



# Rogue Valley Transportation District Public Relations Plan

**Fall 2013, Winter 2014, Spring 2014**

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## About SCI

The Sustainable Cities Initiative (SCI) is a cross-disciplinary organization at the University of Oregon that promotes education, service, public outreach, and research on the design and development of sustainable cities. We are redefining higher education for the public good and catalyzing community change toward sustainability. Our work addresses sustainability at multiple scales and emerges from the conviction that creating the sustainable city cannot happen within any single discipline. SCI is grounded in cross-disciplinary engagement as the key strategy for improving community sustainability. Our work connects student energy, 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 year-long partnership between SCI and one city in Oregon, in which students and faculty in courses from across the university collaborate with the partner city on sustainability and livability projects. SCYP faculty and students work in collaboration with staff from the partner city 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 resulting in on-the-ground impact and expanded conversations for a community ready to transition to a more sustainable and livable future.

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## About City of Medford

Medford, located in Jackson County in Southern Oregon's Rogue Valley, has a population of 75,920 within a metropolitan statistical area of 206,310 people, the 4th largest in the state. The City was founded in 1883 at its present site because of its proximity to Bear Creek and the Oregon and California Railroad, becoming the County seat in 1927.

The downtown is a National Historic District and it is flourishing today due to support from the City's Urban Renewal Agency in cooperation with business and property owners. New construction, building restorations, infrastructure improvements and community events are creating a forward-looking downtown grounded in its diverse past. Streets have been realigned and improved with with new pedestrian and bicycle amenities.

Medford is the economic center for a region of over 460,000 people in Southern Oregon and Northern California. In the past, its economy was fueled by agriculture and lumber products. Although the lumber industry has declined, three lumber mills, Boise Cascade, Timber Products and Sierra Pine, remain. The area also is home to an expanding vineyard and wine industry that includes a large assortment of varietals and over 60 wineries. Lithia Motors, the 9th largest auto retailer in the U.S., has been headquartered in Medford since 1970.

The City is a regional hub for medical services. Two major medical centers employ over 7,000 people in the region. Medford is also a retirement destination, with senior housing, assisted living and other elder care services acting as an important part of the economy.

The Bear Creek Greenway extends from Ashland through central Medford and includes a 26-mile multi-use path, linking several cities and numerous parks. Roxy Ann Peak, one of Medford's most prominent landmarks, is a 3,573-foot dormant volcano located on the east side in Prescott Park, Medford's largest city park at 1,740 acres.

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

## Introduction

This report is the result of three terms of work by students in the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication. During fall term 2013, students in Strategic Communications Research (J495) conducted primary and secondary research to learn more about issues related to Rogue Valley Transportation District. In winter term 2014, students in Strategic Planning and Cases (J453) used the research conducted in J495 to identify strategic communications issues. In spring term 2014, Public Relations Campaigns (J454) students developed a public relations campaign designed to assist RVTD in addressing identified communications issues.

# Research: Fall 2013

## Background

The Rogue Valley Transportation District currently serves the Rogue Valley, which includes Medford, Phoenix, Talent, Ashland, Jacksonville, Central Point, and White City. The organization has recently seen the need to expand their services to better provide for its riders. When talking with Paige Townsend, RVTD's Senior Planner, we discovered that to expand services, RVTD would need to impose a levy of 9-20 cents per thousand dollars of assessed value to simply maintain current service. This levy increase will help RVTD match the federal funds it is given and allow the organization to further develop the services it provides. Worried about public backlash over the levy, RVTD wants to find ways to educate its riders on what this levy will provide, while also generating higher ridership numbers.

Thus far the organization has struggled to target the variety of demographics in each city they serve in a way that appeals to each area. Each city in RVTD's service area has different demographics and lifestyles that the organization needs to address in its campaign to generate support for the levy. RVTD is currently trying to reach out to one of its target demographics, current riders, by conducting surveys such as the RVTD Public Perception Community Survey that is available on its website. This survey consists of nine questions, and those who complete it are entered into a raffle for a \$100 Fred Meyer gift card. Although this has been somewhat effective in collecting data, many of the survey questions were open to interpretation and resulted in highly generalized data.

Overall, RVTD is looking to expand its transit system, but struggles to do so because of a lack of funding, as well as the lack of awareness about RVTD services and routes. To get the public on board with the levy and be able to expand its services, the organization needs to understand its current riders, and why they use RVTD. RVTD can then tailor messages and advertisements that appeal to these behaviors and generate support for the levy. To better understand its riders, the organization still needs to know:

- What do riders want from the transit system that they don't already have?
- Why did riders start using RVTD and why do they continue to do so?
- What do they like about the system that should not be changed?
- How can RVTD increase awareness through media coverage, press releases, and its website?

## Situational Analysis

Prior to conducting primary and secondary research, Paige explained that RVTD is aware of the threats it faces in the budget crisis and potential backlash from the public over the proposed increased levy. However, RVTD is also

aware that 30 percent of its customers rely exclusively on its services for transportation. This provides RVTB with a strong base of current riders to work with to better understand why people ride the buses.

