

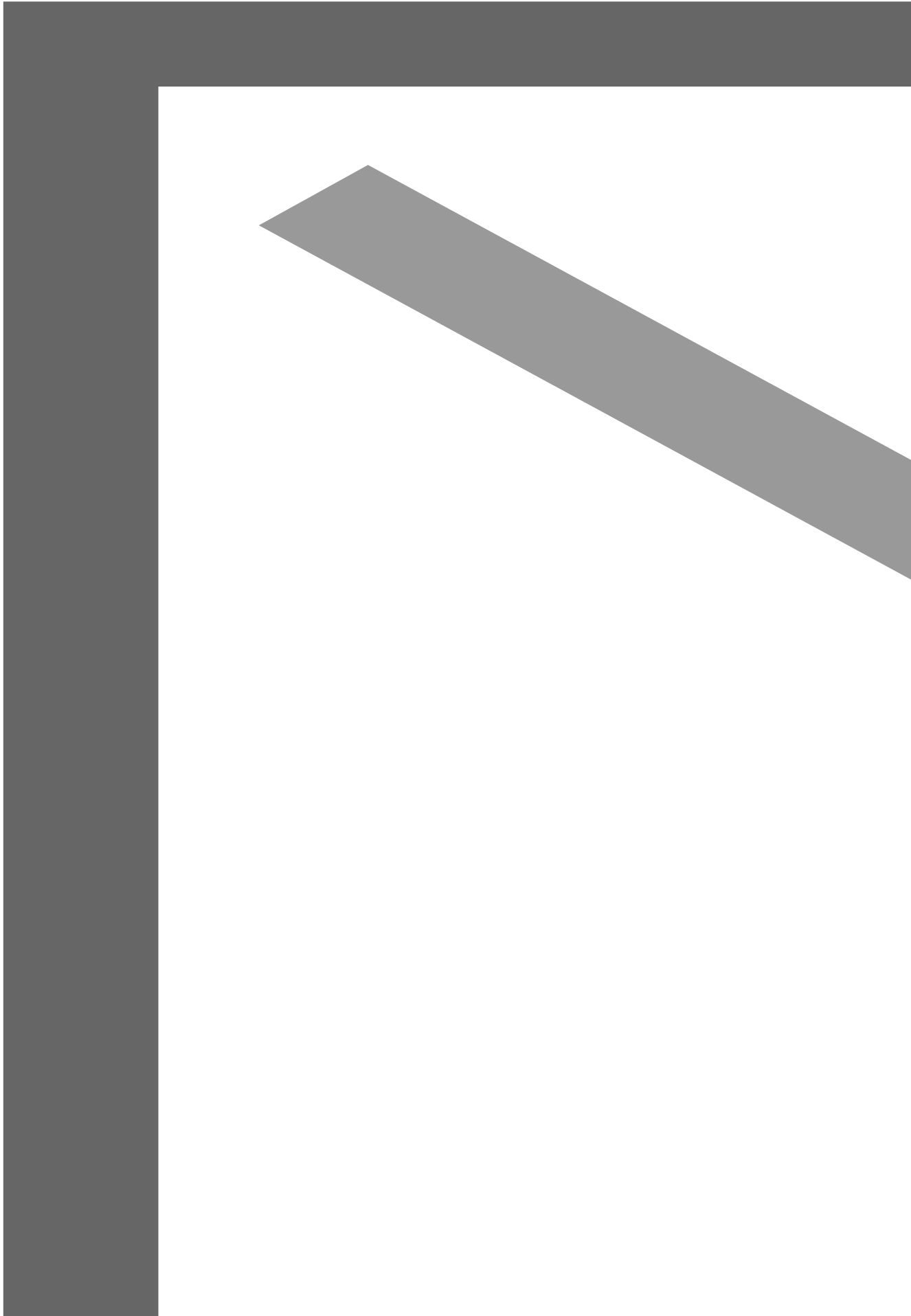


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On Tuesday, October 2, MTS held Free Ride Day. It was a huge success as we recorded almost 53,000 more rides than the same Tuesday one year before, a 17% increase. Every region in our territory experienced significant gains. Significantly, our Sycuan Green Line Trolley, which skirts the doorstep to thousands of middle income condo and rental units, saw a 37% jump in ridership. This means many choice riders we targeted participated in Free Ride Day.

“We wanted to create a movement,” said MTS Marketing Director Rob Schupp. “We wanted to make riders feel special for choosing transit.”

“The response from the public was good. They were receptive to us offering free rides and it really made them happy,” said MTS Rail Transportation Supervisor Fred Kroner.

“It was a great way to get people to ride the Trolley, to try it out,” added Train Operator Veronica Villarreal-Cordova.

Free Ride Day was the culmination of a six-month marketing campaign. There were two phases of advertising: a launch of our direct “Choose Transit” call to action, followed by riders giving reasons why “I Choose Transit.” Most importantly, our third phase included a major public relations effort to enlist the support of every major employer that depends on transit to meet its climate action goals.

We made promoting Free Ride Day easy for city governments and our other supporters like UC San Diego and the U.S. Navy. We developed an e-toolkit that each MTS supporter could easily access on the MTS website complete with sample social media posts, proclamations, op-eds, and graphics in every shape and size.

This approach lifted our message to more audiences and strengthened the credibility of choosing transit.

Bus Operator Josue Benavides was driving Route 10 on Free Ride Day. “People were happy. I had to tell some of them it was free, but they still wanted to tap their cards. It certainly helped people board faster,” he said.

Bus Operator Aide Luna was driving Rapid 215 and noticed the bump in ridership on her bus. “I had lots of non-regular riders,” she said. “Particularly in the downtown area there were more. It was a nice and easy day.”

MTS was trending on Twitter. Elected officials got involved and 80 different organizations posted about Free Ride Day. Our website traffic doubled. Millions of free impressions were created for Free Ride Day by our supporters.

All of our supporters joined us for a news conference in advance of Free Ride Day and it was covered by all news organizations in San Diego and many in Tijuana. On Free Ride Day, we had pop-up events at a dozen of our transit centers passing out Choose Transit key chains and stickers similar to “I Voted” stickers in which riders could declare that they chose transit.

This effort also raised our brand awareness. It elevated the environmental discussion. It

positioned MTS as a solution and a partner in the fight for clean air. Businesses and governments around the region are more open than ever to join MTS programs to promote transit ridership.

Our job now is to keep the momentum going. Our plan is to focus on key bus and Trolley corridors. We will promote #TransitTuesdays with our regional partners. We will continue holding events that show our appreciation for our current riders and new riders.

Ridership numbers in October seem to show that the effort has paid off. There was a 4.2% ridership gain for Bus and 4.8% for Trolley for the month of October.

Turning around the decline in ridership is not an easy proposition. MTS believes that Free Ride Day was the impetus necessary to create the kind of partnerships and synergy the effort demands. Collectively, the region supported transit on Free Ride Day and it gives us a foundation for support in the future.

Free Ride Day: the Numbers

80 Organizations that posted on social media about Free Ride Day

180 Third-party Facebook posts about Free Ride Day

2,000 Re-tweets on Twitter for Free Ride Day post

11 Proclamations received from cities in support of Free Ride Day

3.5 million Impressions from media coverage

17% Increase in daily ridership

37% Increase in ridership on the Sycuan Green Line Trolley - largest increase in system

53,000 Extra passenger trips taken on Free Ride Day

News Category:

Bus

MTS News

Trolley

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