

WINTER 2025

LANE TRANSIT DISTRICT

JCOM 471: PUBLIC RELATIONS PLANNING PROCESS
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

Lane Transit District: Long Term Mobility Strategic Communications Plan

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Image credit: Brian Davies; Source: Rowell Brokaw Architects, Inc.

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Eric Breitenstein, Director of Marketing

Brandon Melton, Senior Planner

Jake McCallum, Director of Operations

Dave Roth, Director of Mobility Planning and Policy

This report represents original student work and recommendations prepared by students in the University of Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program for Lane Transit District. Text and images contained in this report may not be used without permission from the University of Oregon.

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About SCI

The Sustainable Cities Institute (SCI) is an applied think tank focusing on sustainability and cities through applied research, teaching, and community partnerships. We work across disciplines that match the complexity of cities to address sustainability challenges, from regional planning to building design and from enhancing engagement of diverse communities to understanding the impacts on municipal budgets from disruptive technologies and many issues in between.

SCI focuses on sustainability-based research and teaching opportunities through two primary efforts:

1. Our Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP), a massively scaled university-community partnership program that matches the resources of the University with one Oregon community each year to help advance that community's sustainability goals; and

2. Our Urbanism Next Center, which focuses on how autonomous vehicles, e-commerce, and the sharing economy will impact the form and function of cities.

In all cases, we share our expertise and experiences with scholars, policymakers, community leaders, and project partners. We further extend our impact via an annual Expert-in-Residence Program, SCI China visiting scholars program, study abroad course on redesigning cities for people on bicycle, and through our co-leadership of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N), which is transferring SCYP to universities and communities across the globe. Our work connects student passion, faculty experience, and community needs to produce innovative, tangible solutions for the creation of a sustainable society.

About SCYP

The Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) is a yearlong partnership between SCI and a partner in Oregon, in which students and faculty in courses from across the university collaborate with a public entity on sustainability and livability projects. SCYP faculty and students work in collaboration with staff from the partner agency through a variety of studio projects and service-learning courses to provide students with real-world projects to investigate. Students bring energy, enthusiasm, and innovative approaches

to difficult, persistent problems. SCYP's primary value derives from collaborations that result in on-the-ground impact and expanded conversations for a community ready to transition to a more sustainable and livable future.

Community partnerships are possible in part due to support from U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, as well as former Congressman Peter DeFazio, who secured federal funding for SCYP through Congressionally Directed Spending.

About Lane Transit District

Lane Transit District (LTD) is a special district of the State of Oregon led by a seven-member volunteer board of directors appointed by Oregon’s governor. LTD’s budget is funded through a combination of fares, taxes paid by local employers and employees, and from state and federal sources. LTD lives its mission to connect our community by delivering more than six million annual passenger boardings from 30-fixed bus routes and two EmX Bus Rapid Transit lines. LTD’s paratransit service, RideSource, provides more than 360,000 trips annually for people with disabilities and Medicaid recipients.

<h3>MISSION</h3> <p>Connecting our Community.</p>	<h3>VISION</h3> <p>In all that we do, we are committed to creating a more connected, sustainable, and equitable community.</p>	<h3>VALUES</h3> <p>Respect, Integrity, Innovation, Equity, Safety, and Collaboration.</p>
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Image credit: Lane Transit District

Course Participants

All students in this course study in the School of Journalism and Communication's (SOJC) Public Relations Undergraduate program. The class broke into five teams to independently assess the challenges and opportunities within LTD and subsequently presented solutions in a comprehensive strategic public relations plan directly to LTD representatives.

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Course Description

JCOM 471: THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PLANNING PROCESS

In this course, students learn public relations campaign planning and administration, crisis communication and issues management, applied research, writing objectives and tactics, evaluation methods, and constructing budgets and timelines. While students do not execute a campaign in this class, it equips them with the process to be able to execute effectively in the capstone PR Campaigns class (JCOM 472).

Executive Summary

Lane Transit District (LTD) is the leading public transportation service in the Eugene-Springfield area and has plans to significantly develop their operations by investing in solutions to drive more sustainable, equitable, and accessible transit over the next several years through their Long-Range Mobility Plan (LTD Connect 2045).

To ensure that community members are engaged and involved in helping to shape opportunities and changes over the next twenty years, LTD partnered with the Public Relations Planning Process class. The class formed five working groups with the goal of producing a comprehensive strategic communications strategy that could identify pathways for community engagement to develop LTD Connect 2045.

Groups conducted extensive background research and gained a deeper understanding of LTD's long term goals by meeting with LTD staff several times throughout the term. Through this process, students identified two major barriers for community members in accessing services: lack of awareness surrounding LTD services and negative stigma regarding safety and sanitation in public transportation.

