ITEM 8H.

METROLINK

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ITEM ID:	**2026-180-0**
TRANSMITTAL DATE:	**September 18, 2026**
MEETING DATE:	**September 25, 2026**
TO:	**Board of Directors**
FROM:	**Lisa Bahr, Chief Customer Experience Officer**
SUBJECT:	**Fiscal Year 2026 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 Relations, and CX Innovation & Partnerships. For FY26, the CX team's strategic pillars are to strengthen customer engagement and insights, prioritize customer experience and safety initiatives, and clearly communicate Metrolink's vision, brand, and value.

In FY26, 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 December 2025.

Discussion

In October 2025, we realigned the Customer Experience Division to strengthen our focus on the initiatives that matter most: growing ridership, increasing revenue and regional support, and delivering a more seamless customer experience. CX restructuring also enhanced the division's resilience by expanding cross-training opportunities, developing leadership capacity, and creating greater flexibility to meet evolving organizational needs.

This report introduces our Customer Experience Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which will be reported quarterly to provide greater visibility of our progress and outcomes. It also highlights key accomplishments from Fiscal Year 2026 across Marketing, Communications, Customer Relations, and CX Innovation & Partnerships, while looking ahead to the priorities and opportunities that will shape our work in Fiscal Year 2027.

Market Research and Data Analytics
Staff have identified a set of Key Performance Indicators to assess and track the performance of Metrolink's Customer Experience Program. Metrics include:

New Mobile Accounts
New mobile app registrations provide a direct measure of customer growth and reflect intent to ride.

Mobile Adoption
The share of ridership using mobile tickets reflects customer adoption of the mobile purchase channel. Increasing mobile ticket use supports the Authority's goal of reducing administrative burden while improving the user experience.

Repeat Ridership
Analysis of mobile app data allows staff to estimate how many first-time riders Metrolink ride again within 12 months of their first trip, helping to gauge trial-rider conversion.

Corporate Partner Program (CPP) Revenue Growth
Growth in CPP revenue is supported by frequent ridership and reflects the financial value of partnerships with participating schools and businesses.

Net Promoter Score (NPS)
NPS is a widely used measure of customer loyalty derived from surveys offered to customers after riding Metrolink.

FY26 and Q4 performance against these measures is summarized below.

- **New mobile accounts:** New mobile app registrations in FY26 were down 16% from the prior year. That rate improved sharply during the fourth quarter with a 22% increase following the start of the FIFA World Cup 2026 on June 11.
- **Mobile adoption:** Mobile tickets accounted for 64% of ridership in FY26, up from 60% a year earlier.
- **Repeat ridership:** Converting first-time riders into repeat customers remains an important opportunity for ridership growth. Analysis of riders tracked through FY26 found that a majority did not return to Metrolink within 12 months of their first trip. Among non-students, repeat ridership declined 12% year over year in FY26, although the decline moderated over the second half of the year, from -15% in Q2 to -13% in Q3 and -9% in Q4. With the World Cup bringing new customers to Metrolink and the continued cost of driving creating another reason to consider transit, there is significant potential to turn event-driven and price-sensitive riders into more frequent Metrolink users.
- **CPP revenue growth:** CPP revenue reached $5.34 million in FY26, a 15% year-over-year increase, driven in part by continued growth in the Experience Metrolink program with IE Commuter. CPP represented 14% of total farebox revenue and 41% of Monthly Pass revenue. Experience Metrolink also earned three industry honors: the 2026 SCAG Sustainability Award, California Transportation Foundation Program of the Year Award, and Association for Commuter Transportation Outstanding Transportation Demand Management Strategy Award, recognizing its innovative approach to attracting new customers and encouraging regional rail travel.
- **NPS:** An After-Ride Survey, launched in FY26 to capture customers' experience in real time, recorded an NPS of 44.2 in Q4, up from 40.0 in Q3. Scores above 40 indicate strong customer loyalty. Customers cited improved reliability, cleanliness and fares as key contributors to a positive experience, while schedules remained a source of dissatisfaction.

Beyond the established KPIs, FY26 ridership grew 3.3% amid significant changes to fares and service, including the simplified fare pilot, discontinuation of free student fares, reliability issues and a mid-year service reduction. Growth accelerated in Q4, with ridership up 5.4% year over year and non-student ridership increasing by as much as 10%. Major events and higher driving costs helped fuel demand, as the FIFA World Cup 2026 and a 25% increase in gasoline prices since the start of hostilities with Iran brought new and infrequent riders to Metrolink.

