



ITEM ID: 2024-190-0

TRANSMITTAL DATE: May 17, 2024

MEETING DATE: May 24, 2024

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Lisa Bahr, Chief Customer Experience Officer

SUBJECT: Customer Experience Update for Quarter 3 (FY2023-24)

Issue

Staff is updating the Committee on Customer Experience campaigns and activities for January 1, 2024, through March 31, 2024 (Q3, FY 2023-24).

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.

Background

The CX team's FY2023-24 goals are to help regain and grow ridership, reposition and elevate the value of the Metrolink brand, and provide the most exceptional customer experience in public transportation.

This report is an overview of how the Customer Experience group worked to achieve those objectives during the third quarter of FY 2024.

Discussion

Regain and Grow Ridership

Transit Equity Day

Continuing a tradition for the third year, Metrolink marked Transit Equity Day this past February 4, 2024 on what would have been Rosa Parks' birthday by championing the cause of accessible and equitable transportation. In honoring her legacy, we provided free rides across our system, joining forces with LA Metro, SBCTA, RCTC, VCTC, and OCTA in a united front to offer fare-free travel throughout Southern California.

Even as the rainy season presented its challenges with a flood watch and persistent showers, the inclement weather did little to dampen the spirit of our riders. The result was a remarkable surge in boardings, which leaped to 10,219 - doubling the average of the preceding four Sundays.

The Metrolink Arrow service also witnessed an unprecedented upsurge in ridership with 624 boardings, registering a significant 96% increase from an average Sunday. This impressive turnout, despite the rain, is a testament to the resilience of our riders and the importance of reliable and affordable transit. Our community's response is a clear indicator of the essential role that Metrolink plays in their daily lives, and it reaffirms our responsibility to ensure that everyone has access to safe, reliable, and equitable transportation options.

Student Adventure Pass

As the fall term concluded in early December 2023, the team refined their approach to promote the pass more effectively. With the spring semester beginning in January, the campaign was rejuvenated, introducing college-specific initiatives tailored for the back-to-school period and aimed at engaging new students who have not yet explored the Student Adventure Pass. Metrolink maintains its partnerships with over 35 educational institutions, including colleges, universities, schools, and school districts, to further the program's reach among students and facilitate on-campus events. To date, the Metrolink street team has successfully held 46 events at the campuses of partnering institutions.

Since the program's inception, more than 24,000 Southern California students have taken at least one trip using the Student Adventure Pass on the mobile app, representing students from 446 schools across Metrolink's service area. Moreover, the number of student tickets issued more than doubled, from 175,000 in October 2023, to 365,000 in March 2024. Student ridership climbed 85% in March, compared to the same month in 2023 when the Student Adventure Pass did not exist. More than one in four riders (26%) who took the train in March 2024 was a student, up from just 17% a year earlier. Arrow trains have the highest student ridership share with 47% of trips taken on that line in March.

Students can receive their free Student Adventure Pass at any Metrolink ticket machine or by creating a verified mobile app account using their school email. A valid student ID is required for students to use the pass.

On February 23, Metrolink extended the Student Adventure Pass validity to June 30, 2024,

enabling students to continue riding Metrolink for free through the LCTOP grant-funded pilot program. Metrolink team members have presented recommendations for extending the program through the 2024-2025 school year to the MAAC, and discussions continue with member agencies. The team is collecting data and will share future updates as the pilot program continues.

Mobility 4 All

The Mobility 4 All program stands as a cornerstone of Metrolink's commitment to fostering equitable access to transportation within our service areas. In Q3, we continued to reach out to disadvantaged communities, ensuring that mobility is not just a service but a shared value, connecting people to opportunity and progress.

In the early weeks of February, we engaged our communities directly through a robust email campaign. Messages were sent to nearly 480,000 English speakers and over 159,000 Spanish speakers identified within the disadvantaged census tracts. This effort led to a significant engagement, with 16,429 individuals directed to the Mobility 4 All program via our landing page, indicating a strong community interest in Metrolink services.

It's important to note the shift in usage patterns with the introduction of the free Student Adventure Pass. With the launch of this pass, Mobility 4 All usage declined as students shifted to the free student fare. Since then, usage has stabilized, and the number of active program participants has continued to grow by 45%. It demonstrates our successful approach to equitable fare support, ensuring we meet the dynamic needs of all demographics across our ridership.

