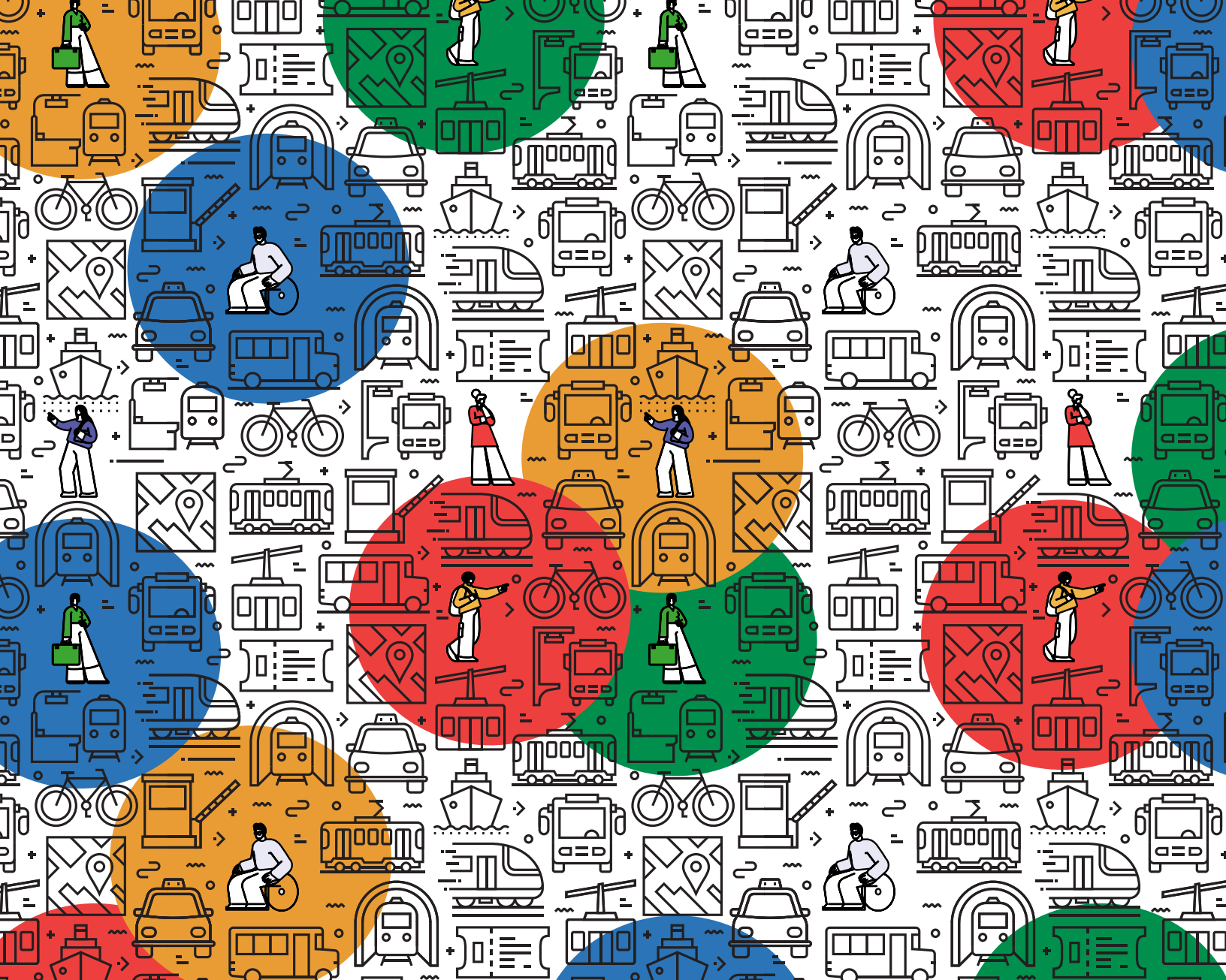




The National Transit Adaptation Strategy





The National Transit Adaptation Strategy

Phase III - Marketing Campaign

SAN FRANCISCO MUNICIPAL TRANSPORTATION AGENCY JUNE 2024

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Foreword

COVID-19 was an unprecedented pattern break that disrupted the status quo across America's public and private sectors. The pandemic exacerbated existing challenges faced by the US transit industry, particularly in connection with ridership and revenue, and it posed new challenges. In combination, those challenges require transit agencies to consider the role of public transportation as a public good, and how it can best respond to changes in traveler journey needs and journey patterns, and deliver services that reflect the needs, values and realities of the post-pandemic context.

With public transit ridership changing and fare revenues declining, the transit industry needs to identify ways to restore ridership by, in part, restoring confidence in its service offerings, as it turns its focus from pandemic response to economic recovery.

In 2021, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) was awarded a Federal Transit Administration competitive grant to develop a National Transit Adaptation Strategy (NTAS). The primary objective for this project is the development of tools and data-supported initiatives that any U.S. transit agency may implement to rebuild confidence in public transit and quickly drive-up ridership.

The National Transit Adaptation Strategy project is comprised of four phases: Phase I—a futures report that identifies possible futures to help transit agencies set a path toward the most probable future scenario, Phase II—a ridership persona report which identifies four public transit user personas that provide the industry with key market segments to understand current and potential riders, Phase III—a marketing campaign and messaging package which transit agencies can use to target specific rider personas given anticipated future scenarios to increase system ridership, and Phase IV—a ridership data model which transit agencies can use to model potential ridership scenarios based on various intervention strategies.

