

Ventura County Short Range Transit Plan 2025-2034

Partnership Plan



Prepared for:

Ventura County Transportation Commission

June 16, 2025 - DRAFT

This page left intentionally blank.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Partnership Plan | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Why Establish a Partnership Plan? | 1 |
| Federal and State Authorizations | 2 |
| Partners to Support Ventura County’s Public Transportation Community | 4 |
| Building Partnerships..... | 4 |
| Evaluating the Countywide Array of Stakeholders | 5 |
| Venues for Partner Strengthening and Partner Communication | 7 |
| Mapping Partner Relationships to Target Resources | 8 |
| Communication Strategies | 14 |
| Understanding Your Audience to Design Effective Communication Tools..... | 14 |
| Crafting Countywide Transit Messaging..... | 16 |
| Frequency and Types of Communication | 19 |
| Understanding Incentives to Invite and Encourage Engagement | 20 |
| Actions to Strengthen Partnerships..... | 22 |
| Determining Resources to Support the Partnership Function | 22 |
| Building Lists and Building Relationships..... | 23 |
| Developing Countywide Informational Tools | 25 |

INTRODUCTION

The overarching goal of public transportation improvements is to grow ridership by all possible means. Partnerships are one such avenue. This Partnership Plan presents a construct for developing and strengthening partnerships between the County’s public transportation providers and community-based organizations serving a wide range of Ventura County citizens and travelers.

Much of the activity described in this Plan is already undertaken by VCTC but can be strengthened, can be made more visible and explicit and expanded to new partners. All stakeholders in the County have a role in supporting this work. This Plan details the array of partners and activities VCTC, the transit operators and others can address to intentionally and cohesively to carry out and help realize the benefits of increased transit use.

Why Establish a Partnership Plan?

OBJECTIVE

Defining a framework for meaningful and insightful engagement between public transit and non-transit organizations is the primary objective of the Partnership Plan. The Plan addresses three key components:

1. Engaging current and potential partners across multiple sectors,
2. Promoting awareness and engagement around all-things transit, and
3. Systematically strengthening and maintaining relationships among stakeholder partners to enhance and sustain benefits to all parties.

MOTIVATIONS

Enhancing mobility for communities and accessing new riders are key motivations for building strong partnerships between public transit agencies and community organizations of all types. Community-based organizations are often the “trusted messengers” who can pass along information to their constituents on how-to-use and where-to-find public transit services. Such communication sometimes can fall flat when community-based organizations (a) do not feel confident in delivering transit-related information to their constituents; (b) are not aware if services have changed, dissolved or expanded; and (c) do not know where to get information. This Plan intends to alleviate those issues through clear and strategic messaging that is channeled through mutually beneficial relationships.

Strengthened partnerships can improve access. This supports public transit in communicating with individuals that transit staff might not otherwise reach. Through neighborhood associations, coalitions of organizations, community colleges, adult education venues, public schools, libraries, employers and more, there is an opportunity for VCTC and the public transit operators of Ventura County to deepen their communications network. More people can be reached to inform them of new transit services, route changes, improved connections, fare discounts and free fare opportunities. To do so effectively, these partnerships must be bi-directional, offering value to existing and new partners.

This Plan proposes stronger, countywide public engagement processes through a broadened information network that actively supports partnerships. Fundamentally, this will aid Ventura County residents as they seek to discover what public transportation services offer and will encourage new transit ridership. In time, this may also support expanding transit's funding base to increase transit coverage and frequency.

Federal and State Authorizations

The Partnership Plan extends Federal and state requirements, and previously developed local plans, to improve the usefulness of public transit's community engagement.

Federal law, **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**, establishes public engagement requirements on public transit. For example, Title VI standards related to engagement of limited-English proficiency and underserved communities are required of all Ventura County transit operators. Additional rules also apply to the larger operators operating 50 or more fixed route vehicles in peak service and serving a population of 200,000 or more in an Urbanized Area (UZA).

The California Transportation Development Act (TDA), through Public Utilities Code (PUC) Section 99241, requires that counties hold annual public hearings to invite the public to comment on unmet transit needs. Counties then evaluate those public comments to determine if the requests can be reasonably met. VCTC widely notices these hearings in multiple languages and on various communication platforms (e.g. digital, print, etc.) to ensure broad-based input from residents across the County. The process only applies to those cities not spending all of their TDA on transit purposes (Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Santa Paula, Thousand Oaks) but VCTC solicits feedback throughout the county.

Other VCTC planning studies and those undertaken by county's transit operators require public outreach in varying forms. These include **Short Range Transit Plans, Comprehensive Operational Analyses, Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans**, and

others. VCTC and the transit operators can leverage these requirements to strengthen partnerships across the County. These plans are addressed in the SRTP Gaps and Opportunities report.

PARTNERS TO SUPPORT VENTURA COUNTY'S PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMUNITY

Building Partnerships

Two principles are useful to VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators in pursuing future partnerships and strengthening existing ones:

1. The partnership realizes an intersection of benefits; for example, there is benefit to the Ventura County transit operators in securing access to potential riders and benefit to partners in improving mobility of its constituents.
2. The collaborative partnership is cultivated via some level of continuing interaction and exchange of information.

Effective partnerships will recognize the importance of satisfying both principles. Where VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators can offer something of value to their partners, this can promote trust. The value or benefit most readily offered is information. This can include:

- Information about the public transportation network and improvements being made
- Free fare promotions for target groups (e.g., free youth fares)
- Special fare promotions for all ridership (e.g., free fares on Transit Equity Day or Earth Day)
- General information on how to access public transportation
- Specific information on how to use electronic fare tools
- Specific information on how to use trip planning tools (i.e. Google Transit, Transit App, etc.)

Potential partners can be encouraged to see that such information will benefit their students, employees, human services clients and more. Additional benefits outlined for partners could include:

- Availability of FTA Section 5310 grant funding, for private, non-profits and municipalities to support transportation aiding for seniors and persons with disabilities
- Technical support in securing FTA Section 5310 grant funding awards

- Transit agency participation in partner fairs and community gatherings
- Training of agency personnel in how to plan trips or connect with public transit
- Discounted fare packages and subsidized fare opportunities

VCTC's existing working partnerships have focused heavily on collaboration with municipalities, by virtue of VCTC's mission of stewardship of the county's transportation resources. There has been expansion beyond that in VCTC partnership development related focused on youth, related to free youth fare opportunities while outreach and marketing to Spanish-language audiences focused on limited-English proficient contacts and other disadvantaged groups to support equitable access to public transit.

