

**To:** Marketing, Planning, & Legislative Committee

**Date:** 11/21/2022

**From:** Ryan Jones, Manager of Marketing & Communications

**Reviewed by:** MR

**SUBJECT: October Free Ride Campaign**

### Background:

The October Free Ride Campaign provided a month of free rides on all County Connection buses and paratransit, made possible by federal stimulus funding. The month of free rides was intended to not only help essential workers save money on transit costs but encourage commuters to take public transit...perhaps beyond October. County Connection ran a similar campaign last year in September as part of a regional "Return to Transit" marketing effort.

### Promotional Campaign:

Similar to last year, staff partnered with Zero Company, a digital marketing company that specializes in online engagement and content promotion, not only across social media platforms, but through ads/banners on websites. Digital ads were run in both English and Spanish from the end of September through October to help amplify our outreach efforts, which drove a lot of traffic to County Connection's website and social media pages. Staff was also able to use results from last year's campaign to refine the target audiences. Below are high-level stats from the month-long campaign:

SOURCE	CLICKS	IMPRESSIONS	CTR (CLICKS/IMPRESSIONS)
Programmatic	5,008	3,200,000*	0.16%
Google	8,682	2,120,084	0.41%
Facebook	3,513	485,417	0.72%
Twitter	1,540	717,632	0.21%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18,743</b>	<b>6,523,133</b>	<b>0.29%</b>

\*Approximately

### Terms (for reference):

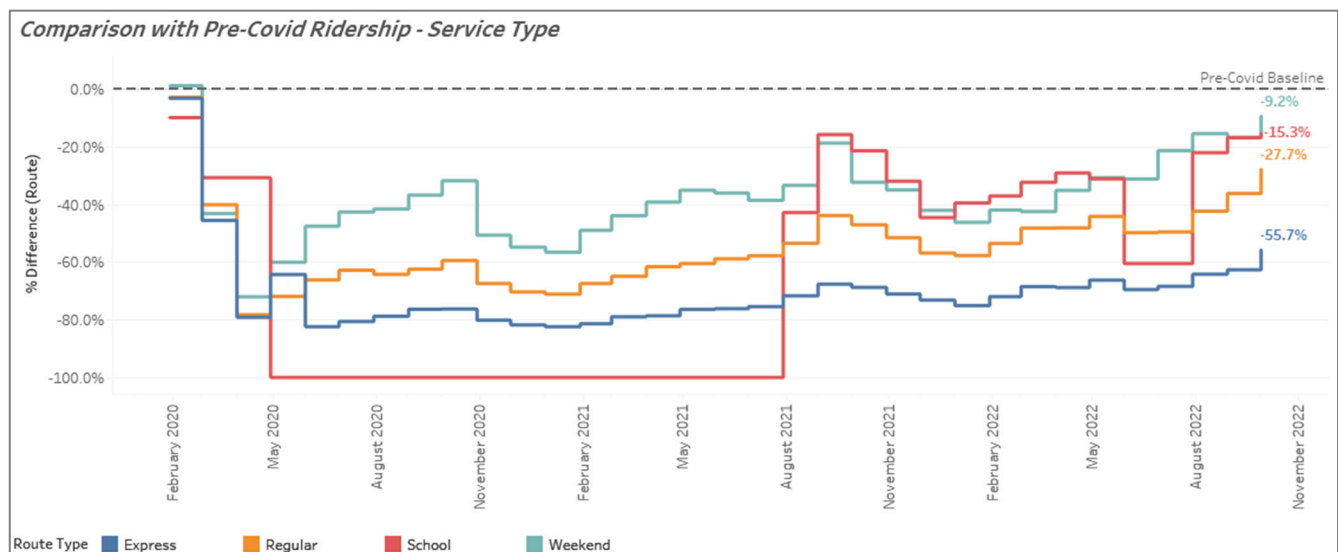
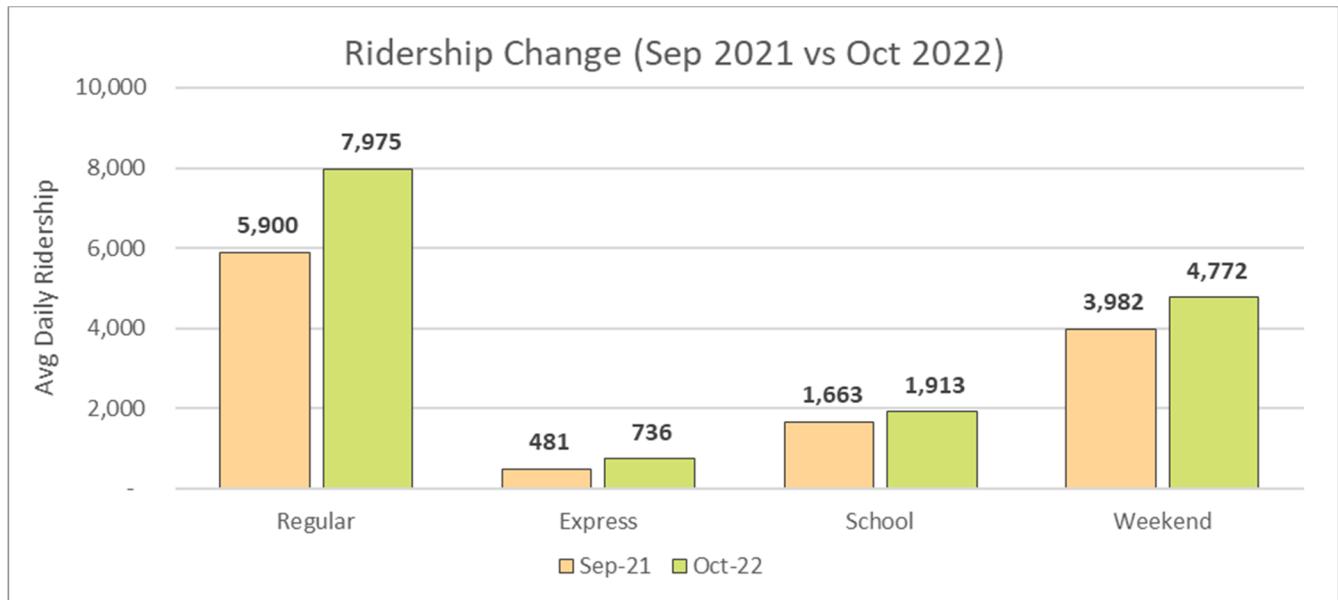
- **Programmatic** – Purchased advertising space (e.g., web banners, ads on side menus, etc.)
- **Clicks** – Represents when someone has seen the ad/post and clicks on it.
- **Impressions** – Represents when someone has seen the ad/post.
- **CTR** – Click Through Rate represents clicks divided by impressions to give a sense of how often people who see the ad end up clicking it.

