



GWRideConnect Support (UPC 103685) FY21 Work Plan

Table of Contents

DRAFT

- Introduction 2
- Program Manager 2
- Program Description 2
- Program Components 2
 - Commuter Assistance and Ridematching Services 2
 - Promotion of Transit Options 3
 - Vanpool and Carpool Formation and Maintenance Assistance 4
 - Vanpool Rider Matching and Express Matching 4
 - VanStart and VanSave Assistance 4
 - Participation in and Promotion of the Vanpool Alliance 5
 - Operation of the AdvANTage Vanpool Self-Insurance Program 5
 - Marketing and Community Outreach 6
 - Leasing of Commuter Parking Spaces 6
 - Supporting Community Efforts to Promote Transportation Alternatives 7
- Budget 7

Introduction

This work plan, describing the activities supported through GWRideConnect's annual allocation of Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding from the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (FAMPO) for the GWRideConnect Support project (UPC 103685), is presented annually to the FAMPO Policy Committee prior to the allocation of CMAQ funding.

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Program Description

GWRideConnect is the transportation demand management (TDM) program operated by the George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC). The program serves the City of Fredericksburg and the counties of Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania, and Stafford, the fastest-growing region in Virginia. GWRideConnect promotes ridesharing to assist persons seeking transportation options to workplaces and other destinations. The goal of the program is to promote, plan, and establish transportation alternatives to the single occupant vehicle (SOV), improving air quality, reducing congestion, and improving quality of life. GWRideConnect is guided by its TDM Strategic Plan (adopted June 2015).

GWRideConnect's annual allocation of CMAQ funding for the GWRideConnect Support project supports GWRideConnect's core program components: 1) Commuter Assistance and Ridematching Services, 2) Promotion of Transit Options, 3) Vanpool and Carpool Formation and Maintenance Assistance, 4) Vanpool Rider Matching and Express Matching, 5) VanStart and VanSave Assistance, 6) Participation in and Promotion of the Vanpool Alliance, 7) Operation of the AdVANtage Vanpool Self-Insurance Program, 8) Marketing and Community Outreach, 9) Leasing of Commuter Parking Spaces, and 10) Supporting Community Efforts to Promote Transportation Alternatives. Funding will be spent on salaries, fringe benefits, indirect costs, marketing, training, and travel. These costs are further detailed below.

In FY19, GWRideConnect placed 3,671 applicants in alternative modes of transportation, reducing the number of daily vehicle trips by 1,158 trips and reducing the number of daily vehicle miles traveled by 60,089 miles.

This funding, which will make up 20% of GWRideConnect's overall FY21 budget, supports core program components and is absolutely vital to the continued success of the program in reducing SOV trips.

Program Components

Commuter Assistance and Ridematching Services

GWRideConnect's commuter assistance and ridematching services assist thousands of residents each year, matching them to existing transit providers and resources that they were previously not aware of. This information provides residents with solutions/alternatives to the SOV commute.

The GWRideConnect website acts as a clearinghouse for transportation information, providing residents with immediate, 24/7 access to transportation options and solutions. The website contains information on joining a carpool or vanpool, contact information for carpools and vanpool seeking riders, and an online ridematching application to request a matchlist and ridematching packet. The website also contains information on commuter lots, express lanes, traffic and accessibility resources, commuter transit benefits, and guaranteed ride home (GRH). The Transit Options section of the website contains information on buses, trains/light rail, airport services, door-to-door options, and bicycles. Residents can easily find non-SOV modes for work and leisure trips. GWRideConnect staff also posts relevant news and alerts to the website.

Commuters can initiate a ridematching application through a phone call, email, website application, or social media message. GWRideConnect staff enter the commuter's information into the program's internal ridematching database, which then produces a matchlist that is emailed or mailed with a complete ridematching packet, which also includes pertinent transit materials and information about commuter lots and GRH. All commuters that are assisted by GWRideConnect are also entered into the Commuter Connections database, so that they can enroll in Commuter Connections' GRH program.

In the first half of FY20, GWRideConnect staff has processed 1,162 ridematching applications, including 786 from applicants who were new to the program. In FY21, GWRideConnect will strive to process a total of 2,330 ridematching applications, including 1,580 from applicants who are new to the program.

All applicants receive a follow-up email survey asking if the applicant found a ride and, if so, what mode they switched to. In addition to helping GWRideConnect track successful placements, these follow-up surveys also remind applicants that may not have moved forward with their matchlist of the options available to them, or prompt them to reach out to GWRideConnect staff for further assistance. Follow-up surveys are sent to applicants via email twice per month.

Twice per year, GWRideConnect staff undertake an effort to update each commuter's information in both the program's internal ridematching database and the Commuter Connections database. This ensures that data used for ridematching and rider matching is accurate and leads to successful matches. These efforts will begin on/around July 1, 2020 and January 1, 2021 and will take about 4 weeks to complete. To complete this effort, GWRideConnect staff email or mail a copy of the commuter's current database information and ask for the commuter to return any updates. Any updates received are made in the internal database and Commuter Connections. In addition to keeping data up-to-date, this process often prompts commuters to reach out to GWRideConnect staff for information or assistance in refining their commute, keeping commuters engaged in the program.