Previously, RVTB made attempts to gain public support by making its board meetings open to the public; however, the board meetings have not been publicized enough for the general public to become aware of the opportunity. This is both a weakness and an opportunity for the organization, as RVTB is not communicating with its publics well enough to inform people about these meetings. With a better communication effort, RVTB could raise attendance numbers at these board meetings and receive better feedback about how the organization is seen by the public.

While 30 percent of RVTB riders rely exclusively on RVTB for transportation, buses struggle with a low frequency and small route system. RVTB has trouble competing with personal transportation. People will choose to drive themselves to work or school if the buses do not get them to where they need to go in a timely manner.

There are several areas for improvement in the structure of the organization. The staff at RVTB takes on a variety of roles. However, it does not have any designated in-house public relations employees. With no in-house public relations department, RVTB does not have someone focused on its communication with the public, which can lead to problems with public opinion and appearance. An in-house public relations employee could also help conduct research on a continuous basis to stay in touch with what the public wants from the organization. Also with the little communications training provided, there is an opportunity to train all staff on how to deal with the media. This would all help portray RVTB in a way that could garner support for the levy. Furthermore, RVTB has an opportunity to increase the number of ads displayed on its buses to generate profit and help get its messages out in public.

***A chart with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats we identified is available in Appendix A.***

## **Secondary Research**

### **Rogue Valley Information**

Out of the seven cities RVTB provides public transportation to, Medford is the largest with 74,907 residents. In all seven cities served, less than 5 percent of the commuting-to-work population use public transportation. Phoenix and Jacksonville both reported zero people using public transportation to commute to work on the 2010 Census report. All cities have a significant portion of commuters driving alone to work. The 2010 Census reported Medford having 25,156 residents who drive alone when commuting; 3,106 residents carpooling; and only 254 residents using public transportation to commute.

## **Basic Rider Information**

People riding the bus depend on it, using it approximately 3-5 times per week. The majority of people travel three blocks to get on or off the bus. Over 63 percent of riders did not have a valid driver's license. Nearly 77 percent of riders are between the ages of 19 and 64. Riders between the ages of 10 and 18 tend to use the bus mostly to get to and from school. Riders ages 19-64 tend to use the bus mainly to commute to and from work. Riders 65 and over tend to use the bus for shopping and recreational trips. In Jackson County, 16 percent of households own one or no vehicle. Nearly 54 percent of RVTD passengers have an annual income of \$25,000 or less. Over 58 percent of riders paid their bus fare in cash (RVTD).

## **General Bus Systems Information**

A rising number of people in the United States opt to use public transportation rather than their cars and the highway systems. In fact, the development of public transportation is increasing faster than the development of the nation's highways. The industry of public transportation has an expected average annual revenue growth of 2.5 percent to \$44.6 billion over the next five years. As of 2010, there were 1,200 agencies in the US that were providing bus services. The most successful bus services were succeeding because of a number of important key factors. Each weekday, Americans take public transportation roughly 35 million times; this adds up to more than 10 billion trips a year. These trips were taken for a variety of reasons, including work, shopping and for unusual or unpredictable circumstances.

For every dollar earned by the average (car using) household, 18 cents of that goes towards transportation (most of which is for the costs of owning an automobile). This number goes up in areas with "sprawl and few transportation services," much like the areas surrounding Medford. In 2008, residents of small urban and rural areas made 621 million trips on public transit. Households that were within one-tenth of a mile from a bus stop ended up driving 4,400 fewer miles annually than households with no public transportation access (as of 2010).

Another key success factor for public transportation includes excellent customer relations that are in touch with community needs. Since most public transportation systems are funded by federal or state governments, it is important the organization stay in touch with its local community. If the transit system doesn't provide what locals want, then it probably won't be staying in operation for long. RVTD is doing a good job so far, but to get the full support of the community, and in turn support for its levy proposal, the organization will have to develop a better understanding of what Rogue Valley citizens want from them.

In developing an understanding of Rogue Valley Transportation District's current situation as well as their future goals, the Rogue Valley Metropolitan Planning

Organization (RVMPO) Commuter Rail Report provides a source of questions that can be explored through further research. The Predictors of Commuter Rail Success can be used to determine the likelihood of success for bus service expansion as well (RVMPO p.32). While much of the report contains commuter rail-specific information, the list of factors to consider in determining the potential success of commuter rail are also important in evaluating the success of bus service expansion projects. The factors to consider when assessing RVTD's goals are as follows (RVMPO p.32):

1. Supporting regional goals (including land use and transportation goals)
2. Growing population and high density close to stations
3. High level of daily commuting along rail (bus) route
4. Large levels of traffic congestion that could motivate people to switch to public transportation
5. Parking in popular commuter areas is available and affordable
6. Rail (bus) service provides convenient and comparable commute times and costs to automobile commute times and costs
7. The question of if daily commuters have a motivation to use public transportation
8. Are there outside compelling circumstances such as economic, environmental, or safety concerns that could motivate local communities to promote public transportation as an important service

These factors provide measurable questions to help guide RVTD's expansion goals.

