ALAMEDA COUNTY
CONGESTION MANAGEMENT AGENCY

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February 26, 2009
Agenda Item 7.1

Memorandum

Date: February 17, 2009

To: CMA Board

From: Plans & Programs Committee

Subject: Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) Program Evaluation

Action Requested
It is recommended that the Board approve the Evaluation of the Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) Program, which includes the following recommendations: 1) continue to rely on TFCA grants to fund the GRH Program for now, 2) investigate implementing a regional GRH Program with MTC and all nine counties in the region, 3) expand the GRH Program in Alameda County into a comprehensive TDM Program (pending new funding), 4) investigate requiring employers to contribute up to 50 percent towards the cost of the program and/or a $10 to $20 co-payment per employee (after certain conditions are in place), and 5) eliminate the minimum number of 75 employees per employer requirement.. The recommendations are described in more detail below. The Executive Summary is attached and the full report is on the CMA's website at www.accma.ca.gov.

Next Steps
Incorporate recommendations into annual GRH Program evaluation and produce the Final Report.

Discussion
In May 2008, as part of their action to accept the 2007 Annual Evaluation Report for the GRH Program, the CMA Board directed staff to conduct an independent review of the GRH Program. They asked that the review include a discussion of ways to transition funding from Transportation Funds for Clean Air (TFCA) to employers contributing towards the program.

The GRH Program provides a "guaranteed ride home" to any registered employee working for a participating employer in cases of emergency on days the employee has used an alternative mode of transportation to get to work. Alternative modes include carpools, vanpools, bus, train, ferry, walking and bicycling.

The consulting firm, Eisen/Letunic, reviewed the following five elements, which are summarized in the attached Executive Summary: 1) Compare the Alameda County CMA GRH Program to other County Programs, 2) Evaluate the effectiveness of the annual surveys and make recommendations for improvement, as needed, 3) Assess the historical performance of the program against the program's original guiding principles, 4) Review alternative funding strategies for the program, and 5) Prepare program recommendations.

After reviewing the Draft Program Evaluation, the Plans and Programs Committee at its February 9th, 2009 meeting, expressed concern about the cost of rides, the cost of the program, and the number of people served. They also reiterated their concern about whether employees and/or employers should pay some part of the program costs. To address their concerns, the recommendations were revised as shown in **bold** below. The Final Report will be modified to include the revised recommendations.

1) Continue to rely on TFCA grants to fund the GRH Program.
The evaluation recommends continuing to fund the program through TFCA grants for now. This is because the GRH Program competes for TFCA grants and is one of six programs funded through this program. This, coupled with not offering any other TDM program for employers makes it difficult to get other funds solely for the GRH Program.

2) **Investigate implementing a regional GRH Program with MTC and all nine counties in the region.**
Merging the program would provide economies of scale in marketing, and would allow the opportunity to incorporate additional commute alternatives. Also, GRH programs in other counties benefit some employees who work in those counties but live in Alameda County. The Plans and Programs Committee felt this recommendation should be broadened from merging with adjacent counties, such as Contra Costa and Santa Clara, to approaching MTC in conjunction with all nine counties in the region to implement a regionwide GRH Program.

3) Expand the GRH program into a comprehensive TDM program
In light of the fact that every other GRH Program is part of a larger TDM package of programs; there is an opportunity for economies of scale in administering the program; as well as the combined effect of further reducing single occupancy vehicle (SOV) usage through a package of TDM programs, the evaluation recommended expanding the GRH Program into a comprehensive TDM Program. This would also have the benefit of fulfilling the TDM requirement of the Congestion Management Program, and would provide alternatives to the SOV, reduce vehicle miles traveled, and help in reducing greenhouse gases. New funding would be required to implement this recommendation.

4) **Investigate requiring employers to contribute up to 50 percent towards the cost of the GRH program and/or a co-payment of $10 to $20 per employee** (after certain conditions are in place).
The consultant team conducting the Evaluation felt that requiring an employer contribution could result in some employer attrition in the program. The other counties that do charge employers offer a range of TDM programs. Also, the Air District has consistently highly ranked and funded the GRH Program. Prior to charging employers, the Evaluation recommends that the program add a more robust TDM Program. That should be preceded by employer surveys about contributions to the program and stronger incentives for employers to provide commute alternative benefits for their employees. The Plans and Programs Committee strengthened this recommendation by directing staff to investigate ways for employers and employees to pay a portion of the program costs. Staff will be adding language to this year's employee and employer surveys about how much they would be willing to pay for GRH Program services as a first step in this process.

