



EL METRO MARKETING PLAN



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Chapter 1:

Introduction

Transit marketing is essentially everything El Metro does to communicate with passengers, potential riders, and the surrounding community. This includes all materials on bus schedules, route maps, and signage as well as online outreach tools such as the organization's website, social media campaigns, and other communications. It also includes all campaigns and community involvement undertaken by El Metro.

Marketing Plan Overview

There are several purposes for conducting a formal transit marketing plan, including:

- Building visibility
- Educating existing and potential riders
- Generating ridership
- Building community support and partnership opportunities

El Metro Transit last updated its marketing plan in September 2014. While the plan was never fully implemented and published, many of the marketing recommendations in the draft plan have been completed.

Since 2014, El Metro and the Laredo Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) have undertaken a Transit Development Plan (TDP) to guide priorities for improvements to El Metro services over the next five years. This plan is expected to be finalized in late 2016.

This five-year TDP provides an opportunity to also take a fresh look at the marketing strategies employed and potential coordination mechanisms to enhance marketing efforts in

Laredo and to complement TDP recommendations.

In addition to reviewing the existing marketing plan and coordinating with the TDP, specialized outreach was conducted to provide input into the Marketing Plan. Stakeholder workshops were conducted on August 31, 2016 with both internal and external community stakeholders. Additional details on stakeholder outreach are provided in **Chapter 3**.

Organization of this Plan

The marketing strategies identified in this plan were developed using a standard marketing step by step approach, as shown in **Figure 1**. Each section of the Marketing Plan coincides with each of the key steps identified in the diagram.

This approach allows El Metro to identify strategies that address current agency challenges and opportunities, are in line with specific and measurable objectives and which respond to target markets El Metro is attempting to reach.

Figure 1: Marketing Plan Approach



Chapter 2 of this plan contains background information necessary to conduct an assessment of current conditions. It includes information on the history of El Metro, a summary of the existing El Metro service, as well as a listing of services, programs and informational materials currently offered.

Chapter 3 of this plan provides a Situation Analysis of the system. It contains background information such as an industry analysis, local customer analysis, and competition analysis to assess challenges and opportunities of the service. Current ridership and target markets are also identified. In addition, using recently conducted passenger surveys and stakeholder outreach, it assesses how the service is perceived by customers and the surrounding community, the level of support within the community, and potential community partners.

Chapter 4 of this plan contains a brief Resources Analysis of the system. Resources are the people and funding mechanisms that can assist El Metro with marketing objectives. Resources include staff, any community partners and volunteers, and a realistic assessment of the current budget.

Chapter 5 of this plan provides a list of goals and objectives for the marketing plan. While goals are bigger picture concepts of what El Metro would like to achieve through marketing, objectives are the measure-able short-term actions that can be taken to meet longer-term goals.

Chapter 6 of this plan provides specific recommended strategies for marketing El Metro services. These strategies are broken out into types of efforts that may be employed to meet goals and objectives of the plan.

Chapter 7 provides conclusions on budgetary needs to implement marketing strategies and outlines priorities and a timetable for implementation of strategies.

Chapter 2:

Background

Mission and Vision

Mission and vision statements define organizational purpose and are essential elements to strategically planning for the future of an organization. As such, mission and vision statements were developed as part of El Metro's 2016 Transit Development Plan and are incorporated into this market plan to clarify the overarching purpose and goals of the El Metro Marketing Plan.

Leaders within organizations should emphasize the current mission statement to employees, which clarifies the purpose and primary, measurable objectives of the organization. A mission statement is meant for employees and leaders of the organization.

Like mission statements, vision statements help to describe the organization's purpose. Vision statements also include the organization values. Vision statements give direction for employee behavior and helps provide inspiration.

El Metro Mission Statement

The mission of El Metro is to promote and provide high quality, cost-effective public transportation services that address the needs and demands of the citizens of Laredo, Texas.

El Metro Vision

By operating efficiently and effectively, El Metro will become an integral, safe, and reliable mode of transportation that contributes to the economic and social growth of the Laredo region.

Overview of El Metro

In 1889, Laredo built the first street railway system in the United States west of the Mississippi River. El Metro first established in June 1975.

Figure 2: El Metro Garage Facility Circa 1970



Today, El Metro is a transit system that operates fixed route and paratransit services with 170 employees, a 2014 operating budget of approximately 12 million dollars and an annual ridership of 3.2 million passengers (2014).

El Metro works with a fleet of over forty-eight (48) fixed route buses, one (1) trolley and twenty-one (21) demand-response "El Lift" vans. Economical fares and reliable service provides the community of Laredo an alternative for their transportation needs.

The City of Laredo acquired a contract with First Transit to administer the operational duties of El Metro, Laredo Transit Management, Inc. in 2003 which continues today.

Fixed-Route Service

El Metro currently offers bus service throughout the city of Laredo of which 22 routes reach different areas. On these routes, the bus stops at the same places, at the same time, every weekday. Local fixed

routes have shorter schedules on weekends. Buses stop only at bus shelters and posted “Bus Stop” signs. Most bus stops are served every 15 or 30 minutes weekdays on the move. El Metro buses have ramps or lifts for ease of boarding and have two spaces for persons in wheelchairs. Buses are also equipped with bike racks.

Paratransit Service

The El Lift Paratransit Service provides shared, origin destination public transportation to people with disabilities who are unable to use El Metro’s fixed route buses. Paratransit services are a shared-ride service operated with modern, accessible vehicles. Riders who are unable to access vans using steps may use wheel chair lifts.

Branding and Identity

Updated El Metro Logo

El Metro recently updated its logo and the new logo is being used on all newly produced materials, including at bus stops and shelters.

Branding of New Buses and Shelters

New bus stop signage, shelters, and other amenities such as bus benches have been recently updated to reflect new logo information as well as route information at locations with shelters to address customer needs for increased visibility of the system. Implementation is ongoing.

Figure 3: New Bus Shelter Branding and Route Information



User Information

Website: elmetrotransit.com

El Metro re-launched a newly designed website in July 2013, offering customers an informative tool about its city's public transportation system. Providing informative resources for customers for fixed route such as the route schedules, system map, riding guide, fare and policy information; paratransit service policy information is a goal El Metro aimed for when building the website. New features on the website include the real time bus service, rider alerts and the Google language (Spanish) translation.

A new update to the website has recently been created to reflect new changes, and is expected to go live in late 2016 or early 2017.

Route Schedules

El Metro has route schedule brochures for each route. Each route has a route schedule with full description of the fares and transfer rules, map of the route and time points and the website address. In February 2013, El Metro re-designed all route schedules and system map.