### **Women in Medford**

According to the U.S. Census, females take up over half of Medford's population. There are 14,431 women between the ages of 30 and 60 in Medford, making up almost 20 percent of Medford's population. Many of these women are mothers and some of them are single mothers. They are in need of convenient and affordable transportation because they are responsible for getting their children places safely as well as themselves. RVTD has the ability to offer them a safe mode of transportation. If RVTD is able to adapt the bus system to make it more accommodating for women between the ages of 30 and 60 they will be able to increase ridership.

## Previous Action

The Rogue Valley MPO Transportation Attitudes and Behavior Survey that was conducted in 2003 gathered general public opinion about RVTD. Important findings from the survey include:

- “A sample size of 500 completed questionnaires was selected to provide a +/-5% reliability factor for Medford, Ashland, Phoenix, Central Point, Eagle Point, Talent, and White City. 54% of the questionnaires were from Medford.”
- “More Rogue Valley residents trust Rogue Valley Transportation District than Jackson County or the Oregon Department of Transportation with public funds.”
- “More residents support spending for enhanced transit service than support other spending options such as: bike paths and lanes, parks and open space, commuter rail service, sidewalks, additional road capacity, or public parking.”
- 2.75% of the sample population had ridden a bus in the previous 24 hours before the questionnaire.
- 78.4% of the sample population believed traffic congestion is a problem.
- 59% believed that taxes are a problem.
- 38.7% supported a tax for enhanced public transit.
- 71.1% agreed that they would like to walk or bicycle more.
- 51.9% agreed with the statement, “People only ride the bus when they don’t have any other choice.”
- 53.2% agreed, “People like me don’t seem to ride the bus.”
- 68.2% agreed to the following statement, “I know how to get schedule and information for our bus system.” At the same time, 28.7% agreed with the statement, “If I understood the bus system better, I might use it more.”
- 78% of sample population agreed “The Rogue Valley would be a better place if people drove their cars less.”

## Research Results

Researchers held a focus group with 13 women, since women are a group that has potential to increase their use of RVTD services. The data showed that 46 percent of the women interviewed were unemployed. Those interviewed had an average household size of 3.3 people. From the responses, 76 percent of women interviewed gathered information from the local newspaper and Internet, while 23 percent gathered information from television. Of the participants, 77 percent of them were unlikely to use public transportation when asked prior to watching a promotional video. Sixty-nine percent of the same women were more inclined to use public transportation if they were shown an ad relating to their specific demographic.

After watching a current RVTB promotional video, 69 percent of participants said they had a positive view towards public transportation. Key words used by the participants after watching the video were 'informative', 'favorable', 'problem', 'everyday', and 'need'. These responses demonstrated that participants found the advertisement informative for an everyday problem that the public is in need of. When asked if they found the advertisement informative, 92 percent of respondents found the advertisement's message to be informative and clear. These responses demonstrate that RVTB's advertisement communicated their services clearly to the participants. After watching the advertisement, 70 percent of the participants stated they felt comfortable letting their children ride public transportation, while 85 percent felt comfortable letting their elderly parents ride public transportation.

The research identified barriers to riding the bus were infrequent times and bus cleanliness. Participants also stated the people riding the bus were a deterrent. However, subjects are motivated to use public transportation when a car is inaccessible and because the bus is more environmentally friendly than personal vehicles.

A second survey was conducted at the Rogue Valley Mall in the fall of 2013. The researchers presented five different messages to participants who took the survey and asked how each message resonated with the participants on a scale from one to five, with one being not at all and five being a great deal. The ultimate goal of this process was to determine which factors regarding the upcoming levy and RVTB were most important to voters to inform RVTB what factors to highlight in their pro-levy messaging. The messages presented:

- Environmental impact: Using public transportation like RVTB in lieu of using a personal automobile can reduce harmful emissions by up to 95 percent
- Annual savings: Families that use RVTB can save up to \$6,200 per year
- Affordability: For \$5 per month per household (the average cost of the levy), RVTB can expand its services and operating hours
- Failed levy: If the November 2014 levy fails, RVTB will be forced to cut back services and hours of operation
- Convenience: If the levy passes, RVTB will be able to reduce wait time and expand services to reach more areas in Jackson County

Survey respondents ranked environmental impact as the least important benefit of public transportation. On a scale of one-to-five of importance, the average rating for environmental impact was 2.8 out of 5. The consequences of the levy not passing, RVTB downsizing or disappearing, received an average rating of 3.2 out of 5 on the list of importance. This came in fourth out of the five

messages we presented. The next message spoke to affordability and received a 3.4 out of 5 on the scale of importance. The second most important message presented with was convenience, which received a 4.2 out of 5. The most successful message respondents rated presented the potential annual savings of choosing to ride public transportation. This message received a 4.4 out of 5 on the scale of importance.

