

RTAP Peer Roundtable Notes

Growing Ridership, Public Engagement & Marketing

1/15/2026 | 1:30–3 PM | Online

Attendees

1. Chris Thompson
2. Cindy Pic
3. Aaron Forstrom
4. Stacy Struck
5. Randy Jahnke
6. Bill Spitzer
7. Taaren Haak
8. Ashley Strand
9. Cathleen Amick
10. Jeremy Monahan
11. Gale Schulz
12. Rhonda Torgerson
13. Melinda Estey
14. Allison Karau
15. Mariah Kathan

Biggest Challenges:

- Low public awareness of transit services and eligibility
- Perception that transit is only for specific populations
- Difficulty reaching new or choice riders
- Limited marketing budgets and staff capacity
- Large service areas with diverse communities
- Inconsistent branding and messaging across regions
- Converting outreach efforts into actual ridership
- Measuring the effectiveness of marketing strategies

Solutions & Strategies:

- Partnering with cities, counties, employers, schools, and community organizations
- Using local newsletters, utility bill inserts, and community mailings
- Storytelling through rider testimonials and staff spotlights
- Repurposing content across social media, websites, and print materials
- Participating in community events, fairs, and public meetings
- Targeted outreach to seniors, students, employers, and human service agencies
- High school outreach and travel training programs
- Using QR codes on printed materials to direct riders to schedules and apps
- Offering free-ride promotions or special event services
- Tracking outreach timelines alongside ridership trends

Ask a Peer Q & A:

Q: What marketing efforts have been most effective for increasing awareness?

A: Agencies reported success with direct mail, bill inserts, community events, and partnerships with trusted local organizations.

Q: How do agencies reach people who do not think transit is for them?

A: Participants emphasized inclusive messaging, highlighting diverse riders, and promoting transit for everyday trips rather than only medical or senior trips.

Q: Are statewide or shared marketing efforts helpful?

A: Yes. Many agencies supported statewide branding, billboards, and shared tools or apps to extend reach beyond local budgets.

Q: How do you measure whether marketing is working?

A: Most agencies track outreach efforts informally by noting when campaigns occur and comparing them to ridership or call volume changes.

Q: What role do drivers and frontline staff play in marketing?

A: Drivers often serve as ambassadors by answering questions, sharing feedback, and identifying stories or outreach opportunities.

Q: How do you market with very limited resources?

A: Agencies recommended partnerships, free community channels, repurposing content, and focusing on a few high-impact strategies rather than many small ones.

Next Peer Roundtable: February 12, 2026 - Policies