This report on Phase III of the National Transit Adaptation Strategy applies the lessons from NTAS Phase I and Phase II to an actionable strategy: deploying a marketing campaign in support of choosing public transit. This report explores the motivation to pursue marketing of public transit, the objectives of such a marketing campaign, which demographics and personas identified in Phase II are best suited to receive such a campaign, and assesses the real-world implementation of the campaign materials developed. The report also includes a Campaign Deployment Toolkit which any public transit operator may freely use to deploy the developed campaign on their own systems, including the marketing assets.

Acknowledgments

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The findings and recommendations of this report are SFMTA's and do not necessarily reflect the views of those listed below. Any errors are the authors' alone.

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Abstract

NTAS Phase I imagined possible future scenarios, and Phase II described rider personas to populate and understand those possible scenarios. Phase III uses this information to form actionable steps agencies can take to deploy an intervention in the form of a marketing campaign to encourage increased use of public transit. The SFMTA partnered with Civic Edge Consulting and MIG Inc. who provided creative services in development of the campaign that would promote increased use of public transit, targeting the demographics most likely to have some familiarity with using public transit but, for one reason or another, may not be choosing to ride. MIG created a campaign called “Together We Go,” which promotes a shift of awareness and attitudes in a positive way towards public transportation and mobility by emphasizing the benefits, reliability and ease of public transit with the goal of encouraging the public to increase public transit use. The campaign also establishes a toolkit that any transit agency can utilize to deploy the campaign in their own markets, including campaign artwork that is freely available on the NTAS project website.

Once the campaign theme, message, and visual material were developed, the SFMTA contacted public transit agencies across the USA and offered deployment of the campaign on their respective ad networks at no cost to those agencies. The Chicago Transportation Authority (CTA) and Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (CapMetro) agencies in Chicago, IL and Austin, TX, respectively, agreed to participate, and on May 19, 2025, the campaign was deployed in Austin, Chicago, and San Francisco. The campaign was considered a success, reaching over 1.5 million people and having a click-through rate (CTR) exceeding average CTRs. Phase IV of the NTAS project developed a Data Model to compare observed ridership following interventions like the marketing campaign with expected ridership without a campaign; application of this model to the “Together We Go” campaign correlated with increases in weekend ridership.

Executive Summary

In October 2020, the Federal Transit Administration issued a NOFO “The Public Transportation COVID-19 Research Demonstration Grant Program,” and in September 2021 awarded the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency funding (Grant # CA-2021-183/SFMTA Project C19) for a National Transit Adaptation Strategy. A summary of the Campaign phase (Phase III) of this project is provided in this report.

Current post-pandemic ridership recovery has stagnated nationally around 75%, and with reduced commuting demand due to remote and hybrid work, the NTAS team believes that roughly the same number of people are using transit as before the pandemic, but are now using it less frequently, resulting in a decrease in trips from pre-pandemic levels. This means, critically, that American transit agencies need to generate an increase in transit trips to reach greater financial stability. This will be accomplished either by encouraging existing users to ride more often or by acquiring new users.

This report is divided into five sections:

(1) a summary of lessons learned from Phases I and II which inform the decision to pursue a marketing campaign,

(2) a detailed explanation of why marketing campaigns are a strong choice of intervention for struggling transit agencies,

(3) an outline of the objectives of a campaign encouraging increased use of public transit including an explanation of the demographics who should be targeted in such a campaign,

(4) an evaluation of a real-world deployment of the campaign, and concludes with

(5) a Campaign Deployment Toolkit that any transit agency can customize to run the developed campaign in their ad market.

Lessons from NTAS

Phase I and Phase II

The first and second phases of the National Transit Adaptation Strategy have imagined the ways possible future societal scenarios could impact public transit and identified methods for understanding the people who will inhabit those possible futures.

Lessons from Phase I – Future Scenarios

NTAS Phase I imagines possible futures that transit agencies may face in the coming decades. Phase I includes four final reports: a Future Forces Report which identifies the most probable principle drivers of change in the near and far future, a Future Scenario Report which uses the forces identified in the Future Forces Report to develop five potential scenarios for public transit agencies, an interactive Map of the Future which transit agencies can use to explore possible futures and subsequent courses of action, and a final summary report submitted and published by the Federal Transit Administration.

There are 5 possible future scenarios developed in Phase I:

- 1. Shifting to Market-Based Mobility Systems:** the transportation marketplace shifts from a mixture of publicly and privately owned and operated systems to a fully privatized transportation landscape where prices are determined by market forces.
- 2. Pioneering a New Civic Norm:** transportation systems become central in delivering 'people-first' policies and practices, with a scaled micro-mobility market adopted and prioritized over car ownership, all in service of improving living conditions for all.
- 3. Centering Resilience:** public transportation becomes reimagined as a lever for building resilience and future-readiness as cities embrace the principles of equity, sustainability, and foresight to respond to calls for justice.
- 4. Prioritizing Social Cohesion:** reimagines public transit as a purveyor of social cohesion in response to systemic failures to deliver on promises to address geographic segregation, inequality, and violence, in an attempt to create a vibrant city.
- 5. Embedding Regeneration:** repurposing transit agencies into climate action organizations to respond to the deep social and economic inequalities which result in extreme weather and climate emergencies by using mobility as a force for climate and community action.