Qualitative research through participant observation was conducted through interviews with bus riders. To gain insight into the target demographic and ridership of the Rogue Valley Transportation District, researchers began riding the bus at 8:40 a.m. Surveyors rode the 10 bus, which services Ashland, Talent, and Phoenix. The ride is an hour and 45 minute loop that starts at the Medford Front Street Station and circles around the Southern Oregon University campus. The second route for the day was route 60, which services White City. Surveyors rode the bus at 2:30 p.m. and rode the entire route for an hour and 18 minutes. During this time, a lot of people were on their way to visit their families who lived across town. The general sense was that these people did not work a traditional 9 to 5 job, but had meetings or errands they needed to run and get to. Each rider was asked:

- How long have you been riding the RVTD bus system?
- Are you a resident of Medford?
- Do you have other forms of transportation? If so, what?
- Why do you choose to ride the bus?
- Have you noticed any improvements or changes in the bus system throughout your time as a rider?
- What would you like to see changed or added to improve your experience?
- RVTD is considering extending route 60 to White City and having it service the Table Rock Campus. Would you support that even if it makes your commute longer?

Data was gathered from 37 people consisting of a wide demographic ranging from men in their late 70's to young mothers and college-age women. In general, people rode the bus because they did not have another transportation option. A few did own a car but chose to use the bus to get to and from work, school, or appointments because it was cheaper than parking and gas.

The majority of the riders on RVTD were residents in the Medford area commuting to work, appointments, or running errands. Some riders interviewed had other modes of transportation available, but choose to ride the bus. For example, those who had bikes available as another mode of transportation took the bus when the weather was cold or their destination was farther away.

More than half stated they used the bus, despite owning a car, because fare was cheaper than gas. A little less than half of car owners also mentioned that they could not currently afford their car's maintenance and were using the bus to save money for repairs.

Complaints about RVTD were less in regards to the environment, but more towards accessibility and convenience. Many stated that the bus times were inconsistent, leaving them late to work and appointments. Bus stops are also scarce, leaving many to complain. For example, one rider stated she "had a dentist appointment and had to walk almost two miles because the bus did not go far enough." Currently buses run every hour, with even more time in between buses on the Saturday routes. With times inconsistent and already far apart, residents often are left stranded for long periods of time. Riders expressed a need for a Sunday route to go to church and run errands. Every rider spoken to was supportive of the RVTD expansion. One rider said, "[He] would support any expansion RVTD makes, even out to Table Rock campus. Even though it might slow down [his] own bus."

Additional qualitative interviews with citizens of Medford were conducted to gather information about non-rider awareness of the brand as well as attitudes towards RVTD's bus services. The goal was to gauge non-rider awareness of RVTD services, find out which sources non-riders typically hear about RVTD from, where they seek information about RVTD, and the reasoning behind their general attitude for RVTD. Research was conducted in the Rogue Valley Mall. In total, 14 interviews were conducted with 18 citizens that lasted from 3-12 minutes.

From the interviews four themes surfaced, with the first being a lack of awareness. One interviewee said, "I don't think (the information) is out there about where the routes go, and how accessible it is. Or I don't pay attention to it, I don't know, but I haven't noticed it." Half of the people we interviewed couldn't tell us what the RVTD acronym stood for but still identified with "RVTD" as the bus system. RVTD has become a household name that everyone we interviewed knew what we were talking about but lacked knowledge about the services that RVTD provides. Interviewees also stated they would look for information about routes at the bus station itself, either on signage or from the information clerk. None of the interviewees said that they would look online.

All of the participants used the word "convenience." They didn't state that the bus is inconvenient, but that their mode of transportation (usually personal vehicle) is more convenient than the bus system. When additional questions were asked about personal vehicles, interviewees stated that the bus takes longer due to frequent stops, it isn't always on time, that there are not enough routes, and that there is a limited schedule on weekends. The same people who said that their car was more convenient didn't know any of the bus schedules, which might impact their judgment of RVTD's convenience.

Thirdly, the general consensus from non-riders of RVTD is that the bus system is a common good for the community. One interviewee stated, “I don’t mind (paying my taxes) because I think it’s a good service. There are blind people, physically challenged people that need transportation that can get it through RVTD. I have a blind friend who rides the bus. So yeah, I think its great.” The non-riders knew the buses help people who could not otherwise get around the community. Lastly, participants were asked about their level of support for a tax increase to fund RVTD. A respondent said, “No new taxes, taxed enough. That’s not just for RVTD, that’s across the board.”

## **Recommendations**

In moving forward, the first recommendation for RVTD is to be more relatable to its target audience. Results showed that modernizing the setting and clothing choice for the commercial would make it more relatable. Also, data shows 69 percent of the women in our study are more inclined to use services that advertise with people of their demographic. This means including advertisements featuring middle-class busy mothers.

Addressing the hesitations showcased in our focus group is also key to RVTD’s success. RVTD needs to be approachable, and accessible and clean. Participants repeatedly mentioned “dirty” when describing the bus. Continuing to promote a clean and safe bus system will eventually dispel these hesitations. A more proactive way to aid this situation is to install hand sanitation dispensers in each bus.

Data showed that 76 percent of women in this demographic are more inclined to receive news through Internet or newspaper rather than television. One of the main recommendations is to move RVTD advertising campaign to mostly Internet and newspaper. Television commercials should not be as much of a focus as they have been in the past because of the target audience’s preferred sources of information being newspaper and the Internet.

