



# MARKETING PLAN

FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025

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# OVERVIEW

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In fiscal year 2023-2024, The COMET continued to successfully position itself as a vital transportation service in the Midlands through effective marketing strategies and robust community engagement, adding to the efforts of past years. By focusing on increasing brand awareness, highlighting the accessibility and convenience of the services, and fostering community connections, The COMET saw growth and positive public perception. Notable achievements included the successful implementation of targeted advertising campaigns, enhanced social media presence, and strategic partnerships that underscored The COMET's role in providing essential transit services.

As we move into 2024-2025, our marketing focus will be on reinforcing this position, increasing ridership, and promoting new initiatives, particularly in light of the upcoming Penny Tax vote. The upcoming year presents both challenges and opportunities, and our plan will address these through a multifaceted approach.





## KEY INITIATIVES FOR 2024-2025

### Strategic Messaging Campaigns

**Pre-November Campaign:** Intensify efforts to educate the public on the importance of the Penny Tax. This will include messaging that emphasizes the tangible benefits of past support, such as testimonials from actual riders.

**Post-November Messaging:** Depending on the vote's outcome, our messaging will either focus on thanking the community for their support and outlining future plans or providing reassurance and detailed information about maintaining service levels despite the vote outcome.

### Soda Cap Connector Promotion

**Hotel Outreach and Partnerships:** Distribute table tents and window clings to hotels and local businesses to promote the Soda Cap Connector. Highlight its convenience for tourists, emphasizing easy access to major attractions and events.

**Collaborative Marketing Efforts:** Work with local businesses to develop partnership materials such as flyers, brochures, and in-venue signage to enhance the visibility of the Soda Cap Connector.

### Leveraging Ambassadors and Influencers

**Ambassador Program:** Strengthen relationships with community ambassadors who can advocate for The COMET, particularly focusing on how the service provides access to education, jobs, and healthcare.

**Influencer Campaigns:** Refresh and implement our influencer strategy to engage local bloggers and social media personalities in promoting The COMET's services, particularly the Soda Cap Connector.

### Creative Campaigns

**Sarah Mae Flemming Campaign:** Commemorate the 71st anniversary of her historic ride with a focused, smaller-scale campaign that includes bus shelter posters, social media content, and targeted advertising. This campaign aims to educate the public about her legacy and inspire continued support for civil rights and public transportation.

**People of The COMET:** Continue to showcase personal stories and testimonials through various media channels to humanize the brand and highlight the positive impact of The COMET on individuals and the community.

### Digital and Traditional Advertising

**Expanded Advertising Channels:** Increase our presence across radio, digital, and outdoor advertising platforms. This includes leveraging digital billboards, social media ads, and targeted print ads in local publications to maximize reach and engagement.

**Special Segments and Features:** Collaborate with local media outlets like WIS + WLTX to produce special on-air segments that highlight The COMET's services and impact, further raising awareness and driving ridership.

This comprehensive marketing plan for 2024-2025 will incorporate ongoing marketing services, special creative and service campaigns, and leverage new and existing media channels to achieve our goals. By focusing on these key initiatives, The COMET aims to strengthen its position as a crucial transportation service, increase ridership, and secure ongoing community and financial support.



# STRATEGY FOR 2024-2025

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Entering the sixth year of marketing support with Flock and Rally, this plan will continue with foundational tools developed in previous years, along with new initiatives to address current challenges and opportunities. Our strategy will include:

### Pre-November



Emphasize the importance of the Penny Tax, highlighting the potential impact on services if the vote passes or fails.

### Post-November



Adjust messaging based on the vote outcome to either thank supporters and outline future plans or provide reassurance and information about maintaining service levels.

### Increase Ridership



Focus on the Soda Cap Connector and other key routes to drive ridership, particularly among choice riders and tourists.

### Community Engagement



Continue to build connections with transit-dependent riders and engage new audiences through targeted outreach and partnerships.



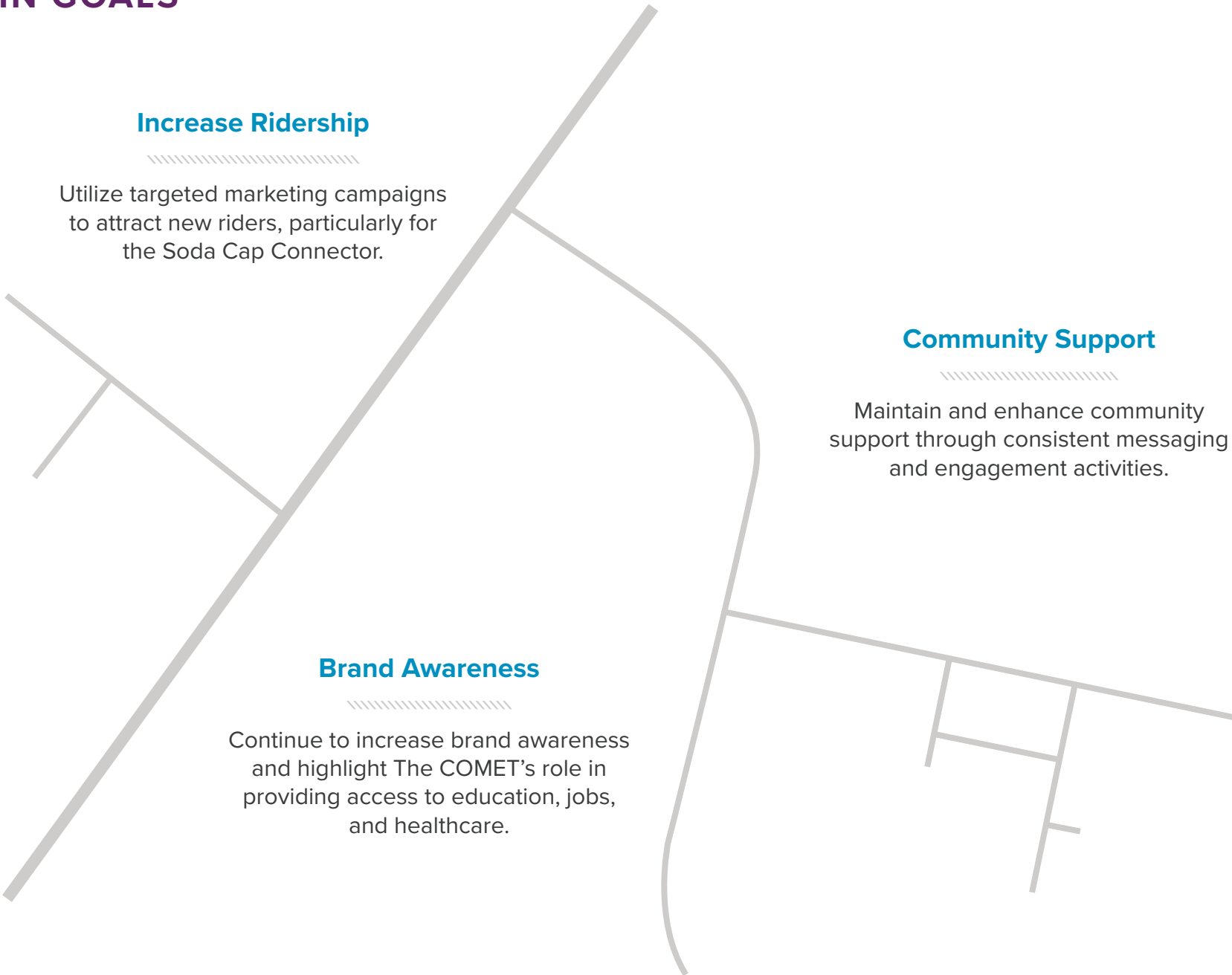
# GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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MAIN GOALS



## FLOCK AND RALLY GOALS

- Focus advertising creative elements on people and places.
- Highlight local tourism and downtown districts and The COMET's access to them.
- Maintain effective communications in the marketplace, maximizing every dollar spent.
- Adhere to an updated set of brand standards and use the brand guidelines as a tool to ensure cohesive copy and visual communications.
- Leverage paid media dollars to gain in-kind and added value promotions.
- Increase frequency of placements for paid media in the radio and outdoor channels and strategically decrease the amount of competing placements that garner little to no traction due to low frequency.
- Continue to increase awareness of all COMET services and programs, as well as ridership.
- Emphasize ridership on the Soda Cap Connector.
- Promote the Soda Cap Connector as its own sub-brand of The COMET.
- Connect with base ridership and help them feel proud to ride The COMET.
- Continue community interaction and engagement through town hall events, partnerships, event attendance, and maintain support among business districts.
- Leverage relationships with ambassadors and influential individuals in the Midlands.
- Promote The COMET as it provides access to education, jobs, and health care.
- Continue to increase traffic to the new website (measurable objective below).
- Add public and media relations as a new tactic to increase brand awareness, education, and support among Richland County residents in advance of the Penny Tax vote.

