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**TRB** TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD

# TRB Webinar: Increasing Customer Awareness and Understanding of On- Demand Transit

*June 6, 2023*

*2:00 – 3:30 PM*



NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE

# AICP Credit Information

1.5 American Institute of Certified Planners Certification Maintenance Credits

You must attend the entire webinar

Log into the American Planning Association website to claim your credits

Contact AICP, not TRB, with questions

# Purpose Statement

This webinar will provide findings and insights about how transit agencies and other local government entities approach marketing, customer education, and engagement efforts to improve awareness and utilization of their on-demand transit services or subsidy programs.

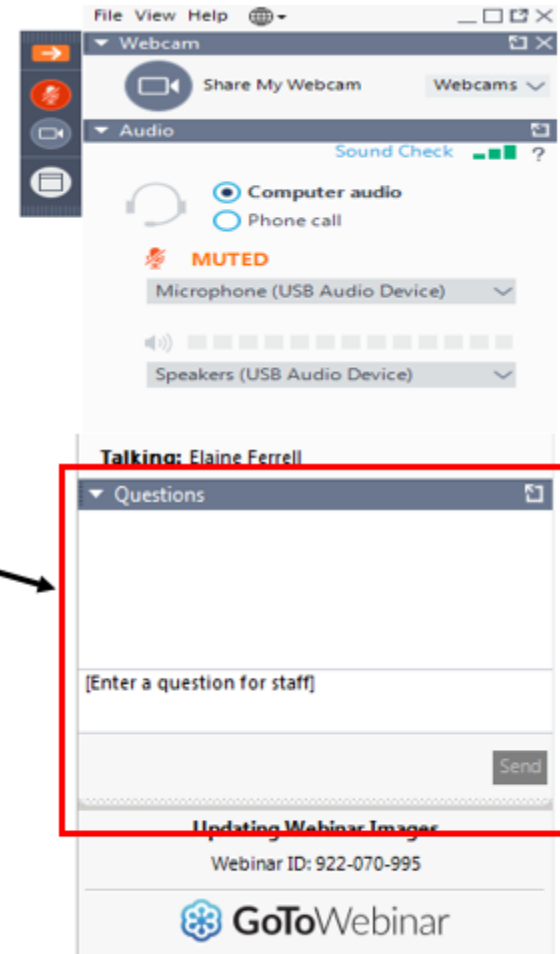
## Learning Objectives

At the end of this webinar, you will be able to:

- (1) Evaluate marketing and customer education throughout the life of the on-demand service
- (2) Consider tailoring the messaging and medium of customer education to the intended audience
- (3) Develop budgeting and evaluation mechanisms for marketing and training efforts

# Questions and Answers

- Please type your questions into your webinar control panel
- We will read your questions out loud, and answer as many as time allows



# Today's presenters



**Mia Zmud**

Founding Partner

**Blue Door Strategy and Research**

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**Todd Hansen, AICP**

Associate Research Scientist

**Transit Mobility Program –**

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**Eric Lingaur**

Communications & Development Dir.