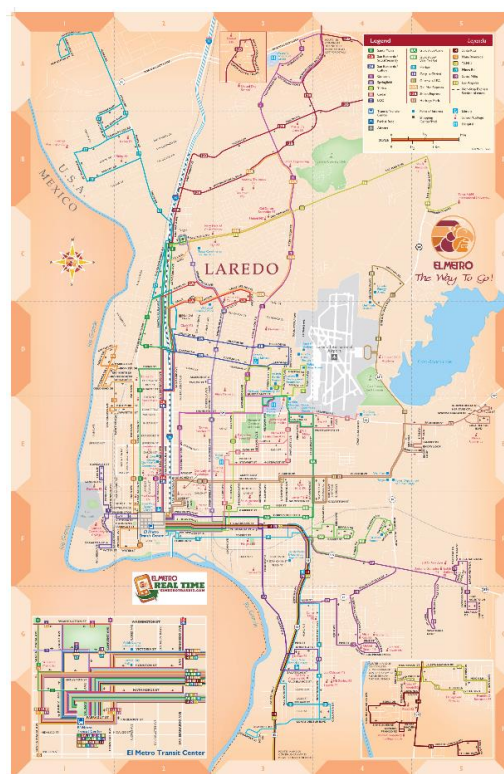
Figure 4: El Metro Route Schedule Brochure



System Map

The System Map provides general information in English and Spanish on the main destination points throughout the city, time frequency for each route, fixed route and paratransit information, fares, rider tips and maps of all routes (color coordinated pertaining to each route).

Figure 5: El Metro System Map



Customer Amenities

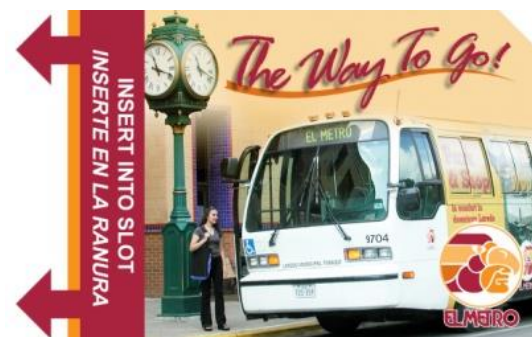
Bikes on the Bus

El Metro allows cyclists to bring their bikes along when they travel. The low floor fleet is equipped with bike racks to help customers navigate congested streets on their way to bike trails, work, school or other desired destinations.

Fare Purchases

El Metro does not currently offer daily, weekly, or monthly passes. El Metro riders are required to provide bus operators with exact change to pay for fares.

Figure 6: El Metro Fare/Value Card



Fixed route reduced fare program

The reduced fare program is for those individuals that are 62 and older or who have a disability that are willing to use the fixed route service. In order to qualify for the reduced fare program, an application must be filled out by his or her medical doctor; provide proof of Medicare card and picture ID must be taken at El Metro customer service office. Medicare card holders do not need to partake in the application process. An El Metro ID is required and must be presented when boarding the bus in order to pay reduced fares.

Advertising and Marketing Campaigns

Advertising Opportunities

El Metro offers interior and exterior advertising to businesses or organizations willing to advertise on buses. Also, El Metro currently has 77 bus shelters throughout the city, with 176 advertising panes available to allow advertisement for businesses and

organizations. Certain restrictions apply when advertising in our buses and bus shelters.

HEB Grocery Promotional Campaign

El Metro is continuing to work with GEB Grocery on a potential bus card distribution program which allows HEB to purchase bus tickets on a monthly basis and make them available to customers to promote public transportation service in the City.

Park and Shop Campaign

The Downtown Transfer Center for El Metro transit services also provides a paid parking garage available for the general public to encourage shopping in the Central Business District.

Educational and Student Campaigns

El Metro has continued to provide presentations at local schools in the City to educate students on the overall services provides (both fixed-route and paratransit service) and to provide travel training.

Travel training is available through El Metro and offers personalized, one-on-one or group travel training instruction on how to use the bus services in the City. Taking each trainee's unique needs and abilities into account, the Travel Trainer teaches participants how to safely and independently use the El Metro system.

Internal Marketing Efforts

Internal Communications

El Metro previously provided newsletters for employees. These newsletters are no longer produced; however other forms of

internal communication are used, including flyers, safety meetings, and the weekly City Manager's Report (a statistical report provided to City Manager staff and City Council members).

Employee Recognition Awards

El Metro currently offers two employee recognition programs: Employee of the Month and Safety Star of the Month awards.

Chapter 3:

Situation Analysis

To understand factors influencing the real and perceived opportunities and challenges to the El Metro system, a number of different analyses were undertaken. This included an industry-wide analysis of the public transit system, a local customer analysis based on recently conducted passenger surveys and demographic analyses, and a competition analysis to identify competing modes of transportation in Laredo. In addition, an internal assessment by El Metro staff of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats was undertaken and stakeholder workshops were conducted to assess the image of public transportation by the surrounding community.

Industry Analysis

In 2010, the total ridership for public transportation was 10.2 billion trips; making that 35 million people using transit on a weekly basis. From 1995 through 2010, public transportation ridership increased by 31% a growth rate higher than the 17% increase in U.S. population and higher than the 24% growth in the use of the nation's highways over the same period.

More than 7,200 organizations provide public transportation in the United States. Investment in the public transportation industry creates and supports over 1.9 million public and private sector jobs and is a \$55 billion a year industry.

According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), public transportation in the United States is a crucial part of the solution to the nation's economic, energy and environmental challenges helping to bring a better quality of life. Every segment of American society – individuals, families, communities, and businesses benefits from public transportation.

Public transportation enhances personal opportunities, access to public transportation gives people transportation options to get to work, go to school, visit friends, or go to a doctor's office. Public transportation saves fuel and reduces congestion; Americans living in areas served by public transportation save 785 million hours in travel time and 640 million gallons of fuel annually in congestion reduction alone.

Public transportation also provides economic opportunities; every 1 billion invested in public transportation supports and creates 50,751 jobs.

Public transportation saves money; the average household spends 18 cents of every dollar on transportation, and 94% of this goes to buying, maintaining, and operating cars, the largest expenditure after housing.

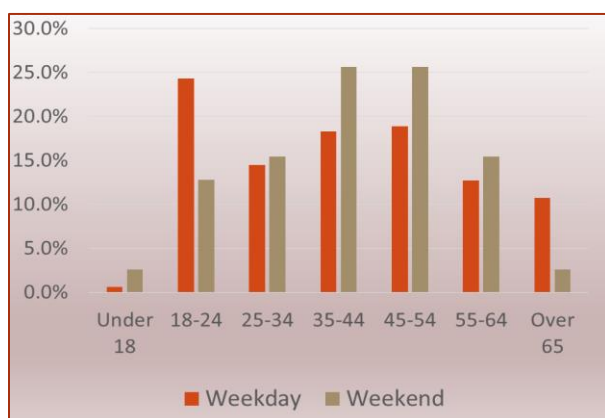
Local Customer Analysis

A passenger survey was conducted in coordination with the Laredo TDP update in 2016. A full summary of passenger surveys is available in the updated TDP. This passenger survey provides important information both on existing rider demographics and satisfaction/perception of services offered.

Rider Demographics

Figure 6 provides existing rider age demographics. Over 64 percent of weekday riders are between the ages of 25-64. Notably, weekday riders between 18 to 24 years of age comprise almost a quarter of riders and this market is a growing market and those self-identifying as students are also increasing. Given these weekday trends, both workers and students are important target markets for maintaining and growing existing weekday ridership.