5) **Eliminate minimum number of 75 employees per employer requirement.**
The Alameda County GRH program is the only program that was evaluated that had a minimum number of employees per employer requirement. The Plans and Programs Committee recommended that this be included in the recommendations.

The Board is requested to approve the Evaluation of the Guaranteed Ride Home Program.

We have summarized the results of the 2007 Guaranteed Ride Home Program. The statistics are shown below for additional information.

- 4,437 people were registered in the program;
- # of annual drive-alone trips replaced by alternative modes for enrollees in the program:
    - 363,896 one-way trips per year (based on 4,437 people enrolled in the program and the # of trips each person would have taken for the year without the GRH program)
    - or 181,948 round-trips per year;
- # Guaranteed Ride Home rides taken per year: 98 one way cab or car rental rides;
- # Rides not taken due to enrollment in GRH program: 181,850 (or 181,948 round-trip rides minus 98 GRH trips taken),
- Annual Program Cost: $135,000
- Annual miles saved per work year (250 days): 10,542,618
- Annual gallons of gas saved per work year (250 days): 466,488
- Annual dollars not spent on gas per work year (250 days): $1,007,846 (assumes average price of $2.46 per gallon)

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Performance Evaluation of the ACCMA Guaranteed Ride Home Program

Submitted to the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency

February 13, 2009

EISEN | LETUNIC
Transportation, Environmental and Urban Planning

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Executive Summary

Overview

The Alameda County Congestion Management Agency (CMA) has sponsored a "Guaranteed Ride Home" (GRH) program since April 1998. The program provides vouchers good for a free ride home in a taxi or rental car to any registered employee of a participating employer in cases of emergency or unscheduled overtime on days in which the employee has used an alternative mode of transportation to get to work. The objective of the GRH program is to encourage eligible employees to use commute alternatives—including transit, carpools, vanpools, bicycling and walking—instead of driving to work alone. The program is funded through grants from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's Transportation Fund for Clean Air.

Following a recommendation by the CMA Board, the CMA hired Eisen | Letunic, a Bay Area-based consulting firm, to carry out an independent performance review of the GRH program to ensure that it is being administered and operated as efficiently and effectively as possible and to explore alternative funding strategies. The review consists of four tasks:

❶ To compare the CMA's GRH program to similar programs in other counties on a number of key dimensions, including operating principles and characteristics, number of people served, program budget and fund sources, and supportive programs. This task is described in Chapter 1 of this report, beginning on page 3.

❷ To assess the historical performance of the GRH program against the program's original guiding principles, using performance measures developed based on the guiding principles. This task is described in Chapter 2, beginning on page 29.

❸ To evaluate the effectiveness of the surveys administered to participating program employers and employees and, if necessary, make recommendations to improve the surveys. This task is described in Chapter 3, beginning on page 39.

❹ To consider alternative funding strategies for the GRH program to ensure its financial sustainability and long-term viability. This task is described in Chapter 4, beginning on page 51.

The report concludes with overall recommendations for the program, based on the findings from our performance review, beginning on page 61.

Task Summaries

Below are summaries of the four review tasks outlined above:

❶ Comparison to Other Programs

We profiled eight GRH programs, in addition to the CMA's program. These included the four other county-level GRH programs in the Bay Area (Contra Costa County, City and County of San Francisco, San Mateo County and Solano/Napa counties); one other program in California (the program serving Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties); and three programs outside the state (King County, Washington; Boston; and Metropolitan Washington, DC). The programs are compared across a number of key dimensions, including eligibility criteria for employers and employees, valid circumstances for the use of rides, types of rides offered, limitations on use, number of participating employers and employees, number of rides taken annually, average cost of the rides, annual costs, funding sources and other TDM programs offered. The program profiles appear on pages 6-20.