Evaluating the Countywide Array of Stakeholders

VCTC has considerable experience in working with community group and sectors they represent across its diverse County, as do the Ventura County transit operators. These include working with **affinity groups** in past *Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans* and *Comprehensive Transportation Plans* and with **limited-English proficient populations** and **neighborhood groups, with employee transportation coordinators** on transportation demand management initiatives. The Ventura County transit operators have their own, individual relationships with the local community groups.

In evaluating whom to reach out to, VCTC must consider a full breadth of sectors. Table 1 details three evaluation dimensions to consider in seeking or strengthening partner relations: the (a) the sector of representation, (b) demographics typically represented under that sector, and most importantly, (c) the type of outreach and engagement appropriate for the audience. These support outreach and engagement as strategic, not assuming a "one-size-fits-all" approach to participation.

Table 1, Sectors and Purposes-by-Sector for Outreach

| Sectors for Representation | Example Demographic | Outreach & Engagement Purposes |
|--|--|---|
| Specific Demographic Representation | Low-income Individuals, Veteran, Seniors | Transit-specific service, grant requirement |
| Disability Representation | Intellectual, Physical, Personal Care Attendants, Homecare help | Transit-specific service, grant requirement |
| Historically Disadvantaged Communities | Limited English proficient, persons of low-income | Ensuring current information is communicated to less visible groups, re: service change, expansion or reductions, fare changes, free fare days, etc. |
| Transit Operator Representation | Drivers, Dispatchers, Customer Service Representatives | Boots-on-the-ground perspective that is typically lacking in representation |
| General Public Representation | Choice riders, may not own a car, cannot drive | Ability to gain ridership outside of vulnerable populations already served |
| Education | Middle school, high school, community college and university students | Introducing younger demographics to transit, may not have a vehicle or cannot afford one |
| Employees | Employees who may confront limited worksite parking or long travel times to work | Introducing transportation demand management to employees (i.e. employer transit benefits), ways to reduce congestion, introduce sustainability and reduce parking facility expansion |
| Public Agency Stakeholders/Construction Updates/Congestion Issues | Public agency personnel with road network responsibilities, whose work may erode confidence in using transit | Understanding impacts of the road network and the built environment on public transit; build detour communication platform |

Market segmentation, thinking about these sectors and sub-groups, helps identify the methods and means for reaching different audiences to grow ridership. There are differing motivations for people across any demographic or affinity group who may want or need public transit. These include affordability, convenience, independence and access in reaching both local and distant destinations.

These differing motivations point to different messaging and approach strategies. Partnerships become important to accessing different markets. For example, school systems can help to connect with **young people** regarding their school and after-school trips. Employers can help to communicate with their **employees** and their recurring work trips, encouraging them maximize their take-home pay by relying on transit subsidies and employer-purchased bus passes. Human service organizations' information portals can connect with **seniors** and **persons with disabilities** who have an array of trip needs and special requirements. Similarly, they can reach **caretakers** and the **seniors** under their care to encourage them to leave home without a car.

Partnerships are a means both of accessing these market groups and of honing messaging to connect with key marketing segments. Strong, well-functioning partnerships improve both access to and outcomes with target groups, aiding them in finding and using public transit.

Venues for Partner Strengthening and Partner Communication

VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators use a wide array of venues to get out their messages and now to find and develop partners. The days of simply scheduling meetings and expecting professionals in ancillary sectors to attend are largely past. Venues for cultivating partnership relationships and identifying new ones must be sought in the field. Some of these may be on a regular schedule – such as predictable annual, quarterly or monthly events. Others lend themselves to the maintenance of a community partners’ calendar of special events.

These can include:

- Community fairs and special events
- Community college student and/or administration special events
- Coalition meetings, such as 211 Ventura sponsored for emergency services, youth services
- Library associations, such as County library meetings, gathering branch managers together
- Work fairs and employment-focused events
- Neighborhood councils meetings and working with Chambers of Commerce
- Community-oriented retail settings, such as restaurants or coffee shops,

Mapping Partner Relationships to Target Resources

PRIORITIZING PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES

To build and strengthen partnerships, tools for evaluating the status of partnerships by sector will be useful. Considering past and existing working relationships with stakeholders and prospective partners are critical factors. In which sectors do the Ventura County transit operators have existing working relationships? Where are these lacking or in need of strengthening? Where should VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators start? These questions point to the value of a guiding “map,” a tool to offer direction in considering where to focus agency energies.

A place to begin thinking about partnership strengthening activities is in relation to **service sectors** – and selected organizations – within Ventura County with whom VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators have existing relationships or may desire stronger ones. A three-level *Community Partnership Map* (Table 2) provides a tool to aid VCTC staff in prioritizing activity, in prioritizing organizations in thinking about where to focus partnership-building efforts. Table 2 illustrates the potential partners, relationships, and collaboration opportunities between Ventura County transit services and community stakeholders. This “map” is expected to be flexible and adapt to changing priorities. Its three levels, with strengths and weaknesses of each tier’s partners identified, include:

Level I: Funds and Resource-Sharing Partnerships – largely entities with whom VCTC has regular and recurring contacts and exchange.

Level II: Programmatic Partnerships – some existing and some new entities with whom program-specific initiatives can be built, focused on particular market segments, particular geographies or particular services for program-specific communication.

Level III: Community Partnerships – some existing and some new entities with whom annual contact is encouraged to introduce public transit and promote its use.

Example partners are identified in Table 2 but these are by no means all potential partners within Ventura County.