Students proposed solutions that prioritized a community centered

approach, leveraging community partnerships to dismantle negative stigmas that threaten the longevity of LTD. The two primary solutions were to gamify LTD services and implement educational outreach programming focused on reaching older adults, sorority members, University of Oregon (UO) first-year students, Lane Community College (LCC) and Bushnell University students, and high school students in Lane County.

Each group created specific tactics and implementation strategies to implement prior to the launch and throughout development of LTD Connect 2045. By maintaining regular pathways for community engagement early on in this process, students sought to provide LTD with adaptable solutions that could be adjusted as operational changes are implemented. As these tactics develop, students aimed to create long-term relationships with community members and sustained support for public transportation.

Introduction

Lane Transit District, or LTD, is a special transportation district established in 1970. LTD covers the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area and surrounding cities (Coburg, Junction City, Creswell, Cottage Grove, Veneta and Lowell), serving a population of approximately 325,000 residents. Founded on the core values of respect, innovation, equity, integrity, safety, and collaboration, LTD seeks to expand ease of access to housing, healthcare, education, and the workplace.

LTD's current fleet of 30 fully electric buses and 79 renewable diesel buses provide six million rides per year along 30 fixed bus routes and two EmX Bus Rapid Transit lines. With over 300 staff members that maintain and operate bus lines, LTD has cemented itself as more than just a transportation agency; it is a community connector.

LTD collaborated with students from the UO School of Journalism and Communications (SOJC) Public Relations Planning Process class to identify pathways for community-centered communications regarding LTD Connect 2045. This plan highlights development in cross transportation methods, focusing on increasing choice ridership among community members in the Eugene-Springfield area and decreasing barriers to alternative transportation by connecting walking, biking, and busing to create a fluid user experience. Students in the class were split into five teams and asked to develop a strategic public relations plan focused on identifying pathways toward engagement for community members in the Eugene-Springfield area in communicating new features and developments as they arise over the next twenty years.

Students identified the immediate need to dismantle several challenges LTD noted

as significant barriers for community members in choice-ridership: lack of awareness surrounding LTD services and negative stigma regarding safety and sanitation in public transportation.

Each team focused its strategic plan on a particular audience, including older adults, sorority members, UO first-year students, LCC and Bushnell students, and high school students in Lane County. The sum of the proposed solutions is compiled into two broader pathways for increasing community engagement:

- 1.** Expanding strategic partnerships to gamify LTD.
- 2.** Crafting outreach programming with key segmented audiences.

Within these broader recommendations, specific tactics outline action steps LTD can implement in their day-to-day operations. All recommendations sought to engage and inform community members about LTD services and dismantle negative stigmas surrounding public transit use. By dismantling these issues and fostering long-term relationships, teams hoped to use these channels as pathways for new programmatic information dissemination with the development and implementation of the LTD Connect 2045.

Initial Research

Students met in-person with LTD staff Eric Breitenstein, Director of Marketing, and Brandon Melton, Senior Development Planner, several times to discuss LTD's communication and business needs, as well as LTD's operational capacity. These meetings allowed students to ask personalized questions and better understand their role in building a strategic communications plan.

After meeting with LTD staff, student groups utilized LTD services to gain a hands-on understanding of how LTD operates and conduct a brief observational study of how community members use LTD services. Teams contextualized their strategic plan within the broader scope of transportation by conducting background research to analyze the transportation industry in the Pacific Northwest. This research helped to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to LTD and the broader transportation industry. Student research identified key threats that guided all strategic plans, which included lack of awareness surrounding LTD services and negative stigma regarding safety and sanitation in public transportation.

STRENGTHS

- Strong affiliation with the University of Oregon, including free bus passes for students.
- Eco-friendly transportation option with a focus on sustainability.
- High accessibility and safety features for riders.
- Reliable access for students and the general community.
- Educational resources available to inform riders about LTD services.

- Committed organizational values and service dedication.
- Extensive rapid transit system with 30 fixed routes and a fleet of 110 buses.
- Integrated with Apple Maps, Google Maps, and the UMO app for real-time transit updates.
- Efficient east-west route connectivity.
- Periodic welfare checks by bus drivers to ensure rider safety.

WEAKNESSES

- Limited engagement and low follower count on social media platforms.
- Inadequate rural area coverage.
- Insufficient funding and limited service hours.
- Negative public perception and stigma associated with bus ridership.
- Decrease in ridership outside academic terms and post-pandemic.
- Occasional delays and lack of onboard fare validators.
- Shortage of qualified drivers.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Form strategic partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and the University of Oregon.
- Expand route coverage and service hours.
- Leverage public interest in sustainability and smart mobility trends.
- Enhance and promote the mobile app for better user experience.
- Capitalize on population growth in the region.
- Develop targeted marketing campaigns to improve brand perception and ridership.
- Collaborate with local businesses for sponsorships and promotions.
- Strengthen security measures on buses and at transit points.