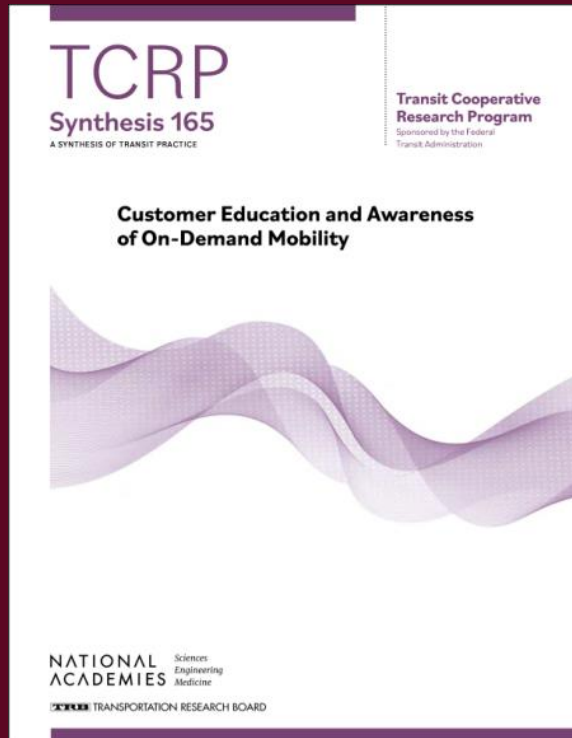
**Bay Area Transportation Authority**

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# Increasing Customer Awareness and Understanding of On-Demand Transit

*TCRP Synthesis 165: Customer Education and Awareness of On-Demand Mobility*

# Agenda

- Research Findings from Synthesis Report 165
- Large Urban Case Study: LA Metro
- Small Urban/Rural Case Study: BATA
- Moderated question and answer session





# Research Findings from Synthesis Report 165

Todd Hansen, Texas A&M Transportation Institute



# Improving Customer Education Efforts



**Commission on Aging Senior Transit**

**Changes are coming to COAST on October 1st!**

**COAST** → **link on-demand** **link Village**

**More Rides! More Availability! Better Efficiency!**

COAST is transitioning to BATA's Link On-Demand and Village Link services on Oct. 1st

Link On-Demand ride requests will be accepted with no denials with average wait times of 30 minutes or less. Village Link service is still based on availability.

Fare will now be required to ride and free fare passes are available through the COA for those who need it  
\$3 one-way for Link On-Demand  
\$1.50 one-way for Village Link

Schedule rides with an app, online or on the phone through BATA Customer Service (Link On-Demand)


Link On-Demand: 6am – 10:30pm (Mon – Fri) 6am – 11:30pm (Sat/Sun)  
Village Link: Monday – Friday, call BATA Customer Service for hours of operation

**GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY** Commission on Aging  
231.941.2324  
www.bata.net

**BATA**  
Bay Area Transportation Authority

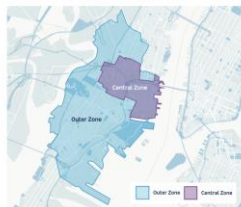
**A new way to get around Jersey City!**

Your first two rides are **FREE** using promo code:  
**VIAINJC**  
Expiration Date: 4/1/2020



**Service hours.**  
Monday - Friday: 6am-10pm

**Service zone.**  
Ride anywhere within the area shown on the map.



**Important:** You can ride between the Central Zone and the Outer Zone, but you can't ride within the Central Zone.




**How to ride.**

- 1 Create an account.**  
Download Via from the App Store or Google Play store and follow the simple signup steps.  

If you don't have a smartphone, call 201-514-6228 to get set up.
- 2 Request a ride.**  
Enter your pickup and dropoff addresses and choose the ride option that works for you.
- 3 Meet your driver.**  
Check the app and walk a short distance to your pickup spot. Call us if you're having trouble!

**Need a wheelchair-accessible ride?**  
Just tap "Wheelchair accessibility" in your account profile and we'll be sure to assign you a wheelchair accessible vehicle.

**VIA** | **CITY** | Have questions? Email us at: support-jerseycity@ridewithvia.com



# Research Overview

- TCRP Synthesis SB-35, now published as Synthesis 165: Customer Education and Awareness of On-Demand Mobility
- Learn how marketing, customer outreach, and education/travel training efforts are conducted for on-demand transit
  - Transit partnerships with TNCs, taxi companies, and microtransit as service providers or technology solutions
- Interested in media channels and strategies, targeted population groups, partner roles, and phases of engagement

# Key Terms

- Ride-hailing
- Transportation network company (TNC)
- Microtransit
- Digital platform
- Subsidy program
- Turnkey
- Software as a Service



