

Soda Cap

CONNECTOR



Target Audience: The people living, working, visiting, or recreating in the Vista, Five Points, and Main Street, aka the greater Columbia, SC Downtown.

Strategy Objective: At a unique moment of convergence, a renewed transit system with a brand new fleet was able to connect three distinct districts of the greater downtown, an urban triptych that, too, had stormed back to relevance over the last five years but struggled with parking limitations and geographic isolation from one another. The objective was to create a *stand-alone service* that would be a marketing campaign for the rest of the system, a system-within-a-system focused on the greater downtown with low barriers to entry (short trips, high frequency, differentiated vehicles, free) and a fun vibe supported by retro signage and clear marketing collateral. If we can get South Carolinians to ride the Soda Cap Connector, we can get them to ride the rest of The COMET.



Situation Challenge: The last 100 years had not gone particularly well. A transit system founded in 1892 on street-car catenary had been powered and owned by the utility for over a century. From 1929 to 2002 the power company had been compelled to operate transit against its financial interests, a circumstance that did not produce a high-quality service. The public opinion of the agency was poor even by the standards of medium-sized southern towns. A transportation sales tax—the first dedicated funding in the agency’s history—in 2012 brought needed funds, a rebranding, additional service, a pristine fleet, and resurgent ridership from our long-term customers, but few new riders. The COMET needed a way to make transit easy, approachable, and even essential to make up for decades of lost time.

Results Impact: The service launched very recently (September 1, 2017) and ridership is steadily growing (with only two months of data). The community support is the real story. The COMET is taking offices, hotel managers, museum staff and anyone else near the Cap on ride-alongs to show them how to ride so they can tell customers. The Convention and Visitors Bureau put all of The COMET’s schedules in its welcome center for the first time. Members of the business community who had for so long shunned the transit system showed up *en masse* at the public hearing to voice their support for the service and found elected officials there too. The COMET is delivering a long-needed service and those in-the-know are responding.

Why Submit: Columbia—abbreviated Cola—over time became known as Soda City. The Soda Cap Connector is The COMET’s foothold downtown. This service would not have happened five years ago: The COMET was running ancient buses made by a school bus manufacturer and in the midst of a 45% service cut; the tallest building downtown was empty and many store fronts were boarded up, the Vista had not yet boomed, and gangs, not growth, captured headlines in the Five Points. Today all four of these entities are unrecognizable from just a half decade ago. There is a tremendous pride in the revitalization of the greater downtown area and the outpouring of media coverage, social media interest, and the willingness to get out and ride the Soda Cap Connector show the community is ready to ride like it’s 1892.

PRESSER



We held a press conference on the day the service launched between the Congaree River and the Edventure Children's Museum featuring speakers from the Vista, Five Points, City Center Partnership, and the Chair of County Council Joyce Dickerson (photos above).

The Soda Cap Singers (below) entertained the crowd with a rendition of "We'll take you there." *Five Points... We'll take you there. Vista... We'll take you there. (Go to link to view)*

The event concluded with our first ride-along with community leaders, board members, and interested folks (right).



SIGNAGE

The centerpiece of the marketing platform is the sign: three-dimensional, on-brand, and cute.



The star in the logo is modeled on the stars on the South Carolina State House where six cannon balls struck during the Civil War. The bottle cap shape and pink-and-teal colors are retro throwbacks.

DESIGN



“Columbia” has long been shortened to “Cola” and more recently to “Soda City,” as with the super-popular Soda City Market every Saturday on Main Street (below).



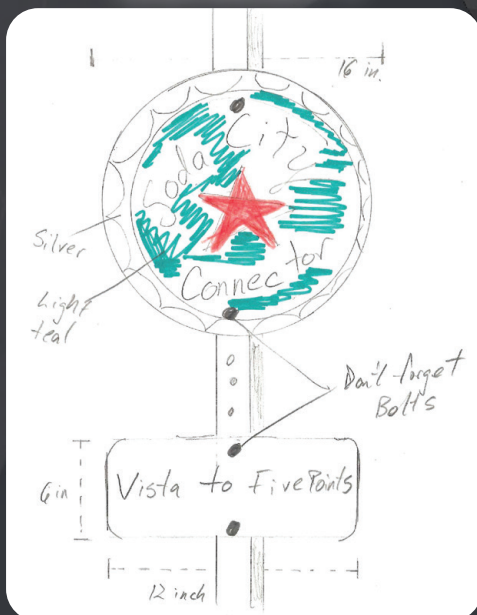
VISTA TO FIVE POINTS

VISTA TO TAYLOR ST.

