Building Community Through Transit & Marketing in Frederick County: Mary Dennis

CommuterChoice Maryland

"Most of the problem is lack of awareness, and that's our responsibility. So we've worked with our HR team and economic development teams in the county and the city to create simple flyers to let new businesses and employees know that transit may work for them."

-Mary Dennis
Communications Manager, Transit Services of Frederick County

From Turf to Transportation Demand Management (TDM)

Mary Dennis never imagined her career would involve shaping how people think about their commutes. After college, where she earned an exercise science degree and played competitive soccer, she assumed she'd work in sports. Instead, she found herself teaching, coaching, and learning marketing skills on the side. When she joined Transit Services of Frederick County nearly three years ago as Communications Manager, transportation was entirely new to Mary. Her unique background and fresh perspective were exactly what the program needed.

A Fresh Perspective

Being new to transportation became one of Mary's greatest strengths. Without prior knowledge of industry jargon, Mary could approach communications from everyday commuters' perspective. "If I look at something and I'm confused, then we need to change it," she explained. Her user-first philosophy led to practical changes like redesigning bus stop signs to show only what riders need to know. Mary's fresh perspective, combined with her marketing and graphics skills, helped her design effective communications for commuters in Frederick.

Building Community Connections

Mary's creative outreach has transformed how Frederick County engages transit customers. At community events, she uses a life-size bus cutout for photos—a simple prop that sparks conversations about transit options. When a local organization asked Transit Services to help spread the word about a free Thanksgiving community dinner, Mary didn't hesitate. "This is what community is all about," Mary reflects. By sharing the flyer on buses and social media and identifying nearby routes, she demonstrated that transit is about connection and support.

COVID Comeback Challenge

Because the pandemic halted Frederick County's vanpool program, Mary rebuilt it from scratch. 2025 marked the county's first real opportunity to relaunch vanpool subsidies. She combined eye-catching visuals inspired by the county's recent rebrand with strategic partnerships and multi-channel marketing across radio, digital, and print. Her messaging: "Are you driving by yourself? We can help." The results: Frederick County now subsidizes five vanpools heading toward Silver Spring. In FY 25, the COG Rideshare database logged 194 new carpool/vanpool applicants and 42 re-applicants.

Matchmaker Philosophy

Mary thinks of herself as a matchmaker, connecting commuters with ideal travel companions and routes. In FY 25, Frederick County worked with 92 employers across all Council of Governments TDM levels, from 34 Level 1 employers just beginning commuter programs to 8 Level 4 employers demonstrating advanced TDM commitments. As hybrid work has brought people back to offices, Mary is optimistic about continued growth. With creative marketing, community focus, and competitive drive, Frederick County's commuters have a champion making every trip easier.

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****!*