Three key lessons to take away from NTAS Phase I are:

- 1.** Conventional peak hours (9-to-5) commute trips have declined since 2019.
- 2.** Trips are more evenly distributed throughout the day following the pandemic, including increased trips in the evenings and on weekends.
- 3.** Agencies need to take actions in the form of interventions to continue to recover and grow ridership.

While the future scenarios identified during NTAS Phase I imagine the transportation landscape 10 to 20 years into the future, the transportation landscape has already undergone significant changes following the COVID-19 Pandemic. Those changes include both a large decline in conventional peak hours of 9-to-5 commute trips and an increase in trips outside of those historic peak times, and these changes create an environment for which the operational tactics public transit agencies have relied on previously are no longer suitable. Therefore, transit agencies need to take action, in the form of interventions of many types, to continue to operate services and meet the transportation needs of the people they serve.

Interventions can be loosely understood as intentional actions which are intended to produce certain outcomes. This concept of interventions, and the various forms and types at the disposal of US transit agencies, are expanded upon in the NTAS Phase IV Report and Phase IV Appendix 1, both of which can be found on the [NTAS Phase IV project website](#). The marketing campaign described in this Phase III report is one of many potential interventions transit agencies may implement. The scenarios that were developed in Phase I informed the marketing messages and campaign approach described in this report.

Lessons from Phase II – Personas

Phase II argues that public transit agencies across the country should adopt a persona-centric approach to address the diverse needs of various riders. By understanding the distinct preferences and requirements of Transit System Navigators, Versatile Travelers, Event Driven Explorers, and Transit Sympathizers, transit organizations can tailor their services and strategies to enhance the attractiveness of public transportation.

Two key lessons to take away from NTAS Phase II are:

1. Transit agencies should adopt a persona-centric approach to address rider needs.
2. Transit agencies should focus on actionable and impactful interventions.

After establishing the need for interventions to support possible future scenarios, NTAS proposes use of ‘personas,’ theoretical exemplary rider categories to which existing and potential system users can be classified, to design interventions to best meet the needs of persona types.

Personas are a tool utilized in various design disciplines, notable in the design of digital tools and services (referred to as ‘product design’ in the technology industry). This larger category of product design contains sub-fields of user experience design and research, user interface design, and product marketing. All these fields utilize personas to research, iterate, and understand the needs of customers and to develop solutions to address those needs.

More commonly utilized in the private sector, NTAS proposes that public sector transit agencies adopt this market research approach and utilize personas to understand the people currently served by public transit and those who could be served.

The NTAS Phase II Report, developed in partnership with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) using information from Transit and the National Transit Database (NTD), defined four public transit rider personas for the United States transit market that US agencies should adopt for use during deployment of interventions.

- **Persona A - Transit System Navigator:** a user who relies on public transportation for their daily activities. They may not have access to a personal vehicle or may be unable to and/or choose not to drive. Transit System Navigators are experts in navigating the public transportation system and use it for a variety of purposes, including commuting to work, running errands, and socializing.
- **Persona B - Versatile Traveler:** a user whose transportation preference is flexible and adaptable and who utilizes a variety of transportation modes based on their specific needs and preferences. They may use public transit for some trips, cycling or walking for others, and ride-hailing services or car rentals for occasional trips. Versatile Travelers value convenience and efficiency, and they are always looking for the best way to get around.
- **Persona C - Event Driven Explorer:** a user who primarily uses public transportation for events and destinations where it is more convenient or efficient than driving, such as a regular commute, sporting events, concerts, festivals, or destinations with limited parking and adequate public transit access. This persona uses public transit for one specific type of destination but does not typically consider transit for other destinations or trip types.
- **Persona D - Transit Sympathizer:** a user who rarely, if ever, uses public transportation. They may support public transit in principle, but they prefer to use a car for their transportation needs. Transit Sympathizers may use public transit for specific occasions, such as business and leisure trips or journeys to airports, but they do not see it as a viable option for their commute or daily activities.

These personas are intended to assist in deploying various forms of interventions. Some personas already use public transit regularly, while others use it infrequently or only for specific use cases, and others still almost never use public transit. Therefore, some riders will require more effort—and therefore higher costs—to convert into more frequent users of public transit, but others, notably Personas B and C, will require less effort—and therefore lower costs—to increase their use of public transit.

Understanding and identifying the types of riders who will be most impacted by the different forms of interventions can help agencies ensure that their actions have the most benefit for dollars spent. During fiscally constrained periods where outside funding is limited, efficient spending with measurable and effective outcomes is critical for transit agencies.

Transit agencies find themselves in a similar position to private sector companies who seek to acquire customers, and therefore, transit agencies should adopt tactics demonstrated to be effective by the private sector, particularly deploying marketing campaigns to encourage increased use of public transit.

Why public transit needs marketing

The private car is seen as the default for personal mobility and is often equated with 'freedom,' even in urban areas where public transit can be more competitive by price, time, or both. Car ownership is expensive, costing American car owners an average of more than \$12,000 per year,¹ and those sunk costs can motivate residents of areas with adequate public transit to choose their private cars and to not consider using public transit at all, even in cases when public transit may be faster or less expensive than driving.

