Get on the bus:
Increasing the adoption of public transit in Los Angeles to help decrease commuter traffic
The detrimental effects of gridlock go beyond frustration, inconvenience and delays.

- **Traffic worsens air quality, jeopardizing health.** Transportation is a top contributor to air pollution, affecting the health of all area residents; it can be especially detrimental to low-income communities.

- **Vehicle emissions contribute to climate change.** Transportation accounts for 19% of LA’s greenhouse gas emissions which are directly linked to climate change.

- **More time in traffic also means lost productivity and an increased likelihood of accidents and injury.**

In the past, Los Angeles voters have demonstrated strong support for public transportation.

- Voters approved four sales tax increases in the past 40 years to fund the expansion of new transportation projects and programs.

But despite this support, public transportation ridership in Los Angeles is declining.

- Personal car ownership has increased dramatically since 2000, particularly among the most reliable public transportation users: low income and foreign-born residents.

- Census data show nearly 75% of Los Angeles County commuters drive to and from work by themselves; **less than 7% use public transit.**
The Question

How can the City of Los Angeles increase adoption of mass transit to assist the decline in commuter traffic?
The Objectives

• Understand the perceptions and barriers to mass transit adoption among current public transit riders and nonriders in Los Angeles
• Identify opportunities to use technology to help overcome barriers and speed the public transit adoption curve
• Determine whether conversion is likely and identify measures to ensure sustainability
The Plan
Conduct a three-part qualitative study with transportation officials and commuters

Part 1:
Brainstorming session with transportation decision-makers

Part 2:
Ride-along intercepts with transit riders

Part 3:
Discussions with Riders and Nonriders
# The Plan, Part 1

## Brainstorming session with transportation decision-makers

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| • Daylong session with key personnel from the entities responsible for transportation planning and management in Los Angeles | • Learn about current and future plans to address unmet needs in the public transit system (e.g., rail line and bus rapid transit expansions, schedule changes, traffic light synchronization, etc.)  
• Identify ways technology can help boost ridership and potentially solve issues (e.g., the “first mile/last mile” problem)  
• Brainstorm and discuss the viability of:  
  o **Incentives** (“carrots”) that might encourage increased ridership (e.g., ticket/pass subsidies, employer incentive programs, educational/outreach efforts to help consumers plan their commute using public transportation)  
  o **Disincentives** (“sticks”) to discourage car trips (e.g., congestion tolling, higher fuel taxes, vehicle miles traveled fees, increased parking fees) | • This session will help ensure that the research team understands the key considerations and priorities of city transportation planners  
• Having this deep understanding will ensure that research with consumers yields the most relevant and actionable results for the City of Los Angeles  
• The learnings from this phase will be used to help structure the discussions in Part 3 of the project |
The Plan, Part 2
Ride-along intercepts with transit riders

**Approach:**
- Intercept interviews with public transit riders during morning and afternoon/evening commuting hours (7-10 am, 4-7 pm)
- Research team will strive to get a mix of ridership frequency (Frequent Riders and Occasional Riders)

**Objectives:**
- Understand riders’ motivations for commuting via public transit
- Determine their other commuting options, if any (personal vehicle, ridesharing, car/van pool) and why/when they use them
- For Occasional Riders:
  - Identify changes/improvements that would encourage them to shift more commuting trips to public transit

**Rationale:**
- Interacting with riders while on their daily commutes will allow the research team to learn about current riders’ transit experience within the context of an actual trip
- This approach will enable the team to interview and interact with a large number of riders in a short period of time
- Information gathered in this phase will be used to help inform the focus group discussions in Part 3
- In addition, the research team will identify Occasional Riders who would be appropriate participants in the Part 3 focus group discussions
## The Plan, Part 3

### Discussions with Riders and Nonriders

**Approach:**
- 2-hour focus groups with Occasional Riders and Nonriders
- Occasional Riders identified in previous phase of research will be screened for participation; traditional recruiting methods will be used to recruit additional Occasional Riders and all Nonriders

**Objectives:**
- Understand barriers keeping commuters from utilizing public transit/utilizing it more often
  - Identify perceived downsides of public transit as well as benefits of other transportation methods (personal vehicle, Uber/Lyft, etc.)
  - Identify changes/improvements that could help encourage
    - Nonriders to consider commuting via transit
    - Occasional Riders to use transit more often
- Gather reactions to potential incentives and disincentives developed during Part 1 session with transportation leaders
- Determine the most motivating and compelling positioning and messaging that will encourage:
  - Occasional Riders to ride more often
  - Nonriders to consider commuting via public transit

**Rationale:**
- Because the ultimate solution to increase public transit ridership may be a combination of “carrots” and “sticks,” these discussions will be valuable in helping anticipate the eventual public response to programs and initiatives designed to boost ridership and help Metro and its partner agencies understand the best way to present these new initiatives to ease acceptance and result in the desired behavior change.
## The Participants

### Transportation Decision-Makers
- Employed in key roles in one of three agencies responsible for transportation planning and management for the Greater Los Angeles region:
  - LA Department of Transportation (LADOT) Planning & Policy division
  - Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro)
  - Department of City Planning

### Riders
- Mix of *Frequent* (commute via public transit 4+ times/week) and *Occasional* (commute via public transit 1-3 times/week)
- Also commute via other methods, including personal car, ridesharing (Uber/Lyft), employer car/van pool and/or informal carpool with others
- Mix of those with a personal car and those without
- Travel via most congested corridors (per LA Metro)
- Additional segmentation by age and income level

### Nonriders
- Rarely/never use public transportation to commute to/from work (average 1 trip or less per month)
- Travel via most congested transit corridors (per LA Metro)
- Commute almost exclusively in a personal car or via ridesharing (Uber/Lyft)
- Additional segmentation by age and income level