

The County Connection

Inter Office Memo

To: Board of Directors

Date: May 11, 2011

From: Mary Burdick, Sr. Manager of Marketing *MB*

Reviewed By: *AKM*

SUBJECT: FY2012 Draft Marketing Plan

SUMMARY OF ISSUES:

Each year the manager of marketing prepares a marketing plan that guides the activities of the department to promote CCCTA transit service. The plan identifies opportunities, challenges, and objectives for FY2012 and strategies planned to target various market segments.

RECOMMENDATION:

Discussion/Approval

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The FY2012 Promotions budget requires \$104,000 to implement as presented.

OPTIONS:

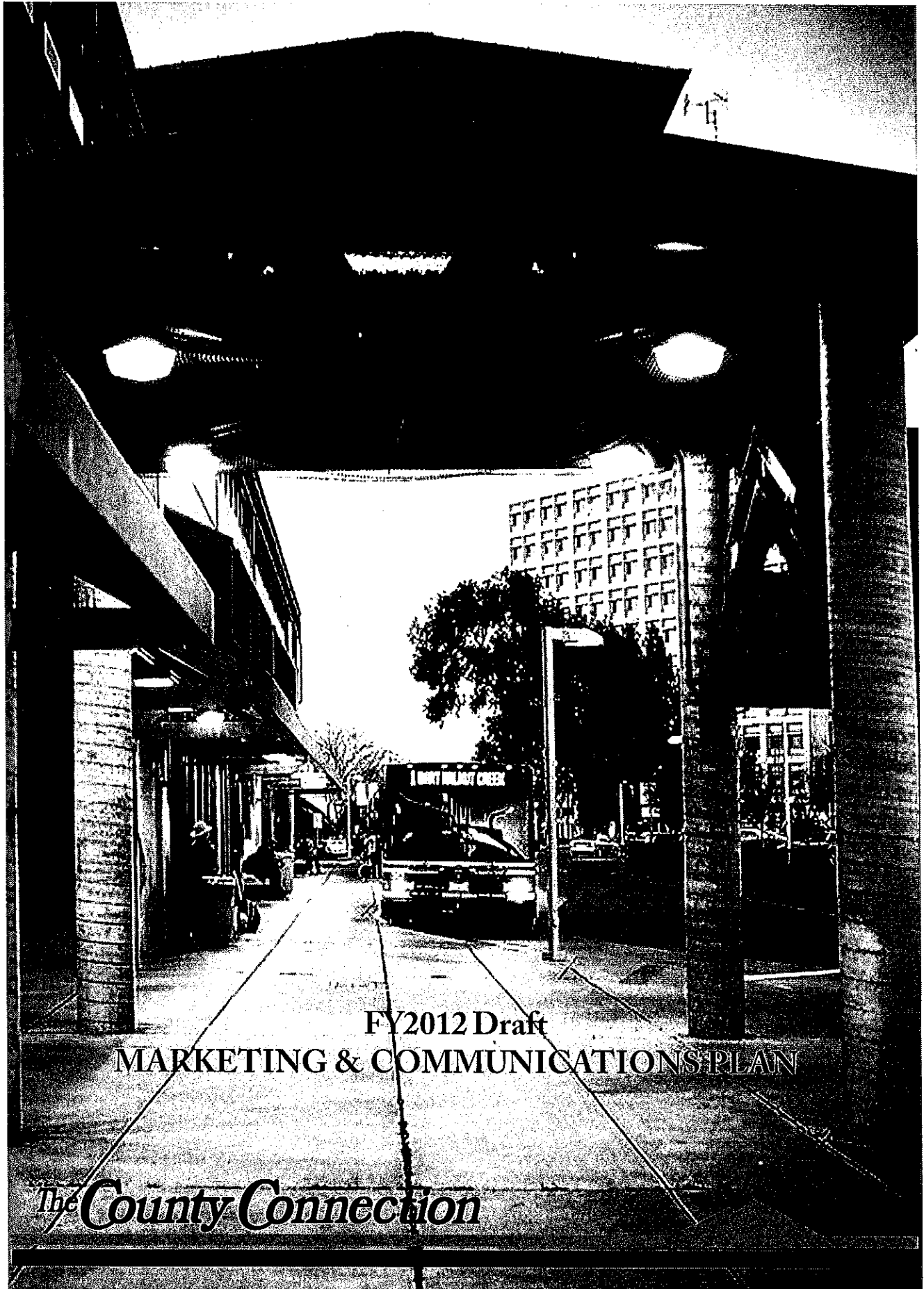
- 1) Approve the plan as presented
- 2) Suggest changes to the plan
- 3) Other action as directed

ACTION REQUESTED:

Approval

ATTACHMENTS:

Draft FY2012 Marketing & Communications Plan



FY2012 Draft
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

The County Connection

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MARKETING PLAN SUMMARY

The FY2012 Marketing Plan focuses on:

- Improvement and maintenance of the website
- Promoting real-time schedule information
- Improving customer service
- Street signage and shelter maintenance
- Community outreach
- Public/private partnerships

The FY2012 plan relies heavily on the newly refreshed website that includes a trip planner and mapping capabilities driven by google maps. The introduction of the bus time software will make the website a more valuable tool for new riders who expect and value real time information. These enhancements will be an asset to the customer service department, and those calling County Connection for the first time.

