

To: Marketing, Planning, & Legislative Committee

Date: February 28, 2013

From: Mary Burdick, Sr. Manager of Marketing

Reviewed by:

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## **SUBJECT: County Connection Brand**

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### **Summary of Issues:**

The County Connection “brand” was recently discussed at the Marketing, Planning, & Legislative Committee and the Board of Directors meetings. At that time questions were raised about our awareness within the community, our name and how we’re known, and suggestions were given to refresh our color scheme. The General Manager retained an independent communications professional, Stephanie Jordan, to conduct a brief review of County Connection’s brand, and to provide feedback and recommendations.

Ms. Jordan reviewed a sampling of marketing and communications materials, the agency website, and the agency vehicles. During the review it became clear that the agency’s naming structure is inconsistent. Agency descriptors used throughout all communications include:

- Central Contra Costa Transit Authority (CCCTA)
- CCCTA (without spelling out the acronym)
- County Connection
- The County Connection

Ms. Jordan suggests that while the brand of the agency is tied to a number of things, how the agency refers to itself is the foundation on which we build our awareness and our reputation programs. The recommended first key step is to determine how the agency name should appear, be consistent in how the name is used going forward, and to determine the extent willing to go to address the situation. Once this is decided, we can move forward with an action plan.

### Further Considerations:

- Consider purchasing additional URLs to protect the brand
- Consider refreshing the County Connection color scheme
- Consider the value of formal branding

Ms. Jordan stressed that by defining the agency name and being purposeful about the use of the name, we can build reputation in the marketplace, which leads to:

An increase in exposure and awareness

More effective communication of services and amenities

Enhanced sense of partnership in the community

More clearly defined single net impression

More friendly and approachable

Correct position to the audience (rider, media, and community member)

**Staff Recommendation:**

Based on a number of factors, including how the telephones are answered, the most prevalent use of the agency name in print materials, how the agency is referred to by riders and the media (newsprint, radio/television, telephone directories), staff recommends that "The" be removed from the agency nomenclature, and that we refer to Central Contra Costa Transit Authority (County Connection) in a limited fashion, such as in legal documents.

Attached is an action plan for accomplishing the key first step and next step considerations.

**Financial Implications:**

Many of the activities outlined in the first step action plan can be accomplished with minimal financial impact, if we are willing to consider a transitional approach to replacing logos on the vehicles and bus stop signage. Staff recommends that existing letterhead, envelopes, and mail labels be replaced immediately at an estimated cost of \$7,000.

# County Connection Brand Review and Action Plan – First Steps

## The County Connection Name

The recommendation to drop “The” from the agency nomenclature and refer to the agency as “County Connection” is a subtle change and will require revising the existing logo. Reproducing existing internal and external print communication materials can begin immediately and be accomplished with minimal financial impact. Replacing the logo on all agency vehicles, bus stop signs, shelters, and information panels will take longer, without a significant financial commitment.

Of the 121 fixed-route buses 81 will be replaced through 2015 leaving only the 900 series (40 buses replaced in 2010) with older version logos.

## Implementation Plan

To rollout the consistent use of the agency name, a few documents will be developed:

- Letter from the General Manager to employees
- Mini-style guide with recommendations for website content, printed materials, signage, and agency vehicles

Completed within the year:

- Internal documents/letterhead – 1 month
- Schedules/System Maps as reprinted – 2 to 6 months
- Website content update – 1 month
- Current program literature as reprinted – 6 to 12 months

Transition over time:

- Bus Stop Flags – There are approximately 1500 active bus stops
- Bus Stop Information Panels – Approximately 550 stops have panels
- Fixed-Route Buses – 121 (81 being replaced by 2015)
- Paratransit Vehicles – 63 (42 replaced last year)
- Staff trucks/vans – 9

## Next Step Considerations

1. Purchase additional URL's – The IT Manager found the following URLs available for purchase for prices varying from \$5,000 to \$8,000 and purchased countyconnection.com.

- thecountyconnection.org
- thecountyconnection.net
- countyconnection.com

## 2. Consider refreshing the color palette

Refreshing the color palette can be as simple as introducing a single new color to the existing color scheme or as dramatic as changing a number of colors currently in use.

First step would be to retain a professional graphic designer to make suggestions and offer recommendations on color palette options.

**Upon board approval, the new color palette rollout would require:**

- Changes to internal documents and communications materials, which would take place quickly with nominal financial investment.
- Gradual changes to vehicle and street signage would require more time, but be incorporated within the planned budget for replacement or upgrades
- Immediate changes to vehicle and street signage would require unplanned financial investment.

**3. Brand Equity**

To date, we have completed a top level brand communications review. If desired, staff can embark on additional in depth brand studies.

Additional branding investigations include:

- Formal trademark - establishing “value” requires both research and legal assistance.
- Market traction, customer, and non-customer brand awareness research, which requires marketing outreach, surveys, polling, and analysis.