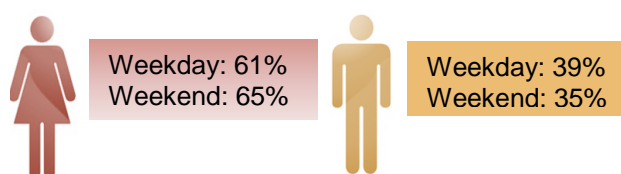
Figure 7: Rider Age Demographics (2016)



Weekend rider age is somewhat higher than weekday rider age demographics, with 82 percent of riders between the ages of 25 to 64 years of age. Younger riders between the ages of 18 to 24 years are significantly less than weekday riders, with only approximately 12 percent identified as age 18 to 24. This is likely due to school trips that are not taken/needed on weekends as well differences in travel purposes for weekday versus weekend services (i.e., work/school are primary trip purposes during weekdays and shopping and other services are greater on weekends).

In addition to age, gender is another important part of demographic makeup of existing riders. As shown in **Figure 7**, 61 percent of weekday riders and 65 percent of weekend are women.

Figure 8: Rider Gender Demographics (2016)

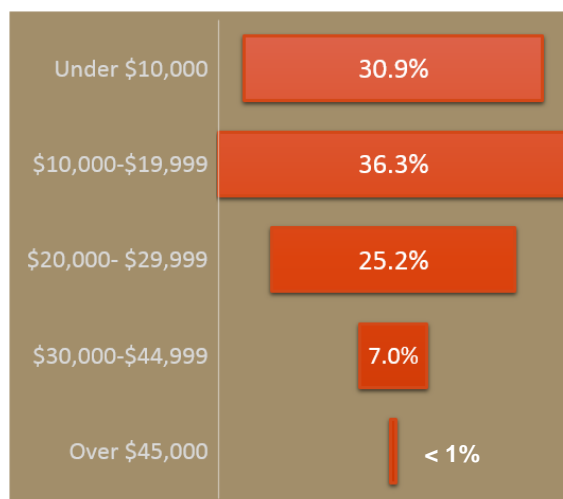


This is somewhat higher than the demographic make-up of the City of Laredo (52 percent female, 48 percent male).

Income levels, employment trends, and dependency on transit is another key element of rider demographics that help identify existing target markets.

As shown in **Figure 8**, over 95 percent of existing riders surveyed make less than \$30,000 per year and approximately 67 percent make less than \$20,000 per year.

Figure 9: Rider Income Levels (2016)

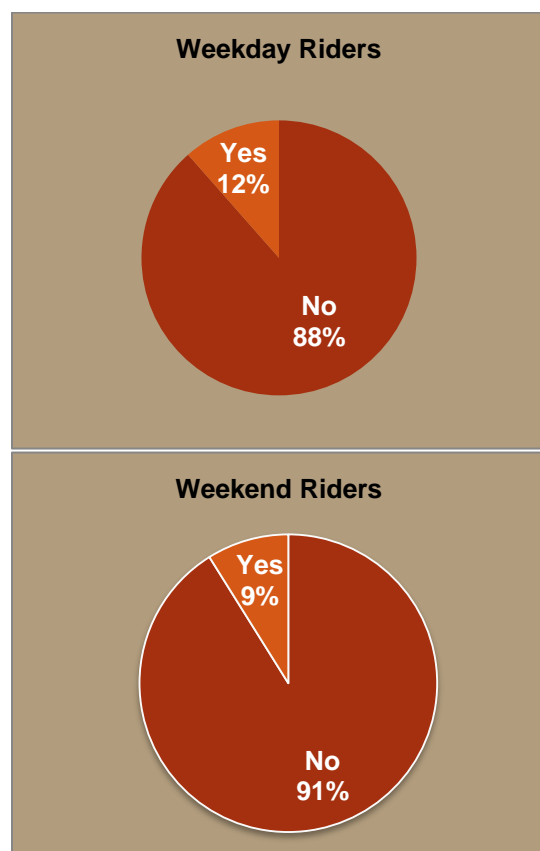


In addition, half of El Metro riders surveyed are employed either full or part-time, and another 13 percent are students. The primary trip purpose (over 50 percent of riders) is home or work. Access to school or shopping makes up another approximately 20 percent of rider trip purposes.

Approximately 90 percent of riders surveyed for weekday or weekend service also

indicated that they did not have access to a vehicle (see **Figure 9**). This, combined with other factors noted above, indicates a strong transit captive rider market.

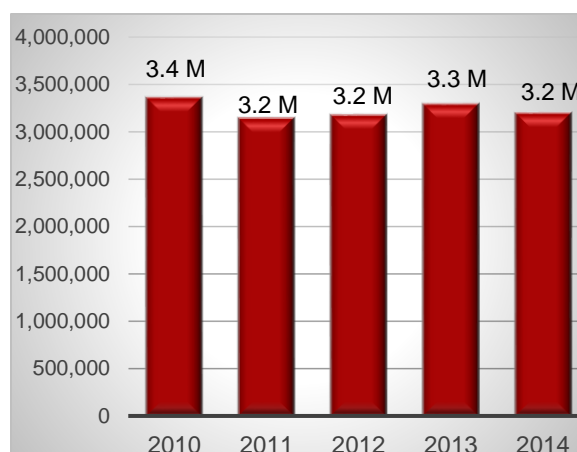
Figure 10: Rider Vehicle Availability (2016)



This transit dependency also contributes to the number of times riders tend to use El Metro services. Approximately 80 percent of riders use El Metro three times or more a week and 73 percent of weekend riders use El Metro three or more times per week.

Finally, as shown in **Figure 10**, ridership on El Metro has declined slightly but remained relatively stable over the last five years. This also indicates a strong, continuing transit captive market.

Figure 11: El Metro Ridership Trends 2010-2014



Customer Satisfaction

The passenger surveys also asked questions about customer satisfaction with El Metro. These results can serve as focus areas for marketing efforts that help maintain existing riders and enhance the perception of public transportation in Laredo. It is important to note, however, that marketing efforts alone will not be effective if there are specific issues of service that need to be addressed. Marketing works best when it works in coordination with other efforts to improve services.

Tables 1 and **2** provide customer satisfaction results for weekday and weekend customers surveyed. In terms of overall satisfaction with services, both weekday and weekend riders overwhelmingly rate the services as good, very good, or excellent. Notably, weekend riders rated overall service quality much higher than weekday riders asked similar questions.

One important perceived or real need for improvement for both weekday and weekend riders is bus reliability.