## FLOCK AND RALLY OBJECTIVES



**Increase open rate for email newsletters by 5%.**



**Increase social media engagement by 5%.**



**Increase web traffic to the new website by 5%.**



**Obtain a minimum click-thru for all digital placements of 0.10%.**



**Increase ridership on the Soda Cap Connector by 10%.**





# AUDIENCES

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The updated audiences for The COMET's 2024-2025 marketing plan are categorized into Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Audiences. This structure allows us to tailor our marketing efforts effectively, ensuring we address the unique needs and preferences of each group.

The following messaging examples can be updated after approval of the marketing plan and with each deliverable where the copy will be used.



## PRIMARY AUDIENCES



### Transit-Dependent Riders

Individuals who rely on The COMET for their daily commute, access to essential services, and more.

#### Seniors:

Messaging should emphasize reliability and safety. Example: *“The COMET ensures Mary can safely visit her grandchildren and attend her doctor’s appointments on time, providing reliable and secure transportation.”*

#### Veterans and Fort Jackson Recruits

Highlight connections to key locations and affordability. Example: *“The COMET offers our heroes affordable and convenient transportation, connecting them to essential services and family members.”*

#### People Returning to the Workforce

Focus on job access and economic benefits. Example: *“The COMET is a vital resource for John, facilitating his commute to his new job and contributing to his family’s economic stability.”*

#### Hospitality, Labor, Construction, and Service Industry Workers

Emphasize convenience and reliability. Example: *“The COMET guarantees that workers like Maria arrive at their jobs punctually, ready to contribute to our community.”*

#### People Accessing Food Resources and Medical Services

Highlight essential access. Example: *“With The COMET, David can easily access food resources and medical appointments, ensuring his well-being and health.”*

#### People with Disabilities

Focus on accessibility and independence. Example: *“The COMET’s accessible services empower Jane to maintain her independence and stay connected with her community.”*



### Students

High school and college students who use The COMET’s services primarily for transportation to and from school. Students from Allen University, Benedict College, Midlands Tech, and Columbia College:

Messaging should highlight convenience, cost savings, and connectivity to social activities. Example: *“The COMET is your gateway to campus life and beyond, providing affordable and reliable transportation to classes, friends, and social events.”*



### Choice Riders

People who use The COMET system of services but are not dependent on it for daily travel.

#### Choice Riders Who Use The COMET:

Emphasize convenience and benefits. Example: *“Skip the hassle of parking and traffic. The COMET makes your commute stress-free.”*

#### Choice Riders Who Do Not Use The COMET

Promote the Soda Cap Connector and specific use cases. Example: *“Discover Columbia without the parking headaches. The Soda Cap Connector takes you to all the best spots.”*





## SECONDARY AUDIENCES



### Partner and Latino/Latinx Community

Latino/Latinx individuals make up a small base of The COMET's existing audience of transit-dependent riders.

**Marketing Focus:** Increase outreach and engagement by providing bilingual materials and participating in Latino/Latinx-focused events. Tailor messages to resonate with their specific needs and preferences. Example: *"El COMET es tu conexión a la ciudad, ofreciendo transporte confiable y accesible para toda la comunidad."*



### Champions

Social, educational, and governmental entities, as well as employers and community leaders.

**Marketing Focus:** Engage these entities to support The COMET. Promote the benefits of The COMET's pass programs and services to enhance staffing and community support. Example: *"Support The COMET in providing essential transportation for our workforce and community."*



### Tourists

Visitors to Columbia, S.C., who need convenient transportation options.

**Marketing Focus:** Promote the Soda Cap Connector as the ideal transportation method for tourists exploring downtown Columbia. Highlight the ease of travel to major attractions, restaurants, and entertainment venues. Example: *"Discover Columbia effortlessly with the Soda Cap Connector, your ride to the city's top attractions and dining spots."*



### Community Influencers

Individuals who have the power to influence public opinion and behavior.

**Marketing Focus:** Engage with ambassadors and influential individuals in the Midlands to promote The COMET's services. Leverage these relationships to increase community interaction and engagement. Example: *"Join local leaders in championing The COMET, a vital service connecting our community."*

## TERTIARY AUDIENCES



### Board Members and Staff

A crucial segment of internal communications, including the board of directors and staff.

**Marketing Focus:** Ensure they are informed and engaged with The COMET's marketing efforts, fostering internal support and advocacy. Example: *"Stay informed and be an advocate for The COMET. Together, we can drive our mission forward."*



### Employers in Pass Program

Businesses that have employees who could take the bus (if there are routes that take them directly from home to work).

**Marketing Focus:** Focus on informing employers and gaining their endorsement and partnership, making them feel comfortable recommending The COMET as a reliable transportation option. Example: *"Those you rely on, rely on The COMET. The COMET helps your employees get to and from work safely, reliably, and on time."*



# FOUNDATIONAL TOOLS

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# PHOTO AND VIDEO SHOOTS

## Objective

Capture authentic and engaging visual content that showcases The COMET's services, enhances brand perception, and drives community engagement.

## EXPANDED PLAN FOR 2024-2025:

### STRATEGIC GOALS:

**Humanize The COMET:** By showcasing real passengers, employees, and community events, we aim to create a more relatable and humanized image of The COMET.

**Increase Engagement:** Engaging visuals are more likely to be shared on social media, increasing our reach and visibility.

**Enhance Credibility:** Real-life testimonials build trust and credibility among potential riders and stakeholders.

### IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY:

**Short-notice Shoots:** We will be prepared to capture photos with less notice to ensure a steady stream of fresh content.

**Diverse Representation:** Ensure diversity in the people featured in the visuals to reflect the broad demographic that The COMET serves.

**Storytelling Approach:** All images should tell a story – whether it's about a day in the life of a rider, a behind-the-scenes look at The COMET operations, or a feature on a new service route.

### INTEGRATION WITH CAMPAIGNS:

#### “People of The COMET” Campaign:

- Capture interviews and testimonials from diverse riders.
- Highlight personal stories and experiences with The COMET.
- Use both video clips and still images for social media, website, and print materials.



## BRAND GUIDELINES UPDATES

## Objective

Ensure The COMET's brand guidelines reflect current services and programs, maintaining consistency across all communications.

### EXPANDED PLAN FOR 2024-2025:

## STRATEGIC GOALS:

**Consistency:** Maintain a cohesive brand image across all channels.

**Relevance:** Reflect The COMET's current services and offerings accurately.

## KEY UPDATES FOR 2024-2025:

**New Services:** Include any new routes and programs.

**Messaging Framework:** Revise messaging to highlight new initiatives and improvements if needed.

**Bilingual Content:** Expand bilingual guidelines for inclusivity.



## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY:

**Reviews:** Conduct a new year and a mid-year review to update the guidelines as needed.

**Stakeholder Feedback:** Incorporate feedback gathered anecdotally from riders, staff, community partners, and board members.

### IMPORTANCE:

**Brand Integrity:** Ensures a strong, recognizable brand image.

**Audience Trust:** Builds trust through consistent branding.

**Adaptability:** Keeps The COMET relevant and engaging.

By regularly updating the brand guidelines, The COMET ensures consistency, relevance, and engagement, strengthening its connection with the community and enhancing marketing effectiveness.

# MARKETING PLAN COMPONENTS

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## ONGOING MARKETING UPDATES

General awareness advertising, community event support, social media content development, and more.