American transit operators often assume that the population of users of their systems are relatively static. Agencies often assume that the people who are willing to use public transit are those who already do, and that those who don't already choose public transit would not be able to be convinced to make the switch, thereby justifying the choice to focus only on those who already ride. Of course, it is critical to serve the needs of those who already ride, especially following the changes in commute patterns and ridership demographics following the COVID-19 pandemic where many 'choice' riders (those who have alternatives, usually a private car), decreased their public transit use or abandoned public transit entirely. However, public transit faces strong competition from both the private car and from a growing private transportation sector (ride-hailing companies like Uber, Lyft, and Waymo in the USA).

A decline in use of public transit before the pandemic correlated with an increase in market share of these ride-hailing services. These private companies explicitly compete with public transit and take more aggressive approaches to marketing directly to prospective users. Given that these companies were in their infancy, they needed to focus on acquiring new users through marketing, something mass transit operators have previously not prioritized, but will need to begin doing to mitigate losses of market share to ride-hailing services and other factors.

Mentalities and language more commonly used in marketing settings can be useful for transit agencies to adopt as they more deliberately compete with the private car and with private sector transportation. In the private sector, corporations devote extensive resources to growth, often having entire divisions of companies dedicated specifically to studying how to acquire new users and how to retain existing and new users to continue to grow their business. Private companies have a more direct incentive to chase growth than public agencies do, but in a world with stiff competition from the private sector and declining support from the federal government, public agencies need to adopt some of these tactics in order to continue running service. This is why public transit operators need to seriously consider marketing their services directly to consumers.

1. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, "Average Cost of Owning and Operating an Automobile," March 27, 2025, <https://www.bts.gov/content/average-cost-owning-and-operating-automobilea-assuming-15000-vehicle-miles-year>.

Specific benefits of Marketing

Compared to the other types of interventions transit agencies can take to respond to the decreased demand and utilization of public transit, marketing is significantly less expensive and able to be deployed more quickly.

Lowest cost intervention

Marketing campaigns, aside from printing physical signs for campaigns utilizing billboards and cards on vehicles, do not require any hard costs, and deliverables can be produced without onboarding of new staff provided the agency deploying a marketing campaign has public relations staff who can manage the campaign. In the case of NTAS, the SFMTA spent less than \$100,000 on development of campaign assets which can be reused at any time. The NTAS project makes these evergreen assets available to any transit agency who wishes to run the campaign on their own system, making this specific campaign an even greater value proposition to transit agencies as the only costs to deploy will be those associated with a media buy (utilization of the ad network, printing costs when necessary, and staff time to manage). These costs are orders of magnitude less than other forms of interventions such as hiring additional staff, making service and operational changes, or building system and network expansions.

Quick implementation timeline

Other types of interventions can take months or years to implement. Service expansions require extensive planning, staffing, and—in some cases—capital procurement costs (system or fleet expansions). Expanded staff and security systems require hiring processes that, in the public sector, can take several months to complete. Changes to fare and payment policies can require support and protection from local and state politicians and legislatures, support that can be precarious and may require adherence to slow and strict legislative calendars.

Marketing campaigns can be rolled out in a matter of weeks, especially if agencies utilize the completed assets freely provided by the National Transit Adaptation Strategy. Deployment timelines can vary based on available funds for media buys, and results of the campaign can be measured using the Data Model developed in NTAS Phase IV within 12 weeks of campaign launch dates.

Campaign Objectives

A marketing campaign in favor of public transit is, at its core, intended to increase system ridership, though the specifics of how this goal is achieved are more complex. Given that before the COVID-19 pandemic, transit agencies tended to primarily support peak period commuters, one might aim to replicate those pre-COVID condition. But demand for the conventional 9-to-5 commuting journey has reduced, as many workplaces have shifted to permitting hybrid or fully remote working for jobs that can be performed without being in person. Agencies must accept this reality and adjust objectives accordingly. 9-to-5 commute trips from residential areas outside of city centers to job centers in urban cores do not compose a majority of trips made by people in US cities; many trips are made outside of these times and outside of urban centers, and these are the types of trips that public transit should aim to compete for.

The challenges and struggles public transit operators faced during the COVID-19 pandemic were widely reported on, but transit agencies' responses to these challenges in more recent years have not been as widely publicized. Beliefs that public transit is unsafe, ineffective, or otherwise undesirable persist despite agencies' efforts to improve safety, cleanliness, restructure networks to better serve changes in travel demand, and the macro-trend of decreased crime in the United States following a spike during the pandemic. Therefore, the public relations challenges that public transit faces can be understood in two major categories: *awareness and perception*.

Increasing awareness

With public transit's national mode share of commute trips at 3.7%² in 2024, public transit is often not considered by most Americans, and if transit agencies want to increase ridership to increase revenues to stay operational, then that needs to change. Many parts of the USA are rural and cannot be efficiently served by public transit, but many urban areas in the USA still have high car use rates where public transit can be a viable option by the metrics of cost, time, community, and convenience.

