



# Building Momentum for Sustainable Commutes Across the Maryland State Government



The Maryland Department of Planning (MDP) is on a mission that goes beyond what would traditionally be expected. With land use, longrange planning, and climate change mitigation at the center of its work, MDP has also turned its attention inward, to how its own employees get to work and whether those commutes can be made greener, healthier, and more sustainable.

Leading that effort is Jason Dubow, Director of the Research, Review, and Policy Division, who has become one of the newest transportation demand management (TDM) advocates within the Maryland state government.

The Maryland Department of Transportation’s (MDOT) Commuter Choice Maryland (CCM) staff recently sat down with Dubow to talk about how MDP is approaching TDM, what it has been like to build awareness and engagement across multiple state agencies, and what he hopes this growing effort will look like in the years ahead.

### ABOUT MDP

The Maryland Department of Planning provides leadership, analysis, guidance, and support for the preservation and stewardship of Maryland’s natural resources, built environment, and public infrastructure in pursuit of economic, community, and environmental vitality. At MDP, Dubow oversees a broad portfolio of long-range planning efforts, from informing state policy to providing guidance to local governments on several aspects of comprehensive planning. Transportation planning is the cornerstone of his division’s work, and it is through that lens that he began connecting the dots between MDP’s planning mission and its own carbon footprint.

Governor Moore’s executive order established a climate change sub-cabinet, and state agencies have increasingly taken stock of their environmental impact, including how and how far employees travel to work. For an agency like MDP, whose planning work already centers on sustainability, land use, and climate resilience, the alignment was natural.

“We focus on a number of environmental planning issues, including climate change mitigation,” Dubow explained. “And it’s through that type of effort that’s led us to try to make a difference, both through the operations of our department and through transportation demand management for our employees.”

“My approach has really just been to try to understand people’s concerns and questions, and then to brainstorm ways to encourage people to put their feet in the water and try something different.”

-Jason Dubow

Director of the Research, Review, and Policy Division at MDP

**“As one of several state agencies located in downtown Baltimore, MDP has always supported staff efforts to carpool or use alternative transportation modes, such as transit. Transportation demand management lessens pressure on our roadway system while minimizing greenhouse gas emissions. Doing so also supports implementation of the new Sustainable Growth Planning Principles, adopted in 2025, especially the principles related to Land, Transportation, Equity, and Ecology.”**  
MDP Secretary Rebecca Flora, AICP



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](http://www.mdot.maryland.gov/employerpartner).

“Those conversations, especially with CCM presenting, gave people a chance to ask real questions about their commute and learn about programs they didn’t even know existed.”

-Jason Dubow

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## WHO’S GETTING TO WORK AND HOW?

MDP’s Baltimore office reflects a commuting picture familiar to many state agencies: a motivated minority already embracing sustainable transportation, with a larger majority still relying on single-occupancy vehicles. Approximately 20% of MDP employees travel to work by bus, metro, vanpool, carpool, bicycle, on foot, or some combination. The remaining 80% drive alone.

That ratio, while not uncommon, is exactly what MDP is working to shift. MDP’s situation is not uniform across the other tenants in their building, either. Other state agencies that share the space do not have access to subsidized parking, meaning the financial motivation to explore alternatives is considerably higher for their staff. That difference has made interagency collaboration particularly productive. Employees from different agencies, facing different circumstances, can share experiences and strategies in a way that feels both relevant and actionable.

## THE CATALYST: AN OFFICE MOVE

MDP’s active engagement with TDM has a clear origin story: an office move. Approximately a year and a half ago, the department relocated from its longtime home at State Center, a campus shared by numerous state agencies and adjacent to a Metro Station, to a new office in downtown Baltimore. This move created a practical and timely opportunity to ask: how do our employees get to work, and can we encourage sustainable commuting options?

Before the move was finalized, MDP’s infrastructure unit, in coordination with agency leadership, conducted a staff survey. The goal was to understand current commuting behaviors and to gauge whether employees might be willing to try transit, vanpool, carpool or active transportation options to get to the new location. At that stage, it was not yet clear whether parking at the new building would be available and what the cost would be .