Major events and promotions brought new and infrequent riders to Metrolink. During the World Cup, Metrolink operated 48 supplemental trains across 10 days of special-event service. Ridership during the five-week World Cup period increased 12% compared with the prior year. Weekend ridership increased by 26% over the six weekends of the World Cup compared to the preceding six weekends, rising from 101,761 to 128,273. Free-ride promotions for Earth Day and Bike Day further supported customer acquisition. At the same time, key fare products posted gains, with SoCal Explorer Day Pass sales increasing 13% and LA Zone Day Pass sales growing nearly 10% over the prior quarter.

Strong ridership growth did not eliminate persistent concerns around schedules and fares. A service reduction implemented in March generated significant negative feedback, which intensified after potential fare increases and further service reductions were announced. Together, schedule- and fare-related issues accounted for 65% of Q4 customer complaints.

Stronger on-time performance provided a positive counterpoint, contributing to higher customer satisfaction as total complaints declined 42% year over year.

Metrolink is attracting new riders but retaining them remains a challenge. Shaping how customers perceive Metrolink's convenience and value will be critical to turning recent event-driven gains into sustained ridership growth.

Marketing

FY26 marked a significant departmental reorganization for Marketing that strengthened specialized capabilities and added a new strategic agency partner. Marketing focused on driving ridership and revenue by positioning Metrolink as Southern California's regional rail connector and making the system easier to understand and use.

Targeted campaigns delivered strong results in priority markets. San Bernardino Line ridership increased nearly 10% year-over-year, while Pomona-North boardings increased 37%. Arrow service marked a 17% increase in ticket sales during a promotional campaign period, demonstrating the value of focusing resources where they can directly support ridership and revenue growth.

Student ridership remained strong following the transition from fully subsidized fares to the 50% Student Discount. Despite the shift from free to paid travel, student boardings increased 34% from July to September 2025 compared with the prior three months. A winter and spring campaign generated a further 15% increase in student ticket sales. Mobility-4-All, Metrolink's low-income discount, remains an opportunity. Participation was affected by uncertainty surrounding public benefit programs and limited access to eligible audiences.

The team also supported the transition to Metrolink's restructured fares, driving awareness and sales of priority products, including the 5-Day Flex Pass and the new SoCal Day Pass and LA Zone Day Pass. Public engagement generated more than 1,500 comments and strong customer ratings, contributing to Board adoption of the permanent fare structure.

In FY27, expanding partnerships with trusted organizations, including the Department of Public Social Services and LA Metro, will strengthen outreach and program education. Metrolink will also continue to focus on acquiring new riders, retaining existing customers and recapturing lapsed riders to drive ridership, revenue and long-term customer value.

CX Innovation and Partnerships

The October 2025 Customer Experience reorganization established CX Innovation & Partnerships to help grow ridership by developing and testing solutions that address customer pain points and make Metrolink a more attractive travel option. The team was also charged with expanding strategic partnerships and developing sustainable non-fare revenue sources, creating a dedicated function for an increasingly important area of agency growth.

One of the team's first initiatives was a Contactless Payments pilot aimed at making Metrolink easier and more convenient to use. Since launching June 10 on the San Bernardino Line and Arrow service, the pilot has recorded 1,594 tap-ins, with 96.7% of users riding only once, consistent with expectations that contactless payments would appeal to new and infrequent customers. About two-thirds of usage occurred during the FIFA World Cup, while mobile wallets have accounted for roughly three in five taps. Early findings are informing improvements to validator visibility and customer education.

Partnership activity also delivered measurable revenue growth while laying the groundwork for future opportunities. The team generated $229,084 in advertising, sponsorship, licensing, special event and other partnership revenue, a 36% year-over-year increase. A systemwide valuation of Metrolink assets helped shape a long-term sponsorship strategy encompassing multi-year agreements, naming rights, advertising assets and innovative brand partnerships. Collaborations with regional events, destinations and entertainment properties introduced Metrolink to new audiences, highlighted by a promotional campaign and press junket at Los Angeles Union Station for Bleecker Street's feature film, *STOP! THAT! TRAIN!*

A new Partner Portal moved forward in FY26, creating infrastructure to support the Corporate Partner Program as well as other event, student and revenue opportunities over time. In FY27, Metrolink will also launch a more structured advertising and sponsorship program designed to diversify non-fare revenue and create more a sustainable revenue pipeline, with the goal of generating over half a million dollars in additional annual revenue across the portfolio.

