

Riverside Transit Agency's

Express Bus Service to the Happiest Place on Earth



2019 APTA AdWheel Awards

Category: Best Marketing and Communications
to Increase Ridership

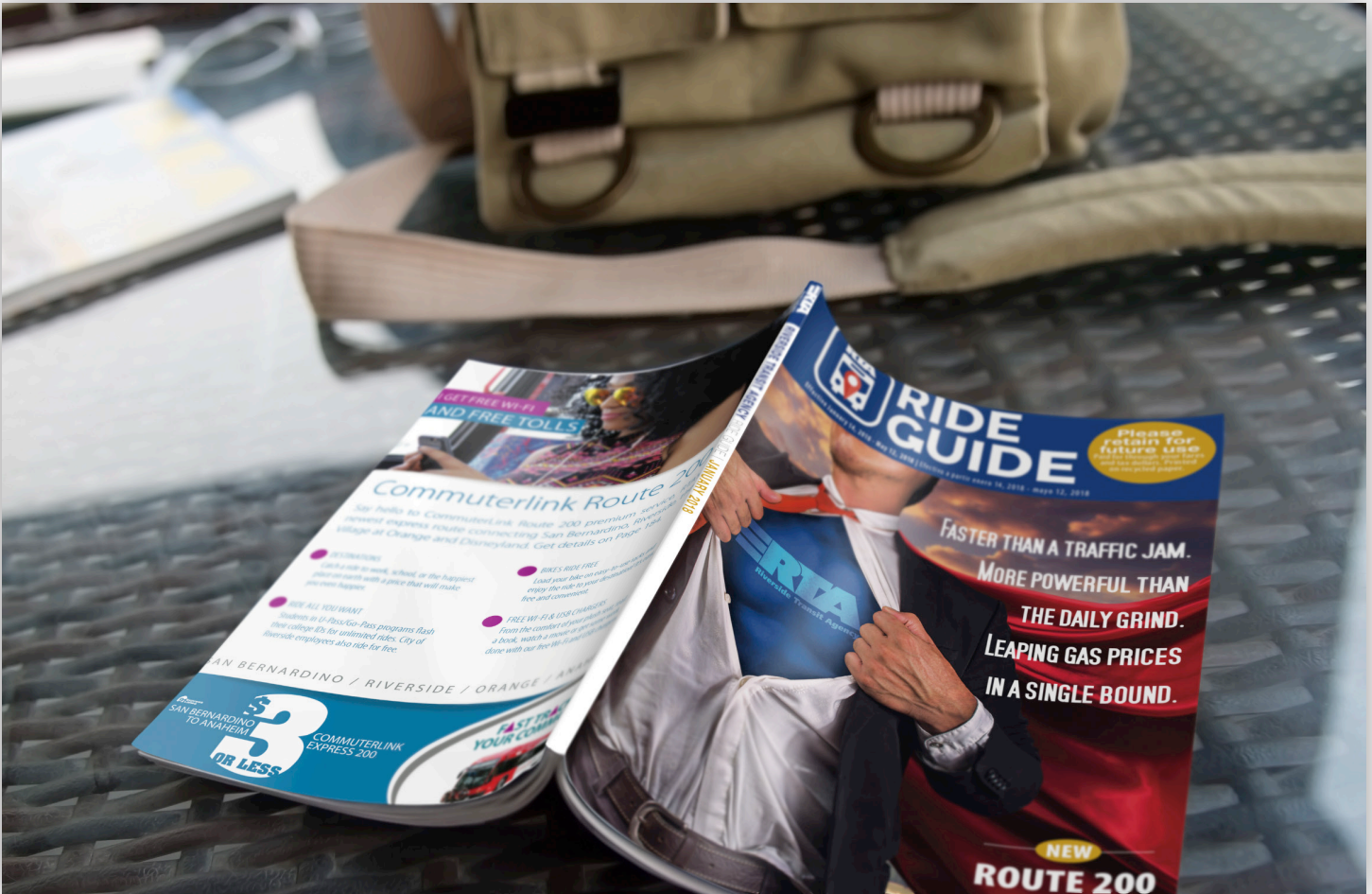
COMPANY SUMMARY

The Riverside Transit Agency (RTA) provides public transportation for Western Riverside County, operating 38 fixed routes, nine express routes and Dial-A-Ride service. RTA's service area spans 2,500 square miles, among the largest in the nation. During Fiscal Year 2018, RTA buses had 8.5 million boardings and operated over 871,000 revenue hours and 16.6 million revenue miles under an annual operating budget of \$87 million. RTA employs a total of 900 employees including administrative, maintenance, operational and contracted operations staff. A total of 224 vehicles compose the fixed-route fleet with another 110 dedicated to paratransit services.