10 AM TO 6 PM TUESDAY - SATURDAY

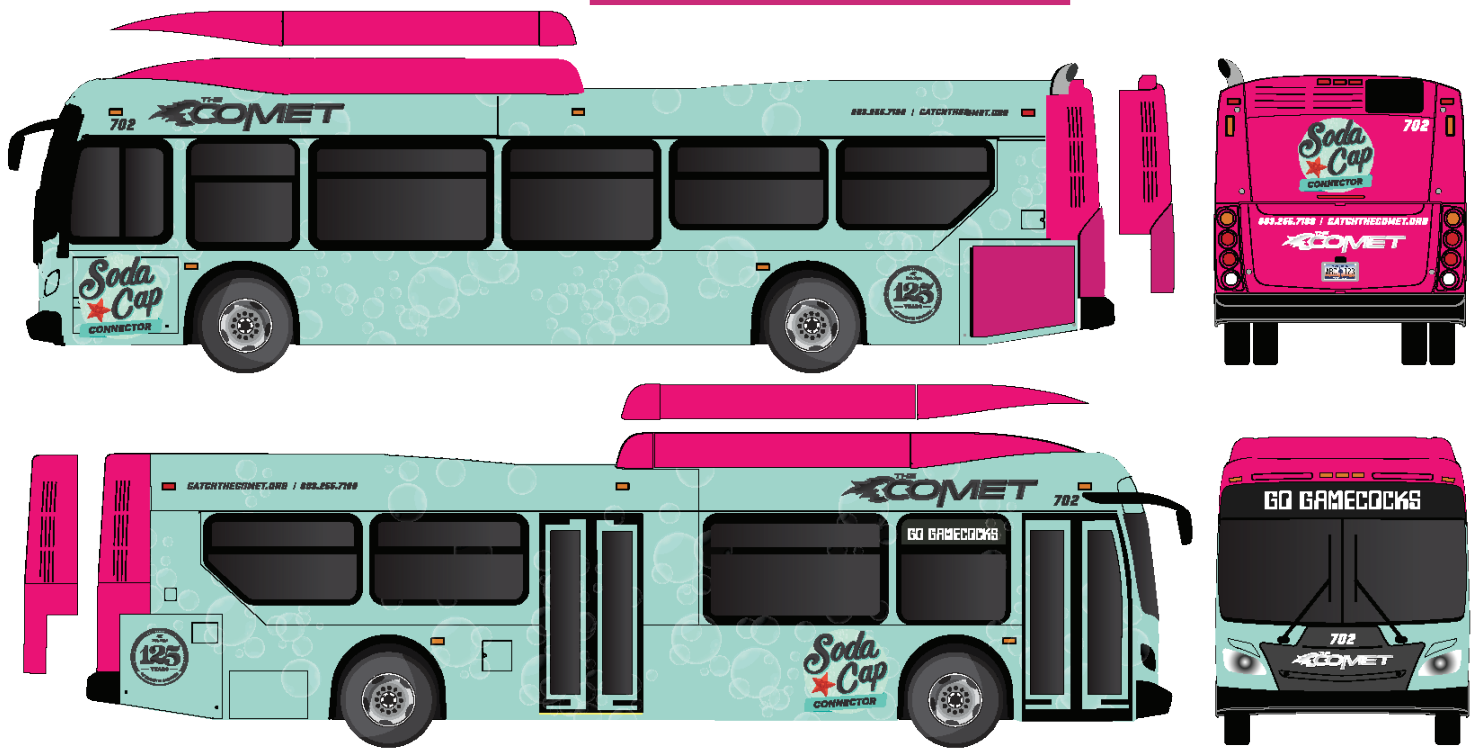
The Soda Cap Connector is not a route but a system-within-a-system focused on the area around the State House, or capitol, hence the “Cap,” (below) which were silkscreened and shaped by the American Metal Sign Co., of Kenton, Ohio.

CONCEPT



IMPLEMENTATION

VEHICLES



Five brand-new, 35-foot New Flyer vehicles—including one spare—are wrapped to be instantly recognizable from the rest of the brightly colored fleet. Two of our regular fixed-route buses are shown below to the left, background.



MEDIA



ft freetimes

NEXT UP

New State House Probe Indictments Snare Richard Quinn, Five Indictments handed down last week struck at the heart of one...

TOP STORY

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

Free Soda Cap Connector Will Circulate Among Vista, Downtown, Five Points

Local Leaders Sing Praises of New Bus Lines

By David Travis Bland Sep 6, 2017 (0)

f t e m



Source: The COMET

COLUMBIA, SC (WIS) - People have a few more options for getting around Columbia on public transportation now.

