



ITEM ID: 2023-192-0

TRANSMITTAL DATE: May 19, 2023

MEETING DATE: May 26, 2023

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Lisa Bahr, Chief Customer Experience Officer

SUBJECT: Customer Experience Quarterly Update for Q3 FY2022-23

Issue

Staff is updating the Committee on Customer Experience campaigns and activities for the third quarter of FY2022-23. These updates will be provided each quarter.

Recommendation

Receive and file.

Strategic Commitment

This report aligns with the Strategic Business Plan commitment of:

- **Customers Are Our Business:** We respect and value our customers, putting them at the heart of all we do, and work hard to attract and retain new customers by understanding their needs and finding new and innovative ways to delight them. In collaboration with departments across Metrolink, the Customer Experience team works to deliver a consistently exceptional experience throughout our customers' entire journey – starting from the moment they first interact with our brand and through every trip planned, taken, and remembered.

Background

The Customer Experience team's FY2022-23 goals are to provide the most exceptional experience in public transportation, grow ridership, and reposition and elevate the value of the Metrolink brand.

This report is an overview of how those objectives were advanced during the third quarter of FY2022-23.

Discussion

Regain and Grow Ridership

Metrolink ridership recovery continued and even accelerated during the third quarter. Total ridership between January and March 2023 reached 1,265,000 boardings. That was up 42% over the same period in 2022 and exceeds the second quarter’s year-over-year growth rate of 38%. The performance during the third quarter was driven primarily by an increase in weekday ridership, which was up 47% year-over-year. This compares to an 11% rate of growth for weekend ridership.

Quarterly Boardings

	FY22Q3	FY23Q3	Change
Weekday	773,690	1,141,740	48%
Weekend	116,330	128,555	11%
Total	890,020	1,270,295	43%

Sales of Monthly Passes continued to be strong into March 2023 and indicate a lasting ridership effect of the 30% discount offered during October, November, and December 2022. As many as 17% of the new customers who responded to the promotion continued to buy a Monthly Pass after the sale price reverted to the regular price. Another 23% had purchased other ticket types prior to the pass promotion. Ridership was also aided by fare promotions for the new Arrow service during the third quarter. Detailed monthly sales trends for passes and tickets are provided in the table below as requested by the Board.

Number of Passes and Tickets sold per month

Ticket Type	Jul -22	Aug-22	Sept-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23
Monthly Pass	3,281	3,510	3,862	4,981	5,129	4,494	4,010	4,233	4,221
7-Day Pass	2,162	2,935	2,445	1,686	1,154	1,188	2,226	1,931	1,937
10-Day Flex Pass	578	838	727	668	501	409	968	834	986
5-Day Flex Pass	1,801	2,249	2,334	2,170	1,841	1,368	2,292	2,119	2,255
Weekend Day Pass	18,155	11,797	9,361	7,325	7,378	5,350	6,916	5,042	6,416

Round-trip Ticket	29,700	33,598	34,354	34,161	31,477	28,168	31,032	30,607	36,193
One-way ticket	134,527	141,281	143,246	151,030	139,339	130,199	128,224	125,753	149,184
\$15 Summer Pass	6,070	7,114	491	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arrow \$1 Special Fare	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,856	2,257

Throughout the third quarter, staff continued to utilize paid, earned, and owned media, partnerships, and incentives to expand the use of Metrolink among our current riders, as well as find and entice new riders to the service. Compared to a year ago, weekday ridership during the third quarter rose 42% while weekend ridership rose 11%. The highest daily ridership was reached on February 4, Transit Equity Day, with 19,824 boardings, a new pandemic record, as we offered free rides. Ridership recovery during the quarter reached 42.3% of pre-pandemic levels. Unfortunately, ridership was impacted negatively by the track closures in southern Orange County.