Following the profiles are key findings from our research and "best practices" gleaned from the design and operation of the various GRH programs (pages 20-28). The best practices are presented for consideration by the CMA as potential ways to improve the effectiveness of its GRH program. Key findings and best practices include, among others:

- **Service area:** Of the nine programs, three serve employers in more than one county. Based partly on this finding, we recommend that the CMA explore merging the GRH program with one or more other programs in adjacent counties (see Chapter 5, recommendation #2).

- **Employer eligibility:** The CMA's program is the only one that requires employers to be of a certain minimum size in order to participate in the program; all other programs allow any

employer in their service area to participate, regardless of size. We suggest eliminating the employer size requirement and extending membership eligibility to other groups, such as transportation management associations, downtown associations and colleges and universities, provided that they are able to assume liability for their members' actions.

- **Annual cost:** Meaningful program comparisons across this area are very difficult for a number of reasons, including that the costs of other GRH programs are absorbed into the budgets of broader TDM programs. However, based on limited information, it appears that both the total cost and the marketing costs of the CMA program are in line with those of other programs. Of four other programs for which we have their total annual cost, the CMA program has a higher cost than two of the programs and a lower cost than the other two. Similarly, of programs for which we have marketing cost information, marketing costs are a larger percentage of total costs under some programs than under the CMA program, while they are a smaller percentage under other programs.

- **Average ride cost:** The CMA program reported the second highest average ride cost, at $86. This could be for several reasons: higher taxi surcharges in Oakland, higher cab fares and a generally higher cost of living in Alameda County compared to other parts of the Bay Area (and of the Bay Area compared to other parts of the country) and the high percentage of rides taken under the CMA program by taxi, which tend to be more expensive than rental car rides. To reduce the average ride cost, the CMA program has been promoting its policy that rental cars are required for rides of 50 miles or more (except in case of emergencies) and encouraged for rides between 20 and 50 miles. To the extent that reducing costs is a priority, controlling the cost of rides is less important than controlling other costs such as administration, marketing and overhead. The reason is that the cost of rides makes up only 8 percent of the total budget of the Alameda County program, whereas other costs constitute 92 percent.

- **Funding sources:** Most of the programs, and all the ones in the Bay Area, are funded entirely or primarily through public sources. All Bay Area GRH programs except one receive grants from the BAAQMD–TFCA and three receive funding from the local half-cent sales tax for transportation. Two programs are funded exclusively by employers (King County and Boston), while an additional two receive some employer contributions. Our main funding-related recommendation is that the CMA program continue to rely on TFCA grants (Chapter 5, recommendation #1). Alternatively, the CMA could consider requiring employers to contribute toward the cost of the GRH program once certain conditions are in place (Chapter 5, recommendation #4).

- **Supportive TDM programs:** With the notable exception of the CMA, all the sponsoring agencies of the GRH programs we researched offer additional TDM programs and services. These typically include financial incentives for using transit, vanpools and carpools; ridesharing and ride-

matching services; and promotions for walking and bicycling. Based partly on this finding, we recommend that the CMA consider offering, either alone or in partnership with other counties, additional commute alternative programs and services (Chapter 5, recommendation #3).

Program Principles

On January 29, 1998, shortly before the launch of the GRH program, the CMA Board adopted a set of three principles to guide the development and operation of the program. We assess the performance of the GRH program against these guiding principles, using performance measures that reflect the intentions behind the principles. Below is a summary of our evaluation of each guiding principle.

Principle 1: Maximize shift from driving alone to transit, carpooling, bicycling and walking

The performance measures we use to assess the performance of the GRH program against this guiding principle are: (i) effectiveness in changing commute behavior of program participants; and, (ii) reductions in emissions of air quality pollutants. For the first performance measure we use the results of the annual survey distributed among employees registered in the GRH program; we find that the survey results broadly suggest, using several criteria, that the GRH program encourages participating employees to shift from driving alone to using alternative modes of transportation for their commute. For the second performance measure, we use cost-effectiveness calculations for air-emission reductions made by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) for projects applying for funding under its Transportation Fund for Clean Air (TFCA) program. The BAAQMD determined that the GRH program was more than twice as cost-effective as other projects under the ridesharing category that applied for TFCA funds. For ridesharing projects, the BAAQMD bases its estimates of emissions reduced on a project's potential to encourage a shift in commuting behavior away from single-occupancy vehicles; this means that, in comparison to other projects, the GRH program is considered significantly more effective at promoting a shift from driving alone to using commute alternatives.

