

# FY2014 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

## I. SYSTEM OVERVIEW

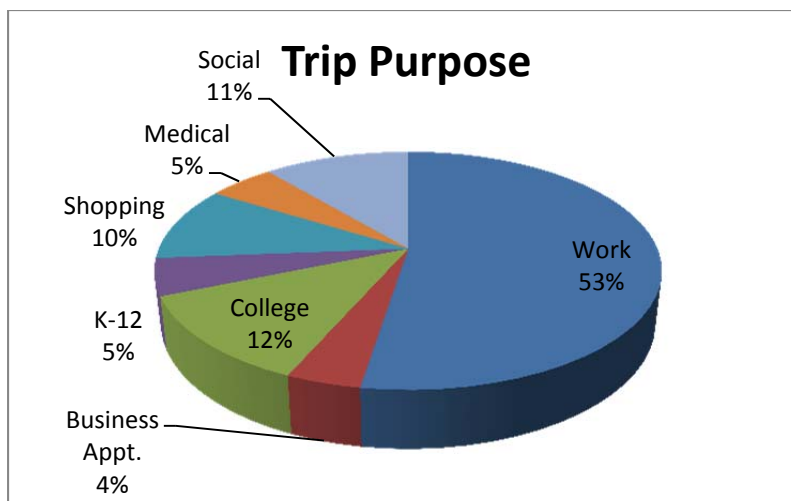
The Central Contra Costa Transit Authority (County Connection) was established in March of 1980, under a Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (JEPA). The County Connection's service area encompasses nearly 200 square miles and includes the cities of Clayton, Concord, Lafayette, Martinez, Orinda, Pleasant Hill, San Ramon, Walnut Creek, the Town of Danville, the Town of Moraga, and unincorporated areas of central Contra Costa County.

County Connection currently operates twenty four weekday local routes, seven express routes, and twenty one routes targeted to school bell times. County Connection connects riders to seven BART stations, Martinez Amtrak, the ACE rail station, business centers, schools, medical facilities, social services, and recreation venues. One hundred and twenty one accessible buses are used. Service is currently provided weekdays between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m., and on weekends from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

### Passenger Profile

In 2012 the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) conducted on-board surveys on behalf of transit agencies throughout the Bay Area. The survey questions included traditional demographic questions, but also included a follow-up telephone survey for a more precise passenger profile. Below is a snapshot of County Connection's ridership.

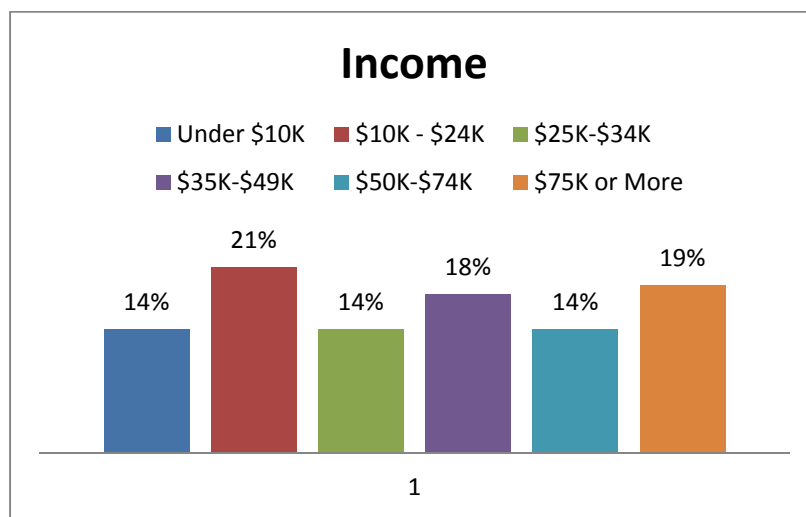
Trip Purposes: 56% of trips were for work and business appointments, 17% were for K-12 and college trips, 11% were for social or recreational trips, 10% were for shopping, and 5% were for medical/dental. Furthermore, 53% reported that they work only, 16% were students only, and 14% were neither students who also work and 17% were neither employed nor students.



Rider Loyalty: The majority of riders are frequent riders - 93% use the bus at least once a week.

Age: The most common age-group are those in their 20's, representing 26% of responses. The age of riders is evenly split among those in their 30's, 40's and 50's, and 60% with percentages of 13%, 18%, 19%, and 15% respectively. Riders under the age of 20 represent 9% of County Connection ridership.

Household Income: Total household income for riders was also distributed relatively evenly among riders, dispelling the perception that public transit serves a primarily low-income population.



Transit Dependence: Over half (53%) of riders indicate they do not have a current driver's license, and nearly one third report they have no working vehicle available to them.

