METROLINK

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ITEM ID:	**2026-346-0**
TRANSMITTAL DATE:	**November 6, 2026**
MEETING DATE:	**November 13, 2026**
TO:	**Board of Directors**
FROM:	**Lisa Bahr, Chief Customer Experience Officer**
SUBJECT:	**Fiscal Year 2027 First Quarter Customer Experience Update**

Issue

Staff is updating the Board on Customer Experience campaigns and activities. These updates will be provided periodically throughout the year.

Recommendation

Receive and file.

Strategic Commitment

This report aligns with the Strategic Business Plan commitments 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 bring them on board. This report includes performance metrics to increase transparency and accountability for the division's activities.

- **Modernizing Business Practices:** We will improve our operational efficiency through transparency, objective metrics, and streamlined governance, reducing reliance on subsidies while bringing our system into good repair and investing in the development of our employees.

Background

The Metrolink Customer Experience (CX) division includes Market Research and Data Analytics, Marketing, Communications, Customer Support, and CX Innovation & Partnerships. For FY27, the CX team's strategic pillars are to Understand and Engage Customers and Communities, Improve the Customer Journey, and to Build Trust, Partnerships, and Value.

Staff have prepared a set of Key Performance Indicators to assess and track the performance of the Authority's Customer Experience program. The results of these metrics will be reported to the Board on a quarterly basis. The last KPI report was presented to the Board in September 2026.

Discussion

First-quarter results underscore both the opportunity and the risk facing Metrolink. Ridership increased 11% year over year, supported by World Cup travel and high gasoline prices. New non-student mobile accounts, repeat ridership, and Corporate Partner Program (CPP) revenue also grew. At the same time, on-time performance declined to 77.2%, and Net Promoter Score (NPS) fell sharply. Converting increased demand into lasting ridership will depend on delivering reliable service and a consistently positive customer experience.

Ridership. Up 11% year over year; World Cup events and high gas prices contributed to demand.

New non-student mobile accounts. Up 12% year over year, continuing the growth trend from the prior quarter.

Mobile ticket adoption. 64% of ridership, compared with 62% a year earlier; unchanged quarter over quarter.

Repeat ridership. Converting first-time riders into repeat customers remains an important opportunity for ridership growth. Analysis of transactions from mobile app accounts found that there was an increase in the number of riders who returned within 12 months of their first trip. Repeat ridership by non-students increased by 3% from a year ago. With high gas prices bringing new customers to Metrolink, there is significant potential to turn price-sensitive riders into more frequent Metrolink users.

CPP ticket revenue. $1.45 million, up 12% year over year, supported in part by Experience Metrolink and IE Commuter.

Customer loyalty. NPS fell to 27.8 from 43.9 in the prior quarter; riders cited schedules and deteriorating on-time performance. (Scores above 40 indicate strong customer loyalty).

Marketing

In the first quarter of FY27, Marketing advanced Metrolink's strategy to acquire new riders, retain existing customers, and recapture lapsed riders. Campaigns connected affordable fares and travel options with customer education, safety, and loyalty initiatives. Results demonstrate growing use among existing students, while identifying opportunities to improve first-time rider acquisition and ongoing engagement.

Attract New Riders

Back to School
Metrolink's August Back-to-School campaign promoted the 50% Student/Youth Discount to attract new students and encourage existing riders to use the train for school, work, and other trips. Outreach included bilingual advertising, social media, email, video, and school partnerships.

The campaign generated its strongest results among existing student riders. Q1 student boardings rose 100,848 (24%) year over year, exceeding the 5% growth objective. In August and September, student ticket sales increased 17% to nearly 198,000, while revenue rose 21% to approximately $1.18 million. Student Monthly Pass sales grew 45%, suggesting more frequent travel among established riders.

The campaign also introduced students to SoCal Explorer Rewards through a 150-point enrollment bonus for .edu email addresses. It attracted 361 enrollments, exceeding the 200-member goal by 80%, and created an additional channel to encourage discretionary travel beyond school trips.