**FIG. 1**

LTD employees

*Image credit: Lane Transit District***THREATS**

- Persistent negative stigma, particularly among students and car-owning demographics.
- Economic downturns potentially affect funding and ridership.
- Competition from ride-sharing services and other alternative transportation modes.
- Perceived safety concerns from fear of encountering uncomfortable situations or individuals.
- Preference for single-occupancy vehicle use among middle- and upper-income residents.

After meeting with LTD staff and extensive background research, teams individually identified key publics to focus on in each strategic communications plan. Key publics include older adults, sorority members, UO first-year students, LCC and Bushnell students, and high school students in Lane County.

Once each group identified a key public, students continued their research by interviewing members of that audience. These interviews helped students build a communication strategy tailored to the needs and interests of each key public to dismantle the negative stigmas surrounding public transportation.

Recommendation 1: Gamify LTD Rides

To address the lack of awareness of services and negative stigma, students recommended gamification as a strategy to address threats to LTD's long-term sustainability as a community-wide trusted source of transportation. Through bingo cards, scavenger hunts, and bus wrap competitions, these tactics center on high school students, older adults, college students, and sorority members to meet broader goals of increasing awareness of services and eliminating negative stigma.

TACTIC 1: BINGO CARDS

Laney & Pals BINGO

Audience

Eugene-Springfield high school students aged 13-18.

Insight

Towards the end of high school, many students pursue their driver's permit and license, with the intent of driving a single-occupancy vehicle. By highlighting the value of transit through strategies that emphasize LTD services as a facilitator of independence and fun, choice-ridership can be fostered and encouraged in a younger age demographic.

Key Messaging Strategies

Brand public transportation as a "ticket to freedom" to explore Lane County early on in their independent lives, using language and slogans like the following:

- "Next stop...independence!"
- "Use LTD to get where you need to go on your own!"
- "Unlike your parents' minivan, LTD is a sweet ride."
- "Learn the friendly transit system with Laney the Bus!"

Implementation:

1. A new menu tab on the LTD website could be a one-stop shop for all things "Laney & Pals". Here, riders can register their monthly digital bingo card, check their progress, learn about the monthly sponsor, and more.
2. Riders will scan a Laney & Pals branded QR code at each of their stops. This will take them to their bingo card, where one square will be marked off randomly. Once the rider gets five in a row, they will receive a coupon for a local business that is valid for one month (sponsor changes monthly).

Laney & Pals Branding

Figures 2 and 3 are mockups of the bingo card designs that can be used for the digital bingo cards. Featuring LTD-themed characters, this bingo card seeks to resonate with a "Pokémon Go" concept that is popular with high school students.

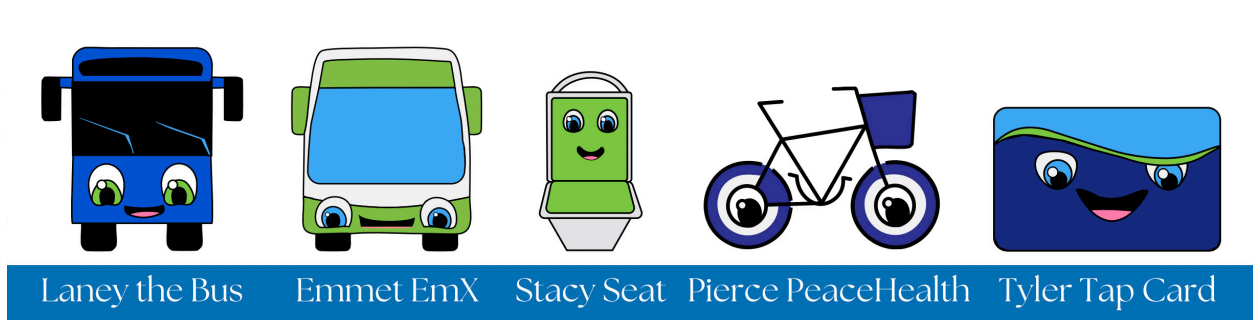


FIG. 3

Mockup of Laney & Pals characters

Source: Team Laney & Pals

Bus Buddy+ BINGO

Audience

Older adults living in care homes in the Eugene-Springfield area.

Insight

LTD could frame services as a way for older adults to maintain independence by navigating trips to medical appointments and other locations without reliance on a car. By using a gamified bingo format, LTD can also foster strong relationships for older adults and their loved ones.

