

Planning/Policy/ Programming

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Project Title: How do people get information about public transit?

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How do people get information about public transit?

Clear, reliable transit information plays a critical role in helping people plan and complete their trips with confidence. Riders now use a wide range of tools, such as apps, websites, signage, and assistance from transit staff, but agencies still lack a full understanding of which resources people trust most and how different types of travelers use them. Inaccurate real-time updates and gaps in basic trip information can make travel more difficult and discourage people from choosing transit.

This research will explore how both riders and non-riders find and use transit information, from initial trip planning to adjusting to service changes. By identifying where information works well and where it falls short, the study will help transit agencies improve the clarity, accuracy, and accessibility of the tools they provide.

The findings will support more effective, user-focused communication strategies, ultimately helping transit agencies deliver information that strengthens reliability, increases ridership, and supports a more sustainable transportation system for communities across California.

WHAT IS THE NEED?

Public transit riders depend on clear, reliable information to plan and complete their trips. However, agencies still lack a full understanding of how people look for and use this information in their daily travel. With many tools now available it is important to understand which options riders rely on most and how these preferences vary among different types of travelers and different types of trips.

At the same time, inaccurate real-time updates can disrupt travel plans and reduce confidence in transit service. Many riders also continue to face challenges with basic trip-planning needs, including knowing when a bus or train will run, where stops are located, and how to pay their fare.

As technology and customer expectations continue to evolve, transit agencies need better insight into the rider experience.



DRISI provides solutions and knowledge that improves California's transportation system.

This research will help identify the most effective ways to share transit information so agencies can prioritize investments that genuinely support customers and make transit a more reliable and attractive choice.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The research team will use both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand how people find and use transit information. This will include gathering input from riders and non-riders, studying how individuals plan their trips, and observing how they respond to real-time updates from apps, websites, signage, and transit staff.

The team will also assess the strengths and weaknesses of different information tools to identify common patterns in how people make decisions. Throughout the project, they will work with partner transit agencies to collect data and develop insights that can help improve how agencies share information with the public.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

The goal of this research is to understand how people use the different tools available for finding transit information and what they need to make their trips easier. By looking at the experiences of both current riders and those who rarely use transit, the project will identify which sources people trust most and where information gaps remain.

The findings will help California's transit agencies choose communication methods that work better for customers and support more reliable, efficient, and cost-effective transit information systems. It will also influence Caltrans' statewide transit planning activities.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

This research will give Caltrans and its transit partners a clearer understanding of how people use the many tools available for accessing transit information. By identifying the types of information

travelers rely on, the challenges they encounter, and the effects of inaccurate updates, Caltrans will be better positioned to guide agencies toward communication strategies that genuinely support customers.

For transit agencies, the findings will highlight where improvements in clarity, accuracy, and usability can make trip planning easier and strengthen the rider experience. For Caltrans, the research will inform statewide guidance, support more effective coordination with local operators, and help target future investments in customer-facing technology.

Ultimately, these insights will help build a more reliable, efficient, and sustainable transit network that makes public transportation a more appealing and dependable option for communities across California.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

The project kicked off in April 2026 and a future quarterly meeting is planned for some time in July.

IMAGES



Image 1: People lining up to get on a bus (Source: <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/transportation-planning/division-of-transportation-planning/office-of-transit-planning>)