Table 1: Customer Satisfaction Weekday Riders (2016)

Customer Satisfaction Factors:	Excellent to Very Good	Good	Fair to Poor
Reliability of services (bus on time)	73.6%	12.3%	14.1%
Frequency of service	74.5%	15.2%	10.4%
Driver Courtesy	79.9%	13.1%	7.0%
Cleanliness of buses and facilities	79.4%	15.5%	5.1%
Safety/Security	81.9%	13.8%	4.3%
Condition of buses	76.2%	16.5%	7.3%
Bus stop amenities	72.1%	14.2%	13.7%
Value received for fare	72.6%	15.4%	12.0%
Transit Guide/Website	80.8%	14.2%	5.1%
Electronic real-time kiosks at transit center	78.0%	16.8%	5.3%
Overall service quality	75.8%	14.1%	10.1%

Table 2: Customer Satisfaction Weekend Riders (2016)

Customer Satisfaction Factors:	Excellent to Very Good	Good'	Fair to Poor
Reliability of services (bus on time)	73.7%	7.9%	18.4%
Frequency of service	86.8%	0.0%	13.2%
Driver Courtesy	92.1%	7.9%	0.0%
Cleanliness of buses and facilities	92.2%	2.6%	5.3%
Safety/Security	94.8%	0.0%	5.2%
Condition of buses	92.1%	5.3%	2.6%
Bus stop amenities	94.8%	5.3%	0.0%
Value received for fare	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Transit Guide/Website	94.3%	5.7%	0.0%
Electronic real-time kiosks at transit center	91.5%	8.6%	0.0%
Overall service quality	94.4%	2.8%	2.8%

Both weekday and weekend riders ranked reliability lowest. In addition, bus stop amenities and value received – while ranked highly for weekend riders, is another area for improvement noted by riders. At the same time, safety and security and driver courtesy and cleanliness are rated very highly for both weekday and weekend riders.

Competition Analysis

The competition analysis considers other viable transportation options in Laredo which may influence transit service provision in the city.

Privately Owned Vehicles

The 2016 passenger survey conducted by NuStats indicated that only 11 percent of weekday riders and only 9 percent of weekend riders have a vehicle available. Furthermore, 73 percent of weekday riders and 81 percent of weekend riders claim to not have access to a driver's license. Comparatively to riders of the system, who include those traveling from Mexico and using the service, the majority of the Laredo population travels to and from work in his/her own personal vehicle.

One major reason contributing to the predominant use of privately owned vehicles is the ease of time associated with commutes in the city. As noted in the MPO's MTP, average commute times for people in Webb County is less (21.6 minutes) than both the state (25.3 minutes) and nation (25.7 minutes) as a whole. At the same time, however, population in the county has grown considerably over the last decade, by approximately 50 percent. This has increased the number of workers commuting and has led to increases in congestion and commute times.

This increased population of workers presents an opportunity for better marketing transit as an option for meeting commuting needs.

El Aguila Rural Transit

El Aguila provides demand response and fixed route service within rural Webb County, including travel to or from urban destinations.

A large portion of their ridership is generated from workers traveling from rural areas in the county to urban centers. While stops within the urban area are limited, El Aguila connects to El Metro bus services within the urbanized area for riders making connections within the city. This synergy of riders indicates an opportunity for partnering with El Aguila in the future.

Taxis and Other Emerging Economies

There are currently 10 taxi companies throughout the City of Laredo. Users of this system of transportation must call and wait on taxis to make their trips individually and prices are comparatively higher than El Metro bus fares. Where riders may not have access to a vehicle or ability to obtain a ride in another way, or when El Metro routes do not fully meet trip demands, riders may utilize this service.

More significantly is the trend of more cost effective taxi-like services such as Uber and Lyft. These services take advantage of mobile applications on cell phones to provide a convenient way for people to request the service. These services are also leveraging their popularity by allowing average people with valid driver's licenses to work as a driver, and choose their own hours. The number of drivers available makes the wait times for customers in many cases less than existing bus service frequencies and otherwise acts as a door to door taxi service.

While Uber has yet to come to Laredo, recent news reports indicate that the service could be provided shortly once enough drivers sign up to provide services. This emerging economy represents both a challenge and opportunity to El Metro. The service itself, once in place, is a cost-

effective, frequent service which may have greater flexibility in hours of service than El Metro services. At the same time, a number of transit services across the nation have begun to take advantage of the partnership opportunities this may bring.

The partnerships opportunities may range from direct subsidies for Uber riders heading to transit stops in Laredo to joint marketing opportunities for both services. These types of programs offer great opportunities for both the Uber/Lyft service and the transit service because they both help to support increases in ridership.

Internal Organization and External Stakeholder Analysis

Internal Organizational Analysis

El Metro staff conducted a strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis for the marketing plan.

Strengths

- New bus fleet (2015 CNG buses)
- Transit silver safety award for lowest lost-time injuries
- New technology, GPS system by Alpine Systems
- New Paratransit scheduling software
- Software upgrades
- Clean bus shelters
- Redesigned website
- Redesigned route schedules and system map
- New accessible sidewalks for people with disabilities
- Constant bus wrap advertisement
- Reduced fare offered
- Only transit system in the city
- Website in Spanish (language)

Weaknesses

- Customer service
- Poor image, misconception of El Metro
- Service frequency- inconsistent arrival times
- Bus stops are ineffective
- Only one transit center/transfer station
- Employee morale
- Lack of funding
- Poor cleanliness of buses
- Proper training in several areas of each department
- Technology, software upgrades

Opportunities

- Corporate sponsorships
- Customer service training
- Re-structure routes
- Logo branding
- Transit awareness
- Advertising benefits from our buses, transit center and bus stops.
- Community Involvement
- Monthly, weekly bus passes
- Transfer hubs

Threats

- No incentives to ride the bus
- People own a car
- Meeting new energy efficient standards
- System neglect

External Stakeholder Analysis

To assess stakeholder perceptions about the El Metro system and potential marketing efforts and partnership potential, El Metro and Laredo MPO staff conducted two rounds of stakeholder workshops with (1)

other agency stakeholders and (2) business and community groups on August 31, 2016.

A full list of invitees to these meetings as well as sign in sheets for these meetings are provided in **Appendix A**.

The purpose of these meetings was two-fold: to better educate agency and community stakeholders on El Metro services, its customers, and existing marketing efforts and to solicit feedback on perceptions about the system, potential for better partnerships with agencies and surrounding business and community organizations, and thoughts on ways El Metro could better market its services.

Several hands-on exercises were conducted during the meeting to solicit feedback on the perceived ease of use of the system, marketing and other opportunities for El Metro to become more integrated into the community, and to answer questions.

Major findings and opportunity areas are summarized as follows:

- El Metro currently participates in social media, and has a Facebook and Twitter; however, many attendees were not aware of these outlets of communication. Better ways to promote these social media outlets, even within the local agencies, is an opportunity for better distributing information about El Metro on a regular basis.
- Attendees were provided with a system map and route maps for a hand on exercise to evaluate the ease of use of the existing schedules and maps and to understand any challenges for potential users of public transit. While the majority of attendees were easily able to identify routes they would utilize if traveling from home to work on El Metro, a number of attendees noted that the Downtown Transit Center is the major transfer center needed to make their trip and is not convenient for making other strictly south to north trips. Others, particularly downtown employees, noted that services were offered convenient to their home and would provide easy direct access to their jobs. In addition, providing strategically located park and ride options for downtown employees living in other areas may provide another option to make transit more appealing for current non-riders that are employed downtown.
- El Metro provides service to a number of student populations, including grade school and college students. In addition, a number of attendees noted that their awareness of public transit or most memorable experience of transit was riding the bus at younger ages. El Metro has provided a number of educational campaigns in the past, and participants agreed that providing continued outreach and educational campaigns – such as a Transportation Day or providing bus tours for younger populations – provides continued opportunities for marketing the service to younger populations.
- In addition, providing bus passes through coordination with surrounding schools and universities offers another opportunity for better marketing and targeting of this potential rider market.
- A number of participants also mentioned exposing their children to public transit in recreational circumstances to educate them. An additional opportunity may be in coordinating an El Metro marketing campaign with a “Take Your Child to Work” day. This may be of particular interest to government employees in the

downtown area given ease of use of the system.