Key Messaging Strategies

Allow older adults and their loved ones the ability to find connection with one another through slogans like the following:

- For older adults: “LTD has made it fun to explore my community again.”
- For their loved ones: “The Bus Buddy program is amazing. It’s great to see older adults feel empowered to use public transportation.”

Implementation

1. Bingo cards will be printed and distributed at community centers, senior centers, and partnering businesses. Each card will feature transit-related activities, engaging users with LTD services.
2. As Bingo cards are completed, honored riders may exchange them for incentives at local partner businesses.

Bus Buddy+ BINGO Branding: Figures 4 and 5 are mockups of the Bus Buddy+ BINGO card designs that can be used by older adults and their loved ones. This BINGO card features location-specific mapping on the back of each card that highlights locations such as medical care facilities, parks, senior care homes, and shopping centers relevant to older adults.



FIG. 4
Front side of a mockup of the Bus Buddy+ BINGO card
Source: Team Hello

FIG. 5

Back side of a mockup of the Bus Buddy+ BINGO card

Source: Team Hello

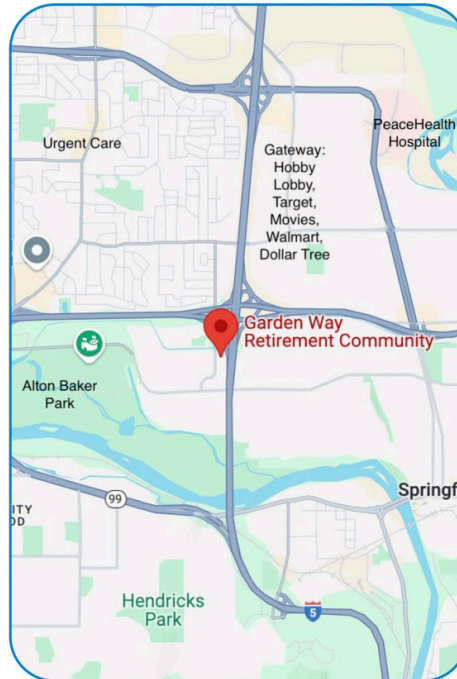


Exchange your full card for a discount at the following businesses:

- Prince Puckler's Ice Cream
- Provisions Market
- The Campbell Community Center
- The Shedd Institute
- Sweet Life Patisserie



The John G. Shedd Institute for the Arts



TACTIC 2: SCAVENGER HUNTS

First Year Flight Scavenger Hunt

Audience

First-year UO undergraduate students.

Insight

UO students have a mandatory two-day in-person orientation hosted by the Student Orientation Programs (SOP). For many students, this is their first time on campus. By introducing LTD services to students seeking to explore Eugene through an interactive format, students can begin to foster trust and excitement within their first days in Eugene.

Key Messaging Strategies

Empower first-year students to explore the unknown using language and slogans like the following:

- “I don’t fly solo, I ride LTD.”
- “From navigating campus to exploring Eugene, these first experiences are unforgettable.”

Implementation

1. Partner with SOP to have “flock leaders”– student orientation leaders– explain the activity so first-year students can participate during their downtime from other orientation activities.
2. On Instagram posts and hearing directly from flock leaders, direct students to: 1) Download the UMO app, 2) Link their student account, 3) Ride to three stops on the bus and scan stop-specific QR codes, and 4) Tag @lanetransit.district on Instagram.
3. After completing this process, students would be entered into a raffle to win LTD merchandise.

First Year Flight Scavenger Hunt Branding

Figures 6-8 show a mockup of a post that can be used to promote the scavenger hunt on Instagram– a popular social media platform used by college undergraduates. Posts can be promoted and posted jointly by LTD and SOP.