## VISUAL BRANDING AND GRAPHICS

### Objective

Ensure all visual branding and graphic design requests from The COMET leadership are met with high-quality, cohesive, and impactful designs that enhance the overall brand identity and effectively communicate key messages to the community.

### CONTENT DEVELOPMENT:

#### GRAPHIC DESIGN REQUESTS:

**Deliverables:** Handle all graphic design needs as requested by The COMET leadership. This includes creating new graphics, updating existing designs, and ensuring all materials adhere to brand guidelines.

#### COLLATERAL MATERIALS:

**Updates and Changes:** Regularly update existing collateral materials to keep them current and relevant. Develop new materials as needed to support campaigns and initiatives.

**Examples:** Brochures, flyers, posters, banners, and other promotional materials.



#### LOGO AND BRANDING:

**Requests:** Fulfill any logo or branding requests, including creating new logos for specific initiatives or updating the existing logo as needed.

- Change the website on logo to “catchthecometsc.gov.”

**Guidelines:** Ensure all logo and branding work adheres to The COMET’s established brand guidelines.

#### INFOGRAPHICS:

**Design:** Create infographics that visually represent data and impact statistics related to The COMET’s services and community impact.

**Content:** Include information on ridership numbers, environmental benefits, economic impact, and service expansions.



## COLLATERAL MATERIALS

### Objective

Ensure all collateral materials reflect The COMET's updated branding and effectively communicate key messages to various audiences.

### EXPANDED PLAN FOR 2024-2025:

#### STRATEGIC GOALS:

**Brand Consistency:** Maintain a cohesive visual identity across all materials.

**Effective Communication:** Ensure that all collateral materials effectively convey The COMET's key messages and services.

By redesigning and maintaining high-quality collateral materials, The COMET ensures effective communication of its services and messages, enhancing its connection with the community and supporting overall marketing efforts.



#### NEW AND UPDATED COLLATERALS FOR 2024-2025:

**Redesign Board Manual:** Update the Board Manual to align with current branding and include new sections on recent initiatives and updates.

**Educational Posters:** Create posters for schools and community centers explaining how to use The COMET services.



# LEVERAGING AMBASSADORS AND INFLUENCERS

## AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

### Objective

Strengthen relationships with community ambassadors who can advocate for The COMET, particularly focusing on how the service provides access to education, jobs, and healthcare.

### STRATEGY:

**Identify Key Ambassadors:** Select individuals who have a strong presence in the community and a genuine interest in public transportation and community development.

**Partnership Development:** Foster relationships with these ambassadors through regular communication, exclusive events, and collaborative initiatives.

**Training and Support:** Provide ambassadors with the necessary tools, training, and information to effectively advocate for The COMET.

**Visibility and Recognition:** Highlight the contributions of ambassadors through social media, newsletters, and special events to recognize their efforts and increase their influence.

### MESSAGING EXAMPLES:

*“Meet our Community Ambassadors: Advocates for Accessible and Reliable Transportation.”*

*“Thanks to our Ambassadors, The COMET continues to provide essential services to our community.”*

### IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS:

#### 1. Ambassador Selection:

- Collaborate with local organizations, educational institutions, and community groups to identify potential ambassadors.
- Focus on individuals who are passionate about public transportation and community improvement.

#### 2. Engagement and Training:

- Host training sessions to equip ambassadors with the latest information about The COMET’s services, benefits, and community impact.
- Provide ambassadors with branded materials, including brochures, flyers, and social media content, to assist in their advocacy efforts.

#### 3. Collaborative Initiatives:

- Develop joint projects with ambassadors, such as community outreach programs, educational workshops, and special events that highlight The COMET’s role in providing access to essential services.
- Encourage ambassadors to participate in public forums, town hall meetings, and other community gatherings to advocate for The COMET.

#### 4. Recognition and Rewards:

- Feature ambassadors in The COMET’s marketing materials, social media posts, and newsletters to recognize their contributions.
- Offer incentives such as free passes, exclusive event invitations, and public recognition to reward ambassadors for their efforts.



# LEVERAGING AMBASSADORS AND INFLUENCERS

## INFLUENCER CAMPAIGNS

### Objective

Refresh and implement our influencer strategy to engage local bloggers and social media personalities in promoting The COMET's services, particularly the Soda Cap Connector.

### STRATEGY:

**Identify Key Ambassadors:** Select influencers who align with The COMET's values and have a significant following among target audiences.

**Create Engaging Content:** Collaborate with influencers to develop authentic and engaging content that highlights The COMET's services and benefits.

**Track and Measure Impact:** Use analytics tools to monitor the performance of influencer campaigns and adjust strategies based on engagement and reach.

### MESSAGING EXAMPLES:

*"Explore Columbia with ease! Check out my ride on the Soda Cap Connector with The COMET.  
#COMETConnector  
#ExploreColumbia."*

*"Discover the convenience of The COMET! I love how easy it is to get around town without the hassle of parking. #RideTheCOMET."*

### IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS:

#### 1. Influencer Identification:

- Research and compile a list of local bloggers, social media personalities, and community influencers who have a strong online presence and align with The COMET's mission.
- Focus on influencers with diverse audiences, including students, professionals, and tourists.

#### 2. Content Collaboration:

- Partner with influencers to create a variety of content, such as blog posts, social media updates, videos, and live streams, showcasing the Soda Cap Connector and other COMET services.
- Encourage influencers to share personal stories and experiences using The COMET to create authentic and relatable content.

#### 3. Campaign Execution:

- Launch influencer campaigns during key periods, such as the promotion of new routes, special events, or the Penny Tax vote.
- Provide influencers with branded hashtags, geotags, and promotional codes to track engagement and measure the success of the campaigns.

#### 4. Performance Monitoring:

- Use social media analytics tools to monitor the reach, engagement, and impact of influencer posts.
- Collect feedback from influencers and their followers to refine future campaigns and ensure continuous improvement.





## SOCIAL MEDIA

### ORGANIC

#### Objective

Elevate The COMET's social media channels, grow engagement among target audiences, and increase following on all platforms through consistent, cohesive, and engaging organic content.

#### ANNUAL DUTIES:

##### Monthly Content Creation, Planning, and Organization:

- Develop and organize monthly content that aligns with The COMET's marketing goals.
- Include both organic and paid strategies to optimize engagement and traffic back to the website.

##### Management of a Social Media Budget for Social Media Ads:

- Oversee the budget for social media ads to ensure effective spending and ROI.
- Regularly review and update targeting to ensure ads reach the most relevant audiences.

##### On-Demand Social Needs and Requests from The COMET Leadership:

- Respond to real-time social media needs and requests to maintain timely and relevant communication.

##### Social Media Training of Staff as Needed:

- Provide training sessions on best practices, content creation, and platform usage.

##### Live Social Media Support at Events as Requested:

- Offer live social media coverage at events, sharing real-time updates and engaging with attendees through platforms like Facebook Live, Reels, and Instagram Stories.



##### Explore Areas for Growth within Existing Platforms and on New Platforms:

- Continuously seek opportunities for growth and engagement on existing and emerging social media platforms.

##### Update About Statements on All Social Media Channels as Needed:

- Ensure all social media profiles have up-to-date information and reflect current branding.

##### Adhere to Brand Standards by Reviewing Organic Content Posted by The COMET Team:

- Review content weekly to offer suggestions and feedback for improvement, ensuring consistency with brand standards.

##### Include Spanish Translations of Social Media Content for The COMET's Spanish-Speaking Audience Members:

- Ensure content is accessible to Spanish-speaking audiences by providing translations.
- Add accessibility to social posts.



## SOCIAL MEDIA

### ORGANIC

#### CONTENT THREADS:

##### The COMET Services:

- Featured services such as DART, Vanpool, The Soda Cap Connector and USC Transit.

##### The COMET Programs:

- Programs like The COMET on the Go!, mobility management programs, The COMET leadership academy, travel training, and other educational opportunities.

##### How To:

- Easy-to-read posts on how to take the bus or use any of The COMET services, general or specific.

##### Events:

- Events and happenings at COMET Central and in the community that are free to attend.

##### Apps:

- Promote all bus-tracking apps.