# Project Phases

- 1 Literature Review and Scan
- 2 Online Targeted Survey
- 3 Case Studies

# Topics in Marketing and Outreach

Internal  
Planning and  
Budgeting

Partnerships  
and Roles

Marketing  
Efforts

Education and  
Participation

Communication  
Methods

Performance  
Measurement

# Survey and Case Study Agencies



King County  
**METRO**

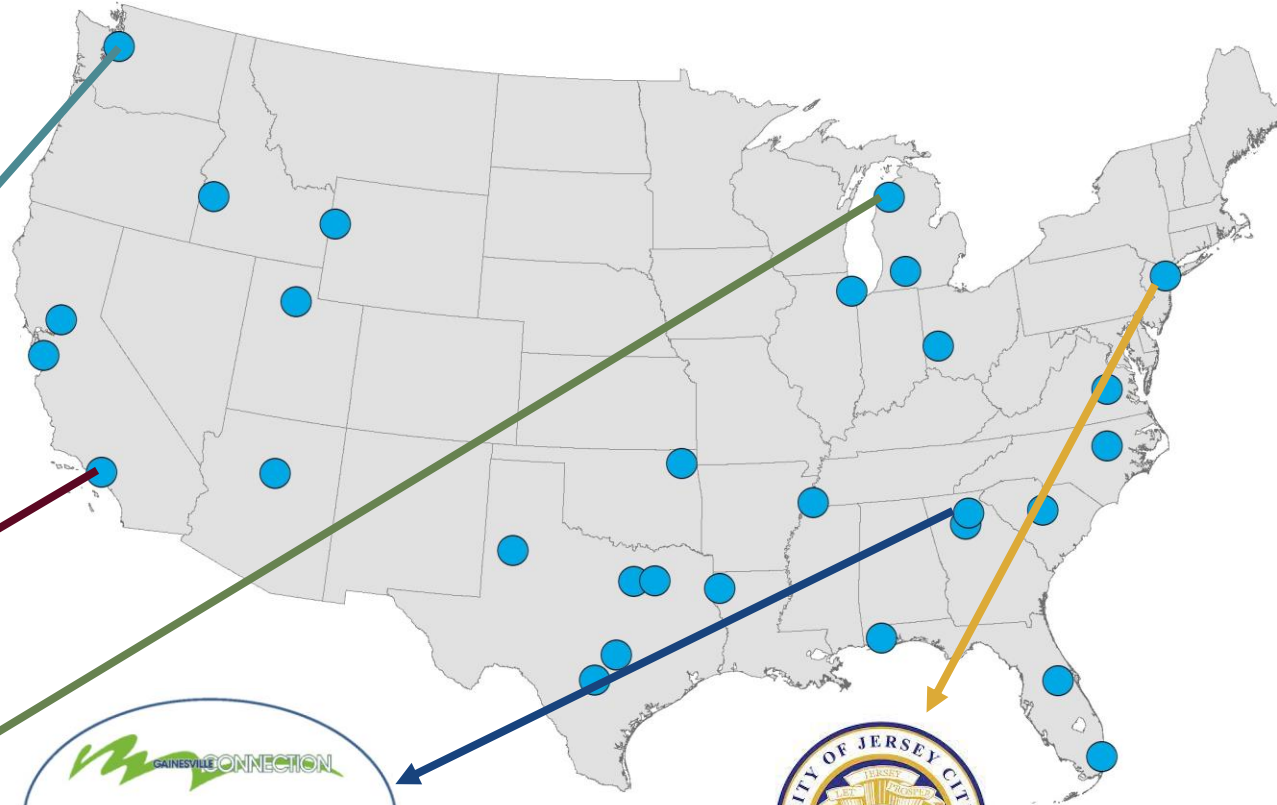
*Moving forward together*



**Metro**

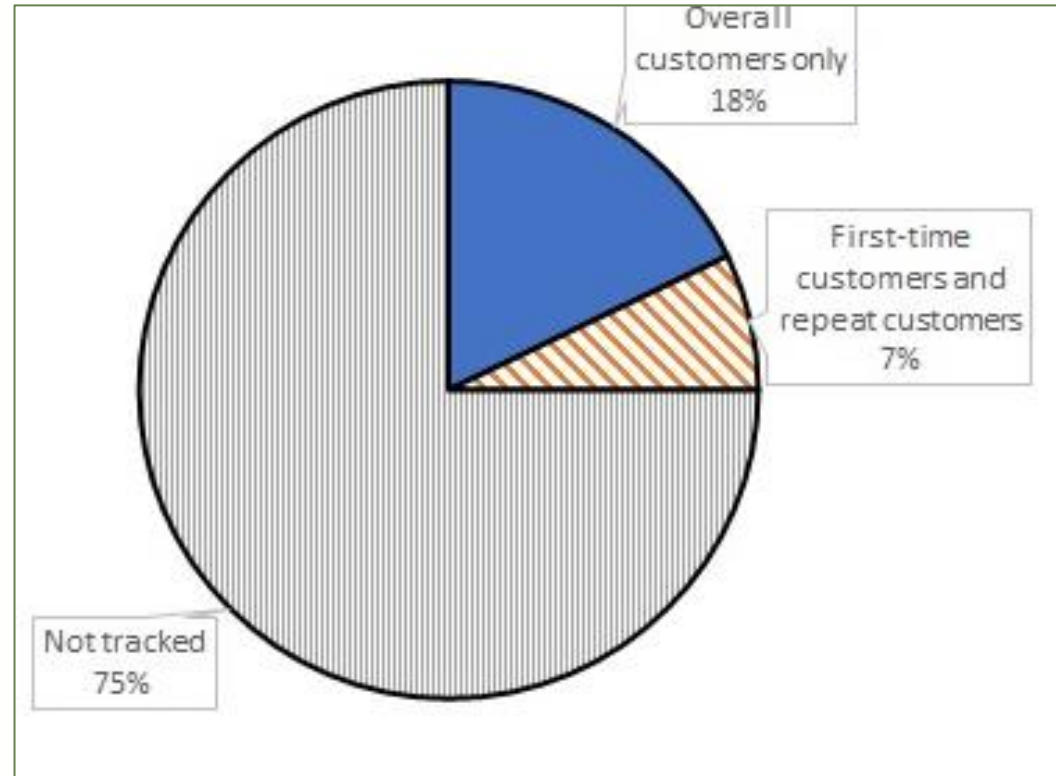


Bay Area Transportation Authority



## Survey Findings

- Location (79%), agency goals (72%), demographics (66%), and points of interest (62%) impacted marketing and branding
- Marketing or Community Outreach Departments were usually the lead group
- Some contracts specified key partner activities and sub-budget
- Print collateral, social media, and workshops/events were most common for marketing



**Results for Tracking Cost of Customer Acquisition**



# Key Takeaways – Tailoring Messaging

- Marketing work is best when tailored to specific customer audiences
  - Use different approaches or pitches based on the local context
- Demonstrating the benefits of on-demand mobility options to customers through hands-on education or comparative materials improve understanding
  - Particularly for customers used to their existing transit services

Hall Area Transit created customer profiles prior to service launch to identify benefits and challenges of transitioning to microtransit.

Jersey City targeted marketing efforts towards housing developments and other key ridership groups.





# Key Takeaways – Retaining Riders

- Rider retention can also be a challenge for some agencies after customers try the new service the first time
  - Need additional understanding of customer issues with using on-demand service and/or their comfort level with the technology
- Getting customers to take the initial ride on the on-demand service is often the biggest barrier
  - Some communities may need additional education efforts
- Attracting new customers who are not already using existing transit services can have mixed success

King County Metro monitored sign-ups for the service compared to initial trips and return trips on their microtransit services.



# Key Takeaways – Follow-up Efforts

- Continued marketing of the new service before the service launch, at the service launch, and as the service continues post-launch helps reach the intended audience
  - Customers can forget about the service after a single touchpoint
- Demonstrate incorporation of customer feedback through responsiveness to their concerns and service asks

Hall Area Transit offered referral bonuses to help retain existing customers and encourage new ridership.