Many Americans simply do not consider riding public transit at all, or don't consider using transit for trips outside of commutes. Trips to grocery stores, recreational destinations, medical appointments, and many other destinations can all be carried out with a combination of walking and public transit in many places in the USA, but due to the instinct to carry on one's status quo, most Americans don't know to think of public transit for those trips and assume that a car is the optimal transportation choice. NTAS postulates that if more people were aware of the competitive advantages of public transit, then more people would choose transit.

2. US Census Bureau, "United States Commuting At A Glance: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates," Census.Gov, accessed November 7, 2025, <https://www.census.gov/topics/employment/commuting/guidance/acs-1yr.html>

Changing perception

Public transit is often perceived negatively by non-users in the USA. With narratives about physical danger, unreliable and inadequate service, and generally poor quality common in media, which influences public opinion, achieving increased confidence in public transit is an uphill battle. To support the goal of increasing ridership, agencies will need to shift attitudes about public transit. NTAS proposes that, in addition to other value propositions relating to cost, travel time, and convenience, agencies should highlight public transit's capacity to foster community connection. Building deeper support for transit's societal role can help agencies in the short term by motivating more use and can help agencies in the long term as deeper support for transit can motivate people to show up for elections and vote in favor of measures to fund public transit, which will be needed as federal and state funding sources recede with time.

Public transit's capacity to foster community connection became a central theme to the campaign developed, with the campaign material highlighting the way that public transit brings people together. To further develop these ideas, SFMTA staff created a Campaign Creative Brief and Campaign Messaging Framework, available as appendices to this report. Those reports describe in detail the techniques and approaches proposed in a marketing campaign to promote confidence in, support of, and increased use of public transit.

The Campaign Messaging Framework provides a tool to be used to develop and refine the way a brand is remembered and actioned. Such a framework is essential to building a successful campaign because messaging frameworks can help to create a more cohesive and effective communications strategy which resonates with customers and drives results.

The Campaign Creative Brief describes the specific objectives of the marketing campaign, identifying the challenge that it will be to shift awareness, human behavior and attitudes towards public transportation and mobility. The Creative Brief also identifies which audiences would respond best to such a campaign, and explores possible concept statements, key messages, and calls to action.

Using Rider Personas

The rider personas developed in NTAS Phase II are the primary method for market segmentation which will allow transit agencies to precisely target marketing campaigns to reach those who are most likely to consider, or reconsider, using public transit. The NTAS team identified that between the four personas, the Versatile Traveler (Persona B) and the Event Driven Explorer (Persona C) are the best positioned to become more frequent users of public transit and therefore should be the target for a campaign encouraging increased public transit use. This is because, unlike the Transit Sympathizer (Persona D), Versatile Travelers and Event Driven Explorers already know to some degree how to use public transit, and therefore the obstacle to getting those personas onto transit more regularly is lower than for Transit Sympathizers.

Transit System Navigators are also not the target demographic for a transit support campaign, but for the opposite reason—these riders already depend on public transit for most trips and often do not have viable alternatives to using public transit (don't or can't drive), so these users already understand the importance of public transit and do not need to be convinced to use transit more frequently.

Together We Go



Figure 1.1: “Together We Go” Horizontal Bus Card

After the SFMTA developed the Campaign Messaging Framework and the Campaign Creative Brief, the SFMTA partnered with MIG, Inc. and Civic Edge Consulting to produce a marketing campaign using the material and objectives the SFMTA developed. Named “Together We Go,” this campaign was designed to showcase how buses and trains do much more than get riders to destinations. This campaign is designed to be usable by any US transit agency, appealing to general themes associated with using public transit, and is designed to be ‘evergreen,’ not seasonally dependent and therefore able to be effectively deployed at any time of year.

The campaign has three major objectives. First, to shift awareness and attitudes in a positive way towards public transportation and mobility. Second, to emphasize the benefits, reliability and ease of public transit, with the goal of encouraging the public to ride transit again. Third, to establish a campaign look and feel as a template to build from for use in additional transit markets.

The campaign is specifically designed to appeal to the Event Driven Explorer and Versatile Traveler Persona groups, and the campaign creative and messaging are designed to work for both a geographically and transit agency-diverse audience. The campaign tone is designed to appeal to people’s sense of community and love for their neighborhood, shift the messaging focus from an agency-specific service to the human-centered experience, and convey that transit is how one can connect to their community.

The campaign is comprised of digital and print images with a bright and engaging illustrated aesthetic. This illustrative approach creates a universal look and feel that more easily can be deployed in various markets, and incorporates a map aesthetic, visually tying to the themes of connection via transit.

Campaign material for Together We Go was developed in the following formats: bus queen (horizontal), transit interior car card (horizontal), transit digital shelter poster (vertical), and animated social ad (square). Text on the physical and digital ads brings the point home: “Public transit is community – connecting us to people and places.”

Campaign Performance



Figure 1.2: Digital and Print Campaign Material in context

The ‘Together We Go’ campaign developed by the NTAS was deployed on the ad networks of three systems in the USA: the SFMTA Muni ad network in San Francisco, CA, the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) ad network in Chicago, IL, and the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (CapMetro) ad network in Austin, TX. The ad campaign was run on both print and digital networks, and on various types of formats, represented in Table 1.1. The campaign was deployed starting on May 19, 2025, and the digital campaign ran through June 20, 2025. Print campaign materials in the SFMTA ad spaces may remain up beyond the window of the digital campaign.