##### Relevant Holidays and National Days:

- Posts that celebrate holidays, bring awareness of holiday schedule changes, and observe national days like Transit Driver Appreciation Day.

##### The COMET News + Updates:

- Share new blog posts or news updates, linking back to the site for more information.

##### Staff and Board Highlights:

- Share highlights and information specific to staff and board members when applicable.



## SOCIAL MEDIA

### PAID

#### Objective

Grow awareness among external audiences, including community and business leaders and choice riders who do not currently use The COMET's services, and to build a relationship with these audiences to encourage service use.

#### CONTENT THREADS:

##### Soda Cap Connector:

- Refresh the approach while continuing to feature the Soda Cap Connector to grow awareness and use.
- Implement new strategies such as Reels, 'Stories of the Soda Cap', and event-specific posts.

##### People of The COMET:

- Highlight community members who ride The COMET, with testimonials or quotes reflecting targeted demographics.

##### Community Impact and News:

- Share stories of The COMET's positive impact on the community.

##### Did You Know?:

- Share interesting facts and figures to increase understanding of the bus system's importance, such as its impact on carbon footprints and economic development.

##### Attractions:

- Promote The COMET as a means to commute to local attractions like Riverbanks Zoo or USC Football games.

##### USC Transit:

- Continue to feature and tag USC Transit to grow awareness and use among external audiences.





## SOCIAL MEDIA

### SHORT-FORM VIDEO CONTENT

#### Objective

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Incorporate more short-form videos on each social platform, including TikTok, to increase engagement and convey relevant information to all audiences.

#### PLAN:

##### Content Creation:

- Produce engaging short-form videos showcasing various aspects of The COMET's services and community impact.

##### Guidelines and Best Practices:

- Update The COMET's social media guide with a step-by-step process for creating short-form videos, including best practices and recommendations.





## SOCIAL MEDIA

### LINKEDIN STRATEGY

#### Objective

Enhance The COMET's presence on LinkedIn with scheduled posts that highlight community involvement, industry insights, and organizational updates.

#### CONTENT THEMES:

##### Community Involvement:

- Posts about The COMET's involvement in local events and partnerships.

##### Industry Trends and Insights:

- Share articles, studies, and news related to public transportation.

##### Transportation Advocacy:

- Share content on the importance of public transportation in reducing congestion and promoting sustainability.

##### Infographics and Data:

- Create and share infographics highlighting key statistics and facts about The COMET.

##### Collaborations and Partnerships:

- Highlight partnerships with local businesses and stakeholders.

##### Employee Training and Development:

- Showcase training programs and initiatives aimed at improving service quality.

By implementing this comprehensive social media strategy, The COMET aims to enhance its online presence, engage effectively with its audience, and maintain a cohesive brand image across all platforms. This approach will help build a strong community, increase ridership, and foster positive sentiment toward the organization.



#### ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2024-2025:

##### Short-Form Vignettes and COMET Chats:

- Develop short-form vignettes and COMET chats to be shared on LinkedIn and other social media platforms, focusing on interviews and stories from riders, staff, and community leaders to humanize The COMET brand.

##### Penny Tax Education Campaign:

- Prioritize the Penny Tax Education campaign to ensure community understanding and support for The COMET's funding needs without advocating for the vote.

##### People of The COMET:

- Continue this campaign throughout the year to maintain a personal connection with the community.



# PAID MEDIA STRATEGY

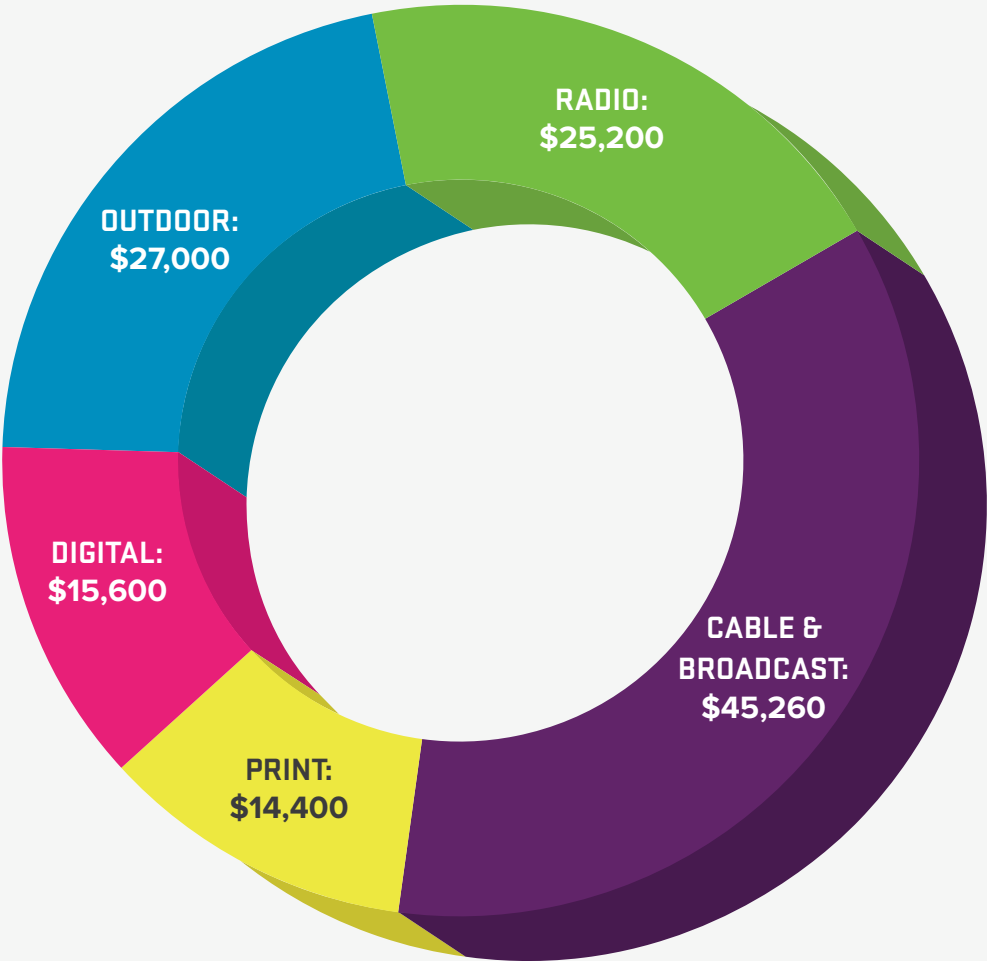
## Objective

Strategically allocate the advertising budget across various media to maximize reach and engagement for The COMET’s services.

TOTAL BUDGET:  
**\$127,460**

### MEDIA BUDGET ALLOCATION:

- Radio: \$25,200**
  - WWDM (Alpha - Big DM): \$12,000
  - WFMV (Glory Communications): \$4,800
  - WHXT (Hot 103.9, Alpha): \$6,000
  - WXYR (Independent Alternative): \$2,400
- Cable + Broadcast: \$45,260**
  - WLTX: \$28,510
  - WIS TV: \$4,750
  - Charter Spectrum: \$12,000
- Print: \$14,400**
  - Carolina Panorama: \$5,400
  - ECSC Gold Package: \$9,000
    - Includes full page advertorial, ECSC Native Ads, Programmatic banner ads, Featured Listing, e-newsletter featured content, and Custom Eblast
- Digital: \$15,600**
  - Minority Eye: \$3,600
  - Audience-targeted mobile display ads: \$6,000
  - WLTX Social: \$6,000
- Outdoor: \$27,000**
  - Lamar - Digital Outdoor: \$18,750
  - Grace - Digital Outdoor: \$8,250



## PAID MEDIA STRATEGY

### MEDIA MIX RATIONALE

#### RADIO:

**WWDM, WFMV, WHXT, WXYR:** These popular radio stations cover a range of genres and effectively reach diverse audience demographics in Columbia. Specifically:

- **WWDM (Big DM):** Known for its urban adult contemporary format, WWDM has a strong following within the Black community, making it an ideal channel for reaching some of The COMET's transit-dependent riders.
- **WFMV (Gospel 95.3):** As a gospel station, WFMV connects deeply with the local faith-based community, which includes a significant portion of Black listeners.
- **WHXT (Hot 103.9):** This station's contemporary hits and hip-hop focus attract younger, diverse audiences, including a substantial number of minority listeners.
- **WXYR (Independent Alternative):** While catering to a broader audience, WXYR also reaches diverse listener groups interested in alternative and independent music.