Language: Surveys were available in both English and Spanish. Of the 2,228 surveys collected 2,125 were English (95%), and 103 were Spanish (5%). Of those completing the survey in English, 33% speak another language at home. At 45% Spanish was the most commonly noted second language.

## II. MARKETING OBJECTIVES

The FY2014 Marketing Plan is intended to meet the following objectives:

- Promote Bus Tracker – Increase awareness and use of bus tracker through media and marketing messages. Support BART's efforts to implement real time signage at BART stations, and work with MTC to feed real time information to 511.

- Strengthen Brand Identity - Increase name awareness and familiarity with the services that County Connection provides. Promote the benefits County Connection offers to riders, and build upon our reputation for providing efficient, friendly service with equipment that is clean, safe, and well maintained.
- Prepare For Clipper - Evaluate fare media effectiveness and options to simplify and coordinate fare media in anticipation of Clipper roll-out.
- Retain Current Riders – Retain current riders through effective passenger information, quality service delivery, and excellent customer service. Reward loyal customers through customer appreciation activities, and well-priced discount fare media options.
- Expand Ridership Base – Encourage trial ridership among the targeted market segments. Identify potential riders that have a high likelihood of trying County Connection to increase ridership and fare revenue.

### **III. TARGET MARKETS**

#### **Commuters**

The commute market has always been the cornerstone of County Connection service, as they use it on a regular basis. Fifty-six percent of those responding to the recent on-board survey were using the bus for work trips. This compares to 46% reported in the 2007 survey.

In late 2012 County Connection introduced Bus Tracker, the real-time bus arrival program. Access to real time arrival information is important to today's commuters who expect accurate and reliable information. The ability to receive text or email alerts when their bus is arriving, saves riders time and increases their confidence. With the economy stabilizing and signs of local employment growth, County Connection is experiencing ridership gains amongst commuters. The availability of real time information will continue to improve service quality and support this market segment.

An effective outreach program has been used the past year to promote Bus Tracker that included the use of mass media to deliver consistent messages. Local broadcast radio, digital radio, and targeted cable television will be used in FY2014 to further promote Bus Tracker while solidifying the County Connection brand.

Marketing staff will continue to support the employee events sponsored by 511 Contra Costa, SWAT, Contra Costa Centre Association, the Bishop Ranch Business Park, and any other business needing our assistance in furthering their commute alternative programs.

## **Students**

School trips make up 17% of the total ridership according to the 2012 on-board survey. Five percent were going to K-12 schools, and 12% were going to college.

It should be noted County Connection also reports student/youth ridership as a fare category, and that these totals are estimates because County Connection does not have a separate youth fare. For instance, riders on the 600 series/student routes are categorized by operators as youth riders though they pay the same fare as an adult. Riders on regular fixed-routes are categorized as adult or youth, based on operator judgment.

Higher Education students are an important market in that several institutions help subsidize service and/or offer free fares. Currently County Connection maintains agreements with Saint Mary's, JFK University, Cal State East Bay, and the ITT Institute in Concord to provide additional services tailored to the needs of the students, providing free fares. Staff is renewing efforts to work out a pass program with Diablo Valley College.

The student market is one best influenced at an early age, and we have had success capturing the 10-14 year olds as they transition from using district sponsored school bus service to County Connection for middle school. The marketing department supports the elementary, middle and high school students through the Class Pass Program and the Summer Youth Program.

The Class Pass Program invites teachers to use the system during off-peak hours for field trips. The program promotes using the bus for trips beyond going to/from school and introduces young students to the public bus system. Class Pass trips are organized through the Marketing Department, and provided free of charge. A small package containing age appropriate promotional items is provided to the teacher for the class. Information is also provided that explains bus safety, places to go, and our partnership with the Safe Place program.

The Summer Youth Program consists of providing youth – age 6 to 18 - with a half price bus pass that's good during the summer months. Program materials are delivered to the schools at the end of the school year. Promotional posters are also distributed to teen centers, recreation areas, and community centers. On-screen advertising during the summer will take place at the Brendan Theater in Concord as long as the local pricing structure remains within budget.

511 Contra Costa and SWAT continue to partner with County Connection to promote free or deeply discounted bus passes as a back-to-school incentive in the fall. During the 2011/12 school year nearly 3,000 students received free bus passes through their School Pool program, generating over \$90,000 in revenue. County Connection works closely with schools and students throughout the year to provide information on the school oriented bus routes.

## **Seniors & Persons With Disabilities**

The senior population (age 65 and older) continues to be a strong, stable market segment, comprising 15% of total ridership. County Connection is experiencing small, consistent increases in senior ridership and anticipates more dramatic growth as “baby boomers” age. It is important to attract seniors to the fixed-route service and to retain their patronage for as long as possible before they shift to the more expensive LINK paratransit service.

