

Connecting WITH Young Riders

Realizing the vital importance of attracting young people — to both ride and to better understand and support community and public transit — operators of all sizes in all types of communities are reaching out to youth in a number of innovative and effective ways. In specifically targeting young community members and their mobility needs, transit systems can expand ridership, provide a safe mobility alternative attractive to busy parents and forge both present and future transit supporters and advocates across generations.

We sampled various communications and service innovations undertaken around the nation to reach young riders. Not surprisingly, we found a number of clever concepts that once again spotlight the resourceful nature of community and public transportation. Most of these incorporate several common themes in delivering their mobility message to young people.



Freedom

Independence is critical to teenagers, and transit is the vehicle to deliver it. When the bus or train goes where teens want, when they want, they no longer have to rely on Mom or Dad or a sibling or friend to chauffeur them around. This message resonates strongly with Mom and Dad, too!

DART First State in Delaware reaches out to both young people and their parents. Mobility options for active youth. Liberation for the beleaguered chauffeur.

San Mateo County Transit District, known to locals as SamTrans, delivers a similar message in California's Bay Area.



Source: DART First State
www.dartfirststate.com/flyer/teendrivers



Source: Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority <http://www.psta.net/youthpass.htm>

Wallet

Most young people don't have substantial disposable income, so they're looking for ways to save money. By choosing transit, they save on gas, insurance and maintenance. And if transit offers them a special deal — a youth fare, a summer pass — the incentive is even greater.

For only \$25, young riders on Florida's central Gulf Coast can use an easy Haul Pass to visit friends, go to the beach, find a job and make money all summer long on Pinellas SunCoast Transit Authority routes. Equally as important, it can save parents money too!



Source: Sun Metro http://www.eelpasotexas.gov/sunmetro/print_sunspff.asp



Free Goodies

Young riders love free stuff. A water bottle with your pass purchase. A handy caribiner sports clip that attaches your pass to your backpack. A colorful pen with the transit system's web address and phone number.

And how about discounted movie passes? A free game at the bowling alley? Reduced admission to the water park? Hey, retailers see a market to tap into here, too, and transit systems have successfully partnered with area busi-

nesses, who offer freebies, discounts and special offers with the purchase of a bus pass.

For example, teens can explore El Paso — and eat free ice cream and pretzels, bowl a free game, take a free tennis lesson and visit a state historic site free — with their Sun Metro Fun Pass.

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Source: Intercity Transit <http://www.intercitytransit.com/page.cfm?ID=0048>

Simplicity

Young people, like most of us, will choose transit when the ride is simple, approachable and effective. Routes, schedules and fares must be easy to understand, convenient passes must be available and sold in convenient locations, and the system must go where kids want to go when they want to go. Many transit systems are successfully educating youth about their mobility options with school outreach and education programs. Others emphasize teen participation through games and contests. User-friendly brochures and maps are helpful, but in the

21st Century — when youths spend an average of 17 hours a week on the Internet — the transit message will reach the most teens via the Internet.

If you're a teen in Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater, Yelm or the South Puget Sound Region of Washington State, Intercity Transit has made it easy to choose transit to make your connection. Meeting friends at Aztec Lanes to bowl a few games? You can get there on Route 60, 62A and 62B. Not sure where or when to get on board? Each route is hyperlinked to a route map and schedule. And when it's time to head to class, Intercity's School Tools offers a list of area schools with nearby routes.

The Washington (D.C.) Metropolitan Area Transit Authority makes mobility simple. The on-line Ride Guide lets passengers 1) enter starting and ending locations, 2) enter date and time and 3) Metro presents the viewer with one or more itinerary options, complete with line, schedule and fare details.



Source: Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority <http://rideguide.wmata.com/>



Photo courtesy Dan Bower, Portland Office of Transportation

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Unsure of your transit acumen? Unfamiliar with the bus? Uneasy with maps and schedules? The City of Portland's Transportation Options group teamed with TriMet to turn a transit lesson into a fun scavenger hunt. On the Teen Transit Adventure, youth were given clues to destinations, and — with their TriMet day pass, map and schedule in hand — they covered the city by bus, earning prizes and picking up new clues. A great way to get both young people and local businesses excited about transit.



Photo courtesy Yuba-Sutter Transit

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Image

A top concern for young people: What will my friends think? Transit must “cool.” Transit has an image to maintain with young riders. And the best image consultants are young riders themselves. Surveys. School visits. Advisory councils. Website feedback. Design contests.

Space Coast Area Transit — known by locals as SCAT — lets Brevard County, Florida, teens know that “This is not your father’s bus system!” Evening and weekend service. Air-conditioned vehicles. Convenient bike racks. Want to bring your surfboard? Go for it!

Yuba-Sutter Transit’s Art Bus involves Yuba City and Marysville, California, young riders in promoting the Summer Youth Bus Pass Program. Art students from area high schools design artwork and paint a transit vehicle themselves. The longevity of their masterpiece depends on the weather forecast (see photo above and at right).

Fashion-conscious? Teens? Always. Utah Transit Authority’s 2002 Summer Youth Pass design let young passengers ride in a new style. The dog-tag necklace was durable, easy to wear and, well, cool. 🚌