ABSTRACT

On January 14, 2018, RTA launched CommuterLink Express Route 200, an express bus service stretching through three counties and ending at the Happiest Place on Earth. With capital funding and operations support from the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) and support from RCTC's Commuter Assistance team, Route 200 has provided a fantastic new option to Inland Empire commuters looking for a faster and more convenient way to school, work, and best of all, to the legendary theme park. Ridership recently reached a fever pitch with a record 3,900 boardings during the second week in October. That's 644 boardings a day! Using brand-new express lanes on Highway 91, Route 200 gives passengers relief from white-knuckle traffic

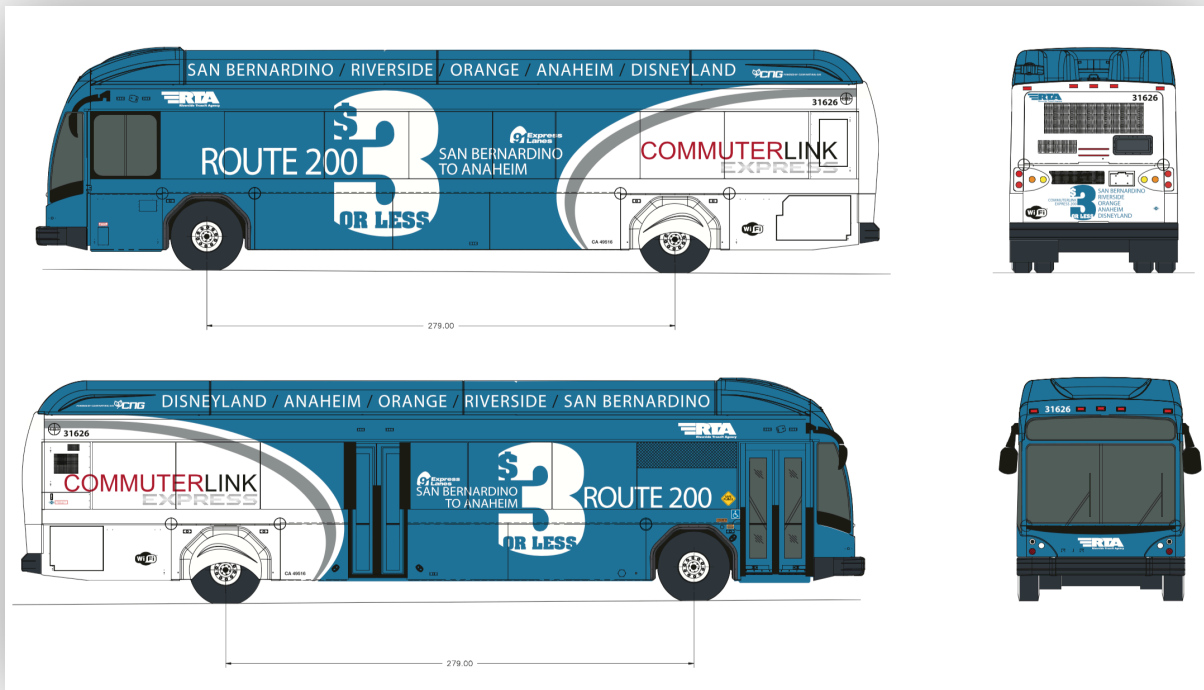




congestion and provides an affordable trip for just \$3, and \$2 for seniors, veterans and disabled customers. The bus has 11 stops along the way – from San Bernardino to Anaheim – which include downtown Riverside, Riverside-Downtown Metrolink Station, Galleria at Tyler, La Sierra Metrolink Station, the Village at Orange, Honda Center, Angel Stadium, Anaheim Convention Center and Disneyland. Buses currently run 17 times a day Monday through Friday, starting at 3:32 a.m., and nine times on weekends with the first bus leaving San Bernardino at 6 a.m. The bus generally arrives at Disneyland’s entrance on Harbor Boulevard in under two hours.

