

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Project Information

REPORT NAME: Marketing and Education Budget for Implementation of New Transit Technology

START DATE: November 2023

REPORT DATE: November 2025

RESEARCH REPORT NUMBER: SPR-1757

PROJECT COST: \$295,618

COST SHARING: 20% MDOT, 80% FHWA through the SPR, Part II, Program

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Marketing new transit technologies and capabilities

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and transit agencies statewide are committed to meeting the public's mobility needs by adopting innovative technologies that improve service and meet users' needs. To raise public awareness and increase ridership, transit agencies must then market these new capabilities. A user-friendly guidebook developed in this project presents strategies that both large and small transit agencies with varying budgets can use to educate the public about new transit offerings.

PROBLEM

To better meet the transportation needs of the public, Michigan transit agencies are investing in mobile trip planning, digital ticketing, real-time service alerts and other technologies. However, without sufficient marketing to educate the public about these new features and capabilities, they may be underused and potentially discontinued. Further, transit agencies must effectively implement technological advancements to participate in statewide efforts such as the Mobility as a Service initiative, which coordinates e-scooters, buses, shared bikes and other travel options through a smartphone app.

Limited budget and staffing resources are ongoing challenges that impede agency efforts to implement new transit technologies. This project provides strategies tailored to small and rural transit agencies that are scalable to agencies of all sizes to effectively market the benefits of these investments.



By effectively marketing technology upgrades, transit agencies can enhance returns on investments and improve transit service across Michigan.

RESEARCH

Multiple efforts were pursued to gather information for this project, including a statewide survey of Michigan's public transit agencies that identified common technology challenges and needs, and a 2021 survey that provided information on how rural transit agencies in Michigan were using technology and their most pressing technological needs. Investigators then hosted workshops with agency leaders, vendors

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“This project has produced valuable tools for Michigan’s public transit agencies and offers practical guidance to agencies of all sizes to effectively market and implement new transit technologies.”

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and community partners to discuss common barriers such as funding, staffing and communications with the public. Available products and best practices from leading technology vendors were also reviewed.

Using information obtained through these efforts, investigators created a guidebook to offer MDOT and local transit providers a framework and practical tools for planning, funding and implementing technology solutions to improve service and the rider experience.

RESULTS

After procuring the appropriate technological solutions and training staff to improve transit service operations, transit agencies must market the improved service to the public and educate users about new features. Specifically, a focused strategy with consistent messaging and a commitment to addressing institutional and cultural barriers is needed to support advancements. For example, when introducing mobile ticketing, real-time tracking or other new features, agencies must clearly communicate how to use the feature and its benefits through digital media, community events and trusted local partnerships to reach a wide audience of transit users.

Further, marketing transit upgrades in rural and midsized communities requires flexible strategies that align with local circumstances, including limited budgets,

varying staffing capacities and distinct community needs. Rather than pursuing a one-size-fits-all approach, transit agencies should leverage the strengths in their particular community, such as partnerships with community organizations and leaders.

A good rule of thumb, according to the guidebook, is to spend 2 percent to 8.5 percent of total revenue on marketing, with one-quarter of that amount dedicated to digital marketing. Given the wide range of transit agency revenues across Michigan, strategies for four tiers of marketing budgets are provided:

- \$1,000 to \$5,000: Single-platform digital campaign, flyers/posters, simple ride guide, volunteer-led information sessions and partner material distribution.
- \$5,000 to \$20,000: Multiplatform digital content, newsletters, community tech events, student/freelance support and signs with QR codes.
- \$20,000 to \$50,000: Coordinated campaigns with videos, live activations, microsites, sponsored print materials and co-branded community outreach.
- \$50,000 to \$100,000: Large-scale print/digital ads, countywide launches, major events, kiosks/signs and a documentary-style video series.

To obtain ongoing staff support for these offerings, transit agencies are also encouraged to capture institutional knowledge and train “superusers” to champion new systems. Representative rider and agency personas described in the report further assist in designing funding, outreach and technology programs tailored to urban, suburban and rural transit users.

IMPLEMENTATION

Other recommendations include taking an active role in advancing public transit technology investments by providing direction for streamlining procurement processes, offering training opportunities, creating a knowledge-sharing system where agencies can share their experiences, and

developing scalable marketing and communication templates, materials and toolkits. The toolkits would provide content, design templates, messaging frameworks and other materials to start a local campaign.

The user-friendly [guidebook](#) is available to agencies to provide guidance throughout the process, including budgeting for and marketing the new technology. The guidance encourages coordination across agencies to ensure the effective use of public funds to meet Michigan’s long-term mobility goals.

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Final report and related materials are available online at

MDOTjboss.state.mi.us/TSSD/tssdResearchAdminDetails.htm?keyword=SPR-1757.

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Research Spotlight produced by CTC & Associates LLC, March 2026.