Friday, The COMET unveiled the Soda Cap Connector between Five Points and The Vista, and the Blythe

This Soda Cap Connector will run Tuesday-Saturday from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. as a pilot. The first six months are for

The Blythe Express is an express service that provides a park-and-ride option for the Town of Blythe residents to the downtown corridor.

"It is important to have mobility options that fit the needs of all citizens of Richland County. We are proud to launch a Park-and-Ride Express service for the Town of Blythe. The Soda Cap Connector downtown circulator that connects people to major parts of the city. The Transportation Penny was passed in order for us to implement these services for the benefit of our community as a whole," said The COMET's Interim Executive Director Ann Auger.

The COMET officials plan to survey riders during the pilot program in order to determine the best service for future use.



Hello Wednesday.

SEPTEMBER 6 2017

Get around downtown (without battling for a parking spot).

Last Friday, I got to break in COMET's brand new bus system, the Soda Cap Connector.

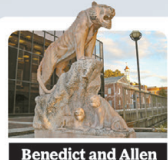
The fleet of teal-hued buses (funded by the Richland County Transportation Penny Program) will take Soda Citizens on two routes with stops at major downtown destinations (including Five Points, The Vista, Main St. + more) Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

The best part? The service is completely free during its ~6-month trial period, which began on Sept. 1. (Depending on the outcome of that trial period, fares might be imposed.)



Soda Cap Connector bus

A long-discussed bus route for downtown Columbia that connects riders to city center retail and dining as well as to major colleges is to launch in September. The Soda Cap circulator will offer four new buses to transport riders from the Edventure Museum on the west to Allen and Benedict colleges on the east, stopping at key sites in between.



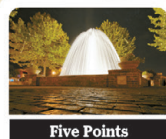
Benedict and Allen



State House



SC State Museum



Five Points



Edventure

TWO WAY STREET

The Soda Cap will offer two routes: one that goes from the Vista to Five Points, another traveling from the Vista to Taylor Street

TEAL ROUTE
Vista to Five Points

REDDISH ROUTE
Vista to Taylor Street



By the Numbers

5
Buses will run five days a week: Tuesdays through Saturdays

All the major media outlets from print, web, and television covered the Soda Cap Connector including an artful layout from *The State Newspaper* (left).

SOCIAL

3:15 PM

Tweet

Kerry Stubbs liked

Samuel L. Scheib @writebothists

We're on our way to @SodaCitySC market on @CatchTheCOMET #sodacapconnector




3:15 PM

Tweet

Aimee Scheib liked

The COMET @CatchTheCOMET

Read and just relax while catching the #SodaCapConnector



3:17 PM

Tweet

Christine Shelek @christineshelek

I absolutely love the #SodaCap connector "signs"! Great marketing tool. @CityofColumbia @SodaCitySC

The Vista @VistaColumbiaSC

The Vista @VistaColumbiaSC

Want to know where to catch the Soda Cap Connector? Check out this map! 🗺️ 🚌 Who's tried it?



10:05 AM - 6 Sep 2017

5 Retweets 5 Likes

3:16 PM

Tweet

SodaCity @SodaCitySC

Replying to @colatoday and @FreeTimesSC

We're pumped for the #SodaCapConnector! Thanks @CatchTheCOMET for thinking on your feet & helping the "parking problem" we often hear of.

8/15/17, 8:23 AM

2 Likes

3:14 PM

Tweet

Fig Columbia Retweeted

Steve Benjamin @St... · 7/4/17

Big move forward by @CatchTheCOMET @ColumbiaSC starting #SodaCapConnector bus service in September #SmartCity



Coming soon: Free bus rides to downtown Columbia hot spots thestate.com

3:19 PM

Tweet

Columbia SC @columbiasc

Soda Cap Connector by @catchthecomets = easy transportation between @FivePointsSC, @mainstcolasc + @VistaColumbiaSC bit.ly/2wNSGIH



3:17 PM

Tweet

Zach Pippin @zachpippin

Replying to @zachpippin

tchTheCOMET and @CityofColumbia kudos to @CatchTheCOMET for frequent SodaCap stops. Didn't wait for another.


1/17, 1:05 PM from South Carolina, USA

3:14 PM

Tweet

Leslie Dillon @LeslieMDillon

First bus ride on the @CatchTheCOMET #sodacapconnector



3:15 PM

Tweet

Angela Rogers @AngRogers_News

.@UofSC? @FivePointsSC? @SCStateMuseum? Comet buses "will get you there" and further for FREE! More on @abc_columbia #SodaCapConnector



3:15 PM

Tweet

Angela Rogers @AngRogers_News

S/O to @goodlife_cafe for supporting our #SodaCapConnector!!!