GWRideConnect staff also regularly marks as inactive commuters that have gone more than 1 year without contacting the program or providing updates through the effort described above. This is another way that GWRideConnect ensures data remains up-to-date. Commuters can reactive their records at any time.

Promotion of Transit Options

The GWRideConnect website acts as a clearinghouse for transportation information, providing residents with immediate, 24/7 access to transportation options and solutions. The Transit Options section of the website contains information on buses (FREDericksburg Regional Transit (FRED), Martz Group,

OmniRide, and Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)), trains/light rail (Amtrak, Virginia Railway Express (VRE), and WMATA), airport services, and door-to-door options. The website also promotes and provides information about slugging. GWRideConnect promotes all alternatives to the SOV, ensuring that residents have as many travel options as possible.

In addition to maintaining information about transit options on the website, GWRideConnect staff is equipped to answer questions or to walk callers through each step of a successful trip on any of these transit options.

Staff also include transit information, including schedules, maps, and promotional materials, in ridematching packets sent to commuters requesting a matchlist.

Vanpool and Carpool Formation and Maintenance Assistance

GWRideConnect assists and supports vanpool operators in forming new vanpools and maintaining existing vanpools. The Vanpool Connections section of the GWRideConnect website provides a one-stop-shop for information on forming, registering, and advertising new vanpools; finding riders; utilizing VanStart and VanSave assistance; and enrolling in the Vanpool Alliance and AdVANTage programs. GWRideConnect staff also provide personalized technical assistance to new or existing vanpool operators who reach out to the program by phone or email, or through the website or social media.

GWRideConnect assists and supports carpool operators in forming new carpools and maintaining existing carpools. The Carpool Connections section of the GWRideConnect website provides a one-stop-shop for information on forming, registering, and advertising new carpools, and provides information for riders interested in joining a carpool. GWRideConnect staff also provide personalized technical assistance to new or existing carpool operators who reach out to the program by phone or email, or through the website or social media. The number of carpools in the region (11) is very small compared to the number of vanpools (366), but carpools continue to provide yet another alternative to the SOV, and GWRideConnect staff supports all new and existing carpools to ensure their success.

Vanpool Rider Matching and Express Matching

GWRideConnect staff generate rider matchlists for vanpools seeking riders upon request. Vanpool operators can also sign up for Express Matching, where they will automatically receive a matchlist twice per week. Express Matching is a service unique to GWRideConnect, and has been received well by the region's vanpool operators.

VanStart and VanSave Assistance

GWRideConnect's VanStart program temporarily subsidizes empty seats during the critical startup phase of new vanpools. VanStart incentivizes the formation of new vanpools by lowering the financial burden of empty seats during this start-up period. GWRideConnect's VanSave program temporarily subsidizes empty seats in existing, established vanpools that are experiencing an emergency loss of passengers, with the goal of preventing the discontinuation vanpools.

Vanpools must complete an application form and submit required documentation to be considered for VanStart or VanSave assistance. Vanpools that meet the eligibility requirements and submit a complete application are approved for assistance on a first-come-first-served basis.

Both VanStart and VanSave require the vanpool owner/operator or coordinator to demonstrate continuous active recruiting for new passengers, ensuring new riders are placed in those vanpools. GWRideConnect staff also provide additional assistance with recruiting riders for vanpools enrolled in VanStart and VanSave. Participation in VanStart and VanSave also require vanpools to be entered into both the internal ridematching database and the Commuter Connections database, and all new riders and new vanpools are entered into both databases.

Participation in and Promotion of the Vanpool Alliance

The Vanpool Alliance is a public-private partnership between GWRC, the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC), the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC), the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT), and private vanpool operators. Qualifying vanpools can earn \$200 or \$400 per month for reporting data to the National Transit Database. The Vanpool Alliance also provides ridematching services and technical assistance. GWRideConnect staff help vanpool operators enroll in the Vanpool Alliance program.

This program component covers GWRideConnect's entire service area. However, only vanpools that originate, travel through, or terminate in the Northern Virginia Region are eligible to enroll in Vanpool Alliance.

The monthly payments to participating vanpools provide an additional incentive for vanpools to begin or continue operation, thus adding to the overall vanpool fleet and providing more options for commuters looking to share a ride.

Participating vanpools report the following data:

- Vehicle breakdowns, changes in vehicle assignments, purchase of new vehicles, and accidents or incidents involving vehicles enrolled in the program
- Vanpool route information, including pick-up and drop-off points and times of service
- Operating costs (including lease or purchase payments, fuel, and maintenance) and passenger fares
- Maintenance records, when requested
- Passenger and boarding lists in the form of a daily passenger log
- Any changes in vanpool ridership
- Daily odometer readings and mileage reports
- Current driver and alternate driver contact information
- Vehicle information, including make, model, and year of manufacture
- Occasional surveys as requested
- Proof of insurance in the form of a valid certificate of insurance demonstrating a comprehensive insurance policy with no less than \$1,000,000 in coverage

In FY19, vanpools enrolled in the Vanpool Alliance travelled a total of 2,462,411 miles within the GWRC region, generating an estimated \$1.35 million in transportation capital funding for use in the region.