During Q3, efforts to regain and attract new riders were focused on the following campaigns:

Transit Equity Day

Metrolink first observed Transit Equity Day on February 4, 2021, to much fanfare. In late 2022, the Metrolink Board of Directors approved plans to honor Rosa Parks’ birthday by offering free rides system-wide on an annual basis. LA Metro and OCTA, along with transit agencies throughout San Bernardino County also offered free rides on February 4.

In addition to reinforcing the message of the importance of equity in transportation, the intent of the promotion was to provide new riders an incentive to try Metrolink and make it a part of their long-term lifestyle as well as highlight the new Low-Income Fare Discount program for California EBT cardholders.

Campaign tactics included a joint press conference with Metro, LADOT and SBCTA, a community outreach table at LA Union Station where Metrolink staff passed out flyers regarding the Low-Income Fare Discount program, and social media posts from our agency as well as from elected officials and local government social media accounts. Metrolink also sent emails to current and lapsed riders, launched a paid social media promotion, and digital signage in LA Union Station.

Three television stations – KNBC 4/KVEA, KCBS/KCAL, and KTLA 5 – covered the joint press conference generating earned media results of 51 media mentions, 104,721,282 impressions, and an ad value equivalency of \$5,701,739.

The 2023 Transit Equity Day campaign resulted in 19,824 boardings, including 1,059 on Arrow trains, a 40% increase over 2022 (14,150 boardings) and a 14% increase in low-income fare

ticket revenue over the previous week.

Spring Back-to-School Campaign

Beginning in January, Metrolink partnered with colleges and universities located near a Metrolink station to promote Metrolink services to faculty, staff, and students. Metrolink also promoted the 25% student discount on social media.

Staff provided college and university partners with a toolkit to encourage faculty, staff and students to take the train to campus. New mobile account users who registered with their valid school email received two complimentary Round-Trip tickets.

Participating schools included Cal State Los Angeles, Cal State Fullerton, Cal State San Bernardino, Cal State Channel Islands, Cal State Northridge, Cal Poly Pomona, UC Irvine, UC Riverside, Claremont Colleges, University of La Verne, University of Southern California, College of the Canyons, Crafton Hills College, San Bernardino Valley College, Riverside Community College, and Mt. San Antonio College.

\$1 Arrow Fare (Feb 1 to April 2)

In partnership with SBCTA, Metrolink offered a \$1 fare promotion for the new Arrow service. The promotion was applied to Round-Trip tickets between any two of the five Arrow stations. The special fare promotion was made available on Metrolink ticket machines and the mobile app as a special ticket option from February 1 through April 2. Staff promoted the offer with a paid advertising campaign, dedicated website, email, social media, and earned media. Results of the campaign included:

	Impressions	Engagement
Website	50,109	41,173 users
Email	38,320	60.0% Open Rate
Social Media	34,741	1,952
Paid Advertising	3,026,093	54,664 clicks
Earned Media	364,206	12 mentions Ad value \$42,239

University of Redlands Partnership

Metrolink partnered with SBCTA and the University of Redlands in January and February to provide complimentary passes to faculty, staff and students. The University of Redlands built a request form on its secure online portal, where faculty, staff, and students requested their passes and received them via the Metrolink App.

The campaign resulted in \$29,529 in revenue and 189 riders. Since the promotion, there have been repeat rider purchases of 96 tickets totaling \$2,013. In a post-campaign survey, 39.4% of respondents had never taken Metrolink prior to the promotion, and 21.2% had not taken Metrolink in more than a year. Thirty-eight percent of respondents previously drove their vehicles to school/work, while 21% were dropped off.

Customer Retention Strategies

Customer Appreciation Day

Since 2019, Metrolink has launched an annual campaign to thank customers for riding. In 2021, the focus of the campaign shifted to show our gratitude not only for the continued ridership of our customers (as well as lapsed ones) but also for their work that kept our region functioning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Then in 2022, Customer Appreciation Day resumed an in-person campaign with pop-ups at several Metrolink stations. This year's campaign incorporated the theme A CLASSIC METROLINK LOVE SONG . Creative included a Metrolink/train twist on love song lyrics by various artists representing different eras and genres, including Al Green, Billy Ocean, Coldplay, Taylor Swift and Rihanna.