Principle 2: Determine value of GRH to employers and employees

Unfortunately, the GRH program does not collect, and we do not have, quantitative or qualitative information on the value that employees or employers place on such aspects as time or monetary savings from participating in the GRH program. Instead, the performance measures we use to assess the performance of the GRH program against this guiding principle are the satisfaction of employees and employer representatives with the program, using satisfaction as a proxy for value. Using survey results, we find a generally high level of satisfaction with the GRH program among both employees and employer representatives, with the possible exception of employees' wait time for a ride. However, we also determine that, because satisfaction is not an adequate proxy for "valuation" of the program, we cannot make a conclusive determination about it. In

conclusion, we recommend ways for the program to collect information through the annual surveys that could be used in the future to determine the value that employees and employers assign to the program (Chapter 2). These changes are being incorporated into the 2009 surveys and the results will be available in the Annual Evaluation.

Principle 3: Develop a sustainable program (if possible)

The performance measures we use to assess the performance of the GRH program against this guiding principle are: (i) long-term continuous operation of the program, beyond the start-up phase; and, (ii) support from one or more secure and reliable funding sources. Concerning the first performance measure, we find the program to be successful, as it has operated continuously, with no interruptions, for ten and a half years; during that time, it has grown at a pace healthy enough to suggest continued interest on the part of employers and employees but not so fast as to overwhelm the program financially or administratively. Regarding the second measure, we find the performance of the GRH program to be mixed. The program has successfully managed to secure sufficient funding to operate for each of the past ten years. However, all program funding has come from a single source, meaning that the program has not yet developed additional sources of funding. Chapter 4 discusses alternative funding strategies for the GRH program while Chapter 5 includes funding-related recommendations.

Survey Effectiveness

The program distributes an annual survey to the representatives of employers who are registered in the GRH program and a separate annual survey to registered employees. We review the design and administration of the two surveys (rather than the survey results), evaluate their effectiveness and make recommendations for improvements. For each survey, we discuss how it can be revised to improve the collection of information needed to evaluate the success and performance of the GRH program against its guiding principles. In particular, we suggest ways in which the survey can attempt to gauge the value that employees and employers place on the program and also to prompt respondents to give more revealing and truthful responses, rather than what they think the survey administrator wants or expects to hear. This is followed by more narrow and specific recommendations related to individual questions and online survey screens, with the objective of improving the meaning, tone and order of questions and the organization and flow of the screens. Recommendations related to the employee survey are on pages 32-36, while recommendations on the employer representative survey are on pages 36-38. A set of appendices, beginning on page 67, contains the hard-copy version of the employee survey administered in 2008 (Appendix A; the online version was nearly identical), the hard-copy version of the employer representative survey (Appendix B) and our detailed edits suggested for various questions in both the employee and employer representative surveys (Appendix C). We will also add a question to the survey asking

whether employers would continue to participate in the program if they were required to contribute towards the cost of the program.

Alternative Funding Strategies

We explore alternative funding strategies for the GRH program—in particular, the use of employer contributions—with the objective of ensuring its financial sustainability and long-term viability. We examine the funding strategies used by 11 other programs—those profiled in Chapter 1 along with three additional ones: Santa Rosa, in Sonoma County; Sacramento; and Austin, TX—and we review a 2006 study by the Federal Transit Administration of 55 GRH programs around the country (pages 52-56). We find, among other things, that almost all programs are funded through public sources; five of six Bay Area programs are funded at least in part through TFCA grants; five programs receive funding from the local half-cent sales tax for transportation; and two programs are funded exclusively by employers (King County and Boston) while an additional two receive some employer contributions (San Francisco and San Mateo County).