As such, marketing efforts have continued to adapt, complementing direct email outreach with strategic paid Google search initiatives and an active social media presence. These tactics are not only about reaching an audience; they're about creating conversations around equitable access and inviting riders to be a part of our journey toward inclusivity.

Insomniac Special Trains

Metrolink continues to work closely in partnership with Insomniac Entertainment, an American electronic music event promoter and music distributor. The special services agreements with Insomniac cover the cost of the train operations and allow Metrolink to retain the ticket revenue for the service. Staff are currently in the process of negotiating a 3-year agreement with Insomniac.

On March 23 and 24, special late-night service was provided, departing at 2:45 a.m. from the San Bernardino-Downtown Metrolink station and making select stops en route to Los Angeles Union Station for the Beyond Wonderland Event. This event generated 1,631 tickets sold and \$32,620 in ticket revenue.

Recognizing the value of this partnership and the ability to target new, leisure riders, staff are working on enhancing the marketing efforts with "Know Before You Go" emails, implementing Spanish language campaigns, surveying Insomniac train riders, and marketing to repeat Insomniac train riders.

Angels Express

The Metrolink team brought back the Angels Express special train service starting on March 26, 2024. The Angels Express service began in 2011 and operated through 2019, when it was suspended due to the pandemic. This 2024 season, Metrolink will serve 42 Angels home games in Anaheim with round-trip service to and from Los Angeles, Riverside, and Oceanside along the Orange County and Inland Empire-Orange County Lines. The service includes a combination of Metrolink regular and special train service and is operated independently of regular service, and funded by OCTA, LA Metro, and RCTC. The first four Angels Express game days have generated over one thousand boardings.

Reposition and Elevate the Value of the Metrolink Brand

Thought Leadership

The Metrolink communications team launched a strategic thought leadership campaign for 2024 to advance organizational goals and raise the agency's profile within Southern California and, more broadly, across the transportation industry. Thought leadership content elevates the voices and perspectives of Metrolink's executive team while allowing customers and stakeholders to hear directly from the organization's decision-makers.

In February, in conjunction with Transit Equity Day, CEO Darren Kettle shared why improving transit equity and serving new customers are foundational to Metrolink's mission. Chief of Program Delivery Justin Fornelli also contributed third-quarter content with a piece in March outlining the need for state of good repair funding to support planned capital development.

Articles were posted to Metrolink's news page and shared on LinkedIn and Instagram. The first two pieces averaged 302 page views with a combined 496 likes on LinkedIn and more than 7,600 impressions on Instagram. Engagement on LinkedIn was 200% higher than the average Metrolink post.

Metrolink Brand Campaign

To consistently foster brand awareness and ensure that Metrolink's intended message reaches the right audience, builds trust, and influences travel behaviors, staff kicked off a Metrolink brand campaign with a radio ad in March. A full brand campaign will launch across all media channels in April.

The campaign highlights "the link between" people, places, and states of being to emotionally connect current and future riders to Metrolink's mission—to move the well-being of our riders, communities, and planet forward—one ride at a time. The campaign aims to create cohesive messaging and showcase the brand's values and services, including the differentiation between Metro and Metrolink, the free connections available with a Metrolink ticket, and reinforce a sense of security for riders.

Improve the Customer Experience

The Customer Experience team collaborates with other Metrolink departments every day to improve our customers' experience. Key initiatives are highlighted here.

San Clemente Track Closure

On January 24, a landslide along a section of the Mariposa Trail Bridge in San Clemente halted passenger rail traffic through the area for two months. The Metrolink and OCTA project team battled inclement weather, which led to additional hillside movement, and challenging work conditions to ultimately restore service on March 25. In support of the interagency response, Metrolink communications staff worked collaboratively with OCTA and LOSSAN colleagues to keep the public informed through each project stage, including the initial service interruption, Caltrans' emergency declaration and the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) funding commitment, site preparation through multiple weather systems, catchment wall construction and track restoration.

In addition to communicating with customers directly through Metrolink-managed channels, the communications team actively engaged local Los Angeles, Orange County and San Diego-based media, fielding almost daily interview requests and ensuring the public was informed about the latest developments. Coverage of the San Clemente track closure, subsequent project work and resumption of service drew more than 480 media mentions with an audience reach of more than 742 million and an ad equivalent value of over \$15 million.