Operation of the AdvANTage Vanpool Self-Insurance Program

AdvANTage is a self-insurance pool that provides affordable liability, uninsured motorist, and physical damage protection for commuter vanpools. Vanpools that are licensed and registered in the

Commonwealth of Virginia are eligible to become members. Vanpool owners join by paying membership fees, which would traditionally be considered premiums, to the pool. These fees are used to self-insure the AdvANTage member vanpools.

AdvANTage is operated through a partnership between GWRC, DRPT, and the Division of Risk Management (DRM) at the Virginia Department of the Treasury. GWRideConnect staff oversee enrollment, billing and collections, and discontinuation or suspension of coverage. DRM is the claims administrator for AdvANTage, and provides claim and loss control services.

This program component covers the entire Commonwealth of Virginia.

AdvANTage provides an affordable option for the insurance required of vanpools, making it financially possible for more vanpools to begin or continue operation, thus adding to the overall vanpool fleet and providing more options for commuters looking to share a ride.

Marketing and Community Outreach

GWRideConnect uses digital, broadcast, and print marketing to promote the program. GWRideConnect uses digital and print marketing consistently throughout the year to maintain an ongoing media presence. In addition, GWRideConnect typically runs marketing campaigns three times per year, boosting normal digital and print marketing and adding radio ads. The GWRC Deputy Director and GWRideConnect Assistant Director work with GWRideConnect's marketing consultants to plan monthly marketing efforts and marketing campaigns.

Marketing efforts are coordinated with other commuter services marketing efforts, including those by Commuter Connections and DRPT. GWRideConnect uses promotional materials created for specific events/initiatives, such as Try Transit Week, Bike to Work Week, and others. General digital and print marketing is cobranded with relevant, related programs/initiatives.

All GWRideConnect marketing drives traffic to the GWRideConnect website. The website, which had 68,871 pageviews in FY19, provides information on all non-SOV modes of transportation, and encourages visitors to fill out an online ridematching application. Marketing focuses on the benefits of ridesharing, including saving time and money, minimizing stress, reducing road congestion, and improving quality of life, to encourage travel mode behavior change.

In addition to digital, broadcast, and print marketing, GWRideConnect staff perform regular community outreach to promote the GWRideConnect program. Staff attend fairs and community events to share information about the program and transportation options. Staff also outreach to local realtors, long-stay hotels, employers, the community college, the university, and others to encourage them to promote the program through their networks.

Leasing of Commuter Parking Spaces

GWRideConnect currently leases 90 commuter parking spaces in four locations within the region where there are no VDOT commuter lots and there is unmet demand for such spaces. (One location is supported by GWRideConnect's annual TDM Operating Assistance grant through DRPT, and the other three locations are supported through GWRideConnect's annual allocation of CMAQ funding from

FAMPO for UPC 87764.) Commuter lots are critical to the success of carpooling and vanpooling in the region, as they provide the places for shared rides to begin each morning and end each night.

GWRideConnect monitors utilization of the spaces through lot inspections twice per month.

Supporting Community Efforts to Promote Transportation Alternatives

GWRideConnect staff actively participate in local, state-wide, and even national/international efforts to promote transportation alternatives.

GWRideConnect staff serve on the following committees:

- ACT Finance Committee
- ACT Telework Council
- ACT Vanpool Council
- Commuter Connections Subcommittees
- FAMPO Technical Advisory Committee
- FAMPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
- FRED Public Transit Advisory Board
- HGAAA Regional Human Services Transportation Coordinating Committee

GWRideConnect staff also serve on advisory groups for special projects as they arise.

Budget

Line Item	Amount	Description
Salaries	\$47,755	Portion of total salary for the following staff positions: GWRC Deputy Director (10%); GWRideConnect Assistant Director (20%); Transportation Demand Management Planner (20%); GWRideConnect Support & Outreach Specialist (20%); GWRC Executive Director (7%)*
Fringe Benefits	\$28,156	Fringe benefits (including annual/sick/holiday leave, health insurance, Social Security, Medicare, retirement contributions, unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, and life and disability insurance) based on the rate in GWRC's draft FY21 budget
Indirect Costs	\$37,864	Indirect costs based on the rate in GWRC's draft FY21 budget
Marketing	\$9,000	Marketing, including digital, broadcast, and/or print (amounts to be determined through meetings with marketing consultants)
Training	\$725	One registration for the ACT International Conference
Travel	\$1,500	Travel for the ACT International Conference
Total	\$125,000	

*This funding will support 150 hours of the GWRC Executive Director's time, which will be spent facilitating the administration of the Section 5307 funding for transportation capital generated through GWRC's participation in the Vanpool Alliance. This will include allocating approximately \$2.55 million to regional projects in FY21.