The results of our primary research indicated that potential annual savings of riding RVTD was the most appealing message to respondents that participated in our survey. Secondly, it is suggested RVTD emphasizes passing the levy because it will reduce bus wait time and extend bus routes. It is also recommended that RVTD execute a study with a similar construction to these pilot studies, including a talking point related to possible service expansion reaching Eagle Point.

Overall, research indicated that tailoring RVTD messages to promote both annual savings and convenience could be beneficial in increasing public support for the levy. However, it is recommended that RVTD conduct an additional study to test these theories on a broader audience.

A general expansion of times and stops should be added to the weekdays and Saturday service. This includes a Table Rock campus stop during both. An addition of a Sunday service would also be a popular option among riders. These kinds of expansions would show the community that RVTD values its riders' loyalty and listens to its consumers. Furthermore, marketing should include an emphasis on cost effectiveness. It should highlight the difference in cost between a bus fare and paying for gas and parking. Using personal stories about how the bus system impacts the lives of individual citizens may appeal to residents who care about the common good of the community. Future messaging should be focused on illustrating what a difference RVTD makes for many people in the Rogue Valley community. Providing bus information at places where RVTD's services might help people who are in an inconvenient transportation situation, such as auto-body shops and doctor's offices, will help to reinforce RVTD as a reliable source of transportation.

# Strategic Plan: Winter 2014

## Core Challenge and Opportunity

The Rogue Valley Transportation District is currently struggling and does not have sufficient funding to support its services. Should the bond measure fail, the bus system faces the possibility of having to cut some of its services in the next five years (Goldsmith, 2014).

## Goal

Increase support for the proposed bond measure among Medford residents.

## Target Audiences

For the purposes of this strategic plan, there are four primary audiences we suggest RVTD targets in its attempt to pass the November bond measure. The first primary audience includes employers and business leaders of local corporations and businesses with more than 200 employees. Because 72.9 percent of Medford citizens work in the city, this group is essential to target (RVTD 2007). Besides the fact that the majority of the working population of Medford works in the city limits, it made sense to target this population because business leaders are most likely the higher-income residents, and many employees rely on the transit system to get to work. In fact, according to RVTD, 30 percent of all trips on the transit system are work-related.

Our research shows there are several benefits that a business leader can reap from having a reliable transit system in their area. According to RVTD's 10-year long-range plan, having a reliable transit system can be used as a tool to recruit employees and can also be an effective way to help retain employees and cut down on absenteeism. This data is an example of how passing the bond measure can be beneficial to business leaders who may not use the transit system themselves, but have employees that rely on it. RVTD's 10-year long-range plan also points out that "74.5% of all jobs are located within 1/4 mile of an RVTD transit route." With a high level of convenience, it will be easier to convince potential riders to become frequent riders and it will help convince non-riders of the utility of the transit services.

The second target audience includes Cherry Lane (Medford) and Ross Lane (Ashland) residents. These residents were chosen as a primary audience because these neighborhoods have the highest median household incomes in Jackson County. If the bond measure were to pass, there would be 30 cents per thousand dollars of assessed property value taxed, and this audience would be the largest source of revenue from the proposed tax levy. The median household incomes for these two neighborhoods are \$105,875 and \$90,363. Within the 981 households that make up the Cherry Lane and Ross Lane neighborhoods, the median ages are 42 and 51 respectively, which both fall within Generation X, and are made up of 51.3 percent and 46.2 percent females

respectively. Through research we were able to find that Gen X likes to be targeted individually and they tend to care less about the good of the community and more about what things, such as the levy, will do for them personally. This generation is motivated by enjoyable experiences and rewarding challenges (Mintel). Paige Townsend, Senior Planner for RVTB, also believes that women ages 30 to 60 should be targeted because they are found to be the key decision makers in the home (Pew, 2008). To best reach this audience, the Internet and text messaging or mobile marketing will be the best resources (Mintel).

In addition to the primary audiences mentioned above, the local news media serves as the intervening audience for this strategic plan. We have made a list of local TV news stations, newspapers, radio stations and business journals to help inform the community about the proposed bond measure. Local news media is important because Generation X is more likely to get news and information from visual media such as TV; however some still would rather read the news. By including business journals, employers and business leaders are more likely to see this information through a subscription they read frequently.

There are three newspapers in the Rogue Valley: the Mail Tribune, the Ashland Daily Tidings and the Jacksonville Review. Of the three, the Mail Tribune has the largest circulation, with 36,278 copies distributed each day on average (Nationwide Newspapers). The Mail Tribune wrote 5 articles referencing RVTB in 2013 (MailTribune.com). Two articles promoted the statewide Oregon Drive Less Challenge week in which RVTB participated and allowed free bus rides for one day. However, the RVTB bus schedule was left out of both articles (MailTribune.com).