Table 2, Community Partnership Map for Guiding Agency Partnership Direction – In Three Parts

| Ventura County Transportation Commission – Partnership Mapping, page 1 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Level I | | | |
| Example Partners - Funds and Resource-Sharing Partnerships | | | |
| Transit Agencies/ Transit-Related <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TRANSCOM Members and all Transit Agencies Mobility Management Partners, Inc (MMP) | Cities/ Communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Camarillo Fillmore Moorpark Ojai Oxnard Piru Port Hueneme Santa Paula Santa Rosa Valley Santa Susana Saticoy Simi Valley Somis Thousand Oaks Ventura | Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> California State University at Channel Islands Moorpark College Oxnard College Ventura College California Lutheran University Ventura County Adult Education Consortium (VCAEC) Moorpark Adult School Oxnard Adult School Simi Institute for Careers and Education Ojai Adult School Santa Paula Adult School Fillmore Adult School Conejo Valley Adult School | Required TACs/Advisory Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee/ Social Services Transportation Advisory Committee Heritage Valley Policy Committee (HVPAC) Heritage Valley Technical Advisory Committee (HVTAC) 5310 Grantees |
| Identified Strengths | | | |
| Understand VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators' purpose Understand transit operations | | | |
| Identified Constraints | | | |
| Can lack enthusiasm, resources or support to move new initiatives forward May be more motivated to continue status quo | | | |

Level II

Example Partners - Programmatic Partnerships

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| Nonprofits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help of Ojai ▪ United Way ▪ Arc of Ventura ▪ Harmony Project ▪ Food Share ▪ Project Understanding ▪ Community Action of Ventura County ▪ CAPS Media ▪ Turning Point ▪ Gold Coast Veterans ▪ A Voice Discovered ▪ A Heart of Angel ▪ Tri-Counties Regional Center ▪ Senior Concerns ▪ Ventura County Community Foundation | Volunteer Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ventura Land Trust ▪ Schools on Wheels ▪ Volunteer VC ▪ Boy Scouts ▪ Conejo Clinic ▪ Habitat for Humanity ▪ Senior Concerns ▪ Caregivers | Major Employers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chamber of Commerce ▪ Farm Bureau ▪ Naval Base ▪ County of Ventura and multiple departments within the County ▪ Amgen ▪ Reiter ▪ Common Spirit Health ▪ Procter & Gamble ▪ St. John's Regional Medical Center ▪ Haas Automation | Spanish-Speaking and other Limited English Proficient-Speaking Agencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ El Concilio Family Services ▪ Adelante Comunidad Conejo ▪ Oaxacan community ▪ Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP) ▪ One Step a la Vez ▪ Social Services Coalition ▪ Radio Nueva Vida (KMRO) |
| Identified Strengths | | | |
| Understand how their clients think | | | |
| Can help VCTC craft information and messages | | | |
| Identified Constraints | | | |
| Can lack understanding of how transit works | | | |
| May ask for expensive/inefficient services to cater to client needs | | | |

| Level III | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| <i>Example Partners - Community Partnerships</i> | | | |
| Healthcare Entities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ventura County Medical Center Community Memorial Los Robles St. John's Regional Santa Paula | Senior Centers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wilson Senior Center Colonia Senior Center Moorpark Adult Center Simi Valley Senior Center Goebel Community Center Pleasant Valley Recreation and Park District Senior Center Ventura Avenue Adult Center Fillmore Active Adult Center | Libraries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> County of Ventura Library System (13 branches) Oxnard Port Hueneme Simi Valley Thousand Oaks Camarillo Library Blanchard Community Library | Local Businesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-known food establishments Shopping centers Popular retail locations |
| Identified Strengths | | | |
| Ability to tap into new riders and potential riders Build enthusiasm on services of which they may not be aware | | | |
| Identified Constraints | | | |
| Continued frustration regarding services that may not work for "their" clients, but VCTC can turn this constraint into an opportunity to better understand population needs | | | |

Level I Funds and Resource-Sharing Partnerships – Level I partners are most closely related to VCTC via existing funding, contracts or state/federal required outreach, organizations essential to VCTC's mission and purpose. Failure to keep close contact with these entities could lead to erosion of the overall transit system and potential dissolving of certain programs. Communication with these groups must be (a) transparent, (b) frequent and (c) constructive.

Level II Programmatic Partnerships – Partners and potential partners of Level II elevate the transit system beyond its basic requirements. Special programs developed through these partnerships can (a) bring awareness and increased use of the system, and (b) lead to potential new funding opportunities for growth. It is important to remember that for these partnerships to flourish, they must be bidirectional.

Level III Community Partnerships – Partners and potential partners at Level III represent a spectrum of perspectives to help transit operators monitor public need and may provide rider need input not otherwise heard. They can keep operators accountable for the services they deliver and facilitate insight into riders’ current and future needs. Communication with Level III partners may be annual or, as with Level II, focused at the time of relevant activities or on specific ridership groups.

ADDITIONAL PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES

Although activities are further discussed later in this paper, some thinking about projects in relation to potential partner settings is useful here:

- *Transit information in passive and active forms:* Sharing via passive forms of outreach through such venues as, for example, local restaurants coffee shops where staff can periodically stop in to refresh transit poster/materials on displays about the transit service or to refill countertop holders of transit brochures. More active education programs, such as travel training or trip-planning support, can aide riders in how-to-use technology to plan trips or pay fares.
- *Technology training:* Recognizing that increasingly fewer individuals are digitally illiterate, some remain so and particularly in relation to how to use transit-related technology of fare payment and trip planning. Projects to address this for targeted markets, such as younger youth and older seniors will have value.
- *Using current riders as communications’ strategies:* Working through community partnerships to build programs with current riders can involve Travel Buddies to accompany new riders or Transit Ambassadors, as with Metrolink’s purple-jacketed Ambassadors, can answer questions and aide travelers at stations and transit centers. These draw upon existing riders’ experiences to encourage new riders from their place of work, their senior center or other community venue. Providing the Travel Buddy or Transit Ambassador with a free bus pass and a button, sash or colorful vest can recognize the contribution of a volunteer while signaling to new riders that this is someone to whom they can look for questions and information.
- *Travel training through community partnerships:* Using actual buses or focused more narrowly on use of technology and training in trip planning and fare payment. These become opportunities to combat potential users fear of transit. Partner-led travel training, for example through a Senior Center or Community Center, can be excellent ways to improve perceptions about transit and remove or minimize fear-based barriers.

COMMUNICATING BENEFITS

At all levels, partner organizations must perceive benefits to their constituents. Such benefits may devolve to the students who want to participate in an after-school program, but administrators struggle to understand if transportation is available and can be aided via promoting local transit routes. There may be seniors may struggle to understand how-to-use transit but senior center program directors don't have access to train-the-trainer activities or don't have a mechanism to encourage transit-riding seniors to help their peers learn Google Transit. Benefits can be identified and continually communicated via testimonial marketing campaigns or in messaging such as "the places you can go" and more.