Table 1.1: Campaign Ad Type and Location Chart

	SFMTA San Francisco, CA	CTA Chicago, IL	CapMetro Austin, TX
Paid Digital	●		
Paid Social	●	●	●
Bus Kings & Queens	●	●	●
Light Rail	●		
Interior Car Cards	●		
Digital Transit Shelter	●		
Bike Share			●

The media buy—the dollar amount spent on an ad campaign—for the print ad distributions were provided by SFMTA’s ad network partners Clear Channel Outdoor and Intersection as in-kind contributions. Agencies can use capacity in their existing contracts or use underutilized ad space to minimize costs. Agencies with standing agreements with their ad network partners can leverage these agreements, as the SFMTA did, to deploy print ad campaigns at lower costs than might be possible.

The digital media buy represents a particularly strong return on investment, given the relatively low cost of deployment. The San Francisco market digital media buy was \$14,000, and both CTA and CapMetro each had a paid social ad buy of \$3,000 (\$6,000 total).

Campaign Survey

During campaign development, MIG, Inc. and Civic Edge Consulting identified for the benefits of actions to be taken by viewers of the ad. The ads had originally called ad viewers to click through to a landing page with information about the transit agency being advertised. Introducing a survey as part of this action allowed the campaign to collect information about public sentiment, which can be valuable to transit agencies running the campaign.

Through this survey, the SFMTA learned that a majority of respondents were exposed to the campaign via social media (65%), with other respondents finding the campaign through the following sources: outside of a bus: 15%, inside of a bus: 14%, bus stop/shelter: 11%, transit agency website: 9%, billboard: 4%. Younger audiences (18–30) were more likely to see ads on buses and social media, and older adults (65+) had lower exposure overall, especially online.

Most respondents (79%) felt that the following message best described how they see public transit in their communities: “Providing Accessible, Affordable, and High-Quality Transportation for All.” The 18–30 age group showed the strongest support for accessibility (95%) and livability (80%). Respondents reported being slightly more likely to use public transit after seeing the ads; when ranking likelihood to use public transit on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = much more likely to 5 = much less likely), the average score was 2.59.

Overall sentiment about the campaign was mixed. While some respondents appreciated the campaign’s message of inclusivity, accessibility, and community, many others expressed frustration with the disconnect between the campaign’s tone and their lived experiences with public transit—particularly around fare increases, service cuts, and cleanliness.

Respondent comments provide two major lessons. First, campaigns should emphasize community, accessibility, and the emotional value of transit in future messaging, and should highlight real stories of connection and inclusion. Second, passengers feel a strong desire for transparency, service improvements, and practical outcomes. Future campaigns should be paired with visible service enhancements and/or policy changes to build trust.

Civic Edge Consulting produced the “NTAS Online Survey Key Takeaways” (Appendix 4) survey performance report document, which elaborates on the points made above, and includes raw campaign response data.

Campaign Performance Reports

MIG Inc. was responsible for delivering reports about the campaign. These included the “SFMTA NTAS Together We Go Campaign – Digital Campaign Performance Memo” ([Appendix 5](#)) document and the “Campaign Performance Report” ([Appendix 6](#)) prepared by Digital Marketing Group (DMG), both of which are available for download on the NTAS Phase III webpage.

Key takeaways from campaign performance reports:

1. The campaign had an overall click-through-rate (CTR) above the industry average and generated more than 1.6 million impressions.
2. Pushing the campaign to a broader audience is recommended, as when the marketing team did this, they saw a 35% increase in clicks.
3. Campaign material should be customized to fit the specific call to action developed.

Data Model

Phase IV of the National Transit Adaptation Strategy is comprised of two sections; first, an analytical framework to assess the effectiveness of transit system interventions, and second, a qualitative assessment of possible transit system interventions and their respective impacts on the transit rider personas identified in NTAS Phase II.

The analytical framework, created by SFMTA's research partners at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), provides transit agencies with a data model that can be used to project average weekday and weekend ridership after an identified intervention point in which the model assumes that no interventions are made to establish a baseline. This assumed projection without the intervention can then be compared to actual ridership data following an intervention to assess whether or not there is correlation between intervention implementation and ridership outcomes.

Using ridership data from SFMTA, CapMetro, and CTA from before the campaign deployment window (6/3/2024 to 5/18/2025), project partners at MIT created a time-series model to predict what ridership 'should' have been without any interventions over the 12-week period following campaign deployment (5/19/2025 to 8/11/2025). With real-world 'factual' data and p 'counterfactual' data predicted from the model, agencies can measure effectiveness of an intervention, including a marketing campaign like "Together We Go." Note that CapMetro reduces service over the summer months during which the "Together We Go" campaign was deployed in Austin, making the ridership data collected unsuitable for comparison using this model.

