

To: Marketing, Planning, & Legislative Committee

Date: 3/10/2025

From: Ryan Jones, Manager of Marketing & Communication

Reviewed by: AMS

SUBJECT: FY 2026 Marketing Plan

Background:

Marketing and Communications staff are continuing to monitor how passenger engagement evolves and is developing strategic engagement strategies that can not only resonate with our audiences but withstand operational and economic fluctuations in the years ahead. The Marketing Plan for FY 2026 is intended to build upon our current marketing efforts. The plan outlines a strategy to connect with more customers within our service area, as well as those who travel to central Contra Costa County, and build upon our relationships with regional transit partners.

Three Strategies to Enhance Engagement and Outreach:

Develop Online Engagement and Content

Staff plans to focus on enhancing online audience engagement through videos and motion graphics to create a more dynamic and informative communication style. This approach will build on our current online messaging, moving beyond stagnant posts about service interruptions, schedule changes, and events, using more eye-catching multimedia content intended to better resonate with our passengers.

Staff will continue to utilize Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, and Bluesky; and for our younger audiences, TikTok. Additionally, staff will use more paid advertisements through Google Ads which help amplify our online reach by targeting specific demographics and regions. This strategic approach will not only enhance and focus our online presence but also build a stronger community connection.

Regarding use of TikTok, staff are aware of a possible federal ban of the platform beginning in April 2025 and will continue to monitor this situation to ensure compliance with federal regulations. Additionally, IT staff have confirmed that they do not have a concern with potential security breaches through County Connection's use of the service. However, out of an abundance of caution, staff have only installed the TikTok app on a single mobile device that is not connected to our internal computer network. Furthermore, staff have consulted with marketing staff from BART and OmniTrans (a large public transit agency serving the San Bernardino Valley), both of which have well-established TikTok accounts, and neither have expressed any concerns with the use of the service.

Build a Personal Connection: Outreach and Events

Staff will continue to plan Mobile Lobby and community events, aiming to forge stronger personal connections between County Connection and community organizations working with the communities we serve. Having recognized this as a gap in our current marketing strategy, we will develop portfolios

for customer-facing staff in marketing and customer service to act as liaisons. These portfolios will include businesses and non-profits that serve our communities, ensuring effective communication of relevant services and promotions.

The primary goal is to establish reciprocal relationships with designated contacts within community organizations, who will also have a point person at County Connection for streamlined communication. This collaboration will allow our staff to work closely with community representatives to distribute important information and educate them about available public transit resources. By adding this personal touch, we will tap into the power of community engagement, strengthening our connection with those who are already invested in supporting our passengers.

Enhance Youth & Family Programming

County Connection is focused on enhancing our youth and family programming strategies while building strong connections with school districts throughout the academic year. Currently, we disseminate information through parent newsletters managed by the schools and participate in back-to-school events to discuss youth transit passes. While effective, these methods often compete with other school activities, diminishing the impact of our message and reach.

To improve engagement, we will create stand-alone online events via Zoom, scheduled throughout the year for parents and students to learn about discounted transit passes and youth promotional cards. Additionally, we plan to establish a parent advocacy program that empowers volunteers to promote youth transit passes within their communities. By leveraging their networks, we can effectively spread information about our transit options. Participants will receive incentives, such as gift cards or promotional items, in exchange for their assistance. This grassroots approach aims to enhance awareness and foster greater community engagement, ultimately benefiting families and students who rely on our services.

Financial Implications:

Staff has budgeted \$170,000 to cover the expenses associated with the FY 2026 Marketing Plan as follows:

Engagement	\$75,000
Outreach & Events	\$45,000
Paratransit	\$15,000
Youth & Family Programming	\$35,000
TOTAL	\$170,000

Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval of the proposed FY 2026 Marketing Plan.

Action Requested:

Staff requests that the Marketing, Planning, & Legislative Committee provide feedback on the proposed FY 2026 Marketing Plan and forward it to the Board of Directors for further review.

Attachments:

None