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# Public Transportation in La Mesa

The Sage Project

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## Disclaimer

This report represents original student work and recommendations prepared by students in San Diego State University's Sage Project for the City of La Mesa. Text and images contained in this report may not be used without permission from San Diego State University.



## Contents

Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Background.....	6
Problem Statement.....	6
Situation Analysis.....	7
SWOT Analysis.....	7
Secondary Research.....	8
Primary Research .....	8
Target Market.....	10
Primary Target.....	10
Secondary Target.....	10
Communication Strategy .....	10
Communication Objective.....	10
Key Message.....	10
Theme.....	11
Sub-Themes .....	11
Media Strategy .....	12
Primary Target Media .....	12
Secondary Target Media.....	15
Budget.....	18
Low-Cost Budget Plan: \$25,000 .....	18
Mid-Cost Budget Plan: \$30,000.....	19
High-Cost Budget Plan: \$35,000.....	20
Media Schedule: Pulsing.....	21
Measuring Effectiveness .....	21
Post-Campaign Survey Distribution .....	22
Post-Campaign Measuring Opportunities.....	22
Conclusion.....	23

## Acknowledgments

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## About the Sage Project

The Sage Project is a partnership between San Diego State University (SDSU) and a local community partner in the San Diego region. Students, through their course work, engage in meaningful real-world projects and contribute to pressing social needs in a community in SDSU's service area. Students from across the University assist the community with partner-directed projects that address their livability and sustainability goals. SDSU students and faculty connect with high-priority, high-need, highly interdisciplinary community projects, thereby generating interest and fresh ideas that create momentum and provide real service to the community. Each year, the Sage Project at SDSU engages hundreds of students from diverse disciplines who invest thousands of hours assisting communities in our region as they seek to build a more equitable and sustainable future. The Sage Project is part of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities (EPIC) Network and is based on the highly successful and award-winning Sustainable City Year Program at the University of Oregon.

## About La Mesa

La Mesa, California is a city in San Diego County with a strong sense of community. Known as the Jewel of the Hills, La Mesa has walkable neighborhoods, a balmy climate, and a population of approximately 60,000. As the city continues to grow, its goals are set to responding to its residents, enhancing recreation and quality of life services, offering a greater variety of accessible housing options, and mitigating its impact on global climate change.

## Executive Summary

### Campaign Challenge

To design a promotional campaign that increases the overall use of the City of La Mesa's public transportation infrastructure.

### Budget

The budget for this campaign was not defined, so there are three budget options: Low (\$25,000), Mid (\$30,000), and High (\$35,000).

### Target Audience

The primary target audience for this campaign are current La Mesa residents 55+ years old with higher incomes. The secondary target audience for this campaign are current La Mesa residents between the ages of 30–45, with families.

### Creative Strategy

The creative strategy is to emphasize to current La Mesa residents that La Mesa's public transportation infrastructure provides an exciting and efficient way to explore the city through its bike paths, buses, walking trails, and trolley line. This message will be conveyed through the tagline: "Explore Your City with New Eyes."

### Media

The media for this campaign will be focused on local communications, such as out-of-home and print advertising, for the primary target market and online methods, such as Facebook, for the secondary target market.

## Introduction

### Background

The City of La Mesa is located in eastern San Diego County. With a strong domestic culture, the city primarily consists of younger people and families moving into La Mesa ages 30–45, in addition to their current 55+ population. Currently, there are over 60,000 residents.

In March 2018, La Mesa was the first city within the greater San Diego region to adopt a Climate Action Plan that aimed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by half by 2035. The primary approach to meet this goal is to promote the use of La Mesa’s public transportation infrastructure amongst its residents. Public transportation projects have been implemented dating back to 2005, but they have not been utilized to the city’s satisfaction. Currently, there are five trolley stops, seven bus stops, newly developed bike lanes, and improved walking paths. This integrated marketing communications plan will be used as a grant proposal to secure funding for necessary campaign actions to increase the use of their underused transportation infrastructure.

### Problem Statement

The City of La Mesa has implemented a Climate Action Plan designed to reduce its residents’ greenhouse gas emissions by 50%. New additions to the city’s public transportation have been implemented to promote these improvements, but there has not been a significant increase in the use of this new infrastructure. Specifically, the City wants to encourage residents to opt for these public transportation options rather than use their cars, with particular encouragement to use public transportation for leisure activities.