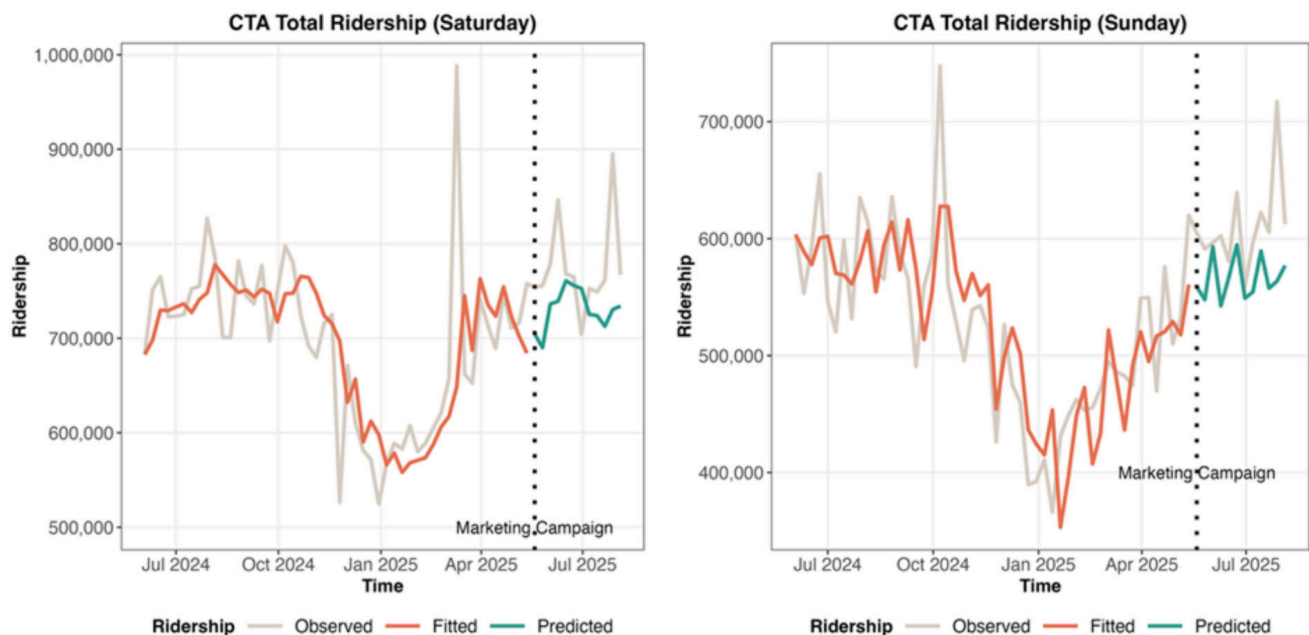


Figure 1.3: CTA observed and predicted ridership for Saturdays and Sundays.

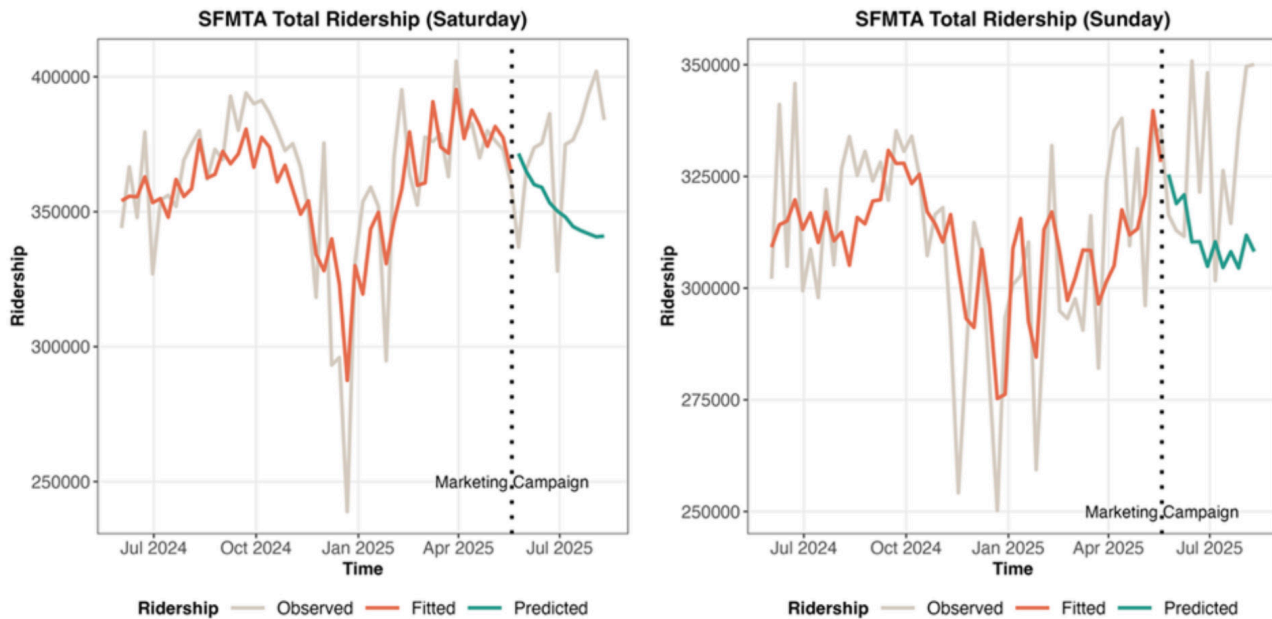


Figure 1.4: SFMTA observed and predicted ridership for Saturdays and Sundays.