The most effective way to market to seniors is to make sure they are knowledgeable of the service before they need it - by educating them about the public transportation options before they reach the point of giving up their driver’s license. Consistent messaging to commuters age 30-55 will support this effort.

Currently Accessible Services staff meets with residents at Senior Centers and senior resource fairs. Information about our accessible services, local bus routes, and the deep discounts offered to seniors is available. Volunteer bus Ambassadors are available to assist those wishing to learn how to use fixed-route buses with trip planning, and will travel with individuals until they are comfortable traveling on their own.

The Marketing department updates The Guide To Accessible Services booklet which 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 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, periodic newsletters, and related promotional supplies. Staff also assists as needed to produce materials targeted to seniors, physicians, and care providers which focus on fixed-route service.

Seniors who use BART get a large discount and many seniors were purchasing paper tickets prior to Clipper. Implementing the change from paper tickets to Clipper has been challenging because they must apply in person to provide proof of age, and the number of outlets shrank significantly. Because there are very few locations in Contra Costa County that distribute the Senior Clipper cards, County Connection has agreed to assist in this role.

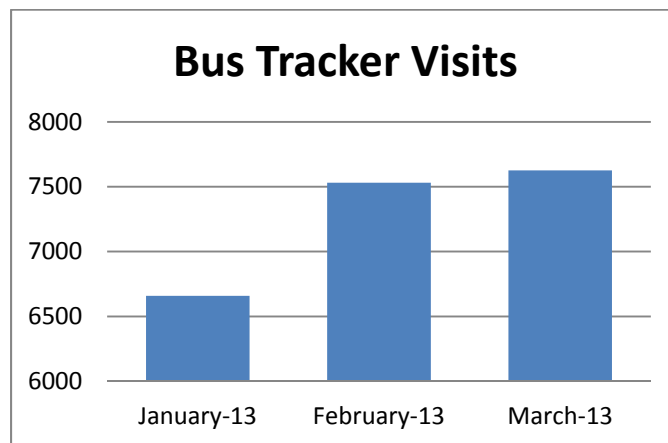
## **IV. FY2014 MARKETING FOCUS & STRATEGIES**

The FY2014 marketing program will emphasize the role County Connection plays as a vital part of our community in providing safe, clean, efficient, and reliable transit service. The program will continue to focus on promoting Bus Tracker, define and strengthen the brand identity,

prepare to be included in the Clipper regional fare program, retain current rider, and expand ridership by encouraging trial ridership.

### **Bus Tracker**

Bus Tracker was introduced in mid FY2013 and has been well received by riders. Bus Tracker provides accurate real time arrival information via the web. One month after the system wide introduction in January 2013 there were 6,000 visits to the Bus Tracker site. By March 2013 the number of visits has climbed to nearly 7,700. At the time of this draft 185 users have established personal accounts. Rider response to Bus Tracker has been positive, and the momentum built with consistent messaging will continue into FY2014.



### **County Connection Branding**

It is important to continually update our image to stay fresh and relevant. Changes to update the agency image and enhance the rider experience have been made. The website has been updated and is more engaging and better utilized. The customer service staff in the Call Center were re-trained, and the call monitoring program was updated.

A brand review was conducted and it was revealed that we refer to the agency in a number of ways that leads to confusion. In written communications we refer to the agency as County Connection, The County Connection, CCCTA, and the Central Contra Costa Transit Authority interchangeably. To be viewed as a relevant service provider in touch with the needs of our passengers, clearly defining our name and using that name consistently in all messaging is essential. The Board of Directors approved dropping “The” from the agency logo and has directed the General Manager and staff to use “County Connection” wherever possible. An implementation plan for both short and long term transition of the agency materials, vehicles and road signage was also approved.

Future efforts to refresh the brand will include evaluation of the colors and the paint scheme on the buses, and options to keep the brand visible when large format advertisements are on the buses.

### **Clipper**

Riders are anxiously awaiting County Connection's participation in the Clipper program. MTC has identified funding and is in the process of developing an implementation schedule for the East Bay operators. County Connection, Tri Delta, WestCAT, and Wheels have begun discussions to coordinate and simplify our fare structures, and will consider fare media options such as a rolling monthly pass and other discounted multi-use fare media.

Marketing staff will work closely with MTC and the marketing staff at neighboring agencies to develop successful advertising and public outreach campaigns.

### **Media Strategies**

Next year the marketing department will continue to promote Bus Tracker and our service through the use of local and regional media outlets.