There are three local television stations in the Rogue Valley; KTVL (CBS), KOB (NBC) and KDRV (ABC). The television stations combined produced seven stories mentioning RVTB. Two of the stories involved changed bus schedules due to snow. However, all three news stations reported on RVTB's possible expansion of bus routes to the Eagle Point area, and how that would affect the property tax (KDRV) (KTVL).

This content analysis reveals that the coverage of RVTB is generally neutral and relatively low in the Rogue Valley. However, the stories that were produced by local media in 2013 contained RVTB events (Oregon Drive Less Challenge) and RVTB developing stories (expansion to Eagle Point).

## **Execution**

Below is a set of primary messages for the employers and business leader's audience, as well as Cherry and Ross Lane residents.

For employer and business leaders of local corporations and businesses with more than 200 employees, the primary message is that the tax levy will ensure employees continue to have a reliable and safe mode of transportation to work. We believe this primary message will resonate with this audience because

employees are essential in caring out business operations; therefore employers are invested in their employees' transportation reliability.

For Cherry and Ross Lane residents, the primary message is that the tax levy increase will help seniors and people with disabilities remain independent and provide transportation to necessary appointments. We believe this primary message will resonate with this audience because this audience cares about the welfare of their families. Therefore, messages relating to how RVTD helps people important to these audiences' families, such as grandparents and teachers, will resonate with this audience.

**Objective:** Have 20 endorsements from local corporations and businesses for the tax levy by late July.

Endorsements from this audience are important to show Medford residents that these influential people support the service, even if they aren't using the services. Our strategy behind this objective is to demonstrate that RVTD may affect employees getting to work on time.

#### **Tactics**

- A direct mail campaign to businesses and corporations
- One-on-one outreach to big businesses and corporations in Medford. Research on similar campaigns at other transportation districts found that businesses responded best to this type of contact
- Hold a kickoff event to rally supporters. We suggest this event be held in a populated area of Medford with view of traffic congestion to show the importance of expanding transit options. Provide food and raffle with prizes to entice citizens to attend the event.
- Create an online report showcasing the effects of a failed levy, such as decreased routes and bus times. We suggest this online report be published on a campaign website

**Objective:** establish RVTD as a reliable alternative source of transportation among 30 percent of employers and business leaders of local corporations.

We want employees and employers to feel that they can rely on RVTD service to get to work. If both parties feel that the services are reliable, they are more likely to vote positively on the bond measure. Our strategy behind this objective is to highlight benefits of using public transportation to employers as a means to get to work.

#### **Tactics**

- Post automated up-to-date bus times and routes at the bus stops so that people are able to better use the system to their advantage. RVTD does not currently have automated bus times at each bus stop. Rather it only has the

planned bus times, but when buses run late, riders are stuck guessing when the buses will arrive

- Create a campaign website to update the public on what the levy entails and any changes to it during the duration of the campaign
- Create a Facebook page for the campaign and that is consistently and frequently updated with promotional materials and event details
- Create a Twitter account to tweet about events, such as any press conferences or fundraising events, and about the benefits RVTD provides to the community

**Objective:** Demonstrate to 60 percent of Cherry and Ross Lane residents that RVTD is beneficial for the entire community by September.

In persuading residents that RVTD is important, we must first show them that RVTD services are beneficial to the community as a whole. While they may not use RVTD's services themselves, people they rely on may use those services, (e.g., clerical workers at a hospital). Our strategy behind this objective is to outline the importance of RVTD services to members of the community.

To execute this objective, the tactic is to create a direct mail campaign detailing the importance of RVTD's services to the community.

**Objective:** Demonstrate to 50 percent of Cherry and Ross Lane residents the importance of passing the bond measure by end of June.

Once we persuade residents that RVTD is important, we can then demonstrate how the bond measure is needed for RVTD to continue to provide services. Our strategy behind this objective is to highlight the consequences of a failed bond measure to society.

The tactic behind this objective is to create an online report showcasing the negative effects of a failed bond measure. We suggest this online report be made readily available to the public on the campaign website.

**Objective:** establish awareness among 80 percent of Cherry and Ross Lane residents of bond measure by September.

To gain support for the bond, we must first establish awareness of the bond measure. Our strategy behind this objective is to establish a measure of the current awareness to better inform the plan.

### **Tactics**

- Conduct surveys to determine who is aware of the proposed bond measure and distinguish them from those who are not aware of the bond measure. Our strategy behind this tactic is to increase awareness of the proposed

bond measure through promotional materials

- Conduct a focus group to test the effectiveness of the message promoting the bond measure. Message: If the proposed bond measure does not pass, RVTD will be forced to cut services, bus routes and times.
- Promote the bond measure through promotional materials, such as flyers and posters including information such as what the bond measure is, what the measure sets out to achieve and how it will improve RVTD's services
- Create a public service announcement about the impact of RVTD services on members of the community and how the bond measure would support these services, 30 seconds long, distributed to as many as 200 stations. These PSA's can be distributed through various forms of media including print, television, and radio.

**Objective:** have 50 percent of Cherry and Ross Lane residents feel that RVTD buses are enjoyable to ride throughout campaign.