Institutional partner benefits can also be communicated. These may include documentation for agencies' grant and strategic planning processes. For example, updated Census mapping prepared for VCTC planning studies can be useful to human service agencies in their grant applications and funding requests. Institutional benefits can include fewer missed medical appointments and sustained medical treatment cycles through improved transit access. Employers may realize better work attendance or employee retention. When working with partners who are programmatically focused, benefits may involve promoting senior discount fares or youth free fares, or improved routing to heavily used destinations or focused on target audiences or targeted locales.

MAINTAINING PARTNERSHIP CONTACT LISTS

Contact lists are a baseline tool necessary in identifying, developing and maintaining partnerships suggested by the Partnership Map. Appendix A presents a Spring 2025 list of key contacts for selected sectors, compiled through the year-long efforts of this SRTP. It is important to have an identified place to maintain this list and assign responsibility and methods for updating and maintaining it. Also important are strategies for expanding the contacts list. These matters are discussed further in the final Action Steps section of this Plan.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Understanding Your Audience to Design Effective Communication Tools

This Plan centers on considering rider groups and potential markets mentioned previously with whom respective partners interact as VCTC and the Ventura County transit operators build and strengthen their community partnerships. VCTC is encouraged to continue to think strategically about its communications strategies. Carefully tailored communication strategies that are appropriate to each audience will increase effectiveness and value to partners as they reach more existing riders and potential riders to communicate any number of messages. Table 3 identifies unique ways in which VCTC and Ventura County transit operators can interact with partners and their sectors, through multiple communication strategies and with different marketing tools to convey broad-based transit information.

Table 3, Communication Examples by Sector/Agency Type

| Sector/Agency Type | Marketing and Communication Material Examples |
|---|--|
| <i>Employees/Large Employers</i> | Employee Transportation Coordinator bulletins, service alerts, promotional events, participation in large employee events |
| <i>Human Services Agencies/Nonprofits/Coalitions</i> | Bilingual brochures, branded swag (i.e., stickers, water bottles, reusable grocery bags), physical schedules, How-To-Ride Guides, Business Cards |
| <i>Municipality/City/County/Government</i> | Funding briefs and updates, future project discussions, identifying unmet need themes |
| <i>School/Education/Institution</i> | Transit technology information: explaining how GTFS feeds from transit users aid in trip planning (Google Transit), How to Ride information, use of mobile aps; fare payment information |
| <i>Advocacy</i> | Press Release information, social media templates and tool kits |

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| General Public | Transit technology information, explaining GTFS feeds from transit users aid in trip planning (Google Transit), How to Ride information, use of mobile app information, fare payment information; participation in community events and street fairs |
|-----------------------|--|

BUILDING ON PREVIOUS VCTC OUTREACH EFFORTS

This Plan recognizes that various outreach efforts are currently underway. These activities can be leveraged and built upon, to extend partnerships and reach existing riders and prospective riders. Targeted outreach can encourage the first group to take more transit trips while inviting or supporting potential new users in trying transit. Table 4 identifies four recent VCTC outreach and engagement programs and poses some questions about the potential limitations of each. Notably, these include highly successful countywide initiatives, as with the ***jBuenas con VCTC!*** campaign winning national attention and an American Public Transportation Association (APTA) 2023 AdWheel Grand Award.

Table 4, Recent VCTC Outreach Programs

| Outreach Program | Purpose | Potential Current Limitations/Questions to Ask |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>VBuspass</i> | Promoting Mobile App for fare payment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not available for all Dial-A-Ride users? • Is there a lack of training of app use? • Is there potential for voucher integration where human service agencies' purchase of vouchers can "show up" in fare payment apps • Is Fare Policy easy to understand to those outside of transit operators? |
| <i>Youth Ride Free Program</i> | Riders who are 18 and under and those over 18 enrolled in high school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do school systems promote the program? • Outside of transit operators' website, where else is this program explained? • When surveying, include a question on whether people have heard of this program? • Plan for when program ends in June 2026 |
| <i>College Ride Program</i> | Riders who are enrolled at colleges within Ventura County and select colleges in Santa Barbara County can board public transit buses for free | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do school systems promote the program? • Outside of transit operators' website, where else is this program explained? • When surveying, include a question on whether people have heard of this program? • Plan for when program ends in June 2026 |
| <i>jBuenas con VCTC!</i> | Spanish-speaking marketing campaign for transit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What measures of success are in place to continue program growth? |

TIMEFRAMES FOR CONTACT AND NOTICING

VCTC and its partners need tools that will realize the principles of partnership presented previously and to address the questions raised above. While Table 4 identifies past outreach

program tools, additional tools can provide useful information to VCTC partners. Some high-level suggestions follow, presented across three timeframes (i.e., immediate, periodic and recurring) in relation to certain transit experiences.

Immediate notices are prompted by the introduction of specific actions or opportunities:

- **Major service changes and fare increases** where Title VI requirements kick in.
- **Minor service changes**, where communication with existing riders may be achieved through Rider Alerts but more extensive information distribution through targeted partners may be indicated.
- **Free or discounted fare opportunities**, whether time-limited or ongoing, should be immediately communicated when introduced and with continuing notice to remind people, as appropriate.

Periodic contacts, at least annually, possibly scheduled information campaigns can focus on:

- **Ventura County's network or connectivity opportunities**, presenting Ventura County public transportation as a network of services that can enable cross-county or inter-jurisdictional trips.
- **Start-of-school year** information should be routinely offered, to help connect students and their parents with new mobility choices, including students who could become new transit users as rising students newly attending middle or high school.

Ongoing communication can be offered through various strategies for:

- **Technology training** to help riders and prospective riders develop confidence in electronic fare paying and in using electronic trip planning tools.
- **Travel training** opportunities to introduce prospective riders to transit and build confidence.

Crafting Countywide Transit Messaging

With an understanding of partners' information requirements, VCTC can develop, prepare or promote countywide messaging about transit's value to its partners. VCTC already embraces countywide free-fare policy and Spanish language promotions, with the Partnership Plan encouraging the enhancement and expansion of such messaging.

This Plan presumes that the individual transit operators continue to develop and present their own marketing information – including local schedules and locally oriented promotions. However, VCTC remains responsible for **countywide messaging**. Such countywide messaging considers the county in its entirety, presenting the public transportation system as a network.