The agency also amended fares, reduced walking distances to virtual stops, and implemented an improved ADA assistance button in their app based on customer feedback.



# Key Takeaways – In-Person Engagement

- When possible to do safely, having staff on the ground to help educate on the street about the service and answer their questions is often the most effective customer engagement tool
  - Use relationships with organizations and elected officials to help educate them about the on-demand service, which then turns into work-of-mouth advertising and organizational support
  - During COVID-19, many agencies had to shift planned in-person activities to be virtual
- Travel training can be a key tool to show customers how to use smartphone apps and board the vehicle
  - Also assisting customers with signing-up or creating profiles



# Key Takeaways – Leveraging Partners

- Partners often play a role in customer awareness and education, depending on agency preferences and company capabilities
  - Can provide templates for marketing materials, send communications/push messages, and provide in-person engagement
- Maintaining ongoing collaboration and communication with project partners and stakeholders leads to better success in building awareness and buy-in to the service
- Monitoring execution of activities from project partners is important; contractual provisions can help ensure they occur as specified
  - Can include specifying activities and performance measures related to customer awareness
- Meet with stakeholders before the service launches for input and feedback to help grow community buy-in
  - Adjust service parameters to meet customers' mobility needs



# Key Takeaways – Measuring Benefit

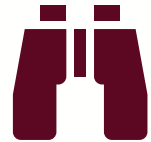
- Performance measurement of marketing efforts typically looks at metrics for service ridership, new and recurring customers, complaints and service rating, and online engagement
- Improvement needed in measuring the benefit of marketing and engagement efforts for new on-demand transit services
- Leveraging available data and resources from service/technology partners is a valuable tool for decision making and saving staff effort
  - Need to work with technology vendor to ensure data availability
- Set benchmarks and KPIs for measuring level of success in customer engagement, retention, and cost



# Key Takeaways – Planning Ahead

- Planning ahead on budgets, resources, and staff/partner roles throughout the project is ideal
  - Setting levels of dedicated funding for education and marketing is critical for activities to occur beyond service launch
- Project budgets for on-demand services can include line items for marketing so that agencies have the resources available to perform these activities.
  - Conversely, overall marketing budgets can include call-outs for on-demand services

King County Metro sets a marketing and engagement budget each year for contracted service (including microtransit). This enables the agency to support planned activities with multiple touchpoints.





**Metro<sup>®</sup>**

# Large Urban Case Study: Los Angeles Metro

Rani Narula-Woods

Metro Micro, Superintendent Operations

Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority

# Case Study Overview – LA Metro



- Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro) provides transportation service in LA city and county in California
- Provides local bus, BRT, heavy rail, light rail, vanpool, and microtransit service (Metro Micro)
- Experience in developing a customer-centric on-demand service and customer-specific marketing campaigns
- Experience in measuring customer acquisition costs for on-demand service
- Significant successes in initial 18 months of Metro Micro operations



# LA Metro – Service Design and Features



- Metro Micro was developed from previous MOD pilots as a public-private on-demand mobility service
- Initially 3 teams providing service, then a contract awarded to one private-sector contractor
- Three service goals:
  1. Provide a cost-effective transit service that customers love.
  2. Invest in new technology.
  3. Change the culture of transit in Los Angeles
- 8 zones, \$1 fare per ride, fleet with accessible minivans

# LA Metro – Processes and Planning



- In Micro's early days, Metro Communications joined the role in Micro marketing
  - Once Micro marketing collateral was developed, the Metro Micro business unit absorbed the leadership role for marketing and education
- Micro staff worked closely with the Aging & Disability Network to learn about customer needs, get input on fleet selection and features
  - LA Metro sought input on the name as part of LA Metro's family of services
- LA Metro further wanted to introduce the newest transit innovations in that area to reinforce the idea that investing in transit service in that community is important