The majority of Cherry and Ross Lane residents belong to Generation X. Research conducted about Gen X by Cal State University, Long Beach states that this age group is motivated by enjoyable experiences (CSULB). Therefore, we believe that ridership will increase if RVTD's services are considered to be enjoyable. Our strategy behind this objective is to improve the visual appeal of the bus station and bus while reducing negative stigmas associated with the current demographic of RVTD bus patrons.

To achieve this objective, our tactic is to record testimonials from current riders about what they like about riding the bus.

**Objective:** have at least five informational articles or stories about RVTD published by Rogue Valley local media within six months.

Our strategy behind this objective is to acquire earned media by creating various news hooks for media leading up to the November levy.

### **Tactics**

- Host two promotional events, one in June and one in September. Prior to these events, we suggest RVTD distributes informational emails for each event. We also suggest RVTD reserves a park, catering, and a bounce house for the event. At the event, we suggest RVTD shows promotional videos at both the beginning and the end of the event and offer mail-in ballots or a ballot box so attendees can drop off their ballot effortlessly.
- Have two news conferences before the levy vote takes place on in November. Prior to these news conferences, we suggest RVTD sends out informational emails to the local media alerting it of the upcoming conferences. We also suggest RVTD prepare an opening statement about RVTD updates and services.

## Evaluation Measures

To evaluate the success of the strategic plan, we have created a method of evaluation for each objective. These evaluation methods are listed below.

- Take inventory of the number of endorsements from local corporations and businesses for the tax levy
- Survey local business leaders to determine attitudes regarding RVTD as a reliable source of transportation
- Hold four focus groups to determine the attitudes these residents have toward RVTD. Then survey Cherry and Ross Lane residents to see if the majority of these residents agree with the opinions of the focus groups
- Survey Cherry and Ross Lane residents about the perceived importance of the bond measure now and again in June
- Survey Cherry and Ross Lane residents for their knowledge of the bond measure now and again in September
- Survey riders four times throughout the campaign to evaluate their attitudes about the enjoyableness of RVTD services
- Survey the local media that published articles about the Rogue Valley Transportation district to determine the public's perception of RVTD

# Public Relations Campaign: Spring 2013

## Core Challenge and Opportunity

The following is a streamlined, strategic public relations campaign, taking into account existing research completed on RVTD's behalf. The goal of this campaign is to provide and complete immediate projects in support of RVTD's overall communications goal; to win the November bond measure to gain the funding it needs to maintain and expand its services.

Because of low funding, should the bond measure fail, the bus system faces the possibility of having to cut some of its services in the next five years. With the vote on a funding measure some time away, we have the opportunity to create awareness among those who are not familiar with the measure.

## Goal

To increase awareness among Medford Gen Xers and Baby Boomers for the November RVTD bond measure.

## Target Audiences

For the purposes of this public relations campaign, the Rogue Valley Transportation District's primary audiences were Medford residents ages 34 – 49, also known as Generation X, and residents ages 50 – 68, known as Baby Boomers. Generation X is important to RVTD's efforts because the median age of Medford residents is 37.9, which lies in Gen X. Residents of this age group represent 37.7 percent of the voting population (US Census). Gen Xers have an average of two and a half children and almost two thirds live with a partner or spouse. Sentimental advertisements appeal to this audience because of their family dynamics, as well as real world situations and authenticity (Nielsen, 2012).

A survey conducted by the US Postal Service found that direct mail was not only the most common communication channel used by this audience, but also the most effective in targeting them. Gen Xers tend to be careful with their finances and make decisions based on product and service attributes (Klein, 2007). Therefore, this audience likes to see guaranteed results in their purchases. The Baby Boomer audience is important to RVTD's efforts in passing the bond measure because they represent 58.9 percent of the voting population according to the 2010 US Census. Therefore, it is essential to target this group to pass the bond measure when it goes to vote in November. This audience does not like to be targeted by age (Harkin, 2004) and is less receptive to digital-based marketing (Hanover Research). According to the US Postal Service, Baby Boomers prefer to be targeted via direct mail.

In addition to Medford residents within Generation X and Baby Boomers, the intervening audience is equally important. The news media is essential in disseminating information to the residents of Medford. For the purposes of this project, we chose to focus on the Mail Tribune, NewsWatch12 in Medford, Daily Tidings, Sneak Preview, and SOPTV.

The Mail Tribune is based in Medford and has a circulation area of 160,500. Its readers are 55 percent women and 45 percent men. More than 60 percent of readers are 55 and older or Gen Xers. Daily Tidings is connected to the Southern Oregon Group, which also produces the Mail Tribune. Daily Tidings is based in Ashland and has a daily circulation of 4,000. Medford Sneak Preview is a free monthly newspaper based in Medford that is available to all Medford residents. It is distributed via traditional mail and has a circulation of 40,000. NewsWatch 12 in Medford is a local news station that reaches the Rogue Valley. SOPTV is the southern Oregon division of PBS and reaches the entirety of southern Oregon.