The Marketing Campaign in Chicago and San Francisco positively influenced Saturday and Sunday ridership. The Marketing Campaign may first influence non-work travel on weekends and may take longer time or more effort (e.g., more frequent service, improve safety) to observe significant changes in weekday ridership. Learn more about the “Together We Go” campaign impacts on ridership in markets where the campaign was deployed in [Appendix 7](#) - NTAS Phase III Internal Analysis of Marketing Campaign.

Any agency who wants to utilize this data model to perform similar analysis can do so by accessing the code for the data model on the [NTAS Phase IV webpage](#), and by reading the NTAS Phase IV Report, available on the [NTAS project webpage](#).

Campaign Toolkit



Figure 1.5: “Together We Go” Campaign Toolkit Cover Image

NTAS Phase III developed a campaign toolkit in the form of a guide that transit agencies can use when deciding how best to deploy the ‘Together We Go’ campaign in their own markets. Framed as a series of guiding questions, the document will point users toward the best approach given their agency’s specific set of conditions.

The Campaign Toolkit ([Appendix 1](#)) is published on the [NTAS Phase III webpage](#). Together We Go campaign assets that agencies can customize are also available for download from that webpage.

Conclusion

Transit agencies, faced with steep competition from private vehicle ownership and from the emerging private transportation market, need to take steps previously not taken in order to continue existing. With uncertainty of funding for public transit, agencies need to ensure that they operate with optimal efficiency and are taking steps to grow their ridership base and increase system utilization. Marketing should be a tool utilized by transit agencies to achieve these goals.

The “Together We Go” campaign created in NTAS Phase III is a versatile and evergreen marketing campaign that transit agencies can modify and deploy as they see fit. The campaign, when deployed in Chicago and San Francisco, appeared to have a positive impact on weekend ridership.

Marketing Campaigns represent a cost-effective form of intervention that transit agencies can take when facing decreased public trust and ridership. Leveraging a campaign to improve public sentiment about public transit can help in the short term by motivating people to choose transit, and can also help in the longer term by giving people a more positive view of public transit which can influence decisions about politically supporting public transit, such as voting for ballot measures to fund transit and voting for pro-transit political figures for public office.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Campaign Toolkit

<https://www.sfmta.com/reports/appendix-1-campaign-toolkit>

Appendix 2 - Campaign Creative Brief

<https://www.sfmta.com/reports/appendix-2-campaign-creative-brief>

Appendix 3 - Messaging Framework

<https://www.sfmta.com/reports/appendix-3-messaging-framework>

Appendix 4 - NTAS Online Survey Key Takeaways and Survey Data

<https://www.sfmta.com/reports/appendix-4-ntas-online-survey-key-takeaways>

Appendix 5 - SFMTA NTAS Together We Go Campaign – Digital Campaign Performance Memo

<https://www.sfmta.com/reports/appendix-5-digital-campaign-performance-memo-ntas-together-we-go>

Appendix 6 - Campaign Performance Report

<https://www.sfmta.com/reports/appendix-6-campaign-performance-report>

Appendix 7 - NTAS Phase III Internal Analysis of Marketing Campaign

<https://www.sfmta.com/reports/appendix-7-ntas-phase-iii-internal-analysis-marketing-campaign>

Acronyms and Glossary

NTAS: National Transit Adaptation Strategy

FTA: Federal Transit Administration

MIT: Massachusetts Institute of Technology

NOFO: Notice of Funding Opportunity

SFMTA: The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency

CTA: Chicago Transportation Authority (Chicago, IL)

CapMetro: Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Austin, TX)

Transit: A mobile app which provides real-time public transit information.

Intervention: Actions taken by transit agencies that introduce new or modified policy or marketing approaches intended to improve transit system performance.

Legacy transit systems: Systems in major U.S. metropolitan areas since before 1955 and historically based upon a streetcar system or pre-existing rail network designed to serve a downtown business core.

Transformative transit systems: Systems which exist in mid-size and major U.S. metropolitan areas, began operating after 1955, and have seen significant growth and system expansion in the last 20 years.

Rural and connector transit systems: Systems found outside of mid or major metropolitan areas, and which operate as a connector service, began operating after 1955, and serve less than 500,000 riders annually.

Transit System Navigator: Public transit riders who rely on public transportation for their daily activities due to a lack of access to a personal vehicle or the inability to drive, for some or all trips.

Versatile Traveler: Individuals with an adaptable and versatile approach to transportation who utilize various mobility options based on specific purposes and situations, making decisions that prioritize convenience, cost-effectiveness, and practicality.

Event-Driven Explorer: A transit user who primarily uses public transportation for pre-determined events and destinations where it is more convenient, efficient, or cost-effective than driving.

Transit Sympathizer: Individuals who seldom, if ever, utilize public transit for their daily needs, though they may express support for transit in surveys or other contexts.

Media Buy: Spending on a media campaign, measured in currency units.

References

Bureau of Transportation Statistics. "Average Cost of Owning and Operating an Automobile." March 27, 2025. <https://www.bts.gov/content/average-cost-owning-and-operating-automobilea-assuming-15000-vehicle-miles-year>.

US Census Bureau. "United States Commuting At A Glance: American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates." Census.Gov. Accessed November 7, 2025. <https://www.census.gov/topics/employment/commuting/guidance/acs-1yr.html>.