FIG. 6

Mockup for an Instagram post to promote the First Year Flight Scavenger Hunt

Source: Lane Changers



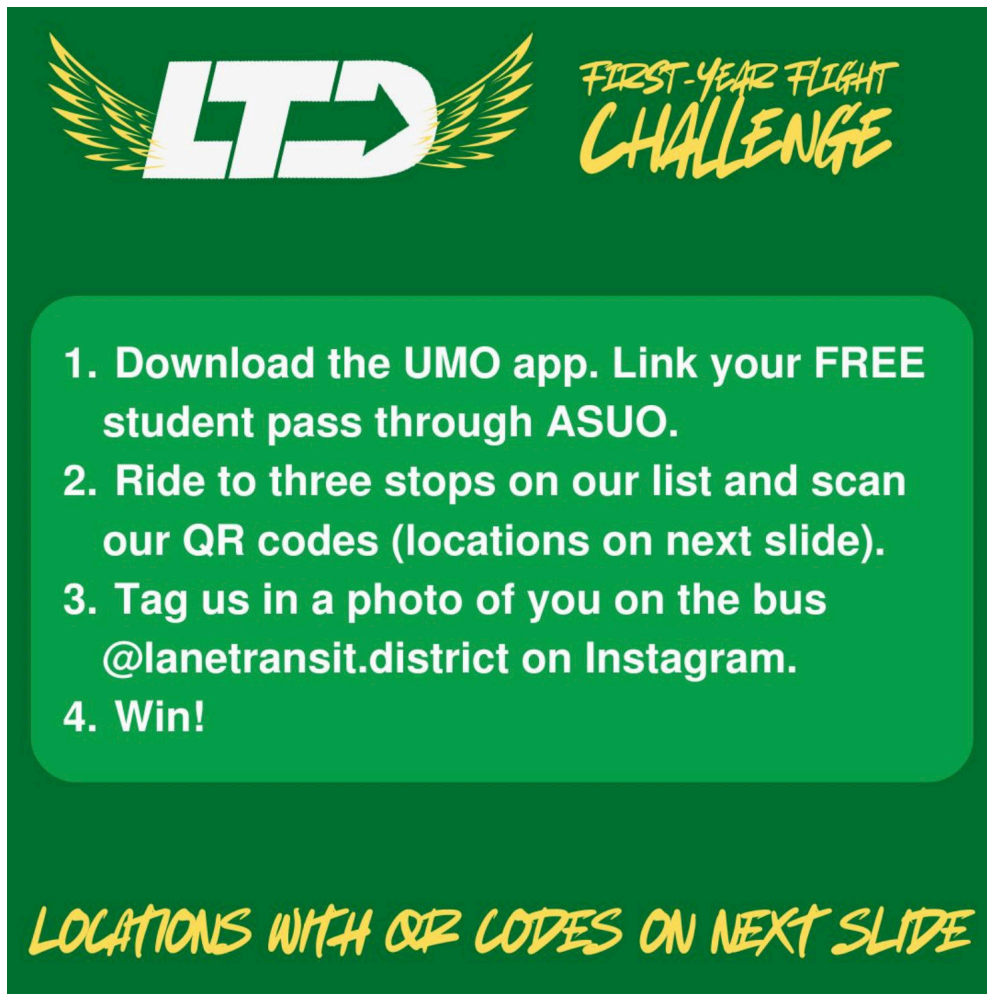


FIG. 7

Mockup for an Instagram post to promote the First Year Flight Scavenger Hunt

Source: Lane Changers

FIG. 8

Mockup for an Instagram post to promote the First Year Flight Scavenger Hunt

Source: Lane Changers



VISIT THREE. TAG US. WIN.

 Valley River Center  	 Autzen Stadium 
 5th Street Public Market  	 Alton Baker Park 
 Safeway/Hirons  	 Eugene Station 

Attractions:

 Shopping	 Nature	 Food & Drink	 Central Station
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Welcome Week Scavenger Hunt

Audience

Returning UO/LCC/Bushnell students.

Insight

College students love discounts. By incentivizing returning students with promotional discounts during the first week back on campus after summer, LTD can encourage student exploration and bolster partnerships with businesses in the community.

Key Messaging Strategies

Encourage returning college students to explore local businesses using language and slogans like the following:

- “Learn the bus and explore the city.”
- “Students can learn to ride LTD while also exploring the City of Eugene.”

Implementation

- 1.** The Welcome Week Scavenger Hunt will run the week before classes begin in the fall, through the second week of the term.
- 2.** A social media campaign will direct students to the LTD website, where students will be able to navigate different scavenger hunt bus routes.
- 3.** Students will redeem prizes at various local business stops.

Welcome Week Scavenger Hunt Branding: Figure 9 is a mockup of the Welcome Week Scavenger Hunt user interface that would be featured on the LTD website. Scavenger hunts can be personalized based on categories of interest: food, history, books, etc.