#### CABLE + BROADCAST:

**WLTX, WIS TV, Charter Spectrum:** These established TV channels have a broad reach across the Midlands and provide impactful visual storytelling and brand building:

- **WLTX and WIS TV:** Both are highly trusted local news stations that reach a wide demographic, including a significant portion of minority viewers who rely on these channels for local news and information.
- **Charter Spectrum:** Offers targeted cable network selection, allowing The COMET to focus on networks popular among diverse audiences in Richland and Lexington counties.



## PAID MEDIA STRATEGY

### MEDIA MIX RATIONALE

#### PRINT:

**Carolina Panorama, ECSC Gold Package:** These print outlets are crucial for reaching community-focused readers who value local news and cultural events:

- **Carolina Panorama:** As a Black-owned newspaper, it has deep roots in the local Black community, making it a vital medium for engaging transit-dependent riders and other minority groups.
- **ECSC Gold Package:** Includes full page advertorials, native ads, programmatic banner ads, featured listings, e-newsletter featured content, and custom eblasts, ensuring comprehensive coverage and high engagement among community readers and tourists.

#### OUTDOOR:

**Lamar - Digital Outdoor, Grace - Digital Outdoor:** High visibility placements along bus routes and key traffic areas:

- **Lamar - Digital Outdoor and Grace - Digital Outdoor:** These high-traffic areas are strategically chosen to capture the attention of daily commuters, including transit-dependent riders who rely on public transportation. Digital billboards ensure dynamic and engaging content that can be updated in real-time, maximizing impact and visibility.

#### DIGITAL:

**Minority Eye, Audience-targeted mobile display ads, WLTX**

**Social:** Leverage high-engagement platforms with targeted ads to reach specific audience segments and track performance in real-time:

- **Minority Eye:** Focuses on issues and news relevant to minority communities, ensuring that The COMET's messages reach and resonate with these audiences.
- **Audience-targeted mobile display ads:** Precision targeting to engage transit-dependent riders and choice riders via their smartphones, which are commonly used by younger and diverse populations.
- **WLTX Social:** Use the strong social media presence of WLTX to reach a broad and diverse audience, including minority groups who actively engage with local news on social media.

By leveraging these selected media outlets, The COMET ensures that its marketing efforts effectively reach and resonate with the Black and minority communities in Columbia, which constitute a significant portion of the primary audience—transit-dependent riders. This approach not only enhances visibility and engagement but also strengthens community connections and supports The COMET's mission to provide accessible, reliable and efficient transportation services to all.





# ADVERTISING PRODUCTION

## Objective



Ensure the advertising content is engaging and effective, The COMET will continue to develop and produce high-quality advertising for all channels throughout the year. This includes updating current materials and creating new content to align with our campaigns.

### PRODUCTION STRATEGY:

**Television and Radio Spots:**

- It is recommended to produce one 30-second spot for both TV and radio.
- These spots should align with the messaging cadence and be revisited after November to evaluate their effectiveness.

**Digital and Social Media Content:**

- Create short-form videos, infographics, and social media posts tailored to specific campaigns and events.

**Deliverables:**

- Short-form videos for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter
- Infographics and animated content for digital ads

### OUTDOOR ADVERTISING:

Design and update billboard graphics and posters regularly to reflect current campaigns and seasonal themes.

**Deliverables:**

- New billboard designs for Lamar and Grace Outdoor
- Posters for bus stops and shelters

### PRINT ADVERTISING:

Develop and design print ads for newspapers and magazines, ensuring they are visually appealing and informative.

**Deliverables:**

- Print ads for Carolina Panorama

By continuously producing and updating a wide range of advertising content, The COMET ensures that all marketing channels are equipped with fresh, engaging, and relevant materials that resonate with the target audience. This approach supports The COMET’s mission to effectively communicate its services and benefits to the community.



# NEWSLETTERS

## Objective

Keep The COMET's audience informed and engaged through regular, high-quality newsletters, tailored email communications, and strategic drip campaigns.

### REGULAR NEWSLETTERS:

- **Frequency:** Produce a minimum of 6 newsletters per 12-month period.
- **Content:** Include updates on services, upcoming events, rider testimonials, safety tips, and community engagement stories.
- **Design:** Use visually appealing templates that adhere to The COMET's brand guidelines, ensuring consistency and professionalism.
- **Audience Segmentation:** Tailor content for different audience segments such as transit-dependent riders, choice riders, students, and community partners.

### PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION:

#### Email Design and Copywriting:

- **Design:** Create visually appealing and responsive email templates.
- **Copywriting:** Craft compelling and concise copy that resonates with the audience.
- **Content Sourcing:** Collaborate with The COMET team to gather relevant information and stories.

#### Print Newsletters:

- **Design and Layout:** Develop print newsletters with a professional layout and design.

By implementing this comprehensive newsletter and email marketing strategy, The COMET can effectively communicate with its audience, driving engagement, increasing ridership, and fostering a strong community connection. This approach ensures that all communications are relevant, timely, and impactful, supporting The COMET's overall marketing objectives.



### NEW: ONE-SUBJECT EMAILS:

- **Purpose:** Deliver focused messages on specific topics such as new services, special promotions or important announcements.
- **Content:** Examples include Penny Tax content, announcements for routes, service changes, promotional offers and community events.
- **Design:** Simple and direct templates that highlight the key message and call to action.

### PERFORMANCE TRACKING AND OPTIMIZATION:

- **Analytics:** Monitor key metrics such as open rates, click-through rates, and conversions to gauge the effectiveness of each email campaign.
- **A/B Testing:** Conduct A/B testing on subject lines, content, and designs to optimize performance.
- **Feedback Loop:** Gather feedback from recipients to continuously improve content and strategy.



## WEBSITE

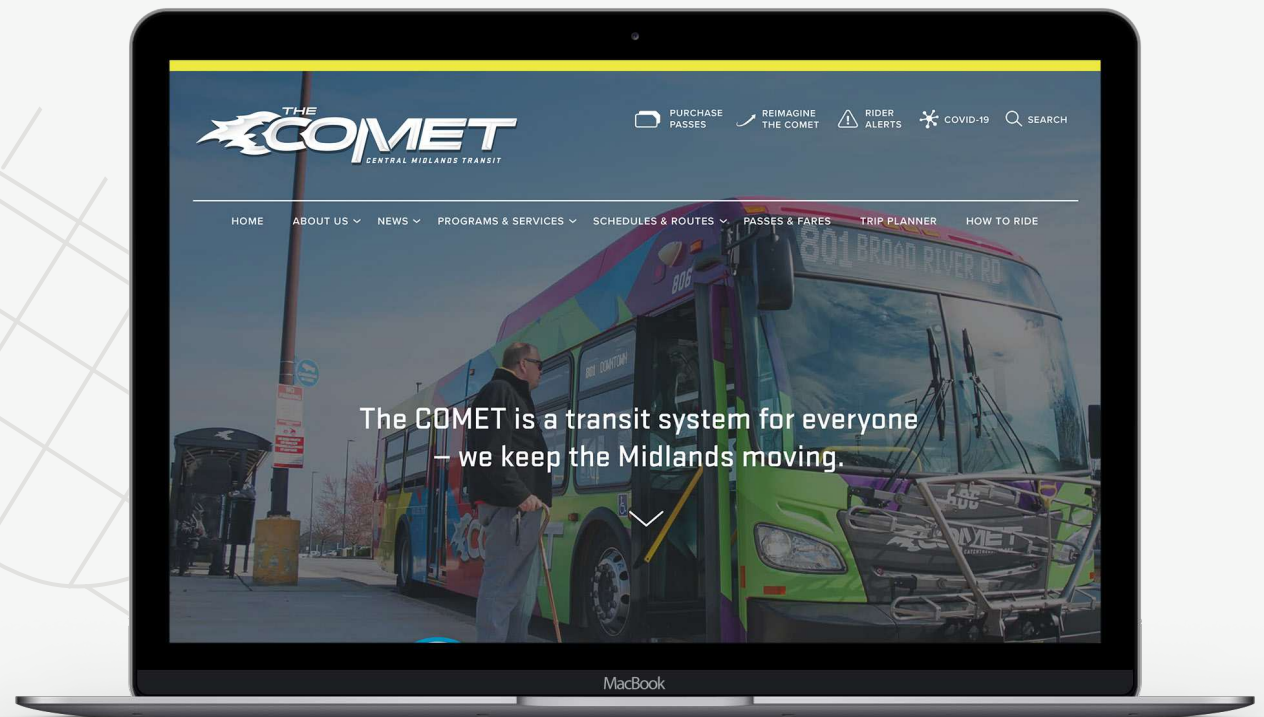
### Objective

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Maintain the COMET website with current information, news, and updates.