- Given that Laredo offers a number of colleges and universities that El Metro has existing relationships with, there is an opportunity to leverage resources within these institutions to meet mutual goals. A number of colleges and universities offer business and marketing programs to students. There is an opportunity for El Metro to coordinate with these programs to promote student internships within El Metro. This would provide much needed resources for marketing efforts within the organization at low to no-cost, would provide needed on-the-job experience for these students, and would increase the visibility of El Metro services to more students (both riders and non-riders).
- Currently, parking for jurors and other users of county buildings in downtown are very limited and often result in illegal parking in nearby residential areas. Transit may provide a convenient option for these people and presents an opportunity to target potential riders. In addition, making these people and County departments responsible for sending out notices aware of shared El Metro services such as the Downtown Transit Center parking garage may provide relief for parking congestion.
- New technologies and services provide opportunities for El Metro to further efforts to enhance ridership among non-riders. Uber and Lyft shared ride services are popular in a number of places across the United States and are expected to become available in Laredo sometime in the future. Other transit agencies have worked to partner with these types of services to offer reduced fares for those transferring to or from transit and/or subsidizing a portion of Uber/Lyft fares for drivers to leverage mutual customer markets. In addition, cell

phone applications allowing potential riders to obtain real-time bus information provide a convenient communication tool to enhance the appeal of the service to potential riders.

In addition, a number of discussions involved assessing ways that El Metro staff can become more integrated into agency processes and leverage partnership opportunities. These include the following major points.

- The City Planning Department has standing technical review board meetings that El Metro staff should attend and become more actively engaged in. As new development occurs, this would allow El Metro to have input into design decisions that directly impact the ability to provide public transportation – including provisions for sidewalks, bus bays, and shelters or stops. For Texas Department of Transportation projects, in particular, El Metro should be involved early on in coordination meetings.
- Potential partnerships with agencies and services that serve similar populations as riders of the El Metro system provides another opportunity for better targeting existing and potential rider markets. El Aguila is the rural transportation provider for Webb County and currently provides service into the Downtown Transit Center where riders may transfer to El Metro services. Providing better interconnectivity for these combined riders provides an opportunity for enhancing the existing and potential rider base, particularly for rural riders that may be accessing employment opportunities within the urban area that El Metro serves.

- Health and social services offer services to populations that often need transit services to meet their transportation needs. There is an opportunity to better coordinate with surrounding nursing homes, hospitals, non-emergency medical providers, workforce development organizations, and others to better coordinate service needs with these existing and potential rider markets. The Federal Transit Administration has recently developed a pilot program to offer funding to transit agencies with creative or unique partnerships with non-emergency medical providers and other health care services. Further identifying mutual organization goals and objectives that may be leveraged through partnership is needed to fully assess partnership opportunities.

El Metro Target Markets

The following existing and potential rider markets were identified through the situation assessment.

- Elderly
- Sustain current riders
- Youth
- Students
- City and county employees
- Local organizations/clubs
- Downtown employees (since downtown is the main transfer station)

Marketing Budget

The marketing budget for FY 2017 is shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4: El Metro Marketing Budget

Type of Advertising	Estimated Cost
Promotional Materials	\$6,000
Advertising (campaigns, magazines, tv, newspaper, radio)	\$8,000
Printing (rack cards, route schedules & system map, etc.)	\$30,000
Support Service (ESRI mapping system, website maintenance, adobe creative suite 6)	\$5,000
Membership/Subscriptions	\$4,500
Award supplies	\$1,200
Materials and supplies	\$0
Training materials	\$0
Photographic supplies	\$200
Travel (marketing conference)	\$0
Food/kitchen (public meetings, campaigns, etc.)	\$200
Minor Apparatus	\$2,000
Total	\$57,100

A standard rule of thumb in the transit agency is that the marketing budget for a transit agency should be roughly equivalent to one percent of its operating budget. Based on the FY 2017 operating and marketing budget, the marketing budget is less than one percent (approximately .40 percent) of the total operating budget. Increasing marketing funds for strategic investments in marketing efforts are recommended to improve the El Metro marketing program.

Marketing Staff Resources

Staff Assistance needs:

- Staff to monitor performance of specific marketing strategies undertaken
- Staff needed to regularly present to local coordinating agencies, schools, and community groups and organizations on marketing opportunities
- Staff needed to attend events (promotion)
- Web design (assist webmaster with El Metro information)
- Research data for new bus stops signage.
- Create database for bus stop inventory
- Printing of informational materials (route schedules, system map, brochures)
- Gather ridership reports and analyze the data to provide efficient service and provide an effective marketing plan
- Maintaining bus stops, transit centers to provide a positive appeal to the public.
- Monitoring of the website
- Revenue reports

Additional Resource Needs

- Invest in bus passes to allow for targeted marketing outreach to specific markets such as students
- Informational materials on bus wrapping for potential customers
- Informational materials to employers on benefits of purchasing and investing in employee passes

Chapter 5: Goals and Objectives

Major goals of the marketing plan were identified by El Metro staff.

- Improve the public image of the El Metro transportation system and increase ridership
- Ensure customer service
- Build relationships between community and local businesses
- Invest in marketing to maximize marketing resources

Improve Public Image and Increase Ridership

- Provide informational material in English and Spanish
- Target marketing to existing and potential riders
- Improve social media
- Customer service availability
- Increase awareness of service availability
- Promote and educate benefits of public transportation
- Offer incentives
- Partner with “green” related agencies and organizations
- Monitor/ensure on-time buses
- Ensure bus cleanliness
- Transit Center Cleanliness

Ensure Customer Service

- Provide passenger information
- Improve employee morale
- Bus stop improvements
- Improve the customer experience

- Employee recognition awards

Build Community Relationships

- Partnerships with colleges and universities
- Sponsorships/ partnerships with local organizations
- Encourage drivers to participate in community events
- Become involved with Chamber of Commerce
- Participate in local events and organizations

Maximize Marketing Resources

- Create and maintain a marketing budget
- Advertise in transit centers, interiors of the buses, local malls/shopping centers
- Website maintenance
- Software upgrades
- Promotional materials
- Dedicated marketing staff to develop materials and conduct regular outreach to target markets
- Maximize resources by utilizing potential low to no cost temporary staff – including internships for college students majoring in business or marketing or public relations
- Increase financial support/partnerships

Chapter 6:

Strategies

Strategies have been identified based on stakeholder outreach, rider surveys, and ultimately the goals and objectives defined through this situation analysis. It should be noted that the best marketing strategies are often those that help achieve more than one of the identified goals of the system. Second, a successful marketing strategy requires ongoing monitoring of implemented programs and campaigns to provide feedback on how well these programs work and to make modifications based on this feedback. The following are several recommendations for future marketing initiatives.