Communications

As part of the broader CX restructure, Public Affairs and Community Relations were integrated within Communications, bringing greater coordination to strategic storytelling, media relations and stakeholder engagement. The more unified structure expanded Metrolink's visibility, reach and regional connections, helping advance major agency priorities.

Over the course of the year, the team strengthened relationships with station cities, achieved better synchronization around FIFA World Cup 2026 planning, reimagined an annual by-line engagement program with a FY26 focus on the Riverside Line, improved communication on capital projects and forged new connections with local schools and students. Metrolink also moved its bimonthly stakeholder newsletter, *The Link*, from email distribution to the LinkedIn social media platform, where it grew to 4,865 subscribers by year-end, representing 28.2% of Metrolink's overall LinkedIn following.

Tactical media outreach also supported major CX initiatives, including simplified fares, contactless payments, safety, ridership growth and World Cup service. A national NPR story featuring a Metrolink subject-matter expert was picked up by the Associated Press, earning nearly 200 media mentions. World Cup communications generated another 186 media mentions, including an in-depth Telemundo feature, resulting in a potential audience of more than 400 million. The agency's annual free ride days also saw strong year-over-year growth, with media reach increasing 145% and advertising-equivalent value increasing 128%. Recognition from industry publications further enhanced Metrolink's reputation and highlighted the agency's work and leadership.

Collectively, this work elevated Metrolink's profile and reinforced the agency's value across Southern California. This progress provides valuable momentum for FY27 and the growing range of opportunities ahead, as Metrolink continues to improve the customer experience, advance major capital investments and prepare the region for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Customer Relations

FY26 brought significant transformation, with team members from Customer Relations and Metrolink's Communications Desk unified under a new customer support structure. This change established clearer accountability and closer collaboration, improving how Metrolink engages with customers, particularly during disruptions. The team complemented the reorganization with technological advancements and better cross-departmental coordination, supporting a more seamless customer experience and the more timely flow of information.

Key accomplishments included:

- **Customer Support operations:** A comprehensive assessment of the Customer Relations, Communications Desk, Call Center and LA Union Station support functions clarified roles and streamlined workflows across customer-facing teams.
- **LA Union Station enhancements:** Customer Relations and Operations worked together to reduce unnecessary track changes at LA Union Station by approximately 50%. New digital signage was also installed to make train, track and service information more visible to customers.
- **Real-time customer communications:** Metrolink Alerts grew to 18,176 subscribers, while expanded SMS capacity allowed the agency to communicate more effectively during periods of increased service disruptions. The program was recognized by APTA with a Grand AdWheel Award for 2026 in the category of Best Marketing and Communications Educational Initiative.
- **Major events:** Led customer support planning for FIFA World Cup service and maintained frontline readiness in case of major disruptions or service changes.
- **Technology improvements:** Modernization of Metrolink's Salesforce platform began in FY26, with a focus on improving case intake, routing, reporting and automation. The team also refined real-time information channels to support more timely and accurate customer communications in preparation for the 2028 Olympics and Paralympics.

Building on the progress made this year, several initiatives will move from planning to implementation in FY27. Upcoming priorities include transitioning to a new Call Center provider, updating the refund process, expanding alternate transportation options during major disruptions, implementing ADA study recommendations, enhancing security efforts, and exploring a field support program. This work will further evolve the customer support model, equipping team members to better anticipate customer needs, manage disruptions effectively, resolve concerns when they arise and deliver a more consistent experience throughout the customer journey.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to monitor Key Performance Indicators and report back to the Board next quarter with the results on ridership, account registrations, mobile ticketing adoption, repeat ridership, CPP revenue, and changes in Net Promoter Scores. Customer Experience efforts will continue to focus on retaining current ridership, converting new customers, strengthening regional and community support, and driving revenue through partnerships and advertising.

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Attachment(s)

Presentation - FY26 Customer Experience Update