## Situation Analysis

### SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a tool used by businesses and organizations to identify strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O), and threats to success for a given plan or goal. A SWOT analysis, displayed in Table 1, was conducted related to awareness of public transportation in La Mesa.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengths (Internal)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High awareness of trolley lines</li> <li>• Lower initial cost than a car</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weaknesses (Internal)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness of bike lanes</li> <li>• Bike lanes and pedestrian walking paths perceived to be dangerous</li> <li>• Bus and trolley lines perceived to be slower than cars</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Opportunities (External)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing desire of consumers to be environmentally conscious</li> <li>• New trolley lines opening</li> <li>• New bike lanes</li> <li>• Local attractions in La Mesa</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Threats (External)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents opting to use cars</li> <li>• Increased popularity of ride-sharing services</li> <li>• Increased popularity of electric vehicles</li> <li>• Establishment of self-driving vehicles</li> </ul>

Table 1: Situational (SWOT) Analysis

## Secondary Research

Based on secondary research gathered in a research focus group, we identified that La Mesa residents' apprehension towards public transportation alternatives stems from two primary categories: comfort and convenience.

Cars are overwhelmingly the preferred form of transportation, primarily due to the convenience that they offer. Cars often drastically reduce travel times as the fastest mode of transport for short-to-medium distances. They also have an advantage over public transportation because they are not constrained to specific schedules and locations. This offers more flexibility to residents, especially for non-routine activities where commuting is spontaneous.

Respondents also cited discomfort using alternatives to their cars. One respondent answered that they preferred driving during their commute because it prevented them from being sweaty when they arrived at their destination. Respondents also expressed that alternatives, such as buses and trolley lines, were unsafe or unhygienic. Similar concerns for safety were expressed in regard to pedestrian walking paths and bike lanes, as they perceived traffic to be a source of danger.

## Primary Research

To gather information on the current sentiments and perceptions towards La Mesa's public transportation infrastructure, a survey was administered to 32 residents of La Mesa. This information was gathered to develop a better understanding of La Mesa residents' position in the consumer decision-making funnel. In addition, these data help create a baseline of consumer attitudes for later comparisons to measure the effectiveness of the campaign.

Survey data were gathered through convenience sampling at the La Mesa Farmers Market. With a booth set up at the market, surveyors asked passersby to complete a survey regarding the public transportation infrastructure in La Mesa. The survey consisted of 13 questions designed to identify where residents fell into the consumer decision funnel. Most of the questions were designed to gauge participants' overall awareness and interest but also included open-ended responses to determine what motivated or deterred people from using public transportation in La Mesa.

The results indicated:

- 30% of respondents were unaware of the public transportation infrastructure in La Mesa.
- 72% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I would like to explore La Mesa by other means of transportation other than my car."



- 31% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I will not stop using my car even if there are alternative forms of transportation accessible to me."
- 19% of open-ended responses indicated that they did not want to use public transportation because of fear/safety.
- 81% of open-ended responses indicated that they did not use public transportation because of inconvenience.

Examples of open-ended comments:

"Because there really wasn't any of that so like especially late at night if you're on the trolley by yourself, it's kind of scary"

"Work is too far to bike or walk, and public transit isn't safe and would not get time there conveniently or in a timely manner"

"There is not a more convenient way to get to work that is time and cost efficient than a car"

A consumer decision funnel was utilized to indicate where La Mesa's residents fall regarding the use of the transportation infrastructure currently in place. From this, a campaign to move La Mesa's residents through the funnel has been developed; specifically focusing on moving residents from awareness to interest into consideration.