One component of the marketing program involves providing current and potential riders with print materials such as schedules, tickets, and transfers, as well as notification of system changes, seasonal promotions, and joint promotions with transit partners.

The 2012 marketing efforts will emphasize the role County Connection plays as a vital part of our community in providing safe, clean, efficient, and reliable transit service, with priority placed on providing up-to-date information at the bus stops and shelters. The shelter maintenance contractor will continue to be held to CCCTA's high standard.

Marketing efforts will continue to focus on community outreach through staff participation in community and business events. Staff is exploring the possibility of developing a unique paint scheme for up to three LINK vans to be used throughout the community, and on special routes such as the Gael Rail Shuttle.

Finally, the FY 2012 marketing program will encourage ridership growth by promoting County Connection as a safe, eco friendly, and cost saving option to driving a car.



SECTION I. FY2011 MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS

- The Diablo Valley College Transit Center was completed and opened for service in September, 2010. The opening of the center served as a positive example of a public/private partnership that benefits the public at large, and it received extensive media coverage.
- The County Connection website was completely redesigned to incorporate a more user friendly look and feel. Enhancements include conversion of the schedule data to the General Transit Feed Specifications (GTFS) format and the introduction of an on-line trip planner, a blog feature, and links to Facebook and Twitter social media pages.
- Emphasis was placed on the Customer Service function. Call center standards were revised and clearly defined. All members of the call center staff attended phone training tailored to our needs. Live call coaching and call monitoring guidelines were established to improve consistency and quality of customer response.
- Investing in the "Just One Day A Week" advertising campaign provided the marketing department with a wide array of "ready to use" print and electronic advertising materials to use throughout the year with a single message to encourage riders to use the bus "Just One Day A Week".



SECTION II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

OPPORTUNITIES

- 1) With gasoline prices exceeding \$4/gallon (and still climbing) commuters and students are looking at transit as a cost saving option. When fuel prices approached \$5/gallon three years ago, County Connection experienced ridership increases over 10%.
- 2) Implementing the Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) will allow passengers to access real time bus information from their computer and smart phone. Customer service will have access to this information as well, and will enable more accurate information to be given to callers.
- 3) Call center staff has been responsive to the new call procedures and are taking an active role in creating a professional, helpful and approachable customer service department.
- 4) The inclusion of social media into our marketing mix allows for direct communication with passengers who will help us spread our message to friends and media outlets.
- 5) "Just One Day a Week" continues to be a relevant message, and will remain a successful campaign that encourages increased ridership while conveying our social and environmental message.



ADVERTISING REVENUES

- 1) Marketing staff carefully monitors the fixed-bus advertising inventory on a monthly basis to assure all advertising contracts are reported and revenues received.
- 2) Lamar Transit Advertising has had some success selling space on the vans to smaller, local businesses. Revenue generated in this fleet is separate from the revenue generated through the advertising contract for the fixed-route fleet.
- 3) The promotional 10-Ride Appreciation Pass continues to serve as a revenue neutral tool for outreach programs that encourage new riders in cooperative marketing campaigns with funding partners, such as 511 Contra Costa.

CHALLENGES

- 1) Intense scrutiny aimed at public and government agencies in the media promote an overall negative perception of public agencies as inefficient bureaucracies that create a drain on taxpayers.
- 2) Marketing the system remains a challenge when service levels cannot be predicted.
- 3) Reduced promotions budget and staff layoffs result in less presence in the community, and in particular, the schools.
- 4) Maintaining a high profile and awareness levels with a limited budget for self promotion will remain a challenge.
- 5) Managing the website, social media, and web based schedule information will continue to be a challenging and time consuming task for staff.



