15 Years of Moving MDE Forward: Catching Up With the Alternative Transportation Group



Maryland Department of the Environment

Pictured to the Right: Members of the MDE Alternative Transportation Group during Bike to Work Day.

In 2023, Commuter Choice Maryland (CCM) published a spotlight article chronicling the Maryland Department of the Environment's (MDE) Alternative Transportation Group (ATG) – celebrating CCM's first Maryland State Agency Employer Partner! Since then, the ATG has been hard at work promoting sustainable commute options to their colleagues at MDE's Baltimore office and expanding their efforts to advocate for safer streets and transit access around their Montgomery Park office.

MDE's Montgomery Park office is well placed for employees to choose a car-free commute. The building sits along two major Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) bus lines that connect to other bus routes, rail lines, commuter buses, and it's right on the Gwynns Falls Trail, a multi-use trail that links to bike facilities across Baltimore City. As Maryland State employees, most MDE staff can also ride MTA's core transit services in the Baltimore area for free.

The ATG started its organizing and advocacy in 2011 – and hasn't lost any momentum since! The group maintains a core membership group of nine employees led by volunteers from across the agency. CCM was excited to have a chance to sit down with ATG leaders Nick Zahn (Geologist), Sharon Guida (Technical Administrative Assistant, Oil Control Program), and Ayanna Miranda (Regulatory Compliance Engineer) to chat about how the group continues to "educate, enlighten, and encourage" agency employees to ditch their cars and adopt active, sustainable modes of transportation.

The ATG continues to "educate, enlighten, and encourage" agency employees to ditch their cars and adopt active, sustainable modes of transportation.

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

As a volunteer employee group, the ATG doesn't have direct control over the agency's official communication channels. All-staff emails, bulletin boards, and newsletters go through several layers of review and approval. The ATG, together with other employee groups, pushed for clearer guidelines on how and when content gets published, and the process has become easier as a result. MDE has also made more room for employee groups to include content in its own channels. The ATG now has a regular spot in MDE's employee newsletter, with one article each quarter to share its recent and upcoming activities. The ATG also maintains an email list of MDE employees who have signed up to receive updates and reminders on the following topics: General/Bicycling (167 subscribers), Walking (137 subscribers), and Carpooling (55 subscribers). Employees can also find the ATG's resources at any time on MDE Net, the agency's intranet, where the group hosts a one-stop page on transit options, commuter benefits, carpooling, and biking and walking amenities near the office.

> "The Alternative Transportation Group shows how small choices can add up to real progress. Whether it's carpooling, walking, biking, or driving an electric vehicle, we can all make a difference. I'm proud of the employees who are leading by example by making healthier decisions. This is how change happens. It starts with each of us."
>
> – Serena McIlwain
> Secretary, Maryland Department of the Environment

If your organization offers and promotes commuter benefits or would like free assistance to start or expand your program, contact Commuter Choice or join the Employer Partner program online at: ***www.mdot.maryland.gov/employerpartner.***

Maryland Department of the Environment

The group has also found its own ways to reach people. At every ATG-organized event and outreach table, the ATG invites employees to sign up for email lists based on their interests, whether that's biking, walking, or commuting in general. Employees who get a department-wide email may set it aside for later, but using the sign-up lists to generate targeted distribution lists, the message is more likely to be read. The group's most recent newsletter, published October 1, highlighted Walktober.

When it comes to getting noticed, ATG found sometimes simple works. "Sometimes the old ways work best," Nick said. The ATG posts flyers by the building's elevators, where people have to wait throughout the day. The group also holds its lunch and learns, which feature subject matter experts from outside the agency, and welcome tables in the food court, one of the busiest spots in the building. These tables have even drawn interest from employees of another agency co-located in the building.

A YEAR-ROUND CALENDAR

The ATG's work follows the seasons. Early in the year, the group builds toward Bike to Work Day with bike tune-up tips, group rides to help people get comfortable riding to work, and a welcome table for employees arriving by bike. Summer is quieter, but the ATG keeps people engaged with lunch and learns on new topics. In the fall, the group promotes Walktober, the statewide campaign led by the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH). As the year turns over, lunch and learns in November and January introduce new employees to the ATG and hand out printed bus route maps. The most recent sessions, in November 2025 and January 2026, welcomed 10 new employees. This winter, the ATG also plans to focus on carpooling, a good fit for the colder months.

Walktober isn't the only time ATG members lace up their walking shoes. Walking has become a bigger part of the group's work since 2023: the weekly walk the ATG's founder once led is now a daily walk, thanks to Sharon and strong interest from employees.





Pictured to the Right:
Left: Members of the MDE Alternative Transportation Group on a daily walk to Carroll Park.
Right: Members of the MDE Alternative Transportation Group during Bike to Work Day.

IMPACTS

MDE employees are also making use of Commuter Choice Maryland's programs. Twenty MDE employees have registered for at least one CCM program, including 11 for ride matching, 9 for Guaranteed Ride Home, 8 for CommuterCash, and 2 for Ride Together Rewards. The ATG also works with the building's landlord to make sure people who bike or walk to work have what they need, including secure bike parking and access to the on-site health club, where employees can lock up their gear and use shower facilities before the workday.

The ATG's advocacy also goes well beyond the office. The group worked with the Baltimore City Department of Transportation on pedestrian and bicycle safety at the intersection of Monroe Street and Washington Boulevard. When the City proposed a traffic calming plan in 2023 to reduce travel lanes and add a bike lane, ATG members gave detailed input. They also encouraged planners to visit the intersection in person to see how heavy the traffic is.

The ATG has also worked with the MTA to push for more frequent bus service, and MTA moved a bus stop closer to the building entrance, so riders have easier access. The ATG is also working with the Friends of Carroll Park to advocate for speed limit signs and other measures to slow traffic coming through the park.



Pictured to the Right: The reward parking space in the "VIP" lot at MDE that rotates between carpool groups.

EV CHARGING AND CARPOOL UPDATES

Demand for electric vehicle (EV) charging has grown, and the ATG now hosts an employee chat group so EV drivers can coordinate use of the building's limited chargers. The group is also working with MDE leadership and the landlord on upgrades, and more chargers are being installed in one of the parking lots.

MDE carpoolers still have about 10 priority spaces near the employee entrance, plus a reward space in the "VIP" lot by the front lobby that rotates among participating carpool teams. Carpooling was once one of the ATG's year-round programs, but changes to in-office schedules have made it a little more challenging for employees to find carpool partners.

LOOKING AHEAD

This fall, the ATG will relaunch its internal carpool matching service to help employees find new partners. The group is also taking part in statewide Walktober events, including Walk Maryland Day and the MDH and MDOT Step Challenge.

Fifteen years in, the ATG shows what a group of committed volunteers can accomplish by meeting colleagues where they are and speaking up for safer streets around their workplace.

Commuter Choice Maryland is proud to have MDE as a strong and impactful Employer Partner. If your organization offers and promotes commuter benefits or would like free assistance to start or expand your program, contact Commuter Choice Maryland at commuterchoice@mdot.maryland.gov or join the Employer Partner Program online at www.mdot.maryland.gov/employerpartner.





Pictured to the Right: **Left:** Members of the MDE Alternative Transportation Group during Bike to Work Day. **Right:** Members of the MDE Alternative Transportation Group on a daily walk to Carroll Park.