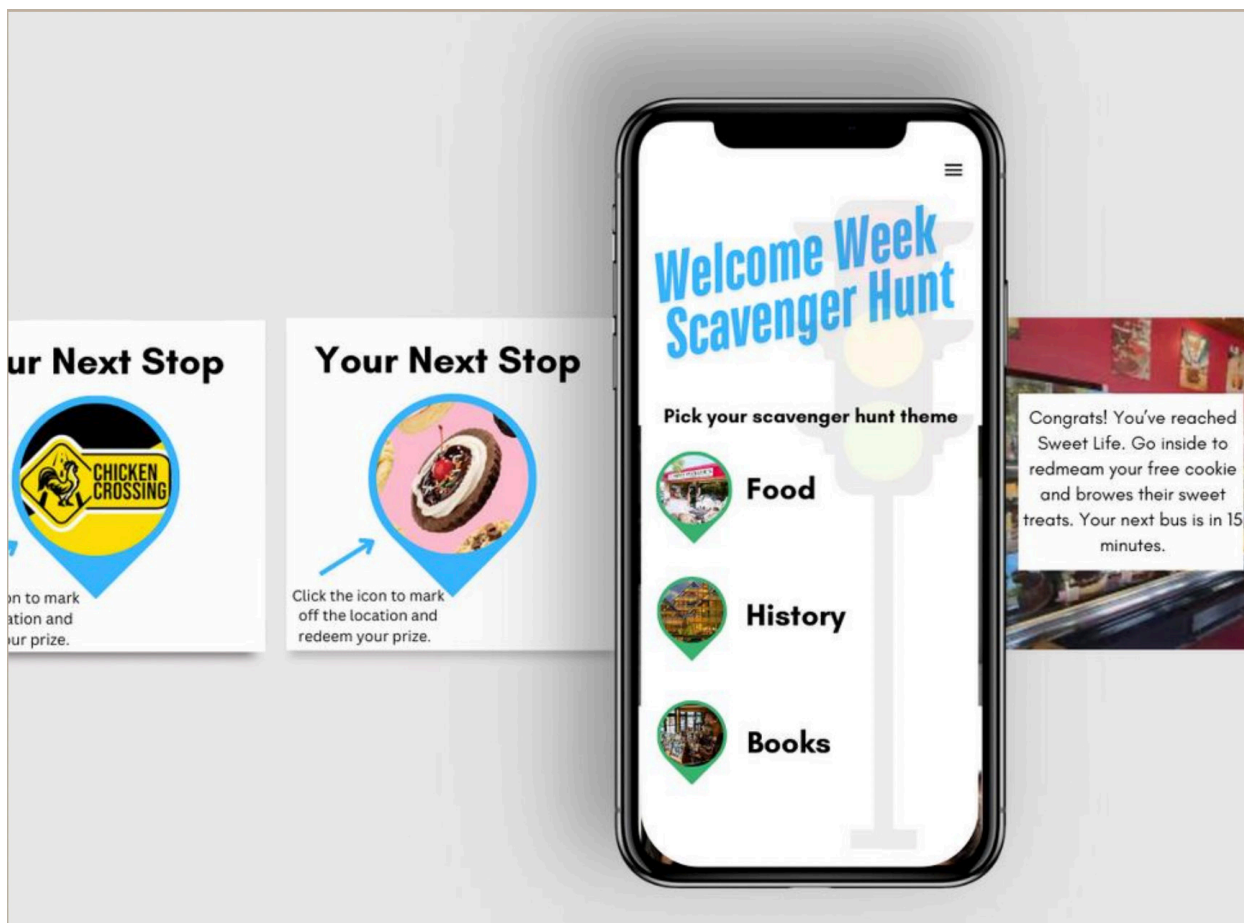


FIG. 9

Mockup of the user interface for the Welcome Week Scavenger Hunt

Source: Team Lane Riders

TACTIC 3: BUS WRAP COMPETITION

Love Your Lane Bus Wrap

Audience

Sorority members actively involved in Greek Life.

Insight

Greek life draws upon community and connection to thrive, with the underlying values of supporting philanthropy efforts. By creating a competition that can ultimately support these goals, LTD can increase its engagement with young female riders and boost social media growth.

Key Messaging Strategies

Build community and positive relationships with Panhellenic Council using language and slogans like the following:

- “LTD is committed to the community by working with members and organizations to improve services and gather valuable feedback.”
- “Love your Lane.”

Implementation

1. Sorority members will have the opportunity to design wraps that showcase their chapter’s values or philanthropy.
2. The winning design will be featured on an LTD bus.

Bus Wrap Competition Branding

Figure 10 is a mockup of promotional material for the bus wrap competition that can be distributed to individual chapters. Figure 11 is an example of bus wraps developed and voted on from other metropolitan areas.

FIG. 10

Mockup poster for the LTD bus wrap competition

Source: Team Lane Legends





FIG. 11
 Examples of bus wraps used from public submissions
 Source: Team Lane Legends

EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF GAMIFICATION

The gamification strategy has the potential to increase familiarity with LTD services by enticing and normalizing bus use across a wide array of audiences. If continued over a long period, these “bus games” could also change public perceptions. Instead of a chore, LTD and public transportation services will be viewed as a unique way to engage with

the community and explore, negating safety and sanitation stigma. Integrating strategic partnerships into the foundation of each of these tactics is crucial and can help:

- Increase community engagement.
- Make LTD services an immersive experience.
- Expand LTD’s social media presence.
- Increase choice ridership.