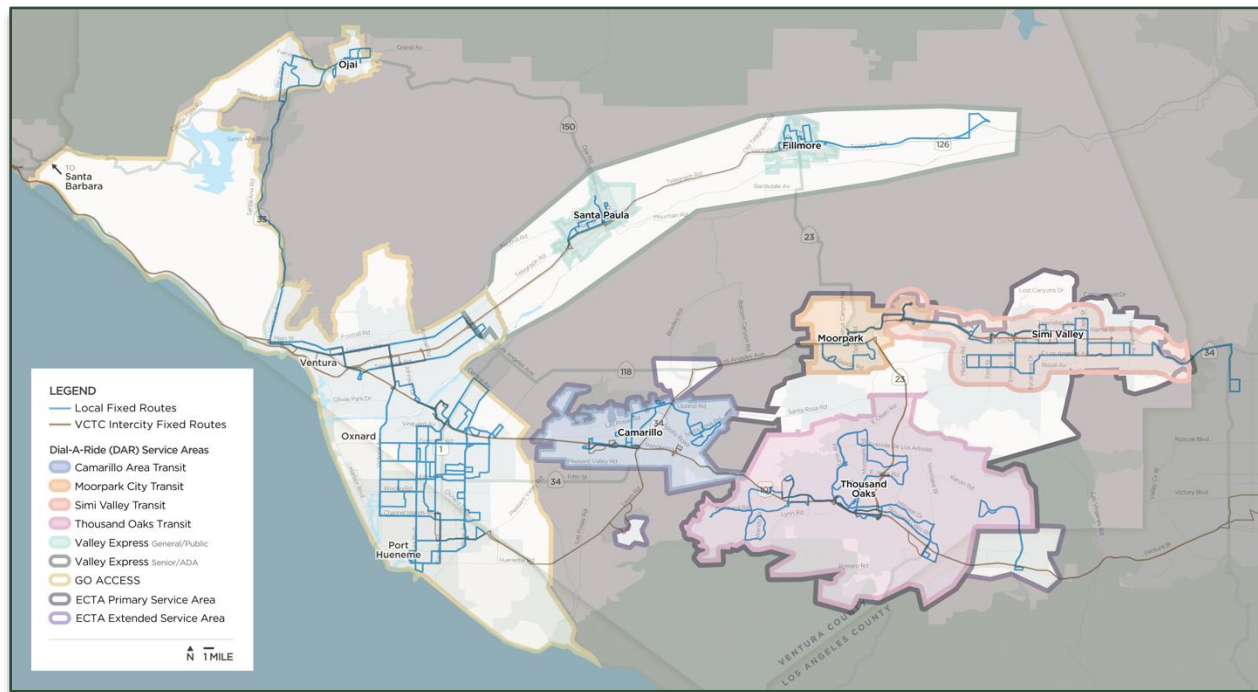
Countywide maps that highlight connections are critical, with attention to Metrolink’s regional network and bus and rail connections. Countywide messaging should continue to focus on VCTC fare policies, such as the free student fare, or the messaging of any rider-oriented policies that become standardized across the County.

A continued focus on countywide messaging of transit benefits is expected to:

- Improve consistency in messaging, by helping the individual cities offer this level of information in a uniform, high-quality formats with little additional effort.
- Support the rider and potential rider in recognizing recurring and consistent transit messaging across the county.
- Reinforce common policies and rider-oriented enhancements, such as electronic fare payment or expanded use of improved “where’s my ride” technology
- Educate riders on technology tools and technology-training in using transit.

In presenting countywide messaging and expanded use of countywide maps to show the entire network in various graphical ways, VCTC will help people envision both **regional trips** they can take and **local transit trips** they may more readily see. Figure 1 presents the SRTP’s version of the current network and provides a starting place from which to develop more graphical illustrations of Ventura County’s public transit systems as an interconnected network.

Figure 1, Ventura County Countywide Transit Network



VCTC can prepare and deploy **informational toolboxes** for use by partners, much as it already does for bicycle campaigns or for Metrolink service initiatives. These enable partners to easily spread countywide messages across their own information networks. Such toolboxes can include:

- Social media messages that can be readily transmitted via Facebook, Instagram and more
- PDFs of posters and banners that can be physically printed and posted or distributed via email
- Language for emails or to include in newsletters to introduce transit initiative

TRANSCOMM may play an important role in identifying what informational pieces and tools will be of value and use to individual members, even as VCTC takes the lead in promoting countywide messaging.

Frequency and Types of Communication

Through many transportation planning efforts, outreach occurs at multiple points but certainly when the federal or state grant and planning processes require. Table 5 suggests how frequently and what type of VCTC should engage in with certain stakeholder types given organizational purpose or mission. For example, for agencies that serve vulnerable populations (i.e., persons with disabilities), communicating major service changes in a one-on-one meeting with a key partner is much more urgent and impactful than perhaps via a local Chamber of Commerce, which may update their transportation information once a year at a very high-level meeting. For large and mid-sized employers, various regular information strategies can be used to connect with new employees or to existing employees to offer alternatives to those tired of long commutes.

The Table 5 list also suggests the *type* of communication VCTC should provide. For instance, multi-modal advocacy groups may participate in a large annual outreach event, whereas for an agency working with seniors, one-on-one or small group conversations regarding travel training may be appropriate.

Table 5, Frequency and Type of Communication by Sector/Agency

| Sector/Agency Type | Frequency of Communication | Type of Communication |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Employers | Two to three times annually, to capture new employees or address the needs of those whose mobility choices may be changing and/or desire alternatives | Internal communications mechanisms (newsletters and other regular messaging vehicles), bulletin boards in employee break rooms, employee orientation handbooks |
| Human Services Agencies | Quarterly, emphasis on service changes | Social Media toolboxes communication: how to use the system, how to use transit technology, service change updates |
| Loosely Affiliated Nonprofits | Biannual/Community Events | Press Releases, marketing tools |
| Municipal/Government | Annually and during required planning processes | Planning process updates, grant announcements; Social Media toolboxes to communicate with constituents |
| Education/Institutions | Two weeks before a semester begins (August/December) | Social Media toolboxes communication: how to use the system, how to use transit technology |
| Advocacy | Biannual/Community Events | Press Releases, marketing tools |

These recommended frequency timeframes offer starting-off points with room for discussion, provide changes and/or updates that meet the needs of individual stakeholders, and work with the information tools VCTC has available at any given point.