STATEMENT OF NEED/OPPORTUNITY

Getting to Disneyland needed to get a lot easier for area residents and park employees. Until now, there was no real reliable public transportation option that didn’t include several transfers from buses or trains. Not anymore. Thanks to this new direct, express route, getting to the park has never been easier. With free Wi-Fi, charging ports, luggage racks, bike racks, overhead lights, and comfy seating, the service was an instant hit among park visitors and as well as employees needing a lift to work. Just ask Swati Bhattacharyya of Riverside who recently took the bus to Disneyland, adding she loved the ease of the trip. “You don’t have to drive, you don’t have to worry,” Bhattacharyya said. Route 200 was created



when the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) called upon RCTC to make its 91 Corridor Improvement Project, which extended the express lanes, more multimodal. Since launching in January 2018, Route 200 has handled more than 121,000 boardings, exceeding expectations and answering the call for a new way to get around on new-and-improved freeways.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

On January 14, RTA introduced new CommuterLink Route 200 with service connecting San Bernardino, Riverside, the Village at Orange and the Disney resort in Anaheim. RTA's CommuterLink Express buses are branded and delivered as a premium express bus service, and target choice riders. The service comes with free Wi-Fi, USB charging ports, and free tolls through the new freeway express lanes.

In coordination with RCTC/IE Commuter, several marketing channels were used to advertise the new Route 200 premium bus service with the following goals and objectives:

- Educate and inform existing and future riders, stakeholders and members of the public about the new Route 200 service
- Promote the new route as a faster and more convenient way to get to places like Disneyland, Angel Stadium and area Metrolink train stations.
- Generate interest and create initially strong ridership on the new route
- Publicize the new route to local, state and national media outlets
- Promote company image by meeting with customers and including them in our plans

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Members of the public, including Disney employees and families going to the Disney resort area
- Area university and college students, staff and faculty
- Orange County employees living near the Route 200 stops
- Media outlets
- Board members and stakeholders

SOLUTION/PROJECT SUMMARY

Before producing the promotional materials and events, RTA developed a campaign that borrowed the iconic message “I’m Going to Disneyland!” and replaced it with “We’re Going to Disneyland!” to reflect our message to bus riders who would be travelling as a group to the theme park. We also included the slogan “Fast Track Your Commute” to indicate the fact that the bus would be using express lanes, which are part of the California FasTrack toll road express lane system. Much of the marketing copy included a large “\$3 or less” to promote the affordable price. Other aspects of the marketing campaign included promotions for free student rides, free Wi-Fi and free tolls aboard the express buses and images of young children or students, many donning Disney ears or caps. The message was used on ride guides, flyers, website landing page, social media, billboards and other campaign materials. We also decided to launch the first wave of the campaign roughly two months before the service change took effect, which gave our customers time to learn about the new service long before it began.

The marketing campaign included the following collaterals:

Outdoor Advertising

- Five buses were wrapped with \$3 promotion to ride graphic and major destinations
- Digital and permanent billboards were visible to EB/WB drivers on Highway 91 near the City of Corona
- Bus shelters throughout RTA’s service area carried promotional messages about the new service

Marketing Collaterals

- Print advertising included college and university newspapers
- Flyers included route schedule and map
- Kiosk posters
- Onboard promotions aboard all RTA buses

Online/Web Advertising

- IE Commuter e-blast to members and transit coordinators





- Web banners on IE Commuter, IE511 and RCTC online properties
- Route 200 landing page on IECommuter.org (linked to RTA's website rotation and articles)
- Geo-targeted mobile advertising on Pandora and iHeartMedia

Community Events

- Community events and outreach
- Press release
- Local media tour on first day of service

Social Media

- Posts on RCTC, SBCTA and IECommuter social media properties
- RTA social media properties: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter

- Internal communication via Intranet

In addition, RTA incorporated the following communication channels to spread the news to existing and future riders about the new Route 200 service.

Service Change Guide

The guide was published a month ahead of the January 14 service change to let the customers know about the upcoming route and schedule changes. Specifically, the Route 200 was promoted as a centerpiece to the guide.