Tagline Marketing Campaign

Based on information gained from stakeholder outreach and rider surveys conducted, certain perceptions of the El Metro System need correction to succeed in maintaining and increasing the ridership base.

For non-riders, a major challenge identified is that there is a perception that all transfers must be done at the Downtown Transit Center. Physical and operational improvements may be made over time to better address this issue – including better interconnections and hubs between routes or developing additional major transit centers within Laredo. At the same time, the existing system does allow for transfers between routes beyond the transit center and the ability to transfer may be better marketed.

For existing riders, major concerns raised included bus frequency and reliability (on-time) buses. While frequency of buses may require greater operational investments in the system over time, reliability is an area that El Metro

can better monitor, improve upon, and market to their existing riders.

To address concerns or perceived issues for both non-rider and existing rider markets, El Metro can develop targeted tag lines as part of a marketing campaign. These internal advertisements can be placed on buses, at the Downtown Transit Center, and as funding is available, even through billboard ads and other media venues that may help spread the message and make it recognizable within the community.

Some example taglines to market to non-riders and enhancing the image of services could include – “It’s Easier than You Think” or “More Connections...Less Time”. For existing riders, this may include taglines such as “On the Go...On Time” or “No Time? El Metro is On Time” to address reliability concerns. It is important to note that these marketing efforts must always be tied to actual monitoring and service improvements to be effective. In coordination with these efforts, El Metro will need to continually improve the ease of their transfers (e.g., staff should perform checks of the ease of making transfers on the system and continue to offer insights on how to improve the timing, bus route interoperability, etc.) and monitor/report on the on-time performance of their buses by route and making improvements or modifications to increase on-time performance. A rule of thumb for good on-time performance is 95 percent on-time; this means buses do not arrive earlier or later than scheduled times. If schedules need to be modified based on staff monitoring of the routes, timing and bus schedules need to be updated as well.

Further advertising through public relations consultants might develop more specific creative visual campaigns to accompany the taglines, and may consider appealing specifically to commuters/employees and may also include some comical elements to make them more memorable. While full advertising campaigns may be costly and cost-prohibitive in the short term, initiating taglines into promotional materials and on to buses is a low-cost way to begin this campaign strategy. Getting the word out through press releases and other internal mechanisms can provide an immediate step and specific target advertising venues can be pursued based on funding availability.

Enhance System/Route Brochure and Ticket Purchase Availability

Working with Chambers of Commerce, social services, municipal buildings and services, grocery stores, hospitals, shopping malls, hotels, airports (among others), making route and system maps more accessible to existing and potential riders will help to enhance the public image and community relations of the El Metro service within Laredo. Many of these locations are directly connected to existing El Metro routes but potential riders may not know how to access their destinations. Making route maps available in easy to find locations such as lobbies of businesses and municipal services serves to attract riders to the service. Currently, the main location for bus route schedules is at the Downtown Transit Center while rider origins and destinations are distributed throughout the city and concentrated at major activity centers. While outreach and continued coordination with these entities to ensure materials are available and re-ordered may require additional staff time, this provides a low-cost marketing effort

that effectively makes the service easier to access.

While El Metro currently does not have a bus pass program, an enhanced measure is to make purchase of tickets (or future bus passes) available at these same locations. This will provide another mechanism for enhancing public image, making the use of the service easy, and reducing any confusion that may be limiting use of the service by non-riders. As an interim measure to implementing new technology on buses to track bus pass use, paper tickets could be considered but would require additional staff resources to monitor and track use.

Jury Duty Promotional

As part of stakeholder outreach, it was noted that jury duty often brings a significant number of people into the downtown area and parking is limited. Coordinating with county/city entities responsible for mailing jury duty notices to include printed information on options to use transit with the El Metro website listed or depending upon the mailing notice formats, including promotional coupons (free or discounted coupons) for transit service may be considered to attract these riders to use the system. While these riders may be one-time users for jury duty notices, attracting this constituency of non-riders may have further reaching impacts to ridership once these riders realize the availability and ease of use of the service. Tracking of coupons is recommended to identify the usefulness of these campaigns.

Employer Paid Pass Programs

A key market of the El Metro service is commuters and employees. Over time,

many business organizations have reached out to El Metro to provide greater service to their businesses, recognizing their employee needs. While enhancing service area coverage may be a longer-term improvement to the system, marketing to major employers to make them aware of how to better identify employees that would utilize El Metro services, business tax credits available, and options for paying for employee passes is a way to better target these existing and potential rider markets. Tri-Met in Portland, Oregon has a similar campaign available on their website that may be referenced as this program is further considered for implementation.¹ El Metro staff may consider reaching out to Tri-Met to obtain examples of surveys used and other materials that can be customized for Laredo.

Website information as part of this campaign would include easy to understand information on steps and options for employers interested in the program. While the website is one major outlet to be explored and implemented first, developing companion brochures and conducting outreach to major employers should be done in coordination with this effort.

Informational materials would include surveys for employers to implement (requiring some specific response rates) to gauge interest and potential use of transit services. This will be an important benefit to El Metro as well in making decisions about changes to existing services or in enhancing routes by providing evidence of ridership potential to serve specific areas.

Additional informational materials would provide easy to understand options for pass programs. There may be some interim cost to El Metro for printing passes in the short-term that can be collected and monitored while

larger system improvements are made to modernize equipment and tracking of riders through electronic bus passes. The advantage of establishing these continued use passes provides El Metro with dedicated advance revenue and benefits employers through tax credits and boosts to employee morale as this can be considered an extra benefit of working for specific employers.

Finally, some informational resources on training employers on the program and establishing transportation coordinators within their businesses can help better coordinate this program and provides points of contact for El Metro to monitor effectiveness of the program over time and make modifications as needed to ensure success.

Working with University/Colleges

Intern Programs

Dedicated staff resources for marketing efforts is a major source of need for better marketing the El Metro system. Interns offer low to no-cost solutions to enhancing staff resources when additional allocation of budget for new staff are constrained. With TAMU and Laredo Community College in Laredo, there is an opportunity to reach out to their Business and Marketing schools or departments to make internships available on a semester basis. This is a win-win-win for the transit agency, the college, and students attempting to get real-world job experience. The added benefits of these types of programs include enhanced coordination with school partners that may be leveraged for future marketing and partnership campaigns and enlisting young and enthusiastic staff that will help to

¹ <https://trimet.org/employers/index.htm>

enhance employee morale and offer potentially creative ideas for enhancing marketing efforts.

Student Pass Programs

While El Metro does not currently have a bus pass program in place, this strategy may be further considered to better target potential student riders (a major constituency in existing rider base) and enhance partnerships with universities and colleges to include passes as part of semester fees.