### INCLUDES:

- Copy across pages, with an emphasis on services and programs.
- Add information as needed if new services/programs arise.
- Update photos/videos with new assets.



# BLOGS

## Objective

Drive traffic to The COMET's website, improve SEO ranking, and engage the audience through informative and engaging blog content.

### INCREASE FREQUENCY:

- **Goal:** Develop and upload at least one new blog post per month, instead of the previous quarterly schedule.
- **Rationale:** More frequent updates will improve SEO performance, keep the content fresh, and provide more opportunities to engage with the audience.

### CONTENT STRATEGY:

#### Focus Areas:

- **Service Updates:** Regular posts about routes, changes in services, and improvements.
- **Community Stories:** Highlighting the impact of The COMET on the community through rider testimonials, community events, and partnership stories.
- **Educational Content:** How-to guides, tips for using The COMET services, and information about the benefits of public transportation.
- **Local Attractions:** Posts about popular destinations accessible by The COMET, promoting local tourism and activities.
- **Environmental Impact:** Articles on how using The COMET reduces carbon footprints and supports sustainable living.
- **Health and Wellness:** The benefits of using public transportation for physical activity and mental well-being.

#### SEO Optimization:

- **Keywords:** Identify and incorporate relevant keywords that potential riders and community members are searching for. Examples include “public transportation in Columbia SC,” “how to use The COMET bus,” “benefits of public transit,” and “Columbia SC local events.”
- **Internal Linking:** Include links to other relevant pages on The COMET's website to improve site navigation and SEO.
- **Meta Descriptions:** Write compelling meta descriptions for each blog post to improve click-through rates from search engine results.

#### Promotion and Distribution:

- **Social Media:** Share each blog post across The COMET's social media platforms to drive traffic and engagement.
- **Email Newsletters:** Feature blog posts in monthly newsletters to keep the audience informed and direct them to the website.
- **Collaborations:** Partner with local businesses, community organizations, and influencers to share blog content and reach a broader audience.





## BLOGS

### EXAMPLES OF BLOG TOPICS:

#### Service Updates:

- “Introducing Route 45: Connecting Downtown Columbia to the Suburbs”
- “Extended Service Hours for The COMET: What You Need to Know”

#### Community Stories:

- “How The COMET Helps John Get to Work on Time: A Rider’s Story”
- “Partnership Spotlight: The COMET and Local Nonprofits Working Together”

#### Educational Content:

- “A Beginner’s Guide to Using The COMET Bus System”
- “5 Tips for a Smooth Commute with The COMET”

#### Local Attractions:

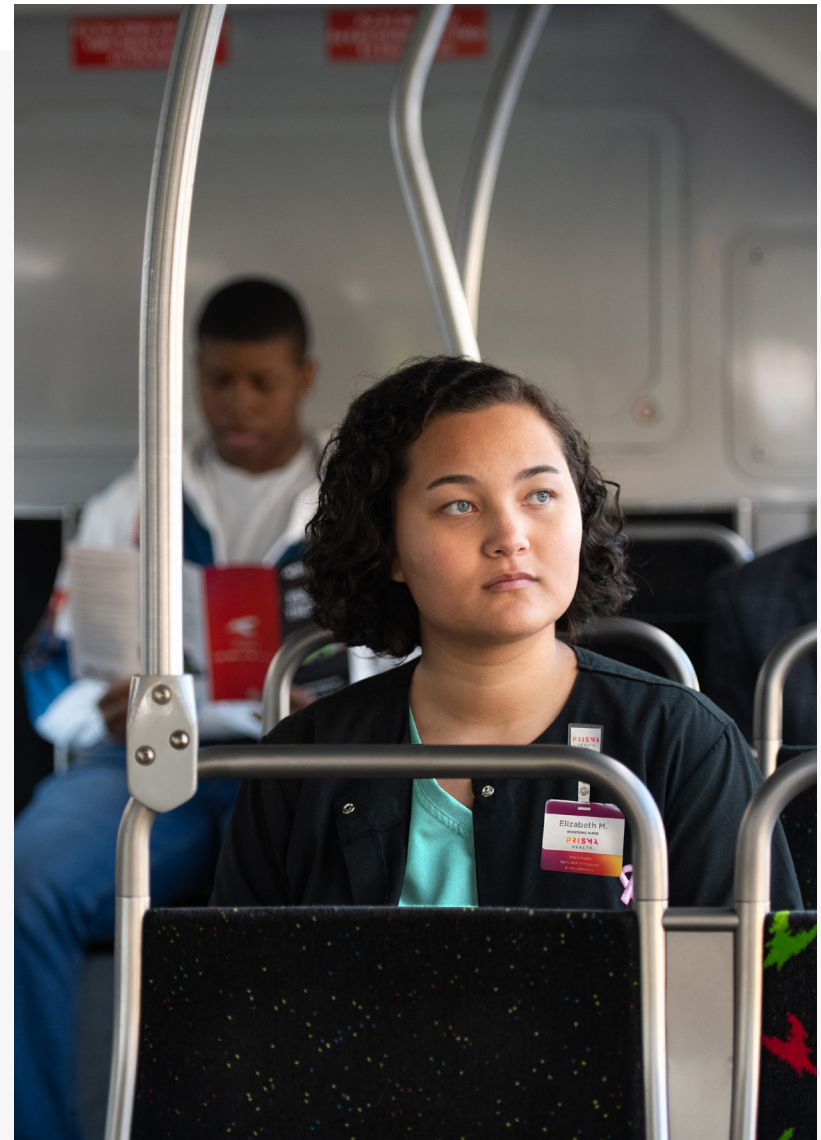
- “Explore Columbia: Top 10 Attractions You Can Visit with The COMET”
- “Discover Local Eateries Along The COMET Routes”

#### Environmental Impact:

- “Going Green: How Riding The COMET Reduces Your Carbon Footprint”
- “The Role of Public Transportation in Sustainable Urban Living”

#### Health and Wellness:

- “The Health Benefits of Taking Public Transportation”
- “How Riding The COMET Can Improve Your Mental Well-Being”
- “How The COMET provides access to education and jobs”.





## SUPPORT SERVICES

- Client meetings and communications.
- Brand stewardship.
- Monthly reporting of hours worked.
- Monthly reporting on social media.
- Annual and bi-annual reporting.



# CREATIVE CAMPAIGNS

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# DID YOU KNOW? CAMPAIGNS

## Objective

Highlight the vital role of The COMET in the community, emphasizing its impact on access to education, jobs, healthcare, and other essential services, thereby fostering positive sentiment and support leading up to the Penny Tax vote in November.

## CONTENT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY:

### CORE MESSAGING THEMES:

#### Access to Essential Services

Highlight how The COMET provides critical access to education, healthcare, and employment.

#### MESSAGING EXAMPLES:



56 likes

**catchthecomet** Because of The COMET, students like Emily can attend college without worrying about transportation costs.

View all 5 comments

Add a comment...



#### Community Impact

Showcase personal stories and testimonials from riders and community members.

#### MESSAGING EXAMPLES:



38 likes

**catchthecomet** Meet Maria, who relies on The COMET to reach her job every day. Thanks to public transportation, she can provide for her family.

View all 2 comments

Add a comment...