Customer Appreciation Day

On the morning of Wednesday, February 14, Metrolink staff, members of our Board and local dignitaries surprised and delighted riders with branded giveaways and Valentine's Day candy at seven Metrolink stations clad in golden embroidered Metrolink beanies. This occurred in Los Angeles, Corona, Fullerton, Newhall, Riverside, San Bernardino and Simi Valley.

Team Metrolink was joined by Board Directors Pam O'Connor, Tam Nguyen, Lauren Hughes-Leslie, Brian Berkson and Tony Trembley and appreciated support from member agencies, Santa Clarita City Councilmember Marsha McLean, City of Riverside Mayor Pro Tem Steve Hemenway, City of San Bernardino Mayor Helen Tran, City of Simi Valley Mayor Pro Tem Rocky Rhodes and Simi Valley City Councilmember Mike Judge.

To inform riders about this event activation and encourage engagement, an email was distributed on Thursday, February 8 featuring a thank you video to riders from CEO Darren Kettle and the launch of the "Transit Era" merchandise collection on the Metrolink online store.

The event received 15 media mentions (6 TV, 4 online/print, 5 radio) for more than \$335,000 in equivalent ad value.

Human Trafficking Awareness

In January, CEO Darren Kettle joined industry leaders from across the country in signing the Department of Transportation's Transportation Leaders Against Human Trafficking Pledge, which outlines three key action areas: employee education, public awareness, and data collection and sharing. In response, Metrolink's safety, security, and compliance and marketing and communications teams are working collaboratively to bolster counter-trafficking efforts.

So far, in 2024, all frontline employees and contractors have received specialized training to help them recognize and respond to suspicious behavior on Metrolink trains and at stations. Most staff, including office personnel, have also completed newly required biannual education,

and additional training sessions are scheduled. On March 11, the agency launched a comprehensive, year-round public awareness campaign to engage Metrolink customers as allies in the fight against human trafficking. Additionally, a new data tracking component within the reporting protocol will facilitate better information sharing with national counter-trafficking programs and organizations.

Copper Wire Theft Awareness

In response to an increase in copper wire thefts affecting Metrolink operations, Metrolink CX staff proactively leveraged relationships with local media to solicit coverage and raise public awareness of this harmful criminal practice, which has adversely affected many public services in recent years, including transportation. The communications team collaborated with colleagues from Metrolink's operations and safety, security and compliance departments along with representatives from the LA County Sheriff's Department Metrolink Bureau to relay information and insight into the cascading impacts of wire thefts on Metrolink's system.

Resulting digital and broadcast media coverage received national attention, reaching an audience of more than 15 million and delivering an ad equivalent value of over \$150,000. Metrolink's marketing and communications team has also partnered with safety, security and compliance staff to create informative content for Instagram and TikTok to support this initiative.

Voice of the Customer

Each quarter the Customer Experience team provides a detailed Voice of the Customer report to Metrolink executives, highlighting key service trends associated with comments made by customers through various communications channels. Customer feedback analysis and reporting identifies customers concerns and needs, helping us to improve service and the customer experience. What follows is a summary of feedback trends for the third quarter.

Metrolink was contacted 41,281 times from January 1 through March 31 via the call center, social media, and the Metrolink website feedback form by people submitting feedback or inquiring about service; a 53% increase compared to the 26,965 contacts received the previous year. Eighty-nine percent (36,651) of all contacts were through the call center (30,125 via phone and 6,526 via text) and 92% were inquiries about service (train status, schedule, fares, etc.). The remaining 6% are positive/negative feedback.

Increased feedback compared to last year is related to an influx of inquiries, mostly about the successful Student Adventure Pass (SAP) program; many students contacted the call center to learn more about the program. We received positive feedback about helpful, friendly, and professional conductors and call center representatives. Negative feedback is primarily associated with onboard policies (fare/quiet car enforcement and not holding for late passengers) and issues related to the SAP (unverified school email domains).

Prepared by: Sabrina Davis, Director, Marketing & Partnerships

Rachel Chaires, Senior Manager, Customer Relations

Approved by: Lisa Bahr, Chief Customer Experience Officer

Attachment(s)

[Presentation - CX Update Q3 FY24](#)