# LA Metro – Partnerships and Marketing



- Vendor supplements what Micro staff do by subcontracting specialists to provide support (through website design, pop-up informational sessions, vehicle wraps, etc.)
  - Contracting out these functions would offer fresh insights
- Marketing officer working with LA Metro throughout the process helps align vehicle experience while matching expectations
- Marketing philosophy principles:
  - Customers should know what Micro service looks and feels like before they experience it
  - Brand and market the service as being as much a part of the LA Metro “family”
  - Service should be “hyperlocalized” and “authentic”
  - Customer concerns should be resolved quickly and directly


# LA Metro – Education and Communications



- Metro Micro marketing includes commercial media, social media, print collateral, and digital ads
- Customer education efforts have included travel training, how-to-ride videos, print collateral, and workshops or other events
  - During to COVID-19, marketing during the service launch became more reliant on digital (now can do more in-person events)
  - Campaigns are specified for each zone (ex. area retail activities)
- Enhanced participation methods include referrals, mobile app push notifications, and incentives/reward systems
  - One Micro marketing campaign involved employees giving random riders \$5 value cards to pass on to their friends (aiming for word-of-mouth)

# LA Metro – Performance Measurement

- Multifaceted set of customer-oriented performance
- Customer retention is a key measure for Micro
- Use of KPIs to track the success of marketing campaigns
- Ridership and user ratings help indicate level of success in achieving goals

	KPIs	Measure	Target	Oct. 2021	Mar. 2022
	Zone-Level (excerpt)				
	Ridership	Passengers per vehicle per hour	3	2.55	2.97
	Customer Experience	Average number of trips per week on Micro by unique users	3	3.3	3.2
		On-time Performance: % of pickups/drop-offs after promised time (10 min window)	75%	--	64%
Project-Level (excerpt)		Star rating from customer in Metro Micro mobile applications (completed rides)	4.5 of 5 stars	4.80	4.85
	Strategic Partnerships	Number of partnerships with health, transport and education institutions	2 per zone	1	5



# Small Urban / Rural Case Study: BATA

Eric Lingaur  
Communications & Development Director  
Bay Area Transportation Authority

# Case Study Overview – BATA



- BATA serves Grand Traverse and Leelanau counties in Northwest Lower Michigan
- BATA directly operates a mixture of transit services:
  - Local bus service (multiple sets of routes) and flexible-fixed route service
  - Link On-Demand in Traverse City
  - Village Link demand response service in rural areas
  - Seasonal shuttle service to area ski resorts or outdoor events and activities
- Group of departments working together on customer education efforts, engaged in marketing service and incorporation of customer feedback
  - Communication with Local Advisory Council on service needs
- Marketing microtransit as a premium service (in fare cost and availability)

# BATA – Service Design and Features



- Developed Link On-Demand service to supplant their previous City Link dial-a-ride service in Traverse City
  - Began as a pilot in 2020, then subsequently expanded to permanent
  - In 2021, transitioned previous senior bus service to be included
- Operates the service with a vendor's software platform in a defined 20 sq. mi. zone; uses cutaway WAVs for all vehicles
  - Most ride requests met in 15-20 minutes (sometimes up to 30-45 min. during peaks)
- Fare designed to be higher (\$6.00) compared to other services
- BATA has explained service changes and transformations to Link On-Demand through web pages and printed materials



# BATA – Processes and Planning



- Conducted community needs assessment in 2017; customers asked for on-demand
  - Internal goal of improving the efficiency of existing demand response service
  - Wanted to make experience of booking trips more fluid for customers
- Customer education efforts led by Communications and Development Department
  - Operations Department also support in responding to customer questions
- Link On-Demand is available to general public and accessible, but at a premium fare (encouraging riders to continue using fixed-routes)

Branding with consideration to the local area characteristics

- Because Link On-Demand replaced previous City Link, kept the “Link” name and logo while adding “On-Demand” to show the service as distinct