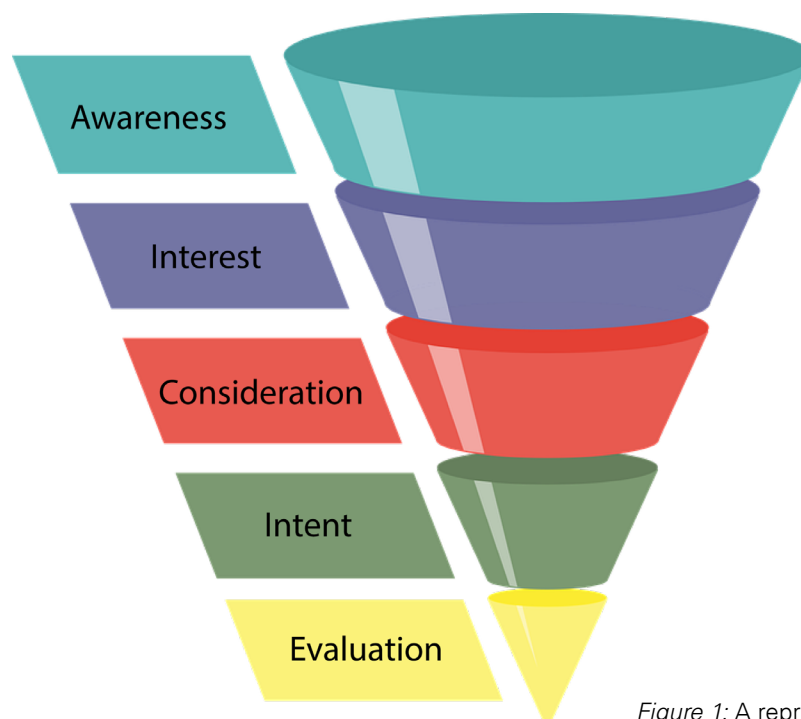


Figure 1: A representation of a marketing funnel.

## Target Market

Target market information was gathered through Claritas, an online marketing segmentation service. Using area codes within La Mesa's radius, Claritas detailed lifestyle information of residents, describing age and personalities of each residential area. From this, we identified target demographics for the proposed strategy.

### Primary Target:

Residents who are 55+ years old, who have high income and advanced degrees. These are individuals who frequently go out, are high spenders and travel.

### Secondary Target:

Individuals who are 30–45 years old with young families, who are educated, hardworking, and upscale and live in fast-growing cities. They enjoy going out to sporting events and leisure-intensive lifestyles.

## Communication Strategy

### Communication Objective

Approximately 60% of respondents showed interest in using alternative forms of transportation, although only 15% considered using the current transportation infrastructure. The goal of this campaign is to widen the funnel to increase consideration of using La Mesa's public transportation infrastructure to 25% within one year by focusing promotional efforts on safety, fun, and convenience. This will increase movement from the awareness stage all the way to actual usage of La Mesa's public transport system.

The strategy will be to:

- Increase the consideration of public transportation by illustrating where bike lanes and walking paths are in La Mesa and how to safely use them.
- Increase the consideration of using the trolley lines and bus stops through out-of-home advertising and social media to the primary residents who are 55 and older as well as to the secondary residents between 30–45 years old.
- Promote where transport services are located, how to use them, and especially why residents should use them.

### Key Message

La Mesa's sustainable transportation infrastructure provides an exciting and efficient way to explore and connect the city through bike paths, buses, walking trails, and a trolley line.

## Theme

### “Explore Your City with New Eyes”

This theme challenges La Mesa residents to become tourists in their own city. The theme encourages residents to step outside and see the destinations located in the city and influence them to visit more frequently. With many residents in the older demographic, there is an increased amount of leisure time that can be spent using public transportation or walking to these destinations instead of using personal vehicles.

One main challenge, however, is pushing residents to realize that there is not a large difference in effort between engaging in everyday activities while using public transportation and using personal transport. The theme emphasizes residents’ use of leisure time, and it highlights the many routes they can take knowing they are saving money, helping the environment, and relieving some of the stressors that come with being behind the wheel.

Another challenge is La Mesa residents’ current lack of knowledge regarding how to use public transportation services, where these services go, and why they would use them to visit La Mesa’s destinations. By emphasizing La Mesa destinations, such as its 46 historic sites, La Mesa residents will have a purpose to get out—feeling motivated to explore areas inside their own neighborhood. Not only does La Mesa offer a variety of destinations, but the city also provides environmentally conscious ways to get there. With this focus, La Mesa residents feel an obligation to help the environment by highlighting transportation methods that are already at their fingertips.

Because many of the residents are already environmentally conscious, sub-themes such as “Walk it Like You Talk it” create a sense of responsibility and culpability for the La Mesa residents to act on their environmentally conscious concerns. This sub-theme drives residents to help the environment by using the infrastructure provided by La Mesa to go to places around their neighborhood.