Regular Participation and Presentation to Agencies and Other Community Groups

Establishing regular presentations to MPO, city and county staff on standing committees is recommended. El Metro will need one point of contact to attend and participate on the committee. Brief agenda items for ongoing meetings that tout recent successes of the system or which educate other agencies on rider markets and successful performance metrics helps to address perceptions of agency and elected officials on the service. Being responsive to these perceptions is important – showing how El Metro is successfully performing efficiently and cost effectively is more effective to obtain support for funding needs and potentially change negative perceptions than noting budget shortfalls and challenges to operate the system alone. By indicating how the system is performing successfully, additional needs to enhance and build upon successes can be made to decision makers.

Coordination with Uber and El Aguila Services

As noted in the Situation Analysis, Uber and other shared economies are arising throughout the nation and are expected to come to Laredo

in the near future. Some transit agencies have successfully worked to partner with these services to offer first and last mile options for potential transit riders to reach destinations. Uber type services benefit by better marketing their services, riders benefit by receiving discounted Uber fares, and the transit agency benefits by better coordinating transportation services and making direct point to point connections for riders. It is recommended that El Metro coordinate with upcoming Uber services to identify and further refine opportunities for partnership as well as shared cost options for this marketing.

In addition, El Aguila already provides rural transportation services and connects to El Metro downtown services. Additional coordination is needed with El Aguila to look at shared costs for routes that serve both populations at a discounted cost to both agencies.

Bus Stop Information and Amenities

El Metro has continued to work on providing system maps at shelters throughout the system and this is recommended to continue into the future. Tracking should be done to note percentage completion of this effort so that this can be communicated to stakeholders.

In addition to shelters, bus flag stops are the most prolific type of bus stop in the El Metro system; however, flag stops often do not contain information on which routes or served by the service. Updating flag stops to include easy to access information on routes served, sources for obtaining real-time bus information via mobile phones, and customer service numbers will enhance the visibility and ease of use of the service for

both existing and potential riders. The most used transit services are ones where customers can navigate the system easily.

Ongoing/Continued Campaigns

El Metro has implemented many campaigns that continue to offer benefits to riders and employees and meet established goals and objectives. These measures should continue to be part of marketing efforts into the future and measured to track effectiveness.

Educational Campaigns

One of the findings in reaching out to stakeholders that may not currently ride the bus service is that often their exposure to the service was established early on by parents or through other means of being exposed as young children to the public transit system. School age riders, such as middle and high school riders comprise a portion of existing ridership and may be grown through continued marketing to these groups.

El Metro has established a mascot for educational outreach of the transit service (“Felix the Bus”), has held training and ride the bus campaigns, and has previously worked on campaigns for creation of specialty bus wrapping created by students with awards and other incentives for participation (see **Figure 12**).

Figure 12: Recent El Metro Educational Campaigns



These types of campaigns are recommended to continue and may be better tracked for effectiveness by monitoring and summarizing participation in campaigns and regular reporting to agencies on successful efforts. In addition, tying these initiatives to safety campaigns and working the Department of Transportation accordingly can assist in meeting multiple agency goals of enhancing safety and reducing pedestrian related crash rates within Laredo. El Metro may also consider additional campaigns to enhance these educational outreach campaigns by working with city, county, and state agency partners on “Take Your Child to Work Day” and/or “Mobility Week” types of campaigns.

Bus Wrapping Program

Bus wrapping provides advertising revenue for the system and a way for businesses to market to their customers on the bus or at shelters. This effort should continue as it provides a source of income to the transit agency and may be improved through greater informational materials on the website and in brochures.

Capital Metro in Austin, Texas has online resources for businesses that may be reviewed for applicability and refining to meet El Metro needs.² Some examples of resources provided are easy to understand rates and options for purchase, promotional brochures to share with major businesses in the area and in partnership with the Laredo Chamber of Commerce, and providing compelling statistics about the potential audience for advertising on buses.

² <http://www.capmetro.org/advertise/>

Chapter 7: Next Steps

El Metro will use this plan as a guideline for prioritizing strategic marketing efforts for the system.

Some primary next steps are provided and summarized below.

Establishing a Budget and Schedule

This task can be conducted in the near-term and should be updated annually as budgets are established for the year ahead.

- Pricing out proposed strategies identified in Chapter 6
- Establishing a proposed marketing budget (typically at least 1 percent of operating budget) over the next five years
- Review Transit Development Plan strategies and identify additional marketing needed to coordinate with planned improvements, if any
- Develop an established budget for marketing implementation over a five-year period, and prioritize strategies that can be accomplished within the established budget
- Develop a schedule for implementation of strategies and identify key steps and milestones for implementation

Identify Marketing Staff

This step includes internal identification of staff as well as working with universities and

colleges in establishing partnerships to obtain intern resources.

- Identify the main point of contact internally for different tasks that will be performed in carrying out the marketing plan for the year
- Allocating time dedication needed for performing tasks to understand staff resource hours needed on a month to month, quarterly and annual basis
- Identify gaps in resources to understand what skills and staff time dedication is needed
- Coordinate with TAMIU and Laredo Community College to establish internship programs
- Establish points of contact for continual monitoring of this program, to survey intern satisfaction, and continue to update the program as necessary

Establish a Monitoring Program

Monitoring is essential to successful implementation of the marketing program. It is essential that El Metro to identify and define internal mechanisms for tracking and reporting. This includes identification of reporting available for, at minimum:

- Monitoring on-time bus service
- Updating route schedules and notifying customers on temporary and permanent changes
- Regular ridership reporting

Determining who will conduct regular reporting, the regularity of reporting (how often), and the format (at meetings, as part of regular internal staff coordination) should be established.

Appendix A: Stakeholder Meeting Supporting Information

El Metro Marketing Plan - Stakeholder Outreach Contact List

Governmental Organization Invitee List

PREFIX	FIRST	LAST	TITLE	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL
Mr.	Joe	Baeza	Public Information Officer	City of Laredo - Police Department	jbazea@ci.laredo.tx.us
Mr.	Ramon	Chavez	Director of Building Development Services	City of Laredo - Building Development Services	rchavez@ci.laredo.tx.us
Mr.	Luis Perez	Garcia	Committee Member	Webb County	lperezgarcia@webbcountytx.gov
Mr.	Arturo	Garcia	Acting Director	City of Laredo Community Development	agarcia@ci.laredo.tx.us
Mr.	Hector F.	Gonzalez	Dir. Of Health	City of Laredo Health Department	hgonzalez@ci.laredo.tx.us
Mr.	Osbaldo	Guzman	Parks and Leisure Director	City of Laredo - Parks and Leisure Department	oguzman@ci.laredo.tx.us
Chief	Steve	Landin	Fire Chief	City of Laredo - Fire Department	slandin@ci.laredo.tx.us
Mr.	Roberto	Martinez	Manager Transportation	Webb County	romartinez@webbcountytx.gov
Mr.	Roberto	Murillo	Traffic Safety Director	City of Laredo - Traffic Safety	rmurillo@ci.laredo.tx.us
Mr.	Albert	Ramirez	Transportation Planning and Development	Texas Department of Transportation	alberto.ramirez@txdot.gov
Mr.	Rogelio	Rivera, PE	City Engineer	City of Laredo - Engineering	rrivera@ci.laredo.tx.us
Mr.	Carlos	Rodriguez	Laredo Area Engineer	Texas Department of Transportation	carlos.rodriguez@txdot.gov
Mr.	Juan E.	Rodriguez	TAC Committee Member	South Texas Economic Development	jerodriguez@stdc.coq.tx.us
Ms.	Rhonda	Tiffin	Planning Director	Webb County	rhonda@webbcountytx.gov
Mr.	Juan	Vargas	Director of Economic Development	Webb County	jvargas@webbcountytx.gov