## Execution

For Generation X, the primary message that we believe will resonate with this audience the most is that Medford families benefit from RVTD. RVTD offers discounted rides for children under the age of 16 throughout the summer, with passes available for \$35 for the entire summer. As a secondary message, we suggest RVTD focuses on how the transportation system benefits the environment. For example, “using RVTD reduces roughly 155 lbs. of carbon monoxide every day that would otherwise be emitted by passenger cars. Reducing CO output helps contribute to a clean environment, which could contribute to reducing the asthma rate in Medford, which is currently ‘off the charts’” (Townsend, 2013). An additional secondary message focuses on RVTD reducing traffic by reducing the number of personal vehicles on the road.

For Baby Boomers, the primary message that we believe is the most effective message is “RVTD provides a safe and reliable mode of transportation to Medford residents.” The secondary messages provided revolve around RVTD keeping traffic off the road and costing less than driving and maintaining a car. For example, “Americans living in areas served by public transportation save 865 million hours in travel time and 450 million gallons of fuel annually in congestion reduction alone,” and “Without public transportation, (national) congestion costs would have been an additional \$21 billion” (APTA). To highlight that RVTD costs less than driving a car, promotional materials can include two additional APTA quotes. For example, “Households that use public transportation in lieu of driving a car save more than \$9,700 annually,” and “the average household spends 16 cents of every dollar on transportation, and 94%

of this goes to buying, maintaining, and operating cars, the largest expenditure after housing.”

**Objective:** Create 25 percent awareness of the November bond measure among Art in Bloom attendees on May 10-11.

The strategy behind this objective surfaced because significant portions of Art in Bloom’s 15,000 annual attendees fall into the GenX category. Additionally, we expected that many mothers of young kids and their families, who would likely be GenX, will attend the event given that it falls on Mother’s Day. Thus, having a presence at the event provides RVTB with an opportunity to engage this demographic. The booth will highlight the ways in which public transit systems benefit their families, including reduction of carbon monoxide and traffic.

One tactic used at RVTB’s Art in Bloom booth was the creation of an email sign-up sheet for booth visitors so that those who signed up could be contacted in the future regarding their feelings on the proposed bond measure. To draw children, and subsequently their parents to the booth, RVTB provided slap bracelets, which also served as ankle and wrist reflectors for those who rode bikes. Free pins were also on display for the public; each pin had a phrase with ideas about public transportation. For example one pin stated, “Transportation is socially responsible.”

One tactic that has not been executed is to create a fact sheet outlining what action RVTB will take if bond measure passes or fails. This fact sheet can include quotes from Medford residents about how important bus transportation is to the community, ridership statistics and information about how many new buses and routes are needed.

**Objective:** Earn two pieces of coverage among Medford journalists by September 2014.

The strategy behind this objective was to gain journalists’ interest by pitching the fact that the RVTB bond measure affects the entire Jackson County community. These include carbon monoxide reduction and traffic reduction, as stated in our secondary messages. One tactic to complete this objective is to write news release outlining important facts related to the bond measure. Future bus transportation needs, any poll results, and facts about existing system should be emphasized in the news release. The news releases should be pitched to Medford journalists who write about politics, business, and local affairs. Below is a list of journalists covering these topics:

- Damien Mann: Mail Tribune
- Curtis Hayden: SneakPreview
- Vickie Aldous: Daily Tidings
- Channel 12: Christy Lewis
- Radio: Jan Abramsson

# Appendix A: SWOT Analysis

## Strengths

- Household name
- 30% rely exclusively on RVTD for transportation

## Weaknesses

- Low frequency service
- Poor website design
- Small route system
- Little public financial support causing excess federal dollars
- No in-house PR to focus on communication with the public
- Staff has undefined roles, staff members take on a variety of roles

## Opportunities

- Increase bus frequency
- Increase route locations
- Increase # of ads on bus to generate profit/sponsorship
- Tailor ads and messages to personal connections riders have with RVTD
- Focused PR efforts
- Publicize board meetings through different forms of communication
- Train all staff on how to deal with media
- RVTD's Google transit app to help provide riders with current information

## Threats

- Budget
- Backlash over level
- Personal transportation (carpool, cars, bikes, etc.)

## Appendix B

To understand why people choose their mode of transportation over the bus system, we asked:

- Where do you regularly travel? (School, work, entertainment, etc.)
- How do you usually get to these destinations?
- What draws you to your mode of transportation?

To gauge citizen awareness about the RVTB brand and knowledge of services, we asked:

- Do you know what RVTB stands for?
- Tell me what you know about the services RVTB offers?
- Do you know if there are bus routes close to your frequent destinations?
  - If there were, do you think you would use the bus to travel there?
  - Have you ever thought about using the bus?

To understand why non-riders have chosen to not ride within the last year, we asked:

- Have you used a RVTB bus within the last year?
- (If yes) what was your reason for using?
- How did you find your experience?
  - (If no) why haven't you?
- Tell me about what prevents you from riding?
- To look for where citizens receive messages about RVTB and how they feel about the brand and service in general, we asked:
- Where do you see and/or from whom do you hear the most about RVTB?
- How do you feel about RVTB?
  - What do you think cause these feelings?
- Is there anything else you'd like to say about the Rogue Valley Transportation District?

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