The Ride Guide and System Map

The Ride Guide and System Map highlighted the introduction of Route 200 including its route, schedule

and map. The Ride Guide and System Map is the primary source of information for RTA's passengers. The publications for the January 14 service change was distributed to key distribution locations throughout RTA's service area.

Rider News

Route 200 was a featured article on RTA's Rider News for several months prior to and after the launch. The Rider News is a monthly publication of 6,000 copies designed to educate and inform RTA riders. The content highlights upcoming promotions, current information on route and schedule changes and helpful riding tips. It is distributed as a hard copy on buses and as an electronic version that's available on RTA's website. The article about the new route was published in the December Rider News and RTA continued to promote Route 200 in the spring 2018 issues.

The Reader

Information about the Route 200 was first published in the November 2017 issue of the RTA Reader. The Reader is a monthly publication generally distributed to the media within days of the monthly RTA Board of Directors' meetings. The articles highlight recent Board actions and other recent Agency innovations and accomplishments. It is distributed as an email communication to Board Members, press, and business and community leaders. It is also available on RTA's website.

Website

Route 200 was highlighted in the main home page and rotation banner space of RTA's website.

iAlert

iAlert is an RTA's email system that is available for free to subscribers. RTA sent out the e-blasts to

approximately 2,000 subscribers to inform riders about the Route 200.

BusWatch Alerts

RTA published a promotional message about Route 200 in the BusWatch app prior to and after the launch of the new route.

Social Media

RTA utilizes social media channels including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google+ and YouTube. RTA developed a social media strategy and calendar to share the news about Route 200 to our riders and followers. Posts were boosted strategically to reach the identified target audiences. In addition, RTA shared, reposted and retweeted Route 200 posts and photos.

Kiosk Insert

Route 200 information was highlighted at major RTA bus stops. Kiosk inserts provide bus route and schedule information on bus stop poles at selected locations throughout the service area. RTA has approximately 2,500 bus stops and 4,200 kiosks that are updated as needed during the year.

Onboard Flier

Interior fliers were placed inside every bus in the advertisement space behind the driver.

Colleges & Universities

Print Advertising in College Newspapers

A flyer targeting U-Pass holders was adapted into a print ad. The print advertising targeted students and staff of UC Riverside, Cal Baptist University, La Sierra University and Riverside City College. Color ads, up to full-page, ran in campus newspapers during the spring 2018 session.

Email Notification to Partner Colleges and Universities

All U-Pass and Go-Pass partner universities and colleges can send email messages to students, faculty and staff. RTA worked with each school to coordinate email messages to promote Route 200 service targeting students commuting to and from Orange County and San Bernardino to area colleges.

Community Relations

Media and Public Relations

In coordination with RCTC, press releases were written and distributed to advise and educate the media and the public about the Route 200. Members of the media rode the bus on the first day of service.

Community Relations and Employer Outreach Events

One of RTA's outreach strategies is to rely on local organizations and businesses to direct specific promotional messages to constituencies with realistic potential for using RTA's transit services. RTA builds upon these relationships by participating in numerous organized community events. Strategic outreach was coordinated with RCTC throughout the year. Route 200 marketing collateral were presented at these events. RTA's CommuterLink Express bus were displayed at the events as identified and coordinated by RCTC.

RTA staff attended the Downtown San Bernardino Passenger Rail Project Completion event on December 5. A CommuterLink Express bus was displayed and Route 200 marketing materials handed out. Outreach to other special groups, travel training customers and chambers of commerce.

Transportation NOW

Route 200 information was presented and promoted at T-NOW meetings. T-NOW is a grassroots advocacy group comprised of public transit advocates. Members of T-NOW range from elected officials to community activists to everyday transit users who are committed not only to addressing regional transportation issues but meeting the needs of individual communities.

Customer Information Center

RTA's Customer Information Center provides phone information to customers seven days a week. Facts and information about Route 200 were communicated to RTA's Customer Information Center clerks so they could effectively communicate with the public.

Internal Communications

Trip Sheet

RTA employees are invaluable ambassadors to promote the company's news and update. The Trip Sheet is RTA's internal newsletter used to share news among departments, recognize superior performance, celebrate milestones and achievements and build morale. It is an integral and important part of a communications strategy that keeps all employees on the same page. The information about Route 200 was included in the November-December issue as well as in the January-February newsletter.