Dubow said, “We did a survey of our staff because we were trying to get a sense from staff whether they might be able to take transit, vanpool, carpool, or use active transportation options to get to the new building.”

Ultimately, MDP was able to secure some free parking for employees at the new site. However, the 20% of staff who already used transit, vanpool, carpool or active transportation options to travel to work continued to do so.

## BUILDING INTERAGENCY MOMENTUM

Once MDP became an Employer Partner with Commuter Choice Maryland, they began working closely with CCM’s Nikki Trasmonte to explore how MDP could help spark TDM interest not just within its own walls, but across the cluster of state agencies located nearby in downtown Baltimore.

That vision has taken shape through a series of informal but increasingly impactful interagency convenings. The first gathering in January 2025 brought together MDP and the Maryland State Retirement Agency, which is co-located in the same building. It was a conversation rather than a formal presentation, focused on understanding what employees actually need to commute differently and what is holding them back.

The second meeting, held in March 2025, scaled up the conversation significantly. Nikki presented a comprehensive overview of available commuter programs and incentives, drawing approximately 30 to 35 participants from roughly five of the agencies located in the building. In addition to MDP and the Retirement Agency, attendees included staff from the Maryland Transit Administration, the Comptroller’s Office, and other nearby state entities. CCM also coordinated outreach to the Maryland Port Administration (MPA).

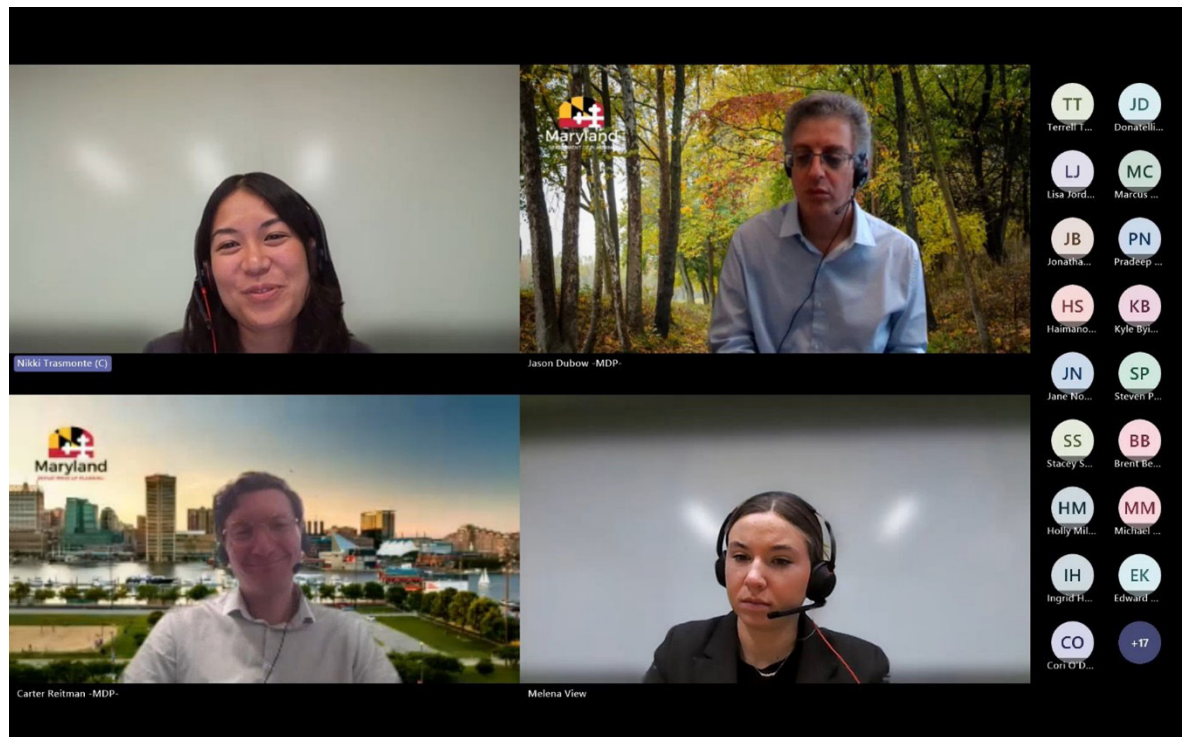
This jump in attendance, from about 15 participants in January to more than 30 in March, is a meaningful indicator of growing curiosity and engagement, as well as an endorsement of the cross-agency engagement that MDP facilitated. Since the meetings, four MDP employees have registered for Commuter Connections accounts, giving them access to programs like Ridematching, Guaranteed Ride Home, and CommuterCash.