3:14 PM

Tweet

Bin Dubya @bindubya

We caught the Comet! Taking a ride around @CityofColumbia on the #SodaCapConnector.



10/14/17, 11:38 AM

3:20 PM

Tweet

RichlandSC @RichlandSC

Council Chair Joyce Dickerson is the first to board @CatchTheCOMET's new Soda Cap Connector bus line that connects major local destinations.



3:19 PM

Tweet

Jay Barry @petridisc · 9/21/17

Pretty sure I saw the whole @FreeTimesSC office get off the @CatchTheCOMET Soda Cap Connector. 🙄

2 1 12

Free Times @FreeTimesSC

Replying to @petridisc and @CatchTheCOMET

Caught us. We rode it down to Southern Belly for BBQ.

9/21/17, 4:45 PM

1 Retweet 5 Likes

COLLATERAL



Cling-frees (top left) were distributed to hotels, restaurants, bars, museums—any place that is “Just Steps From a Stop.” Rack cards (top right) were also handed out to explain the service, and schedules (bottom right) have extra information like larger maps and time points. Wristbands were part of a campaign of free promos like drink or other menu items given out by restaurants near the new routes.

THE SODA CAP CONNECTOR Tuesday - Saturday Service



POINTS OF INTEREST

- The SC State Museum
- Adventure Children's Museum
- The Columbia Convention Center
- The West Restaurants, Shops & Bars
- Memorial Park
- UNC Barnwell
- The Columbia Museum of Art
- Marcy Gregg Park
- The South Carolina State House
- Main Street District
- University of South Carolina Horseshoe
- Five Points Restaurants, Shops & Bars
- Benedict College
- Allen University
- Wynham Garden
- Ilyatt
- Marriott
- Altet
- Hilton
- Hampden Inn
- Clayton

HOTELS:

- Sheraton
- Wyndham Garden
- Ilyatt
- Marriott
- Altet

THE SODA CAP CONNECTOR
Tuesday - Saturday Service
Effective September 4, 2017

ROUTE 1: THE VISTA TO FIVE POINTS
20 Minutes 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

ROUTE 2: THE TAYLOR TO FIVE POINTS
20 Minutes 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

FARE INFORMATION

	Regular	Half Pass
Regular Fare	\$ 1.50	
Half Fare	\$ 0.75	\$ 1.50
All Day	\$ 3.00	\$ 1.50
5-Day	\$ 12.00	\$ 6.00
7-Day	\$ 14.00	\$ 7.00
30-Day	\$ 40.00	\$ 20.00

Free and Half Fare: Children 10 and younger ride The COMET for free. Children 10-19 receive a 50% discount. Children 20 and over receive a 25% discount. A valid photo ID is required for all fares. The COMET Half Fare is available to all riders. The COMET Half Fare is available to all riders. The COMET Half Fare is available to all riders.

Types of Identification required for ID:

- Youth: Student ID or form containing parent's permission to ride for free.
- Persons with disability: Medication and State-issued ID.
- Seniors (65+): State-issued ID.
- Veterans: Military ID card or DD-214 with State-issued ID.

Time	Route 1	Route 2	Route 1	Route 2	Route 1	Route 2	Route 1	Route 2
10:00 AM	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad
10:15 AM	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum
10:30 AM	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad
10:45 AM	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum
11:00 AM	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad
11:15 AM	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum
11:30 AM	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad
11:45 AM	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum
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12:15 PM	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum
12:30 PM	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad
12:45 PM	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum
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4:30 PM	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad
4:45 PM	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum
5:00 PM	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad
5:15 PM	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum
5:30 PM	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad
5:45 PM	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum
6:00 PM	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad	State Museum	Lincoln Railroad

RIDE-ALONGS



Quite possibly the best marketing tool we have available is one-on-one interactions with the public. The COMET staff contacted dozens of offices, hotels, museums, agencies, even the State House to take staff on a trip on the Soda Cap Connector (a ride-along with state representatives is scheduled for January when the house is in session). Scheduling and taking Ride-Alongs is time consuming, but getting people to ride who have never been on a bus before is essential to the new service's success. Clockwise from top left: The Convention and Visitors Bureau, The Junior League, Columbia Music Festival Association, Columbia Museum of Art. At left, we arranged for the Bon Bons from *The Nutcracker* to take a ride, too.