Recommendation 2: Educational Outreach Programming

Audience-specific educational outreach programming is the second strategy students considered to reshape negative opinions about public transportation and create broader awareness about LTD. Through tabling on college campuses, assisted living facility information sessions, and high school assembly skits, these tactics focus on creating clear, consistent messaging about what LTD services are available to specific audiences.

TACTIC 1: COLLEGE CAMPUS TABLING

Audience

First year and returning UO/LCC/Bushnell students.

Insight

Many college students in Eugene-Springfield don't know about the scope of LTD services. Some students may not have grown up regularly using public transportation, and others may have never taken the bus. To introduce LTD services and end stigma when students come to Eugene-Springfield for higher education, LTD's physical presence on college campuses is vital to establish a reliable and safe notion around LTD and public transportation.

Key Messaging Strategies

Emphasize the convenience, cleanliness, and accessibility of LTD services by using slogans like the following:

- "College students ride for free."
- "Clean, safe, comfortable bus ride? Yes, please!"

Implementation

1. LTD will have an on-campus presence at UO, LCC, and Bushnell during move-in and the first week of school for each respective institution.
2. Tabling will primarily direct students to download the UMO app and connect their free student account. Tabling will also cover details about available services, route planning, and upcoming events, as well as allow students and their families to have their questions about transit concerns answered in real time.
3. After connecting a free student account, students can receive a piece of LTD merch collaboratively branded with each university (e.g., t-shirts, keychains, hand sanitizer, tote bags).

Tabling Merch Branding

Figure 12 provides a mockup of collaborative tabling merch between UO and LTD that can be distributed to students after downloading the UMO app and linking their student account.



FIG. 12

Mockup of LTD and UO collaborative merchandising that can be distributed at tabling events

Source: Team Lane Changers

TACTIC 2: HONORED RIDERS REGISTRATION WORKSHOPS

Audience

Older adults living in assisted care facilities in the Eugene-Springfield area.

Insight

LTD's current Bus Buddy program is underutilized by honored riders and difficult to access and navigate alone. By creating workshops where volunteers can guide honored riders through the free registration process for the Bus Buddy program, LTD can help facilitate connective services between honored riders and medical, grocery, and other necessary services in the community.

Key Messaging Strategies

Ensure that both volunteers and recipients of the program feel supported by LTD by using slogans like the following:

- For older adults: "The orientation for the Bus Buddy program made me feel more independent. I now know that I can go where I want, safely and easily."

- For their loved ones: "Helping older adults navigate LTD's system has been so rewarding; I'm making a real difference in the community."

Implementation

1. Volunteer bus buddies and LTD workers will come to assisted living homes, local events, and other areas to give hands-on educational workshops.
2. Honored riders will be guided through the process of signing up for the honored riders card and downloading the UMO app on their devices.
3. Workshops can be expanded to include: map walkthrough, UMO app navigation, and in-person group use trips on LTD services.

Informational Session Branding

Figures 13 and 14 are mockups for an Instagram post that can be posted to recruit volunteers to assist in the Bus Buddy program.



FIG. 13

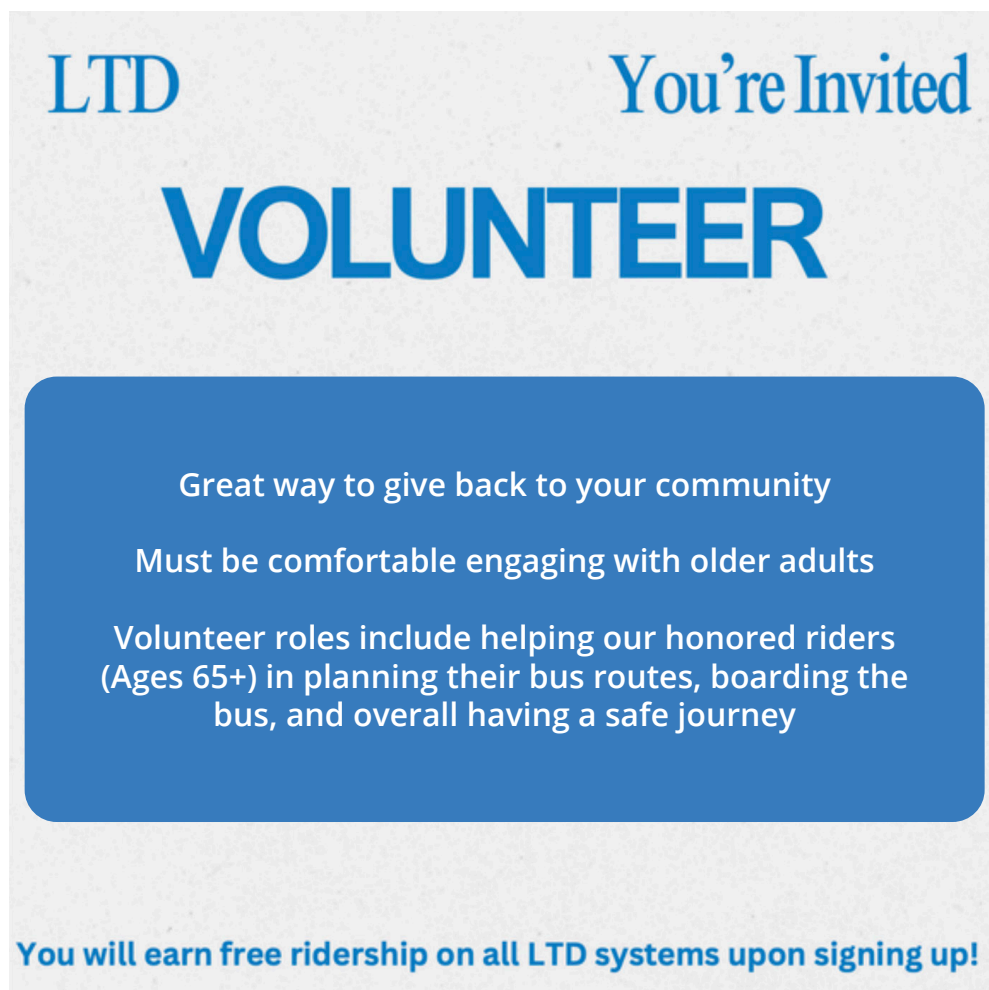
First page of a mockup informational Instagram post for an in-person Bus Buddy informational session