"I think the hard part is just to continue to engage and follow up, to see if we can keep addressing people's needs and interests over time," Dubow said. MDP is going to continue collaborating with CCM to schedule regular interagency meetings to impact more employees.

These gatherings have served a dual purpose: educating employees about programs they may not know exist and creating space for honest conversation about the real concerns and constraints people face when travelling to and from work. According to Dubow, the CCM program was a crucial technical resource for these discussions, serving as presenters, facilitators, and translators of program eligibility requirements and benefits.

"Sometimes it was a little confusing for people to understand whether they were qualified for a program or not," Dubow said. "So, it was helpful to answer those questions and clear up confusion. But we also wanted to understand and respond to people's concerns, not just tell them about the programs."

Pictured to the Right: Jason Dubow and Nikki Trasmonte host an interagency meeting on commuting for state employees in March 2026.



## PARTNERING WITH THE MARYLAND STATE RETIREMENT AGENCY

MDP's interagency outreach resulted in a particularly energetic ally in Cori O'Donnell, Employee Relations Manager at the Maryland State Retirement Agency (their office shares space in the downtown Baltimore building with MDP). O'Donnell came to the interagency commuter conversations through a forwarded email and quickly became one of the effort's most engaged participants.

Her agency's situation illustrates just how varied commuting challenges can be, even among office building neighbors. With nearly 300 employees spread across five floors, the Retirement Agency has a large and geographically dispersed workforce. Many employees commute from Carroll County, Howard County, and even Washington, D.C., resulting in a concentration of MARC Train riders that O'Donnell describes as unlike anything she has seen at other state agencies.

Parking is the issue she hears about most. Unlike other agencies nearby, the Retirement Agency does not have access to free parking, and the limited spots that do exist have become a source of tension as the agency has grown significantly in recent years. O'Donnell said, "For a lot of people, this is their first experience working in a city and they just didn't realize parking would not be free."

Rather than leaving employees without options, she got to work. She compiled a list of nearby parking garages and their costs, shared commuter resources through her agency's communications department, and began attending the interagency meetings that MDP and CCM were organizing. There, she connected with Jason Dubow, who has since helped her navigate conversations with other state agencies about a potential solution: satellite parking.


The idea draws on a model O'Donnell experienced firsthand when she worked in Annapolis, where state employees could park at Navy Stadium for free and access downtown via a trolley at no cost with a state badge. She sees a similar approach as viable in Baltimore, specifically using the state-owned Eutaw Street parking lots managed by the Department of General Services. If employees could park there at no cost, they could reach the office via the nearby subway station for free, eliminating the financial barrier that makes both carpooling and transit a harder sell.

"The goal is to find free parking that people can easily get to work from," she said. "It would not only help people save money but also encourage more people to drive together and use public transportation. It kind of checks all the boxes."

O'Donnell is candid that this vision is still a work in progress, but her persistence reflects something MDP's experience has shown: that a single motivated person, willing to ask questions and connect the right people, can move things forward in ways that formal processes alone cannot.


### WHAT EMPLOYEES ARE ACTUALLY SAYING

The interagency discussions have helped identify a common set of barriers and concerns.




## Time

For many employees, the chief concern is not cost or even convenience but time. Depending on where someone lives, taking transit or biking to work may add meaningful minutes to an already long day. Even when the difference is modest, the perception of added time can be a significant deterrent. Dubow noted that employees need to be genuinely willing to accept some additional travel time, and that framing that tradeoff honestly, rather than minimizing it, is essential to building trust.