# BATA – Partnerships and Marketing



- BATA handles most of marketing and customer education activities themselves while learning to manage customer expectations along with available service capacity
- Uses a combination of templates available from their technology provider and existing tools/media channels
- Vendor supports through helping with technical support issues related to either the smartphone app or online portal website
- Within contract with software vendor, there is a \$500 cost per vehicle per month to cover software and customer service support, upgrades, marketing materials, and related efforts
- Service website includes a link to download the app, pushes to use the app for trip requests, and frequently asked question section

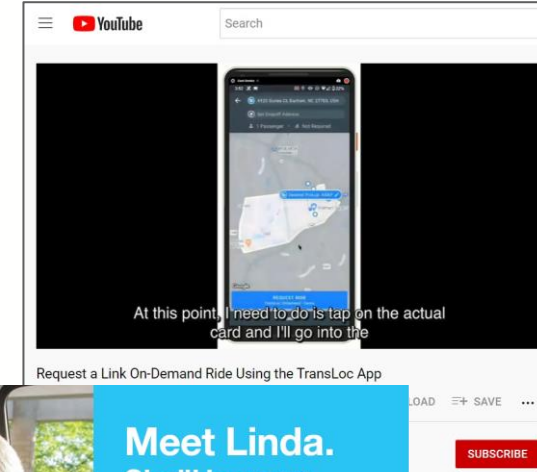
# BATA – Education and Communications



- Variety of numerous avenues for marketing (printed and digital) and informed customers about through vehicle drivers
- Due to COVID-19, held virtual town hall meetings ahead of service launch and mailed postcards to customers
- Somewhat limited marketing due to both reduced staffing levels and being cautious about demand exceeding available capacity
  - Tourism industry was not an initial target due to these uncertainties
  - Marketing has evolved as used of Link On-Demand is observed
- Worked to get information about Link On-Demand to the community 6 weeks ahead of service launch
  - Efforts initially improved use of the smartphone app (rather than calling)

# BATA – Messaging Variety & Response

- Messaging channels included press releases, postcards, emails, texts, posters, rack cards, and social media
- For postcards, used database to identify Link users and send them out along with an email or text message
  - Most effective in increasing awareness
- Developed a YouTube video as a walk-through demonstration for downloading the app and requesting a ride
- Sent marketing materials to area medical clinics and service organizations



# Key Takeaways

- Think about marketing and customer education beyond the launch point and throughout the life of the on-demand service
- Consider right-sizing the messaging and medium of customer education to the intended audience
- Develop budgeting and evaluation mechanisms for marketing and training efforts

# Download TCRP Synthesis 165:

<https://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/182881.aspx>



## Transit Mobility Program

<https://groups.tti.tamu.edu/transit-mobility/>

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# Today's presenters



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**July 8, 2023**

TRB's National Conference on  
Transportation Asset Management



[https://www.nationalacademies.org/trb/  
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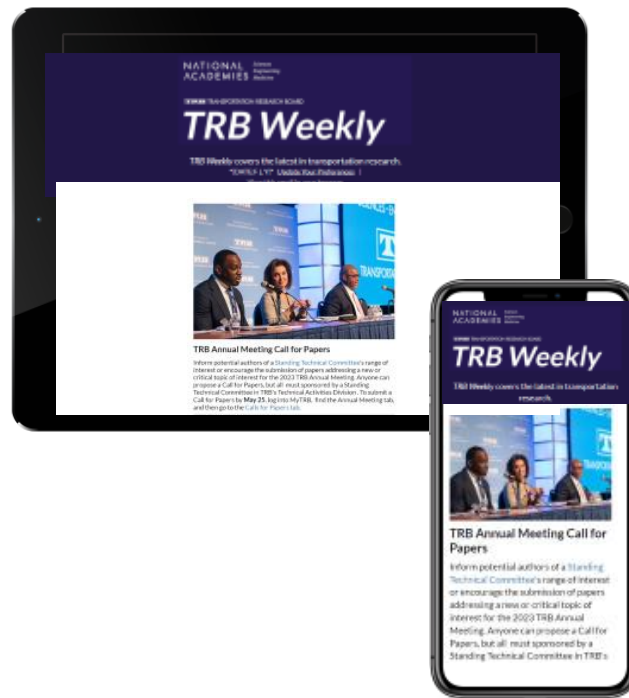