## Sub-Themes

### “You’re halfway there”

Example:

*Open your door and you’re halfway there. Explore La Mesa by foot.*

*Have a bike? You’re halfway there! Ride to Downtown La Mesa in \_\_\_\_\_ min!*

*Own a compass card? You’re halfway there, just a swipe away from adventure.*

## “It’s easier than you think”

Example:

*In 10 min you can \_\_\_\_\_, without the hassle of driving!*

*With 35 bike paths you can get anywhere! It’s easier than you think!*

*Want to reduce emissions? Just swipe a compass card: It’s easier than you think.*

## Media Strategy

Different advertising media will be used to reach the primary and secondary target segments. Because the primary target segment is older, a traditional media strategy using radio, billboards, mobile and direct advertising will be implemented. For the secondary target segment, internet advertising will be used to gain a broader reach on a younger, tech-savvy audience. In addition, other print advertising, such as brochures, flyers and posters, will act as general advertising to reach both segments.

## Primary Target Media

**Radio:** The older demographic is more likely to listen to radio on their daily commutes while driving. This will help with efforts to decrease the use of cars because it will reach consumers who are not currently using public transportation regularly. In addition, radio is a cost-effective form of advertisement that can be segmented geographically.

Example:

For a limited time only, La Mesa transit is offering a fantastic DEAL!!!!

All walking paths are 100% free.

We’re slashing prices OVER HERE!

Act now, and you’ll get 100 percent off bike paths.

La Mesa, explore your city.

**Billboard:** As a result of the primary target market's reduced use of technology in comparison to younger target markets, traditional media will be able to capture their attention more effectively than online media. Placing billboards along high traffic areas in La Mesa will also inform those who use their cars that there are additional means of transportation provided by the city. Example billboards are given in Figures 2 and 3.



Figure 2: Example billboard.

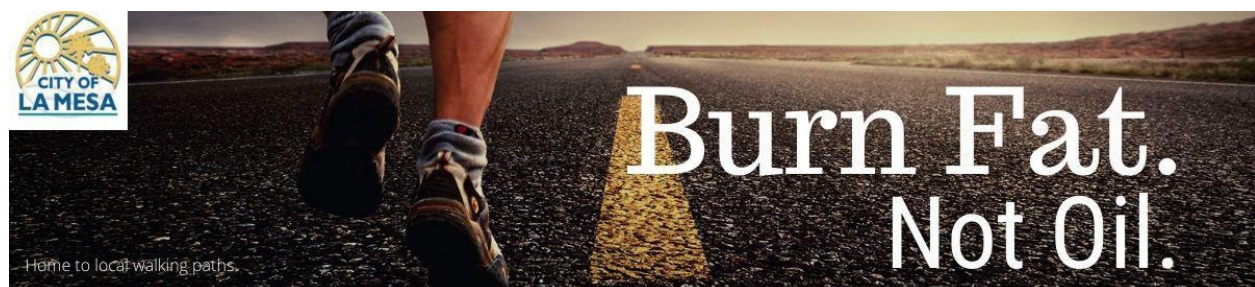


Figure 3: Example billboard.

**Mobile:** Mobile billboards are a dynamic form of out-of-home advertising that is generally less expensive than stationary billboards and have the added benefit of being visible in places that do not have stationary billboards. This form of advertisement will also be more visible to vehicles from a different perspective, targeting drivers to get them out of their cars and to use public transportation instead. An example mobile billboard is given in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Sample mobile billboard.

**Inserts:** The primary target market is more inclined to use traditional media, such as newspapers and magazines, which can include cost-effective advertisements, like inserts. Inserts provide information about exploring the city and also offer discount to local sites when public transit is used. These can be distributed in times of low activity to stimulate more regular use of public transportation amongst residents. A sample insert is given in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Sample insert.

## Secondary Target Media

**Facebook:** Facebook especially captures the secondary target market because of the high usage within this demographic. More motivating and captivating ads increase the likelihood that users will share the ad on their page and spread the information to other users in the same demographic. Facebook also allows for ads to be placed geographically to target La Mesa residents. A sample online advertisement is given in Figure 6.



Figure 6: Sample Facebook advertisement.

**Flyer/Posters:** Flyers and posters can be distributed at events in La Mesa and kept at surrounding buildings, such as City Hall, San Diego State University, bulletin boards in parks, and public schools. Flyers may also be distributed online through email and postings on NextDoor community pages. These can include motivating factors that may be able to persuade residents to use facilities provided by the city to help the environment. An example flyer is given in Figure 7.