Business and Community Group Invitee List

PREFIX	FIRST	LAST	TITLE	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL
Mr.	Jaime	Arizpe	Director	Health and Human Services Colonia Working Group	Jaime.Arizpe@hhsc.state.tx.us
Mr.	Ramón	Avina	President	Laredo Cycling Club	adominguez@abrokeragefirm.com
Mr.	Juan	Barajas		ALFA	jbarajas@aamerican.com.mx
Mr.	Manuel	Canales		ALFA	jdeleon@advanet.net
Ms.	Miriam M.	Castillo	Vice President	Laredo Chamber of Commerce	miriam@laredochamber.com
Mr.	Daniel	Castillon	Committee Member	Blue Ribbon for People with Disabilities	danielc@borderregion.org
Ms.	Veronica	Castillon	Director of Communications	Laredo Independent School District	vcastillon@laredoisd.org
Mr.	Miguel A.	Conchas	President/CEO	Laredo Chamber of Commerce	chamber@laredochamber.com
Ms.	Liz	Martinez	Assistant to the President	Laredo Chamber of Commerce	liz@laredochamber.com
Ms.	Nora	Martinez	Chief of Public Health	Laredo Women's Infants and Children (WIC) Program	nmartinez1@ci.laredo.tx
Ms.	Janet	Miller	Economic Development Center Director	Laredo Community College - Economic Development Center	janet.miller@laredo.edu
Ms.	Lynne	Nava	Executive Director	Keep Laredo Beautiful	lnava1@ci.laredo.tx.us
Mr.	Rolando	Ortiz	Chairman	Laredo Development Foundation	rolando@killamcompanies.com
Mr.	Esteban	Rangel	Director of Transportation	Laredo ISD	erangel@laredoisd.org
Ms.	Dolores	Schandua	United ISD	United ISD	dschandua@uisd.net
Mr.	Federico	Solis	Student Services	Laredo Community College	fsolis@laredo.edu
Ms.	Susie	Torres	CBL Properties	The Laredo Mall	Susie.Torres@CBLProperties.com
Ms.	Olivia	Varela	Executive Director	Laredo Development Foundation	ovarela@ldfonline.org
Mr.	Adrian	Dominguez	MPO Technical Committee Representative	Texas A&M International University	adrian.dominguez@tamiu.edu

Notes on Business/Community Group Contacts:

1. Health and Human Services currently has a vacant opening for Director and no additional contact person could be identified.
2. ALFA invitation also sent to Human Resources contact to ensure ALFA invitation to all applicable contacts: ldgarza@aduanet.net
3. Laredo Chamber of Commerce invitations also sent to President and Vice President contacts: conchas@laredochamber.com; miriam@laredochamber.com
4. Laredo WIC Program invitations also sent to the following interorganizational contacts to ensure notification: hgonzalez@ci.laredo.tx.us; wlopez@ci.laredo.tx.us
5. Laredo Community College Department of Economic Development invitation also sent to main email address to ensure notification: edc@laredo.edu



Marketing Plan Workshop
Traffic Safety Department
5512 Thomas Avenue Laredo, Texas 78041
Wednesday, August 31, 2016

PLEASE SIGN IN (PLEASE PRINT)

NAME	ORGANIZATION	ADDRESS AND ZIP CODE	PHONE	E-MAIL	CHECK HERE TO RECEIVE UPDATES ON FUTURE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING EVENTS
Roberto Rodriguez	TXDOT	1814 Bob Bullock Pkwy Ldc, TX 78043	956-112-1135	Roberto.Rodriguez@txdot.gov	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rosa Soto	ELMETRO	401 Scott	956-795-2250	rsoto@elmetro.org	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hector Lopez	Heetel	2600 Cule	956-795-4422	hlopez@ci.laredo.tx.us	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Robert Penn	CO2-IRATEL	5512 Thomas Ave	956-795-2850	rpenn@ci.laredo.tx.us	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Osvaldo Lopez	CO2-Park	2201 Piedra Chica	795-2350	osvaldo@ci.laredo.tx.us	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ramon Chavez	CO2-Building	1120 San Bernardo	794-1625	rchavez@ci.laredo.tx.us	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



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NAME	ORGANIZATION	ADDRESS AND ZIP CODE	PHONE	E-MAIL	CHECK HERE TO RECEIVE UPDATES ON FUTURE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING EVENTS
Steve Landin	Laredo Fire	6116 E. DEL MAR	956-718-6020	slandin@ci.laredo.tx.us	
Claudio San Miguel	Transit	1301 Farragut	956-286-0167	CSAMiguel2ci...	
Sandy Esparza	El Metro	1301 Farragut	956-795-2200	sesparza@ci...	
Victor Esparza	EL METRO	401 Scott	956-795-2200	VictorEsparza@ci...	
Eduardo Bernal	EL METRO	401 Scott St.	795-2250	ebernal@ci.lard.tx.us	
Roberto Murillo	Traffic	5512 Thomas	956-795-2550	rmurillo"	
Rogelio Rivera	Eng	1110 Haddon	791-7946	Rivera@ci.lard.tx.us	
Victor J. Linares	Building	1120 San Bernardo	(956) 794-1625	vlinares@ci.laredo.tx.us	
Stefan Reyes	Building	1120 San Bernardo	" "	sreyes@ci.lard.tx.us	
Vanessa Guerra	MPO		956-794-1604	vguerra@ci.lard.tx.us	

WORKSHOP #12



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NAME	ORGANIZATION	ADDRESS AND ZIP CODE	PHONE	E-MAIL	CHECK HERE TO RECEIVE UPDATES ON FUTURE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING EVENTS
CHARLIE SULLIVAN	CDMSMITH		512 652 5354	SULLIVAN@CDMSMITH.COM	
Martha Hernandez	STOC		722-3995	martha.h2@stoc.co.tx.us	
Rafael Vidaurri	Webb Planning	1116 WASHINGTON #302, 78040	523-4100	rvidaurri@webbcount.tx.us	✓
<hr/>					
		WORKSHOP #12			
Ben Sanchez	El Metro				
Robert Eads	City Managers				
Federico Solis	LCC	5500 South Zapata Highway	(956) 794-4002	fsolis@laredo.edu	✓



LAREDO URBAN TRANSPORTATION STUDY
metropolitan planning organization



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