We also explore in more depth the funding strategy employed by the CMA's program (pages 56-58). We find that the use of TFCA grants to fund the CMA program is appropriate on a number of counts. In particular, the program:

- fits the TFCA's purpose of decreasing motor vehicle emissions;
- is able to reduce air emissions in a highly cost-effective manner, falling well within the cost-effectiveness limits imposed by the BAAQMD;
- is more cost-effective than almost 90 percent of projects submitted from eight Bay Area counties and under nine project categories that were evaluated under the TFCA's County Program Manager Fund in 2007;
- is one of five GRH programs in the Bay Area (out of six total) that receive TFCA funding;
- does not also offer other TDM services, unlike all the programs we evaluated that receive employer contributions; and
- is not legislatively mandated, unlike some of the employer-funded programs we evaluated.

Our recommendations concerning program funding are presented in Chapter 5, "Overall Program Recommendations."

Overall Program Recommendations

Chapter 5 contains our overall recommendations for the program, based on the findings from our performance review and input form the CMA Board. There are five tiered recommendations:

Recommendation ❶: Continue for now to rely on TFCA grants to fund the GRH program

Because we find the use of TFCA grants to fund the CMA's program appropriate on a number of counts, our main recommendation is that the CMA continue to rely on TFCA grants to fund its GRH program. As we explained earlier, the purpose of the TFCA is to provide grants to public agencies for projects that will decrease motor vehicle emissions in a cost-effective manner. The BAAQMD requires that all projects receiving TFCA funds achieve a cost-effectiveness of $90,000 or less in TFCA funding per ton of emissions reduced. The cost-effectiveness of the 2007/08 TFCA grant for the Alameda County GRH program was $16,591 per ton, which is below the ceiling set by the BAAQMD.

By comparison, the average cost-effectiveness of all 15 projects from the Bay Area Counties in the ridesharing category—which includes the GRH program—that were submitted that year for the TFCA's County Program Manager Fund was $35,369. For ridesharing projects, the BAAQMD bases its estimates of emissions reduced on a project's potential to encourage a shift in commuting behavior away from single-occupancy vehicles. Moreover, the Alameda County program is one of six GRH programs to receive TFCA funding in the Bay Area. While it would be ideal not to rely on a single source of funds, the TFCA appears to be a secure and reliable source. TFCA grants have enabled the GRH program to operate without interruption for more than ten years.

Recommendation ❷: Investigate implementing a regional GRH Program with MTC and all nine counties in the region.

We recommend that the CMA investigate implementing a regional GRH program with MTC and all nine counties in the region. Merging the program would provide economies of scale in marketing and administering the program. It would also allow the opportunity to be incorporated into a regional, comprehensive commute alternatives program. Furthermore, GRH programs in other counties benefit some employees who work in those counties but live in Alameda County. To implement this, the CMA should approach MTC in conjunction with all nine counties in the region to implement a regionwide GRH Program

Recommendation ❸: Expand the GRH program into a comprehensive TDM program (pending new funding)

We recommend that the CMA expand the GRH program into a comprehensive TDM program. Of all the GRH programs we examined, the CMA program is the only one that is not operated as part

of comprehensive program that includes other TDM or commute alternative efforts. Expanding the program would allow the CMA to broaden the range of commute alternative services it provides to residents of Alameda County while fulfilling the Travel-Demand Management Element of its 2007 Congestion Management Program. It would also work toward meeting the objectives of AB 32 and SB 375, state legislative mandates to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. Additional commute alternative services that the CMA could offer include ridematching, financial incentives for carpooling and vanpooling, discounted transit passes, personalized transit itineraries, subsidized bicycle parking racks and lockers, bicycle commuting maps and promotions and other marketing strategies. To fund these additional services, the CMA should investigate the county's sales tax for transportation, the TFCA and funding sources from other public agencies.