However, first-time student purchases remained flat. The results, therefore, point to stronger retention and frequency, rather than new-rider acquisition. Marketing will continue the Student/Youth Discount campaign beyond the back-to-school period, place greater emphasis on first-time riders, and track new purchases separately from total student ridership.

Daisy Chain Fields Festival
Marketing supported special late-night service for the August 29 festival in Orange County, promoting Metrolink as an alternative to driving and parking. The campaign, targeting special event attendees and youth, generated more than 2,000 visits to the event information page, and more than 200 passengers used the late-night service.

Mobility-4-All (EBT Discount)
To more directly reach people eligible for the 50% EBT discount, Metrolink established an outreach partnership with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) and provided promotional materials, collateral, and digital assets for distribution to eligible audiences. The partnership creates a direct channel to reach potential riders who can be difficult to reach through paid advertising and supports efforts to expand awareness and use of the discount.

Retain Existing Riders

Fare Change Campaign
Beginning in September, Metrolink provided advance notice of the October 5 fare changes through email, web content, and other marketing communications channels. The campaign gave riders time to understand the changes, review their options, and plan ahead of the fare change implementation date to prevent unpleasant surprises on the day of the change. During September, the fare change webpage reached approximately 12,700 users, and three related emails delivered more than 120,000 messages.

Rail Safety Month & SAFE Partnership
During Rail Safety Month, Metrolink shared safety messages to reinforce safe behaviors on and around trains. Marketing also promoted the launch of the new Metrolink Safe Ride app,

giving customers another way to report safety and security concerns. A September email introducing the availability of the new app was delivered to more than 42,000 recipients. As of October 20, the app had been downloaded nearly 400 times, and 41 reports had been received, 70% of them through the new mobile app.

Through the Streets Are For Everyone (SAFE) partnership and SAFE Around Trains Challenge, high school students created 30-second public service announcements addressing rail safety. Shared on Metrolink's Instagram channel, the student-created PSA's generated more than 71,000 views and 25,000 engagements on Instagram. The partnership also strengthened connections with schools and engaged students who are potential Metrolink riders.

SoCal Explorer Rewards Loyalty Program
SoCal Explorer Rewards continued to provide customers with added value for riding Metrolink, reaching 92,409 enrolled members by the end of September. The Back-to-School Campaign introduced the program to student riders with a bonus-points offer to encourage ridership beyond school trips.

While membership continued to grow, the number of recently engaged members declined during the quarter, underscoring an opportunity to encourage more frequent participation. A survey has been deployed to gain insight into how the program can better serve riders, encourage retention, and support additional Metrolink travel.

Reengage Lapsed Riders

Creating reasons to return
While Q1 activity primarily focused on attracting and retaining riders, it also identified opportunities to reengage customers who have reduced or stopped their Metrolink travel. The decline in the number of recently engaged SoCal Explorer Rewards members will help inform future outreach and loyalty program improvements.

Marketing is developing targeted email campaigns in partnership with the Market Insights and Analytics team, leveraging customer data and insights to identify audiences and tailor messaging. One campaign focuses on lapsed riders who have stopped traveling with Metrolink, as well as riders whose travel frequency has declined. Upon establishment of the FY27 service plan, Marketing will identify key opportunities to reach lapsed riders along corridors where it makes sense and incentivize them to return when service meets their needs.

CX Innovation and Partnerships

CX Innovation & Partnerships (CXIP) continued to deliver strong results across corporate partnerships, non-fare revenue generation, and customer experience innovation during the first quarter.

The Corporate Partner Program (CPP) generated $1.45 million in first-quarter ticket revenue, representing a 12% year-over-year increase. This growth was supported by the continued expansion of the Experience Metrolink program in partnership with IE Commuter.

Strategic partnerships and special event services generated $88,000 in cash and in-kind sponsorships and special event revenue. Highlights included renewed partnerships with AAA, including its role as the inaugural Presenting Sponsor of Transit Equity Day, Ontario International Airport, and The Music Center, along with a new, in-kind partnership with IchigoCon. The team also secured a three-year renewal agreement with Insomniac for special train service and successfully delivered service for the inaugural Daisy Chain Fields music festival.