SECTION III. OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVES

1. Use the website as a valuable source of information for bus schedules, route information, trip planning, and special service announcements.
2. Expand the focus on providing high quality customer service through live call coaching.
3. Utilize the "Just One Day A Week" messaging to all market segments, utilizing media that will keep awareness of County Connection service high among residents, commuters, and school-aged passengers in our service area.
4. Strengthen relationships with offsite ticket vendors. Regularly promote the availability of ticket sales on the CCCTA website.
5. Produce schedules, information panels, and marketing and customer service materials in-house to keep costs down.
6. Seek opportunities to bring our messages and marketing materials to community groups and organizations who can provide not only potential new ridership, but also build community support for transit improvements.
7. Strengthen partnerships with other transportation advocates such as TRANSPAC, 511 Contra Costa, the Contra Costa Centre Association, and the Bishop Ranch Transportation Centre.
8. Seek opportunities to generate revenues through advertising and other partnerships.
9. Utilize Bus Ambassadors for assistance in community outreach and public events.



SECTION VI. MARKET SEGMENTS

Passenger Information

There are less funds for mass media campaigns, therefore the focus of County Connection's communications plan will be on the website, and on providing excellent customer service. The marketing department will continue to produce print materials in house, and manage distribution of these materials to offsite locations, and business and community events.

CCCTA will use free social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter as a means of direct communication with our "fans", and the updated website includes a blog feature with every news item that is posted. An advantage of providing Google with GTFS data is that other applications can use it. Google Maps has a feature that shows bus stop locations and next bus arrival times based on the schedule data. New applications are likely to come in the next year. The introduction of "Bus Time" will provide real time bus locations and predict the arrival time for the riders stop. This will be a significant improvement and will be promoted in the media to the greatest extent possible.

Strategy #1 - Commute Market

The commute market has always been a cornerstone of County Connection service. Changing a commuter's behavior requires clear knowledge of who we are, what we do, and where to get information. When a significant event takes place, such as the current increase in gasoline prices, commuters must know who to turn to, and will use the service if it is convenient and reliable. The improved access to information with the web based trip planning tools will be appreciated and utilized by this market segment in particular.



If gas prices continue to climb, County Connection should expect to see more commuters riding our buses. Ridership on the commute routes is up 39% March 2010 to March 2011, in part, due to gas price increases.

Strategy #2 - Promote Fixed-Route Service to Student Markets

The youth market is an area where County Connection has seen increases in ridership since the elimination of bus service in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District. With very few changes County Connection has been able to fill some of this void, with an approximate increase of 5% when comparing 2010 to 2011 school periods to date.



The student market is one best influenced at an early age. Traditionally, County Connection has greater success capturing the 10-14 year old student population as they transition from using "yellow school bus" service to using County Connection. Several CCCTA programs targeting the student market have been reduced, but the marketing department continues to support the elementary, middle and high school students in several ways.

The **Class Pass Program** invites teachers to use County Connection fixed route buses during off-peak hours for class field trips. The bus trip is organized through the Marketing Department, and is provided free of charge. A small package containing age appropriate promotional items is provided to the teacher for the class. Because in-class bus safety presentations no longer take place, staff will include bus safety cards, a "places to go" brochure, and information about our partnership with the Safe Place program, as a means to further promote our commitment to providing safe transportation to places teens want to go.

The **Summer Youth Program** consists of a half price bus pass sold during the summer months. This program is heavily marketed within the schools at the end of the school year. Promotional posters are distributed to schools, teen centers, recreation areas, community centers, etc. On-screen advertising during the summer will take place at the Brendan Theater in Concord.

Additionally 511 Contra Costa and SWAT partner with CCCTA, promoting the half price ticket as their back-to-school incentive in the fall. County Connection works closely with these groups to provide information on our school oriented bus service to aid families of elementary age students transition from district provided buses to CCCTA bus service.

Strategy #3 - Promote Fixed-Route Service To Senior & Disabled Community

With the population of seniors expecting to double by the year 2020, it is important to aggressively market CCCTA services to adults before they become seniors. Today's commuters represent the future senior population. This group will live longer resulting in an impending explosion of seniors. County Connection needs to attract and educate people of public transportation options at an earlier age, and keep them on fixed-route services longer.

Bus Ambassadors spend time riding our buses and visiting popular transit hubs in an effort to assist those unfamiliar with our service. Bus Ambassadors are available to assist with one-on-one travel training for ambulatory passengers. Passengers needing more detailed training on the accessible features of our buses are referred to the Accessible Services department.

The County Connection marketing department works closely with the accessible services department to market the fixed-route system to seniors and the disabled. The Guide To Accessible Services brochure outlines all accessible features on our buses. Information is tailored to those with mobility impairments or special needs. This booklet focuses on fixed-route services and includes route descriptions, fare information, accessible features and information on the Regional Transit Connection Discount Card program.

The marketing staff coordinates with the Accessible Services department to produce the Welcome To LINK booklet for those requiring the door-to-door service, periodic newsletters, and related promotional supplies.