On Tuesday, February 14, Metrolink staff, Board members, member agency personnel, and elected officials, distributed Metrolink swag, and scratch-n-sniff valentines to morning riders at various stations throughout the system. Attendees included Board Members Larry McCallon, Pamela O'Connor, Tony Trembley, Daniel Chavez, Tam Nguyen, and Walt Allen.

Three stations, including two Spanish-language stations, covered the activities. A press release was distributed after the station events along with B-Roll and images contributing to total earned media results as follows:

- Three mentions (one tv, one radio, and one online/print)
- 435,542 impressions

Equating to an ad value of \$12,142. Other results included:

	Impressions	Clicks	Other
Email	136,994	2,148	43.3% open rate
Social Media	55,615	3,048	5.48% eng. Rate
CEO Darren Kettle Video	8,377		
Earned Media	435,442	3 mentions	Ad value \$12,142

The shift in our positioning to be inclusive of leisure travel has been an important strategy in our ongoing efforts to grow ridership. To encourage Metrolink travel to major events and introduce Metrolink to new audiences, staff worked with several large-scale event promoters to encourage people to take Metrolink to avoid traffic congestion and parking hassles.

Event Giveaways

Staff ran social media contest giveaways for the following events:

- PaleyFest (March 2023)
- LA Travel and Adventure Show (February 2023)
- Metrolink Store (February 2023)

Special Train Service – Beyond Wonderland 2023

We partnered with Insomniac to offer late-night train service from their Beyond Wonderland festival making select stops along the San Bernardino Line on Saturday, March 25, and Sunday, March 26 departing at 2:45 a.m. from the San Bernardino-Downtown station. To enhance ticket sales, Insomniac provided a lanyard as a giveaway for all festival goers who

showed their Metrolink mobile ticket, included a link to the Metrolink webpage in multiple email blasts and social media posts featuring Metrolink as an alternative to driving.

Ticket Sales:

- Tickets Sold: 1,300
- Ticket Revenue: \$26,000

Special Train Service Ridership:

- Saturday: 900
- Sunday: 693
- Ridership increased 35% from the previous weekend.

Landing Page Metrics (Feb 1 – Mar 27, 2023):

- Total Clicks: 767
- Total Impressions: 22,000

Customer Comments:

- *"It's super easy to use. Did it at escape. You don't have to worry about driving. You don't have to worry about finding parking. Way cheaper than uber." – Instagram*
- *"10/10 recommend!! I'll see you Saturday or Sunday morning technically" – Instagram*
- *"cheaperThanParking" – Instagram*
- *"Haha went solo at my second beyond festival and best experience ever! You get to ride the train with other festival goers, dope experience" – Reddit*
- *"TIL about this transport option - already got a shuttle tix for BW but good to know for future fests!" – Reddit*

Reposition and Elevate the Value of the Metrolink Brand

The success, efficiency and safety of the Metrolink service is dependent on the perceptions of the brand among riders and the community at large. And while brand-building is a part of our ridership-driving campaigns, we also regularly implement initiatives whose primary goal is brand- and reputation-building.

Potential Rider Study

The study is intended to provide a better understanding of the potential ridership market and help devise marketing strategies to attract potential riders. The study is being conducted in two parts:

Phase 1 | Quantitative: The potential rider study launched with an email sent to approximately 90,000 lapsed and potential riders with an invitation to an online survey in English and Spanish. The survey was also advertised on social media to reach non-riders who have never taken Metrolink. The data collected is being used to identify specific market segments and create demographic and psychographic profiles for non-rider segments that have the highest potential for mode shift.

Phase 2 | Qualitative: We are conducting a series of five focus groups with potential riders for a deeper dive into the issues identified in the qualitative survey and to identify strategies for each market segment to drive mode shift to passenger rail and to assess how advertising and marketing strategies can best support these objectives.