In customer experience innovation, Metrolink launched Version 8 of its mobile app, featuring a refreshed design, improved navigation, and a more intuitive user experience. These enhancements make it easier for customers to purchase tickets and plan trips, supporting the agency's ongoing efforts to improve convenience and accessibility.

Communications

Communications supported customer awareness and public understanding of service decisions associated with anticipated El Niño conditions, including high-tide preparation and response. During precautionary service suspensions in South Orange County in August and September, staff coordinated interviews and briefings with Los Angeles and San Diego media to explain the safety rationale. The interruptions generated 774 media mentions with a reported combined potential audience of nearly 915 million, providing an early opportunity to communicate Metrolink’s approach ahead of the winter season.

Safety was also central to Rail Safety Month communications. The team shared safety-focused stories, elevated agency expertise, and promoted the Safe Ride app through local and industry media; one-third of related media mentions were in Spanish.

Public Affairs reinforced these priorities by coordinating with LADOT, elected officials, and law enforcement to address safety, security, and cleanliness at LADOT-maintained stations. Staff also supported right-of-way cleanups and efforts to relocate people from restricted areas near active tracks. Communications and Public Affairs also supported capital investment and raised awareness of construction. In September, Metrolink collaborated with LA Metro on two state grant opportunities to address a funding gap for the Balboa Double Track Extension on the Antelope Valley Line, and developed an outreach plan to engage riders, community organizations, and elected officials; implementation began in Q2. The team also explained construction-related service closures, including a major box-jacking project in Irvine. A video about this work drew nearly 60,000 social media views and helped explain the City of Irvine’s Marine Way Undercrossing project.

Customer Service Support

The first quarter brought more riders to Metrolink and a tougher operating environment. Ridership grew 11%, yet customers contacted us less often, with 41,797 engagements, down 12% from last year. When customers did reach out, their message came down to three things: get me there on time, treat me fairly, and take care of me when things go wrong.

Reliability is still what matters most. On-time performance generated more complaints than any other issue. While those complaints are down 37% from a year ago, on-time performance remains the leading source of dissatisfaction, consistent with After-Ride Survey results. Schedules and fares made up more than half of everything customers contacted us about. For

the new and price-sensitive riders that high gas prices brought to the system, reliability will decide whether they become repeat customers.

How we enforce policy matters as much as enforcing it. Conductor complaints rose 56%, driven mostly by expanded fare inspection and policy enforcement. Customers' concerns centered on how policies were applied and how they were treated in those interactions. Enforcement protects revenue and safety, and it is also one of the most direct encounters a customer has with Metrolink. Staff is working with Operations and Safety & Security to make those interactions consistent and professional.

Our people still make the difference. Nineteen of the quarter's 21 commendations recognized employees. A security officer noticed confused passengers, called out across the tracks, and got them to the right train in time to make their Amtrak Pacific Surfliner connection. A conductor carried an older customer's luggage aboard before she could ask. A call center representative helped a first-time rider feel prepared to travel. Our goal is to make that level of care the standard customers can expect on every trip.

Turning feedback into fixes. Refund costs fell 30%, and the top refund reasons point to friction we can remove. The most common were customers buying tickets for the wrong travel date. In the second quarter, staff will transition to a new Call Center provider, improve how rideshare options are communicated during disruptions, reduce ticket purchase errors, and address enforcement-related feedback. Progress will continue to be reported through the Voice of the Customer program on a quarterly basis so we can update the Board not just what customers told us, but what changed as a result.

Next Steps

Staff will report quarterly on ridership, new mobile accounts, mobile ticket adoption, repeat ridership, CPP revenue, and Net Promoter Score. In Q2, CX priorities include converting first-time riders into repeat customers, reengaging lapsed riders where service supports their needs, improving the customer experience during disruptions and fare enforcement, and expanding revenue through partnerships and sponsorships. Future reporting will emphasize both performance trends and actions taken in response to customer feedback.

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Attachment(s)

Presentation - CX Update FY27 Q1