



Oregon's "Green Rider:" Targeting Communications to the Public Transit Swing Vote

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The success of public transportation depends upon public understanding of, and support for, livability. In response to new Oregon state requirements to significantly reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from light-duty vehicles, a team of University of Oregon (UO) researchers reviewed public communication strategies around transit investments.

The overarching conclusion? The most effective framing of public transportation benefits is not around climate change, but rather on livability. Communication should focus on the benefits to people's pocketbooks, choices, health, and community. While this shift in approach has been marginally applied in Portland, a large gap in connecting with residents' transit concerns persists. This project offers a platform for understanding the relationship between livability and transit.

The research team conducted a review of literature and past strategic communication efforts to gain an understanding of how livability, especially in relation to transportation, is conceived of and applied. They also conducted surveys of non-transit riders in 10 selected metropolitan areas across the country, to better understand their relevant perspectives on livability and transit. Lastly, an undergraduate student team, part of the award-winning advertising program at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication, conducted brief intercept conversations, gathered observational data from Portland and engaged in a creative assessment to develop messaging recommendations.

FINDINGS FROM INTERCEPT CONVERSTAIIONS

- The team's audience descriptions go beyond the usual binary of describing riders as either "captive"

or "choice" to include an emerging category of rider: The Green Rider. The team identified this type of rider as a crucial player in creating a long-term culture of ridership among people who have the ability to drive. Additionally, the research team identified reaching and expanding the base of Green Riders to build ridership and investment in transit policies as a key objective of strategic communication efforts from transit agencies.

- Creative direction recommended stories of heroism, underscoring belief systems and narratives of self-efficacy and use of local characters to engage the Green Rider.

FINDINGS FROM NON-RIDER SURVEYS

- Non-riders are, generally, already supportive of public transit.
- For non-riders, employment opportunities, affordable housing, and protection from crime are of top importance. Transportation system planners and communicators should seek to draw connections among priority livability issues and public transportation.
- Non-riders recognize the positive aspects of public transportation as cutting down on traffic, being good for the environment and being efficient. Non-riders also tend to believe that public transportation is designed more for other people's needs than their own.
- The majority of non-riders think their lives would be mostly unaffected by reductions or increases in transit funding. Transportation communicators should take advantage of a supportive, non-riding public to highlight the benefits of transit funding and make these issues more salient to non-riders.

These key findings and others are presented in the final report, and include a toolkit of several testable recommendations for campaign targeting and messaging. This research stands to help communications and transportation professionals better understand public perceptions of transit and livability, and create strategic communication that can shift attitudes toward public transportation and, ultimately, change public behavior.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The research team consisted of Ivis Garcia Zambrana, University of Utah; Alan DeLaTorre, Portland State University; Ja Young Kim, University of Utah; Julianne Reno, Portland State University; Keith Diaz Moore, University of Utah; Jordan Pieper, University of Utah; Jason Wheeler, Assist

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THE FULL REPORT and ONLINE RESOURCES

For more details about the study, download the full report **Framing Livability: A Strategic Communications Approach to Improving Public Transportation in Oregon** at <https://nitc.trec.pdx.edu/research/project/873>

Photo by Transportation Research and Education Center at Portland State University

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