Source: Team Hello

FIG. 14

Second page of a mockup informational Instagram post for an in-person Bus Buddy informational session

Source: Team Hello



TACTIC 3: HIGH SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES

Audience

Eugene-Springfield high school students aged 13-18.

Insight

High school students don't want to hear about the benefits of public transportation from adults. Utilizing the Associated Student Body (ASB) at high schools in the Eugene-Springfield area, LTD can express the value of public transportation and make riding the bus fun.

Key Messaging Strategies

Harness peer-to-peer communication and emphasize that the messaging is personalized "by students, for students." Slogans will be created by individual ASBs and vary based on LTD's desired needs.

Implementation

1. LTD will meet with ASBs at various high schools to explain new services or themes that LTD wishes to promote (e.g., sanitation practices, Laney & Pals Bingo, posting hashtags on social media, etc.).
2. ASBs will formulate videos or in-person sketches that will be highlighted at school-wide assemblies.

ASB Assembly Branding

The look and feel of the assemblies and videos will be made on a case-by-case basis and approved by LTD before being shared schoolwide.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH PROGRAMMING

Creating educational outreach programming focused on collaboration with key members in the Eugene-Springfield area will allow community members to feel personally supported by LTD. This level of personalization can aid in creating social deviation from the negative stigma that can be associated with public transportation. By connecting with communities in-person through college campus tabling, honored riders registration workshops, and high school assemblies, these tactics have the capacity to:

- Increase LTD's presence in local communities.
- Decrease barriers for community members in accessing LTD services.
- Provide clarity and understanding of the full scope of LTD services.

Conclusion

These recommendations and tactics focus on engaging audiences in new strategic ways. By creating new pathways for engagement for older adults, sorority members, UO first-year students, LCC and Bushnell students, and high school students, LTD can begin to establish relationships that will flourish over time to create powerful long-term strategic partnerships. These long-term partnerships will make planning and operational changes that arise with LTD Connect 2045 easier to implement.

The two primary recommendations to address LTD challenges around negative stigma of public transportation are to a) gamify LTD services, and b) create educational outreach programming.

Gamification of LTD services includes implementing: bingo cards, scavenger hunts, and bus wrap competitions that focus on increasing community engagement, making LTD services an immersive experience, expanding LTD's social media presence, and increasing choice ridership.

Educational outreach programming includes forming a presence with key audiences through college campus tabling, honored riders registration workshops, and high school assemblies. Having space for community members in these supportive, educational formats could help increase LTD's presence in local communities, decrease barriers for community members accessing services, and provide clarity and understanding of the full scope services.

Future efforts could be taken to ensure that these recommendations and tactics support implementation of LTD Connect 2045, such as more two-way engagement and opportunities for LTD to learn from the community. Some preliminary ideas include bingo cards that direct participants to "ride a bike to a bus stop" and/or educational tabling that explains how community members can "scan when getting onto the bus." Content that results in contact information to further engage with the community as opportunities that could include surveys and open houses related to the Connect 2045 planning would also be helpful.

To equip community members with the tools necessary to engage in the development of LTD Connect 2045, LTD should foster strategic partnerships centered around community building today, to build long-term partnerships for tomorrow.

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