Finally, marketing staff assists the Accessible Services department as needed in producing materials targeted to seniors, physicians, and care providers which focus on fixed-route service. These will be distributed through senior centers, independent living centers, community events, and the U.S. mail.

Two ongoing programs targeting senior/disabled fixed-route services are the Monthly Excellence drawings, recognizing bus operators who are given "Excellence" cards by their passengers for providing excellent service, and the awarding of an annual pass each October during Disability Awareness Month. County Connection awards an annual pass to the senior or disabled individual who used the fixed-route system the most throughout the year. The winner is determined by the number of used D&S punch cards returned to County Connection throughout the year.

Strategy #4 Promote Service To The Business Community- Outreach Efforts

Employers recognize the role that housing costs and traffic congestion play in attracting and retaining employees. The environment and the effects of climate change have become key issues in the public and private arenas. Access to affordable housing and multiple transit options are becoming factors in business decisions to relocate or expand existing employment centers. Currently legislation is being considered to adopt a commuter benefit ordinance requiring employers with twenty or more employees to offer commute benefits. If enacted, County Connection may expect to see ridership increase.

One of most visible business centers in our service area, Bishop Ranch Business Park, has been nationally recognized for their actions to financially support and encourage the use of public transportation to their tenants. Colleges and learning centers are also increasing efforts to provide free transit to students. The City of Walnut Creek has provided free transit service on Route 4 which benefits employees, businesses and shoppers in downtown Walnut Creek.

In Central County there are three primary employer organizations that provide incentives to employees - 511 Contra Costa, Bishop Ranch, and the Contra Costa Centre Association. County Connection supports all outreach efforts hosted by these organizations, and in return, they support County Connection promotions. The marketing staff will maintain our cooperative partnerships with these organizations in marketing transit incentives to the business community. In the next fiscal year the marketing staff will continue hands-on involvement with the business communities through employer events and speaking engagements.

Our presence in the business community is also enhanced by our membership in all area Chambers of Commerce. As chamber members County Connection is able to participate in local community and business events, allowing us to highlight our services at little or no cost.



Strategy #5 - Community Service & Public Relations

The marketing department will continue to participate in as many high profile community events as staffing will allow. Additionally, with the purchase of new paratransit vehicles, the marketing department is planning to create a unique "community" design for the vans that are used in providing special services such as Route 250 - The Gael Rail Shuttle. A clear distinction between these



special service vehicles and the LINK service may help better market these services, setting them apart from the paratransit service, while promoting the buses as different and fun

The marketing department will continue to organize and promote the community based annual food drive, support training requests for Guide Dogs For The Blind, and coordinate with maintenance to support law enforcement training activities requiring the use of the buses and the facility.

Finally, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on conducting business in an eco-friendly manner. County Connection has taken many steps in the process of becoming a certified "green" business, and will continue to do so. Marketing staff has established a good relationship with the Sustainable Contra Costa advocacy and outreach organization, who has expressed an interest in assisting County Connection in our mutual outreach efforts in the schools.

Strategy #6 - Customer Service Programs

The website update, trip planning feature, and access to bus stops through google mapping are exciting customer service upgrades. Since introducing the new website last October, marketing staff has immediate access to website user statistics which is a valuable tool for planning and marketing purposes. The implementation of the "Bus Time" software upgrade will give customer service representatives, as well as riders, the ability to locate buses and predict their arrival using their smart phone or computer. This will be a win-win for everyone, and the marketing department plans to market this improvement heavily.

Internal programs consisting of training and live call coaching will support telephone representatives in their provision of excellent customer service.

FY2012 MARKETING PROMOTIONS BUDGET

| | |
|---|------------------|
| I. Systemwide Promotion | \$33,000 |
| • Quarterly local radio messages | |
| • Newspaper advertising as needed | |
| II. Targeted Marketing Programs | \$30,000 |
| • Senior & Disabled Marketing Programs | |
| • Direct Mail Route Support Programs | |
| • Directory Listings (Yellow pages) | |
| III. Business and Community Outreach Efforts | \$10,000 |
| • Chamber Dues | |
| • Business and community event fees | |
| • Flyer/print production | |
| IV. Youth Marketing | \$20,000 |
| • Summer Youth Program (Middle/High) | |
| • Class Pass Program (Elementary/Middle) | |
| • Advertisements in school newspapers and newsletters | |
| • Select on screen theater advertising | |
| V. Miscellaneous Expenses | \$11,000 |
| • Graphics/Translation Support | |
| • Misc./Supplies | |
| TOTAL - FY2012 Expense | \$104,000 |