

**Marketing Team Findings**  
**Yellowstone-Teton Regional Transportation Cooperative Feasibility Study**  
**December 2, 2009**  
**Revised December 14, 2009**

- Transportation providers have identified marketing as one of two top areas where they would benefit from the transportation co-op. This fact, as well as input from marketing professionals about the importance of marketing to establish community awareness and support of the system, especially initially “to get the snowball effect going” suggest that devoting resources to marketing is critically important in the start-up phase of the co-op. START bus in Jackson, which serves only one county with a relatively straight-forward fixed-route bus system, spent approximately \$50,000 per year in marketing in the critical years when they were trying to establish their brand and win community buy-in.
- Due to how important marketing will be to the success of the proposed transportation co-op, the team recommends high priority be given to 1) Hiring a marketing consultant to help make strategic use of marketing funds to maximize results, at least for the launch phase of the co-op. Even transit systems with large in-house marketing departments (such as TriMet, in Oregon, with a marketing staff of 30) will bring in a marketing agency to help do the branding for introducing a new line, for example. 2.) Hiring marketing staff for the co-op once it is formed.
- For some of the co-op’s target audiences, there is real potential to effectively use social media to market the co-op, which is far less expensive than paid media to reach the same group. Effective use of social media requires daily attention in order to be fresh and relevant and to therefore find an audience. The same is true of website content. Once the website has been designed and built there will still need to be considerable investment to ensure the human resources necessary to keep the site content accurate and up to date.
- The current project timeline does not allow for very much time for testing and development of the product before introducing it to the market. Marketing does not just involve advertizing the product but also considerations in development – for example, how do we design the transportation system so that it easy to use and overcome the intimidation factor of using public transportation by people used to having a car at their disposal? Ideally, the co-op would design and test, with target audience(s) in mind every aspect of the rider experience: route design, ease of use of maps and schedules, uniformity of signage and stops, connections to points of interest, driver knowledge and training, website and informational phone line. BART in San Francisco, for example, had a cross-section of their passenger demographic (in terms of level of English, computer literacy, age, ethnicity etc) test their website by attempting to perform specific tasks on it, before it even went live to the public.

- It will be important to ensure that the user experience connects with message. The vision for the co-op that has been communicated so far is for a seamless transportation network that covers the whole 27 county region with one-stop-shop online ticketing. If the co-op is going to be launched before this vision is fully realized in terms of technology and routing, communications and marketing will have to carefully handle consumer expectations as they use a system that is a work in progress.
- There are many areas in which the co-op will have to make a choice about the trade-offs between money, human resources and time. For example, website design and building the website can be split into two separate pieces, with an internal project manager working with the contractors doing each piece (with the added benefit of getting to pick the best person for each job). This approach would take more time and YBP/Co-op capacity than hiring one entity to project manage and do both the design and building of the website, which would be more expensive.
- What the co-op is trying to do is ground-breaking and therefore unforeseen obstacles and delays should be expected as par for the course. No one else is currently offering the level of sophisticated trip planning that we are talking about, and those trying to develop something similar are on a much longer project timeframe. For example, TriMet in Portland is part of a national group working on a multi-modal trip planner that they say they are two years out from completing.
- It takes multiples “touches” for people to remember and understand something. The co-op will have to maximize use of earned media and connecting with partners who will promote the co-op: chambers, non-profits, human service agencies, colleges and universities, the national parks, etc. Geographic dispersion is going to make paid advertizing very costly. One branding/PR/advertizing professional estimated \$300,000 a year in paid advertizing to cover the 27-county region.
- Visitors, and international visitors in particular, have come up time and time again as important potential riders in our team’s discussions. This audience should be taken into account in the design of the collateral development (schedules, maps, pamphlets etc.) as well as the website and vehicle and stop signage. Language may be an issue. See the TriMet ([trimet.org](http://trimet.org)) website for an example of a website the uses a lot of visuals and icons to help users who may have limited English language skills.
- Seniors and people with disabilities also have very specific needs that come into every level of the design of the system – from font size on printed schedules, to accessibility of stops, to marketing that speaks to their special needs and motivations.
- Members of the Marketing Team felt that in some ways they were brought into the process too early and that a better defined product is needed in order to do the job of coming up with a marketing timeline. Also, while they were clear on the long-term vision: “efficient, convenient, affordable and seamless transportation for overcoming the Yellowstone-Teton region’s transit challenges”, the elasticity of the definition of the

region in question, the prioritization of target markets and the steps in between the feasibility study were outstanding questions that came up again and again.