Understanding Incentives to Invite and Encourage Engagement

Public transit outreach and engagement can be difficult to execute, especially when many transit users are working during the day or have trouble traveling to meetings. Incentives can be an inducement to participate by those who don't generally participate in transit planning processes and who may be encouraged to use public transportation. Understanding the incentive behavior of those who should be engaged needs to come from the agencies that best represent them. When meeting with various agencies, it is important to identify and understand what incentives work best for certain groups. Carrying that information forward within the VCTC organization and the Ventura County transit operators benefits future projects and statutorily required outreach.

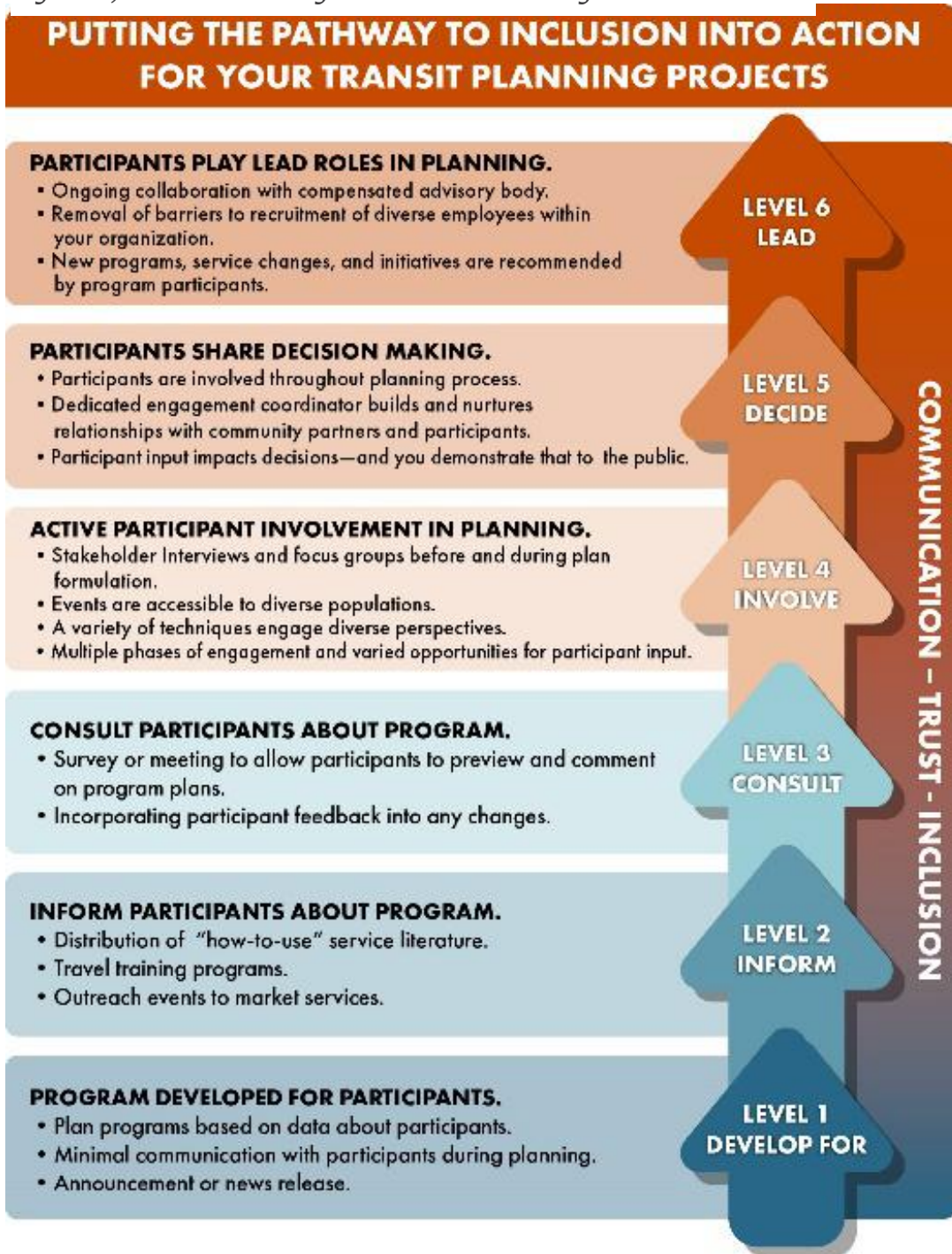
Incentives as motivational tools to encourage the response individual or group of people can range from discounted to free fares, special fare days, special excursions or events, such as transit fairs. Incentives may include some nominal payment for participation of individual or recruited stakeholders in focus group discussions.

Referencing “*Lessons Learned in Inclusive Transit Planning*” (2024) prepared for the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), the incentive purposes include:

- Recognizing the value of participants’ time, energy and expertise, lived experience.
- Recognizing that it can be a luxury for people to participate in planning efforts, with real costs to participate, including travel costs, time off work and childcare.
- Encouraging higher response rates or levels of participation.

CTAA’s *Pathway to Inclusion* is an excellent complement to strategic building of strategic partnerships (Figure 2). Such tools will benefit VCTC’s partnership activities. This Pathway identifies various “moments” in the planning process to consider how to involve members of disadvantaged or underserved communities. In the context of this Partnership plan, the Pathway offers ideas for including members of the public as partners.

Figure 2, CTA's Pathway to Inclusive Planning



ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS

This final section details starting points to continue moving Ventura County forward - to strengthen existing and build new partnerships between community-based organizations and employers and the county's public transportation network of providers.

Determining Resources to Support the Partnership Function

STAFFING THIS FUNCTION

This Partnerships Plan is only sustainable if a point-person within VCTC is sufficiently resourced to carry the function through. VCTC is a relatively small agency when considering the size (in population and geographic area) of the region it supports. Since at least 2020, VCTC has maintained the current *Program Manager of Government and Community Relations* position, which addresses many of the functions envisioned here. When considering all of the functions that VCTC serves beyond coordinating (and directly operating) public transit service in the County, it is probable that a full-time function could be necessary dedicated solely to the ideas of this plan.