Overall, engagement rates for this year’s campaign were lower than last September. However, this year’s campaign had a more limited audience size and duration and did not have the benefit of joint promotion with BART and other transit agencies. Also, there were some differences in how the ads on each platform performed relative to last year. Click-through-rates were relatively similar for Google and programmatic ads, whereas they were significantly lower for Facebook and especially Twitter.

**Impact on Ridership:**

While working with Zero Company did result in a lot of impressions for our digital marketing campaign, what’s more important is how that effort online translated to real-world ridership numbers. The chart below compares the free ride campaign from September 2021 against the free ride campaign from October 2022. Overall, there was a 26% increase in ridership during this year’s promotion compared to last year’s.

The second chart shows ridership trends by route type since the beginning of the pandemic as a percentage compared to pre-COVID levels. The October Free Ride campaign resulted in a 15% increase in ridership compared to the previous month (September 2022).



The express routes had the largest percentage increase in ridership but are still significantly down from pre-COVID levels. In terms of total volume, the local routes had the highest jump in ridership compared to last September. The table below summarizes the increases in ridership by route type, as well as a comparison to pre-COVID levels.

<b>ROUTE TYPE</b>	<b>INCREASE FROM SEPTEMBER 2021</b>	<b>% CHANGE VS. SEPTEMBER 2021</b>	<b>% BELOW PRE-COVID</b>
Regular Local	+2,075	+30%	-27%
Express	+255	+42%	-56%
School	+250	+14%	-15%
Weekend	+790	+20%	-9%

**Recommendation:**

None, for information only.

**Action Requested:**

None, for information only.

**Attachments:**

None