



Pictured Above: George Clark with Tri-County Council of Southern Maryland



GEORGE CLARK ST. MARY'S, CHARLES, AND CALVERT COUNTIES

George Clark is the Transportation Demand Management Specialist for St. Mary's, Charles, and Calvert Counties, as well as working for the Tri-County Council of Southern Maryland, the regional planning and development agency. Gladys Hurwitz, with Commuter Choice Maryland, had the pleasure of interviewing George about his experience working with businesses and commuters, getting insight on how commuters are traveling to work from St. Mary's, Charles, and Calvert Counties, what he enjoys most about his job, and what he loves about working with Commuter Choice Maryland. To learn more about George, keep reading!

Gladys Hurwitz: Thank you for joining us, George. Tell us a little bit about what your role is at the Tri-County Council of Southern Maryland.

George Clark: Thank you for having me. I am the Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Specialist, funded through a Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement program grant with the Maryland Department of Transportation Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA), and have been with the Tri-County Council of Southern Maryland for 11 years. We have also received two grants from the Washington Metropolitan Council of Government for employer outreach and telework promotion. I am a one man show in handling three counties - St. Mary's, Charles, and Calvert. I stay busy trying to alleviate traffic congestion in Southern Maryland Region. We have a robust commuter bus program; however, we do not currently have a Light Rail system. We have participated with MDOT MTA in a Southern Maryland Rapid Transit planning study. A lot of people aren't aware that 70% of our Charles County residents and 60% of our Calvert County residents work in the Washington Metropolitan region; whereas 64% of the St. Mary's County residents work with the county because of the Patuxent (Pax) River Naval Air Station military base, which employs over 55,000 people.

GH: What do you love about your job as a TDM Specialist?

GC: I am a people person. I love getting out there and meeting with new people, finding out what's going on in the Tri-County region, and trying to help employers with their commuting challenges. Especially right now, with everybody teleworking due to COVID-19, it is important to still talk with employers and provide assistance. One of my biggest focuses in Southern Maryland, along with promoting Guaranteed Ride Home and Rideshare, is promoting telework. Most employees don't have a problem teleworking. It's usually the employer who needs more convincing, so I like to get out there and help the employers understand the benefits of teleworking for them and their employees, and help them create a formal telework policy.

GH: When commuters contact you, what do they usually need assistance with?

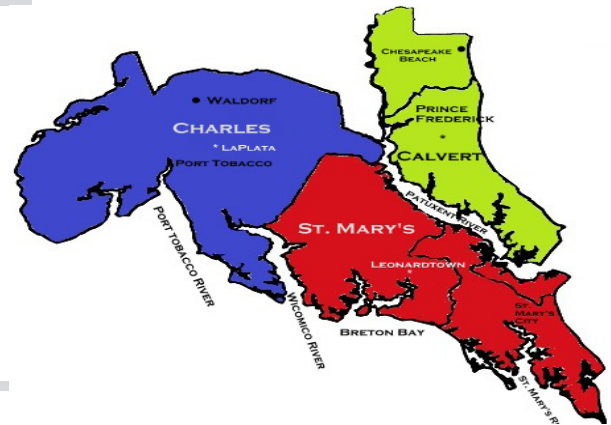
GC: Most times, I am contacted by commuters who are looking for a carpool or vanpool information. We have a lot of individuals that moved here during Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) in 2012. People in Ohio and Pennsylvania were transferred to the Southern Maryland region to Naval Air Station Patuxent River Main Site (NAS PAX) or to Fort Belvoir, Virginia. After looking on the map, they realized that, while Charles County was right across the Potomac River from Fort Belvoir, there wasn't a bridge, which meant that for their commute, they would have to go up and across the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, and back through Virginia, towards Fort Belvoir. In addition, they have to deal with all the traffic we have on the Capital Beltway to get to Fort Meade or Fort Belvoir. I would get calls from these commuters looking for help to find the best commute option because the commute is now 2 hours away.

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GH: You shared earlier that about 70% of your commuters work outside of their counties. What advice would you give them to try a new commute?

GC: I always try to encourage them to take advantage of the transit benefit, particularly if they are working for a federal agency. I tell all commuters that you are not locked into anything, it's not a long-term contract. Try it and if you like it, you stay with it. If you don't like, you jump out of it and try something else, but always try a transit benefit first, which is at \$270.00 per month. I also promote the Maryland Commuter Tax Credit for employers in Maryland to help them offer a transit, vanpool, cash-in-lieu of parking or company sponsored Guaranteed Ride Home to their employees.

GH: What have business shared with you about their commuting needs for employees?

GC: When you talk about my employers, I have a couple of military bases in my region and, after three years, I got my foot in the door at the Naval Weapons Center (my region does not include the DC region, where most of my counties' residents work). Even during the shut-down, due to COVID-19, we continue having conversations in Southern Maryland with a variety of employers. I have found that service industry employers may need different commuting assistance from the information technology and military employers, and I am happy to provide them all with the assistance that they need.

GH: Do you have any projects in the pipeline that you would like our readers to know about?

GC: Right now, I am in my marketing mode, and with help from both you guys and Commuter Connections, I have started my Commute with Confidence! Campaign. I am running ads on the internet, local newspapers and with the help from all three local government agencies. The other project that has been ongoing for years is installing Guaranteed Ride Home signs. I'm one of the few TDM specialists that goes to all three counties' park and ride lots to install Guaranteed Ride Home signs. Thanks to Nancy Huggins with MDOT MTA, and working with MDOT SHA, we will be installing metal Guaranteed Ride Home signs for our Park and Ride lots to ensure they remain mounted for all commuters to see, even after inclement weather. Our county looks forward to having the Guaranteed Ride Home signs as a permanent installation.

GH: What are some other things that you would like businesses and commuters to know about your program?

GC: What I really want them to know is that the services and assistance I provide for them is free. They do not believe that what we do as TDM specialists is free. It is your tax dollars at work. It's trying to convince them. They always think that there's a catch.

GH: I know you work very closely with our partner, Commuter Connections, but I wanted to know what you love most about working with us at Commuter Choice Maryland?

GC: You guys are the best! so easy to work with, always quick to answer my questions, and always open to suggestions and when I need help!