- Electronic and digital messages will be scheduled regularly using a combination of local radio traffic sponsorship packages, as well as digital radio formats.
- Cable television/digital video messages will be scheduled regularly to complement the audio messaging while providing the visual element to strengthen County Connection's brand identity.
- Direct mail and newsprint will be used sporadically to deliver route specific or program specific messages.

## **V. CUSTOMER SERVICE**

### Call Center

Initial contact with County Connection by a new rider is often through Customer Service. To assure that performance standards are met, live call coaching sessions are scheduled regularly, and calls are randomly monitored and scored each month. The monitored calls and the scoring information are shared with each representative as part of the on-going refresher training.

Customer Service agents enjoy access to real time information and are able to provide better, more predictable information to callers.

### Website

Marketing staff strives to keep the County Connection website current and fresh. The website has a blog feature that is reviewed every day, with staff responding to comments or questions

within 24 hours. In the past year the number of visits to the website has grown by 29%, and the number of unique users has grown by 16%.

### Social Media

County Connection maintains Facebook and Twitter business pages in the mix of outreach strategies to communicate with followers. The use of social media as a business tool is a relatively new phenomenon, and the growth in followers has been slow, but consistent. All news information posted on the website is also posted on the Facebook and Twitter pages, and in the past year, the number of responses to Facebook and Twitter posts are nearly equal to those placed through the website. Staff responds to comments posted on social network pages the same as any other customer contact.

### Regional Customer Service Projects

MTC coordinates several regional customer service projects that County Connection participates in. They include:

- 511.org - The 511.org website provides direct links to all area transit agency web sites and includes a regional trip planner. Planning provides the data feed from each service bid and marketing spot checks the schedules for accuracy prior to posting on the 511.org website. We will eventually feed real time information to 511.org.
- 511 Customer Service Telephone Line – Individuals calling 511 are directed by telephone prompts to the transit agency of choice. The caller is then connected to the transit agency Customer Service Center. Each agency is responsible for providing information to 511 relating to call center hours/fares.
- The Bay Area Air Quality Management District routinely sponsors low cost marketing programs targeted to specific audiences. Last year the Contra Costa Spare The Air resource team conducted a “Transit and Trails” promotion, reaching out to youth program coordinators, senior groups and conservation clubs. The promotion will be repeated in FY2014, and County Connection marketing staff will provide support to the resource team for this project.

## **VI. COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

- Business Expos - Participating in business and employer sponsored transportation events are excellent opportunities for County Connection to communicate directly with commuters seeking an alternative to driving. Large employers periodically sponsor events either through a Transportation Demand Management organization, or on their own. County Connection staff routinely attends such events. Many of the Chambers of Commerce sponsor business expos allowing members to set up displays at little or no



cost. Marketing staff attends a select number of these events in an effort to maintain a presence in the business community.

- Earth Day/Green Events - Sustainability, once a topic connected to Earth Day, is becoming a year-round event. Often “green” events are combined with health fairs put on by large hospitals such as John Muir Medical Center, and Kaiser. Earth Day and green events are now scheduled throughout the year in nearly every community. Because these events target a broad market, marketing staff attends as many as possible, often bringing a bus for attendees to board. Having our product available gives staff the opportunity to talk about the environmental benefits of using public transportation, and efforts County Connection is taking to be a responsible and environmentally friendly member of the community.
- Select Community Events – Many communities sponsor events that draw large crowds from throughout the service area. Examples include Kid Fest in Concord, the Walnut Festival in Walnut Creek, Earth Day in Martinez, and the Lafayette Art & Wine Festival. With limited staff, emphasis will be placed on attending events that have a family focus where we can have a bus on display. Young children are drawn to the bus, which provides an opportunity for staff to introduce the bus and our services to parents. Marketing staff will rely on volunteer staff and Ambassadors to assist at these events.
- 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.

## **FY2014 MARKETING PROMOTIONS BUDGET**

### I. Systemwide Branding/Real Time

\$135,000

- Direct Mail - Periodic Route Support Programs (\$30K)
- Bi-Monthly Radio - combination of :30 and :15 announcements (\$35K)
- Bi-Monthly Cable - :30 (\$35K)
- Quarterly Newsprint advertising (\$15K)
- On-Line/Digital Advertising - :15 and :30 (\$20K)

### II. Target Marketing Programs

\$20,000

- Senior & Disabled Marketing Programs
- Youth Marketing

### III. Business and Community Outreach Efforts

\$10,000

- Chamber Dues
- Business and community event fees
- Flyer/print production

### IV. Miscellaneous Expenses

\$15,000

- Graphics Support/Translation
- Directory Listings (Yellow pages)
- Misc./Supplies

### TOTAL - FY2014 Expense

\$180,000