#### Economic and Environmental Benefits

Emphasize how The COMET supports the local economy, reduces traffic congestion, and promotes sustainable living.

#### MESSAGING EXAMPLES:



85 likes

**catchthecomet** Did you know? Public transit saves our community millions in infrastructure costs and reduces our carbon footprint.

View all 19 comments

Add a comment...



72 likes

**catchthecomet** With The COMET, John can get to his medical appointments on time, ensuring he stays healthy and active.

View all 3 comments

Add a comment...



103 likes

**catchthecomet** Local businesses thrive because The COMET brings in customers from all over the city.

View all 26 comments

Add a comment...



79 likes

**catchthecomet** Supporting The COMET means supporting a cleaner, greener Columbia. Every ride helps reduce traffic and pollution.

View all 36 comments

Add a comment...



# DID YOU KNOW? CAMPAIGNS

## CONTENT FORMATS:



### RIDER TESTIMONIALS:

**Video Interviews:** Short videos featuring real riders sharing their stories about how The COMET has impacted their lives.

**Written Stories:** Blog posts and social media updates that profile individual riders and their experiences.



### INFOGRAPHICS:

**Service Statistics:** Visual representations of how many people rely on The COMET for daily commutes, healthcare visits, and education.

**Economic Impact:** Data showcasing the financial benefits of public transportation to the local economy.



### EDUCATIONAL ARTICLES:

“How The COMET Connects Our Community: A Day in the Life of a Rider”

“The Environmental Benefits of Public Transit: Why Every Ride Counts.”

## DID YOU KNOW? CAMPAIGNS

### INSPIRATIONAL THEMES FROM THE “1/3 OF A PENNY” CAMPAIGN:

#### GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION:



42 likes

**catchthecomet** Because of your past support, The COMET has been able to provide reliable transportation to those who need it most.

[View all 5 comments](#)

[Add a comment...](#)



57 likes

**catchthecomet** Thank you for helping us keep our community moving. Your continued support means everything.

[View all 9 comments](#)

[Add a comment...](#)



#### FUTURE BENEFITS:



49 likes

**catchthecomet** Imagine a future where everyone has access to affordable, reliable transportation. With your support, we can make that a reality.

[View all 6 comments](#)

[Add a comment...](#)



63 likes

**catchthecomet** Supporting The COMET means supporting our entire community. Together, we can build a brighter future.

[View all 11 comments](#)

[Add a comment...](#)





## DID YOU KNOW? CAMPAIGNS

### INSPIRATIONAL THEMES FROM THE “1/3 OF A PENNY” CAMPAIGN:

#### KEY TOPICS FOR BLOG POSTS AND ARTICLES:

- **Success Stories:** Profiles of individuals who have benefited from The COMET’s services.
- **Service Highlights:** Detailed articles on specific routes, new services, and improvements.
- **Community Initiatives:** Coverage of events, partnerships, and programs supported by The COMET.
- **Environmental and Economic Impact:** In-depth analysis of how public transportation contributes to a sustainable and economically vibrant community.

#### CONTENT CALENDAR:

- **Monthly Themes:** Plan content around monthly themes such as education, healthcare, employment, and sustainability.
- **Seasonal Content:** Create posts and articles that align with key dates and community events.
- **Real-Time Updates:** Be prepared to publish real-time updates on service changes, community news, and other relevant topics.

#### GOALS:

- **Raise Awareness:** Ensure that the community understands the vital role of The COMET in providing essential services.
- **Build Positive Sentiment:** Foster a positive view of The COMET through compelling stories and evidence of its impact.
- **Encourage Support:** Subtly encourage the community to support the Penny Tax vote by showcasing the benefits of continued funding.

By focusing on these core messaging themes and developing a robust content strategy, The COMET can effectively communicate its value to the community. This approach will build positive sentiment, encourage support, and help ensure the success of the Penny Tax vote in November.



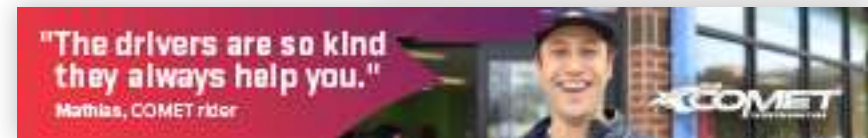
## PEOPLE OF THE COMET

### Objective

Humanize The COMET brand by showcasing personal stories and testimonials, highlighting the positive impact of the bus system on individual lives and the community at large.

### STRATEGY:

The “People of The COMET” campaign aims to build a stronger emotional connection between The COMET and its riders, fostering community support and increasing ridership. By sharing authentic stories, we can illustrate the essential role The COMET plays in the daily lives of its users, thereby enhancing public perception and encouraging continued support.



### CORE MESSAGING THEMES:

#### Personal Impact

Share stories of how The COMET has positively affected individuals' lives, focusing on their personal journeys and successes.

#### Community Connection

Highlight the sense of community and belonging that The COMET fosters among its riders.

#### Accessibility and Inclusion

Emphasize how The COMET provides accessible transportation options for all, including seniors, students, and those with disabilities.

## PEOPLE OF THE COMET

### CAMPAIGN TACTICS AND SERVICES:

#### CONTENT DEVELOPMENT:

##### Rider Testimonials

- **Video Interviews:** Produce short video interviews with riders sharing their stories about how The COMET has impacted their lives.
- **Written Stories:** Create blog posts, social media updates, and newsletter features profiling individual riders and their experiences.

##### Photographic Profiles:

- **Professional Photography:** Capture high-quality images of riders in their daily commutes, at bus stops, and engaging with the community.
- **Story Captions:** Accompany each photo with a brief story or quote from the rider.

#### ADVERTISING:

##### Paid Social Media

- **Platforms:** Use Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to reach a broad audience.
- **Content:** Feature videos, photos, and quotes from the “People of The COMET” campaign to create engaging ads.
- **Targeting:** Use demographic and interest-based targeting to ensure the ads reach relevant audience segments.

The paid social media campaign is expected to drive higher engagement and positive sentiment through targeted storytelling.

#### COLLATERAL MATERIALS:

##### Bus Shelter Posters

- **Design:** Create visually appealing posters featuring photos and quotes from riders.
- **Placement:** Position posters at high-traffic bus shelters and stops to maximize visibility.
- **Impact:** Previous bus shelter poster campaigns increased rider recognition and community engagement, as evidenced by survey feedback.



## PEOPLE OF THE COMET

### SOCIAL MEDIA:

#### Organic and Paid Content:

- **Storytelling:** Regularly post stories and testimonials from riders, highlighting their unique experiences and journeys.
- **Engagement:** Use interactive posts, polls, and Q&A sessions to engage the community.
- **Facebook Lives, Reels, and Instagram Stories:**
  - **Live Interviews:** Conduct live interviews with riders, allowing them to share their stories in real-time.
  - **Behind-the-Scenes:** Show behind-the-scenes operations, community events, and rider experiences.
  - **Short-Form Vignettes and COMET Chats:** Develop and share short-form vignettes and COMET chats featuring interviews and stories from riders, staff, and community leaders to humanize The COMET brand.

### NEWSLETTERS:

#### Email Newsletters

- **Content:** Feature stories on how The COMET supports education, jobs, and healthcare access. Include rider testimonials and updates on services.
- **Frequency:** Send monthly newsletters with a focus on community impact and upcoming events.

#### Print Newsletters

- **Distribution:** Distribute print newsletters at key community centers, libraries, and through direct mail to targeted neighborhoods.
- **Impact:** Last year's newsletter campaign resulted in a 15% increase in open rates and higher engagement with linked content.

By implementing this comprehensive “People of The COMET” campaign, The COMET can effectively communicate its value to the community, build positive sentiment, and garner support ahead of the critical Penny Tax vote in November. This approach will help ensure that The COMET remains an essential service for the Columbia area.





# SARAH MAE FLEMMING

## Celebrating the Legacy of Sarah Mae Flemming

This year marks the 71st anniversary of Sarah Mae Flemming’s courageous stand against segregation on public transportation. Flemming’s actions, which predated Rosa Parks by more than a year, played a significant role in the Civil Rights Movement and helped set the stage for future acts of resistance against racial injustice. As we commemorate this pivotal moment in history, our campaign will honor her legacy and remind the community of the impact one person can make in the fight for equality.

