - Development and implementation of earned media tasks including calendar listings, outreach to like-minded organizations, and possible support with pitching news media (on a request basis)
 - Support for the event website and associated social media
 - Solicitation of regional corporate sponsorships
 - Design of event T-shirt, printed marketing collateral, and digital templates for pit stop signage
 - Planning and support for possible Bike to Work Week opportunities
- **Measurement & Evaluation**
 - Total regional registrations
 - Corporate sponsorship dollars secured

- Measurement shift to an annualized micro-survey model to assess the event's impact of generating new bicycle commuters and a greater frequency of bike commuting for existing riders in the months following
- Publication of the Bike to Work Day Event Report

4. CommuterCash & MDOT CommuterCash Incentive Campaigns

- **Program Overview:** Behavior-modification app that offers rewards points redeemable for cash and transportation credits to commuters who use it to find and log sustainable trips taken during peak commuting hours.
- **Objectives**
 - Encourage app downloads, usage, and long-term adoption of sustainable commuting methods
- **Target Audiences**
 - Younger demographic due to being more adept to using technology and who value cash rewards earnings to a greater extent
 - Commuters within the Washington region
 - MDOT Campaign: commuters within the state of Maryland, outside of the Washington region
- **Strategy & Tactics**
 - Promote the incentive structure: earning of rewards points for each commute direction logged into the CommuterCash app.
 - Redeem points for cash (PayPal or Venmo), Visa gift cards, or transportation benefits such as SmarTrip®, CharmPass, and Capital Bikeshare credits. Virginia residents can also use rewards points toward E-ZPass credits.
 - Redeem up to \$600 throughout the year!
 - Based on timing of app integration and feasibility of messaging, consider working in promotion of the Carpool Bonus and Flextime Rewards (incentivizing commuters to avoid targeted corridors during peak congestion)
 - Deploy targeted media buying through streaming audio, digital display, social, and other applicable marketing channels
- **Measurement & Evaluation**
 - Track data through the app platform, including total downloads, monthly active users, valid trip logs submitted, and rewards points redeemed

5. Regional Employer Commuter Competition (goDMV)

- **Program Overview:** A six-week friendly challenge utilizing the CommuterCash app to encourage behavior change towards sustainable commuting methods
- **Objectives**
 - Encourage app downloads and recurring usage during the competition
 - Engage commuters to actively participate in mini-challenges
 - Reward SOV users for trialing sustainable commuting methods
 - Reward existing non-SOV commuters for trying other sustainable methods of getting to work
 - Incentivize non work trips through the leaderboard and prize opportunities
 - Create long-term mode shifts
- **Target Audiences**
 - Commuters within the Washington region
 - Younger demographic due to being more adept to using technology and who value cash rewards earnings to a greater extent
- **Strategy & Tactics**
 - Placement of digital display advertising, paid social media, and text messaging
 - Update tutorial video accordingly
- **Measurement & Evaluation**
 - Track data through the CommuterCash app platform. Key metrics include total active participants, aggregate trips logged and VMT reduction.
 - Pre and post user survey to determine SOV to sustainable mode conversion.
 - Publication of a goDMV Event Report

6. Employer Awards

- **Program Overview:** A prestigious annual recognition program honoring employers for their outstanding efforts toward offering commuter benefits and amenities that encourage and incentivize employee usage of sustainable commuting methods and telework.
- **Objectives**
 - Honor and promote employees that align with the Commuter Connections mission
 - Use nominations as leads for potential employer case studies
 - Identify active employers to establish relationships with and introduce to other Commuter Connections services and special events
 - Involve TPB members (predominantly officers) in the process
 - Use as Commuter Connections branding opportunity
- **Target Audiences**
 - Level 3 and 4 employers within the Washington region on the OneCommute database
 - Human resources and C-Suite executives.
- **Strategy & Tactics**
 - Design call for nomination materials
 - Produce winner briefs for awards selection committee
 - Create awards ceremony collateral materials and assets
 - Design and place digital advertisements recognizing award participants to targeted regional business audiences
- **Measurement & Evaluation**
 - Assess via total qualified employer nominations received
 - Employer attendance at awards ceremony
 - Response to congratulatory advertisements

7. Employer Marketing (*New Scope for FY 2027*)

- **Program Overview:** Marketing campaign to generate awareness of Commuter Connections' network of representatives who provide free TDM guidance and consulting services to employers
- **Objectives**
 - Create employer leads for follow up by local employer outreach representatives to establish or enhance TDM programs at the workplace.
 - Position Commuter Connections network members as high-value subject matter experts for businesses to consult with.
- **Target Audiences**
 - C-Suite executives, human resource managers, and facilities/transportation directors within the Washington region
 - Employing 100 or more.
- **Strategy & Tactics**
 - Develop and implement a marketing campaign promoting Commuter Connections Employer Outreach services to private and non-profit sector employers in the Washington region
- **Measurement & Evaluation**
 - Track via qualified employer leads through website's online form, inbound calls/emails
 - OneCommute employer database
 - Quarterly Employer Outreach reporting by jurisdictions.

FY 2027 & Creative Development and Marketing Campaign Schedules

Creative Development Schedule

- **August 2026:** Review research and results from previous campaigns.
- **September 2026:** Present spring 2027 campaign creative approach at the Regional TDM Marketing Group meeting.
- **October 2026:** Present visual concepts to the State TDM Workgroup for feedback and selections.
- **November 2026:** Refine, polish, and finalize all creative visuals and messaging.
- **December 2026:** Complete full multi-channel marketing asset production and archive native art files within the shared repository.
- **January 2027:** Traffic final creative assets to media properties.
- **February 2027:** Formally execute and launch the targeted spring marketing campaign.
- **TBD FY 2027:** Employer Outreach

Targeted Marketing Campaign Schedules

- **September – November 2026:** CommuterCash & CommuterCash MDOT
- **October – December 2026:** Fall Regional Umbrella (Carpool & GRH)
- **March – April 2027:** goDMV Commuter Competition
- **February – June 2027:** Spring Regional Umbrella (Carpool & GRH)
- **April – May 2027:** Bike to Work Day (Week)
- **June 2027:** Employer Awards ceremony winner announcements
- **TBD FY 2027:** Employer Outreach