## Safety & Reliability

Perceptions of Safety, both on vehicles and while waiting for transit, came up repeatedly. Perceptions of Reliability was a concern, including when trains have mechanical issues or buses run late. A single bad experience can tip someone back toward their car. "If it happens once in a while, it's okay, Dubow said, "but "if it happens too much, people give up."



## Carpooling Logistics

*What if my schedule is different from my carpool partners? What if I need to leave early or arrive late? These concerns point to a need for flexible solutions, and they underscore the importance of programs like the Guaranteed Ride Home, which CCM offers as a backstop for employees who face an unexpected situation. Helping employees navigate these specifics is exactly the kind of hands-on support MDP has tried to provide through its interagency meetings.*

## THE FARESHARE OPPORTUNITY

One of the more significant issues MDP has identified is a gap in awareness, not just among employees but among HR departments across state government agencies, especially around the FareShare Transit Benefit Program. Under the FareShare program, state agencies can provide employees with transit benefits that help offset the cost of commuting by bus, rail, or other public transportation.

Dubow has been candid that MDP itself has not yet enrolled in the program, but he sees it as a meaningful near-term goal. "I don't know if enough state agencies are aware that they can participate in the FareShare program," he said.

## TRACKING PROGRESS: METRICS AND MILESTONES

MDP is still in the early stages of collecting data, but several meaningful metrics are already in view.

20%

of MDP's Baltimore-based employees currently commute by transit, vanpool, carpool, or active transportation, a baseline established from the survey.

10%

of MDP staff have participated in internal outreach and interagency discussions, indicating engaged awareness even if not yet full participation.

15

participants from three agencies attended the January interagency meeting.

35

participants from five agencies attending the March interagency meeting, representing a 133% increase in attendance.

Following the March session, CCM distributed a carpooling interest survey to attendees. Results are pending at the time of this interview, but the response is expected to give MDP and CCM a clearer picture of unmet demand for ridesharing options.

As the effort matures, more systematic data collection will become important. MDP plans to annually assess commuting behaviors to track growth in mode shift among employees. CCM will continue to support this work through ongoing survey tools that track commuting behavior change over time.

## LOOKING AHEAD

MDP is excited about what they would like to see grow in the future. Their near-term goals include:

- Quarterly interagency convenings that create ongoing space for education, Q&A, and peer connection among state agency employees across downtown Baltimore.
- An annual statewide email to all state employees encouraging them to explore carpooling options and linking to resources for how to get started, a low-cost, highreach mechanism for broadening awareness.
- Agency enrollment in the FareShare Transit Benefit Program, pending conversations with MDP's HR leadership.
- Continued collaboration with CCM to understand what is working, what barriers persist, and how to refine the approach over time.

Underlying all of it is a philosophy of curiosity and creativity. "Our approach has really just been to try to understand people's concerns and questions, and then to brainstorm ways to encourage people to put their feet in the water and try something different," Dubow said. "Brainstorming with CCM has been a big part of that."

## ADVICE FOR OTHER EMPLOYERS

- For organizations that want to launch or deepen their own TDM efforts, MDP's advice draws directly from what MDP has learned:
- Meet with employees on a regular basis, quarterly if possible, to talk through available programs and incentives.
- Make space for honest conversation about obstacles, not just information delivery. Understanding what is actually holding people back matters as much as knowing what programs exist.
- Reach out to neighboring employers or co-located agencies. Shared geography creates real opportunities for carpooling and joint outreach.
- Do not wait for a formal program before starting. MDP's effort began as a loose, curiosity-driven project and has grown into something with real momentum.
- Lean on CCM. Nikki and the Commuter Choice Maryland team offer presentations, surveys, outreach support, and technical assistance on programs like FareShare and Guaranteed Ride Home.

Commuter Choice Maryland is proud to partner with the Maryland Department of Planning and applauds Jason Dubow's leadership in championing sustainable commuting across state government. MDP's work shows how a single motivated champion, working with curiosity and persistence, can build real momentum, one conversation at a time.

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](mailto:commuterchoice@mdot.maryland.gov) or learn more about the Employer Partner Program at [www.mdot.maryland.gov/employerpartner](http://www.mdot.maryland.gov/employerpartner).