While this year’s campaign will be smaller in scale compared to previous years, it remains a critical opportunity to educate the public and celebrate the progress made in civil rights, thanks to pioneers like Sarah Mae Flemming. By integrating various marketing tactics and services, we aim to create a meaningful tribute that resonates with all of our audiences.

### CAMPAIGN TACTICS AND SERVICES:



#### COLLATERAL MATERIALS:

- **Bus Shelter Posters:** Place posters at strategic bus shelters throughout the city to honor Sarah Mae Flemming and inform commuters about her contributions.
- **Cardboard Cut-Outs:** Position life-sized cut-outs of Flemming on buses to create an interactive and educational experience for riders.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA:

- **Organic Static Content:** Share compelling stories, historical facts, and quotes related to Sarah Mae Flemming on our social media platforms.
- **Facebook Lives, Reels, and Instagram Stories:** Utilize these features to engage with the community in real-time, sharing insights and reflections on Flemming’s impact.

#### NEWSLETTERS:

- **Email Newsletters:** Distribute special edition newsletters focusing on Sarah Mae Flemming’s legacy, highlighting events and educational content.
- **Print Newsletters:** Include articles and features about Flemming’s story and its significance in our print newsletters.

#### ADVERTISING:

- **Billboards:** Place ads in specific locations to reach the target audience.
- **Paid Social Media:** Invest in targeted social media ads to maximize reach and engagement.

By leveraging these tactics, we aim to not only commemorate the 71st anniversary of Sarah Mae Flemming’s historic ride but also inspire current and future generations to continue striving for equality and justice in our society.

# SODA CAP CONNECTOR

## Promoting the Soda Cap Connector: Columbia's Premier Tourist Transport

The Soda Cap Connector is an essential component of Columbia's public transportation system, offering a reliable and enjoyable way for tourists and residents to explore the city's vibrant downtown districts. This service connects key attractions, dining, and entertainment venues, making it easier for visitors to navigate the city without the hassle of parking and traffic. Our campaign will focus on promoting the Soda Cap Connector as the top transportation option for tourists while supporting local businesses and enhancing the overall visitor experience.

### CAMPAIGN TACTICS AND SERVICES:

#### COLLATERAL MATERIALS:

- **Bus Shelter Posters:** Design and place eye-catching posters at bus shelters to inform and attract potential riders. These posters will highlight the key routes, benefits, and accessibility of the Soda Cap Connector.
- **Table Tents and Window Clings:** Create and distribute table tents and window clings to local hotels and businesses to promote the Soda Cap Connector. These materials will provide information on routes, schedules, and key destinations, encouraging visitors to use the service.

#### NEWSLETTERS:

- **Email Newsletters:** Send out informative newsletters featuring updates, rider stories, and special promotions related to the Soda Cap Connector. Encourage subscriptions to keep the community informed and engaged.
- **Print Newsletters:** Include dedicated sections on the Soda Cap Connector in our print newsletters, distributed at key locations around the city.



#### SOCIAL MEDIA:

- **Organic Static Content:** Regularly share engaging posts about the Soda Cap Connector's routes, schedule, and user testimonials. Use captivating images and videos to showcase the scenic routes and popular destinations.
- **Facebook Lives, Reels, and Instagram Stories:** Create dynamic and interactive content to engage with our audience in real-time. Highlight events, rider experiences, and behind-the-scenes looks at the service.

## SODA CAP CONNECTOR

### ADVERTISING:

- **Print:** Place ads in local and regional publications to reach a broader audience. Highlight the convenience and benefits of using the Soda Cap Connector.
- **Paid Social Media:** Invest in targeted social media ads to increase visibility and engagement. Focus on key demographics, including tourists and local event-goers.
- **Digital/Banner Ads:** Utilize digital advertising to create a strong online presence. These ads will drive traffic to our website and social media pages for more information.
- **Digital Outdoor Boards:** Display advertisements on digital billboards in high-traffic areas to maximize exposure and attract new riders.

### INFLUENCER PLAN:

- **Revisit and Update:** Refresh our influencer strategy to specifically target the promotion of the Soda Cap Connector. Partner with local influencers, bloggers, and social media personalities to reach a wider audience and generate buzz.

By leveraging these tactics, we aim to cement the Soda Cap Connector's reputation as the top transportation option for exploring Columbia. This campaign will ensure that tourists and residents alike can enjoy the convenience and charm of our city, all while supporting a sustainable and efficient transit system.

### GRAPHIC DESIGN / COLLATERALS:

- **Partnership Pieces:** Develop collaborative materials with local businesses and tourist attractions to promote the Soda Cap Connector. This includes flyers, brochures, and in-venue signage.
- **Event/Booth Collateral:** Design and produce attractive materials for events and information booths. These will include banners, flyers, and interactive displays to engage attendees.
- **Hotel Outreach:** Provide informational table tents and window clings to hotels, ensuring tourists have easy access to information about the Soda Cap Connector and its benefits.



## SPECIAL EVENTS CAMPAIGNS

### Objective

Support events like Hop with Pop and Putt with Pop with marketing materials and social media promotion.

### CAMPAIGN TACTICS AND SERVICES:

#### COLLATERAL MATERIALS:

- Event posters
- Event signage
- All graphics needed for advertising

#### SOCIAL MEDIA:

- Organic static content
- Facebook lives, Reels, and Instagram stories when applicable

#### NEWSLETTERS:

- Email newsletters
- Print newsletters

#### ADVERTISING:

- Paid social when necessary





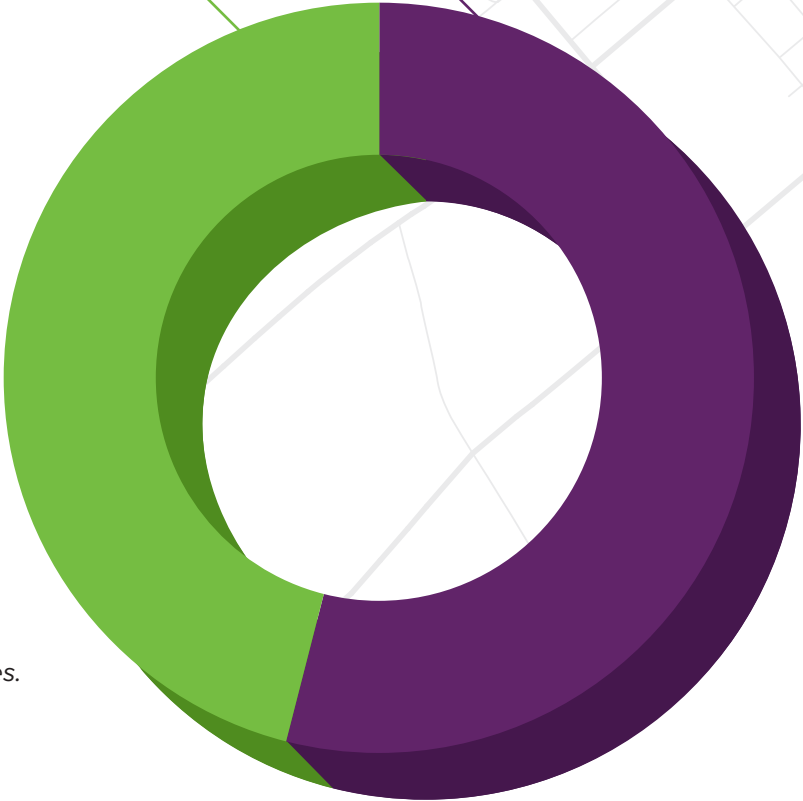
# BUDGET

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Agency Fees (covering all services above)	\$150,000*
Paid Media Fees (covering paid media only)	\$127,460

Total COMET Marketing Plan 2024-2025: \$277,460



*\* Agency fees do not include any outside expenses including all contractors (videographers, VOs, models/talent, etc.) printing or any other outside expenses. Agency fees are for billable time conducted by Flock and Rally staff.*





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at Flock and Rally

[info@flockandrally.com](mailto:info@flockandrally.com)