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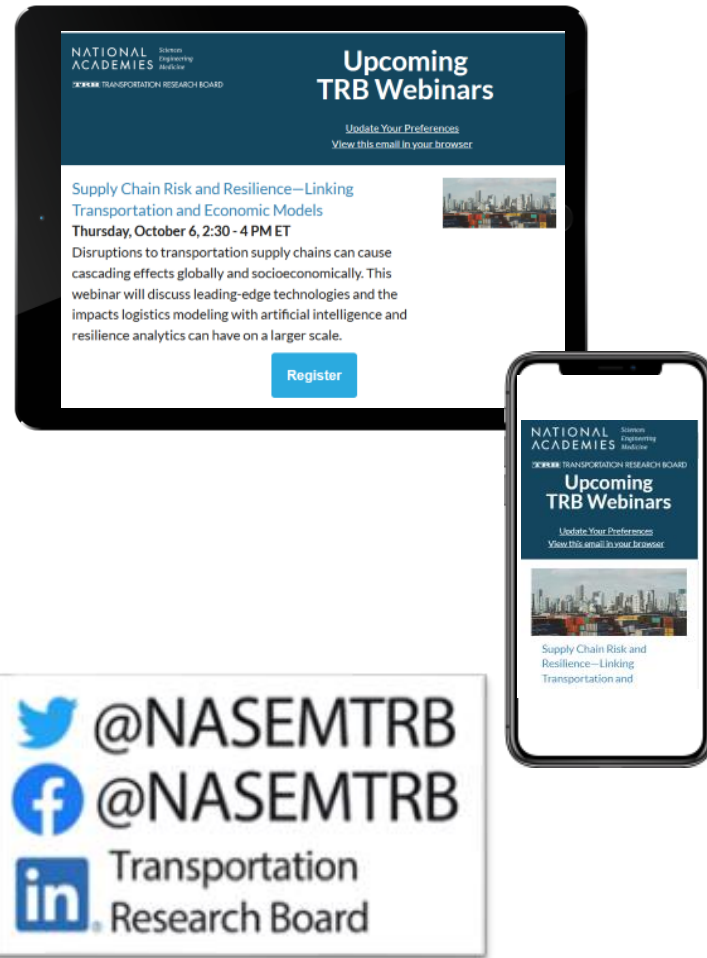
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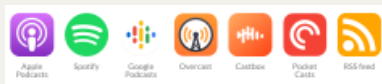
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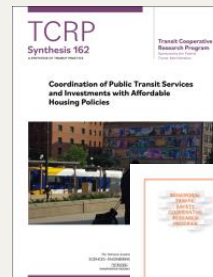
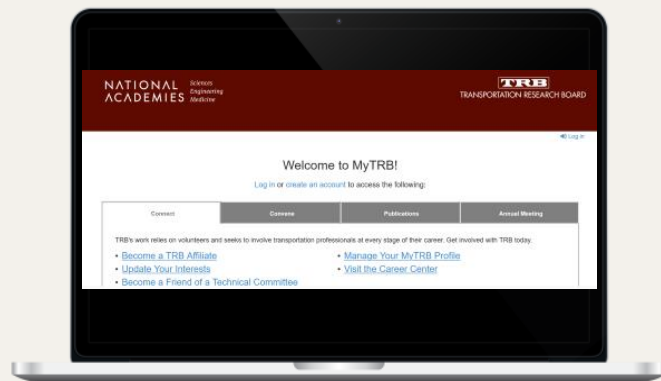
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