BUDGET ELEMENTS

In addition to labor costs, at the level at which VCTC will determine, there are two further line items that are already within VCTC's budget: 1) a marketing line item that includes both creative development and materials production and 2) a local travel budget to enable staff to attend partner events across the county. Resources sufficient to print bus cards, banners, posters and brochures should also include a social media budget to buy ad time on various social media platforms.

Survey responses, including obtained through this SRTP process, as to "where" people obtain information clearly indicates that use of a broad range of print, digital and person-to-person platforms are all important to getting the word out regarding public transportation and how to use it. VCTC's marketing team must continue to access this full range of informational opportunities, expanded and enhanced by the strong partnerships.

Building Lists and Building Relationships

IDENTIFYING CURRENT CONTACTS

This countywide SRTP has generated list of contacts vetted through the SRTP development process and built up from VCTC's existing organization lists. Provided separately to VCTC, this listing combines internal VCTC marketing lists and those from other study efforts, including the *Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan*. Some additional stakeholders were identified.

Information items within this list can include:

- Agency name
- Sector
- Primary contact name, title, email and telephone
- Engagement history or participation – this can be expanded to identify future participation
- Date last updated

This should be a living list, regularly touched by staff to be updated and amended no less frequently than monthly and more often as information presents. Updating the list should be aided through use of software, such as Constant Contact or MailChimp to enable contacts to remove themselves or unsubscribe as they choose.

Updating or adding to the list is more difficult. Several methods exist. These can include:

1. Ensuring easy access to Contact Us or Subscribe page on VCTC's public transportation webpage to receive updated or Alert transit information.
2. Seeking interested parties through the conduct of survey efforts or other outreach.
3. Using partners' mailing lists. Regarding partner mailing lists, some partners will not provide their lists to third party entities, such as school districts, community-based coalitions, Chambers of Commerce, but may send out vetted information to their constituents, where interests align.

An additional method to add to lists is via attendance at gatherings of potentially like-minded organizations to develop new contacts through those interactions. Traveling with a simple VCTC "postcard" with a QR code can invite individuals to "sign up" for updated transit information and bring in new primary contacts.

THINKING ABOUT TIMING

In considering accessing partner mailing lists, the timing of information-sharing may be very infrequent, one-time or continuing. For example, school districts might be willing to send out transit information to their parents and students only at the beginning of the academic year. Colleges and universities might be willing to resend each semester or quarter. Other entities, such as human services organizations or libraries, may be willing to have transit information presented frequently or even regularly to their client base. Such timing issues were considered in the discussion of the frequency of information sharing but are also of relevance in thinking about access to partner mailing lists.

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION PORTALS

It is useful to identify information portals that exist. These include, for example, **community college student activities associations** have access to student lists. **Secondary school districts** have software that enables information dissemination to parents. **Employer transportation coordinators** have lists of people interested in vanpool, rideshare or alternative transportation modes. Keeping a record of such information access portals, as they are identified, will support accessing these via partner relationships.

BUILDING A CALENDAR OF EVENTS AND CREATING SPECIAL TRANSIT EVENTS

Another valuable list to maintain is that of recurring special events sponsored by partners. These may be special purpose fairs, such as job fairs, or community-wide events. Developing a calendar of events will suggest opportunities for promoting public transportation to partners' audiences.

This calendar, sustained on a countywide basis by VCTC, can track existing occasions and events within local communities, such as annual fairs, back-to-school activities and recurring farmers' markets. Information to feed the calendar can come from partners, with some structured tools used to gather key dates throughout the year. Other creative approaches can include "transit outings" which would pair an organized trip to/from somewhere on public transit.

Creating special transit outings is another activity that an energetic coordinator can undertake. This could entail pairing some activity like an art walk or history tour or similar experience with an organized trip on the nearby public transit route. These have been highly successful for seniors, providing a not-so subtle opportunity to encourage and teach potential new riders about navigating the transit network.

Developing Countywide Informational Tools

VCTC has the 60,000-foot vantage point of presenting information for the County as a whole. Partnerships – and the constituents they serve – will benefit from VCTC-supported countywide information in at least two ways:

1. Maintaining the countywide maps that make clear where local services exist, who is providing them and where connections to other modes and transit services exist; and
2. Developing countywide promotions or campaigns of value individually to the operators.

USING CUSTOMER-FOCUSED MAPPING TOOLS

VCTC utilizes live bus tracking capability that includes all of the County’s fixed route bus operations. Its Live Map is a very useful tool for riders who want to see where the buses are, on any given route. The Estimated Arrival Time tab is useful for riders who know their route, its direction and the bus stop of interest, to determine when the next bus is coming along.



For riders new to transit, and who are unclear as to what service or which route, VCTC’s regional network map is an important informational tool. It enables riders to “pick” their route of interest, from the map. It does require that riders know the route number, direction of travel and the specific bus stop – all pulled from drop-down lists – to show “live” arrival information.

Continuously introducing the transit systems to new riders is important. VCTC can build upon its existing countywide maps in more graphical ways. For example, in San Bernardino County, this regional approach presented a greatly simplified graphical map to depict the overall region across which San Bernardino residents could travel, placing the San Bernardino Transit Center, served by Metrolink and Arrow rail lines and seven bus operators, at the center of such travel.

This was prepared for use in kiosks, websites and other mediums to present greater detail. Figure 3 shows a large kiosk map is shown with the underlying local bus network depicted with intercity connections. This map, both in its simplified and more detailed versions, became the focus of a “Where Will You Go?” campaign that embraced all the Inland Empire region’s public transit operators, providing basic contact information for each. Figure 3 depicts the full kiosk text displayed at the San Bernardino Transit Center, where all these operators converge. It also reduces to a take-away brochure for distribution at fairs and community events, with the map excerpted in more detail (Figure 4).