The study is expected to be completed in May 2023 and results will be presented to the Board in FY24Q1.

Women's History Month

In honor of Women's History Month, Metrolink selected four female Metrolink employees to highlight in video interviews, which were shared each Wednesday in March on our social media channels, with an additional kickoff email distributed to current riders across our system on March 8, International Women's Day. The email had a strong 49% open rate, while the various social media posts garnered a total of 7,716 impressions and an average engagement rate of 5.1%. The Moreno Valley Times covered one of the featured employees, Fia AhSue, Assistant Director for Track and Structures Maintenance. The other three subjects were Elisa Cunningham, Shamonda Jones, and Sandra Martinez.

Earthquake Early Warning System

In September 2021, Metrolink announced advanced technology that combines its PTC technology with ShakeAlert earthquake data from the U.S. Geological Survey. The resulting Earthquake Early Warning system allows trains operating along Metrolink-owned tracks to automatically stop or slow down in the event of an earthquake. The technology was initially piloted in the summer of 2022 along the 91/Perris Valley Line and is now available across all lines.

To announce the system-wide availability of the Earthquake Early Warning system on Metrolink-owned tracks, staff distributed a press release, with input from the United States Geological Survey, to coincide with the 90th anniversary of the Long Beach Earthquake on March 10. The press release went out on March 9, the eve of the earthquake anniversary, and it received strong media pickup, including one radio broadcast, two television reports, and three print stories. One of the print stories and one of the television broadcasts were in Spanish. Total media impressions earned were 175,943 with an ad value equivalency of \$36,695.

Improve the Customer Experience

The Customer Experience team collaborates with other Metrolink departments to improve our customers' experience. Key initiatives include:

Station Wayfinding

In January, Customer Experience staff surveyed the San Bernardino-Downtown and Redlands-Downtown stations to determine the effectiveness of existing signage for transferring between Metrolink and Arrow service. Team members met with SBCTA to review findings and discuss signage improvements. SBCTA is working with their vendor to print and install new signs identifying A and B platforms to be consistent with other stations on the system.

In addition, Customer Relations participated in station walk-throughs of the new Anaheim Canyon platform to determine the best locations for new wayfinding signage. The new platform

opened on January 30th, and the signage was installed for opening day.

Website and Mobile App Improvements

Customer Relations staff implemented the following webpage updates:

- Sample images of acceptable proof of eligibility were added to the Accessibility/ADA page
- A new banner announcing the expanded Student/Youth trip program was added to the group trip page
- The Rail2Rail[®] webpage information was updated for clarity and to include the 2023 program blackout dates.

Customer Experience also improved the mobile app user experience by updating mobile ticket regulations, so they are consistent across all ticket types and refreshed the mobile ticket receipt to include the new logo and links to helpful web pages.

LA Union Station Storm Response

After a rainstorm in January flooded the passageway and access to tracks 1-3 and 10-14 at LA Union Station, Customer Relations staff responded by meeting all inbound trains, and redirecting passengers to the south end of the platforms and down the back ramp near track 15 to get to the Patsaouras bus plaza and Metro subway entrance. Metro and Amtrak supported the efforts by shuttling passengers on RedCap and Metro carts, while Metro Ambassadors directed customers from the center of the passageway. Water was cleared from the station after the morning rush and mitigating efforts were implemented prior to heavy rains in late February/early March.

A rainstorm in late February damaged a high-voltage fuse resulting in a power outage to the lights on the platforms, ramps, and the passageway. Metrolink Customer Experience, Safety, and Facilities leadership worked together to implement emergency lighting and restore partial power to the darkest platform. Station staff used flashlights to help guide passengers through the tunnel and to the ramps. Power was restored three days after the lights went out.

Next Steps

Staff will present its next quarterly update to the Executive Committee in September 2023.

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Lisa Bahr, Chief Customer Experience Officer

Attachment(s)

[Presentation - Customer Experience Quarterly Update for Q3 FY2022-23](#)