Recommendation ❷: Investigate requiring employers to contribute up to 50 percent towards the cost of the GRH program and/or a co-payment of $10 to $20 per employee (after certain conditions are in place)

As mentioned under recommendation #1, we believe that the CMA should continue for now to rely on TFCA grants to fund the GRH program. The Air District has consistently highly ranked and funded the GRH Program with TFCA funds. Furthermore, requiring an employer contribution could result in some employer attrition in the program, as indicated in the annual GRH survey in 2004, which stated that up to 51 percent of the employers might drop out of the program if a fee were imposed. The other counties that do charge employers also offer a range of TDM programs. Some of the GRH programs that charge fees are further bolstered by legislative requirements that employers require commute alternatives. Prior to charging employers, the Evaluation recommends that the program add a more robust TDM Program. That should be preceded by surveys asking the employers about their commitment to continue to participate in the program should fees or co-payments be required. Additionally, legislation, such as AB 32 and SB 375, which require reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and rising gas prices, could provide incentive for employer contributions into the program.

Because of the potential for employer contributions to reduce participation in the program—and given that the program already has a stable source of funds, in the form of the TFCA—we recommend that the CMA require employer contributions only if several conditions are in place. These conditions are:

- A determination, based on results of future employer representative surveys, that employers would not abandon the program in large numbers if they are required to pay for it;
- The existence of a comprehensive, or at least more robust, TDM program for Alameda County employers (see recommendation #3); and,

Francisco's ordinance requiring large and medium-size employers to offer commute benefits (see discussion of San Francisco's GRH program in Chapter 1).

Recommendation 6: Eliminate the minimum 75 employees per employer-size requirement for participation in the GRH program

To participate in the CMA program, employers must have 75 or more permanent employees (full- or part-time) in Alameda County. The CMA program is the only one we found that requires employers to have a minimum number of employees in order to participate in the program. All other programs allow any employer in their service area to participate, regardless of size. To increase the number of participating employers, the CMA should eliminate the employer size requirement, opening the program to any employer in the county, regardless of size. It should be noted that this will not necessarily expand the number of people served or of rides taken since smaller businesses often are not able to dedicate staff to market and administer the GRH program internally.

COMPARISON OF GURANTEED RIDE HOME PROGRAMS
JANUARY 2009

GRH Programs	Eligibility	Limitations	Number of Employees	Number of Employers	Annual Cost	Fund Source	Number of Rides taken/year	Average Ride Cost	Other TDM Programs
San Mateo GRH	Any employer in county regardless of number of employees	No program limit on the number of rides No limits on ride distance	41,000 (all employees are automatically registered)	55	N/A	Transportation sales tax Employer contributions	200	N/A	Yes
Solano/Napa Emergency Ride Home	Any employer in county regardless of number of employees	3 rides/employee/month 6 rides/employee/year 100 miles distance max	78	52	N/A	TFCA CMAQ	7	$103.00	Yes
Commute Smart (4 southern California Counties)	Any employer in 4 counties regardless of number of employees	4 rides/employee/year No limit on the distance	358,592 (all employees are registered)	642	N/A	Counties sales tax for transportation	224	$70.42	Yes
King County Home Free Guarantee (Seattle)	Any employer college or other group in County	8 rides/employee/year 60 mile distance	150,000 (all registered)	483	$ 412,000	Employer contributions (required by state Commute Trip Reduction Law)	7,328	$44.00	Yes
ABC TMA GRH Boston	Any ABC TMA Employer member	6 X/employee/6 months No limit on ride distance	75,000 (all registered)	31	$ 125,000	Employers TMA fee	83	$46.90	Yes
Commuter Connections GRH (Washington DC Metropolitan Area)	Any employer in area regardless of size	4 X/employee/year No limit on ride distance	140,487	N/A	$ 545,000	General funds of Metropolitan Washington Council of Government and other Commuter Connections jurisdictions	3,006	$67.00	Yes
511 Contra Costa GRH	Any employer in area regardless of size	2 rides/employee/month 6 rides/year No limit or ride distance	3,800	586	N/A	TFCA & Transportation Sales Tax	600	$67.00	Yes
San Francisco Emergency Ride Home	Any employer in area regardless of size	4 rides/employee/year No limit on ride distance	N/A Employers do not register	150	N/A	TFCA, Transportation Sales Tax, city & county funds, employer contribution	500	N/A	Yes City has "Transit First" Policy requiring employees to have TDM programs
Alameda County CMA GRH	75 employees/employer in county	2 rides/employee/month 6 rides/employees/year 100 miles distance	4,437	155	$ 135,000	TFCA	98	$86.13	No