Figure 3, Take-One/ Kiosk Content Showing Regional Network

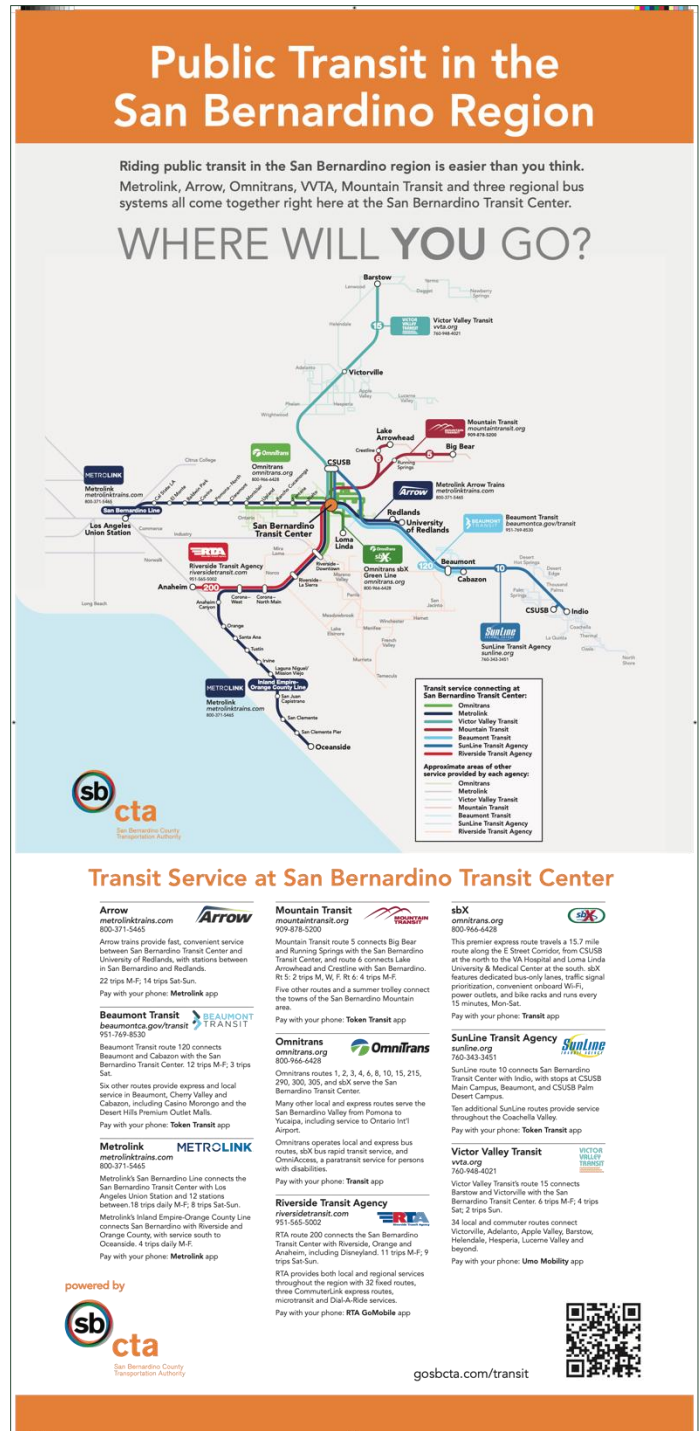
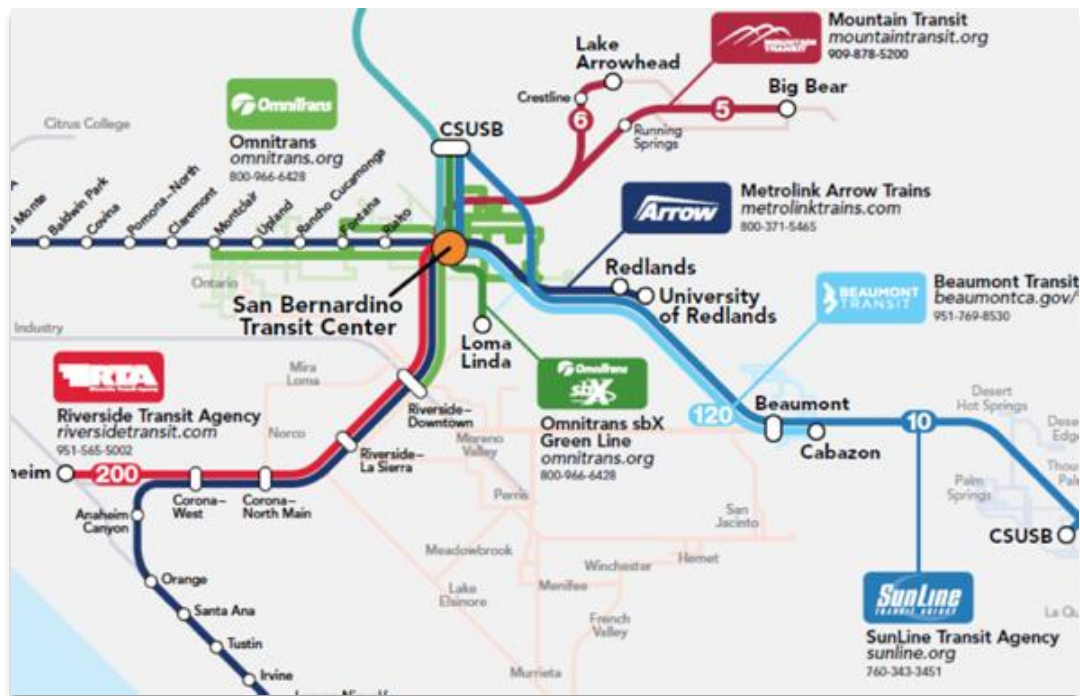


Figure 4, Excerpt of Regional Map Focused on Centralized Transfer Location



COUNTYWIDE TRANSIT PROMOTIONS

Another approach to countywide messaging is to develop campaigns across multiple systems to attract new riders – and for use by willing and able partners. As noted, VCTC has had excellent success with programmatic campaigns such as its award winning ¡Buenas con VCTC!, its Free Fare and Youth Fare promotions (Figure 5).

Where VCTC can support the creative development and the production of these – including social media images, bus cards, kiosk banners, flyers, and website images – it is a boon to the municipal operator. Common messages and recurring presentation of images of the whole system benefits partners, riders and potential riders. Cohesive messaging underscores the concept of a network and a countywide system. It can be easily packaged for use by partners as elements comprising an informational toolkit.

Figure 5, Examples of VCTC Countywide Promotions



Included in Figure 6 below are additional examples from various campaigns in San Bernardino County prepared for use countywide, with all the attendant collateral of bus cards, transit center signage, social media posts and more provided to each system.



Figure 6, Examples of Countywide Messaging for Use by Multiple Operators