Intranet

RTA's intranet is also an important internal communication tool. Like Trip Sheet it is used to share information among departments. An article about Route 200 and the various marketing strategies was posted and featured in RTA's intranet.

Board Presentation

Marketing plans and updates were shared with



members of the Governing Board, as well as RTA managers and directors.

Connecting Transit Agencies

RTA reached out to the partner transit agencies such as Metrolink, OCTA and Omnitrans to inform them about Route 200 and explore avenues to promote the new route to their own riders. RTA provided flyers at key locations, including the San Bernardino Transit Center and the La Sierra Metrolink Station.

Ongoing Promotions

- Bus wraps will continue to be seen on streets
- Online contest gives away Disney and RTA bus passes
- Website continues to promote the Route 200
- Flyers are distributed at community events

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Part of the challenge of having a successful promotional campaign was convincing our customers that Route 200 was an option for getting to Disneyland. We figured we could promote the speed of the route, which used express lanes, as well as the fact that it only cost \$3 to ride with discounts for disabled and seniors. Students in our partnering Go-Pass and U-Pass student ride program rode free. Perhaps the biggest challenge was earning customers trust to believe the route was a benefit to them. The challenge was that people were used to a certain way to travel, accustomed to driving themselves to Disneyland in their own vehicles. Or boarding several different bus routes and perhaps trains to get to their destination. This was a project that needed the public's understanding and buy-in to make it a success. This was accomplished by our aggressive marketing strategy that took ridership to a level that

exceeded our expectations.

MEASURING/EVALUATING SUCCESS

Demand for the service has continued to grow. During the first six months, RTA buses handled more than 82,000 boardings. During its first month, ridership was at approximately 2,500 boardings per week. In the months following, ridership grew by 40 percent to 3,500 boardings per week. Summer ridership, when we typically see less congestion on the freeways, grew even higher to 3,900 boardings per week. The demand for Route 200 has led to RTA adding more frequent trips in both directions. The positive impact Route 200 has had on Riverside and Orange counties and the environment can't be overstated. For \$3, customers are cruising through express lanes and the full bus is freeing up valuable space on the freeway. Every full bus can take 40 cars and their harmful emissions off the road, which is propelling our efforts to lead green. The new route represents a comeback of sorts. RTA operated a similar route from San Bernardino to Disneyland from 1989 to 1994 that was paid for by several agencies. But when that funding was reduced, the route was streamlined to include just Riverside to Orange. The route's return was influenced by a couple of factors. One, there is now Metrolink service to the San Bernardino Transit Center, the first stop where parkgoers can combine bus and train travel to Disneyland. Second, the opening of carpool lanes on the 215 and 91 freeways, and the extension of the toll lanes to Corona, made true express bus service possible. During the first day of service, the nearly full bus carried customers, included a Riverside man wearing a retro Mickey Mouse T-shirt, and a plainly dressed Riverside woman who hadn't been in years. The guests were thrilled with the ride, especially when the Route 200 bus dropped them off in front of the Disneyland

Resort terminal. "I can't even tell you how long it took because we were talking the whole time," said Wanda Demby of Bloomington, who along with friend Pauline Martinez of Riverside caught the third bus of the day. There are other perks: Customers are applauding the fact that they are saving \$20 on Disney parking, getting dropped off at the park entrance and the recent addition of later service has made it possible to stay for fireworks before catching a bus ride home. Disneyland officials said they are pleased that RTA is providing more options for guests and cast members to get to the destination and is assisting the agency in letting cast members know about the service. "It's been more than 20 years since we've operated a route like this. Now is the time to bring it back," said Bradley Weaver, RTA media and public relations manager. "We know that there are a lot of residents in our service area who visit Disneyland and we also know that many Disneyland resort employees live in our service area." To continue to promote the route, RTA officials have launched a campaign that gives away free tickets to Disneyland and free bus passes. "This is a great incentive for people to try public transit," said Chairman Art Welch. "Whether it's a trip to school, to work, or to Disneyland, RTA is working hard to satisfy our long-time customers and encourage other people to give us a try --- even if it's just once."