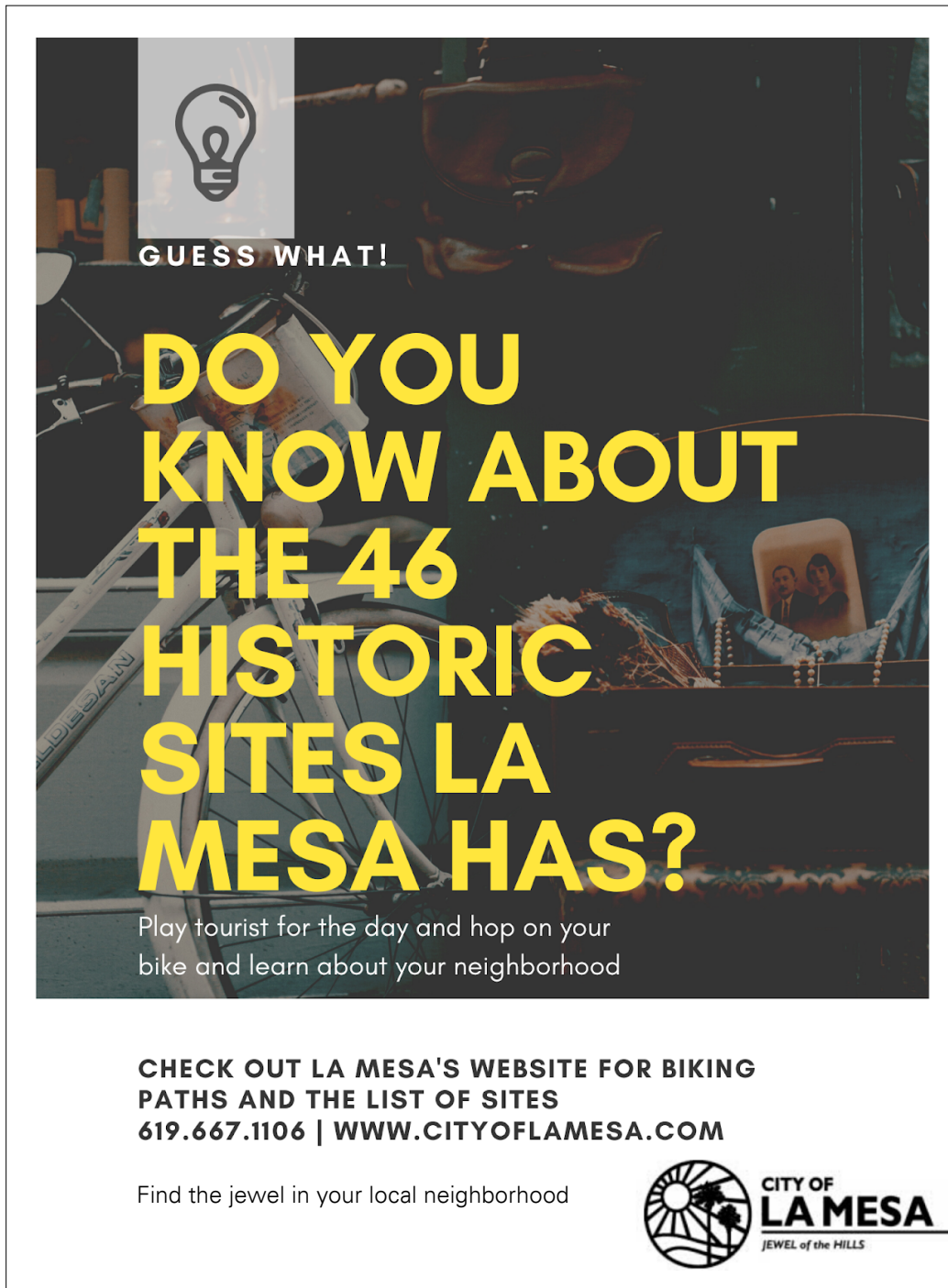


Figure 7: Sample flyer.



**Brochure:** A brochure can be distributed door to door, mailed, emailed, or in left in a holder at a community park. This allows residents to learn about a variety of activities in their own neighborhood as well as how to get there in an environmentally friendly way. Example brochures are given in Figures 8 and 9.

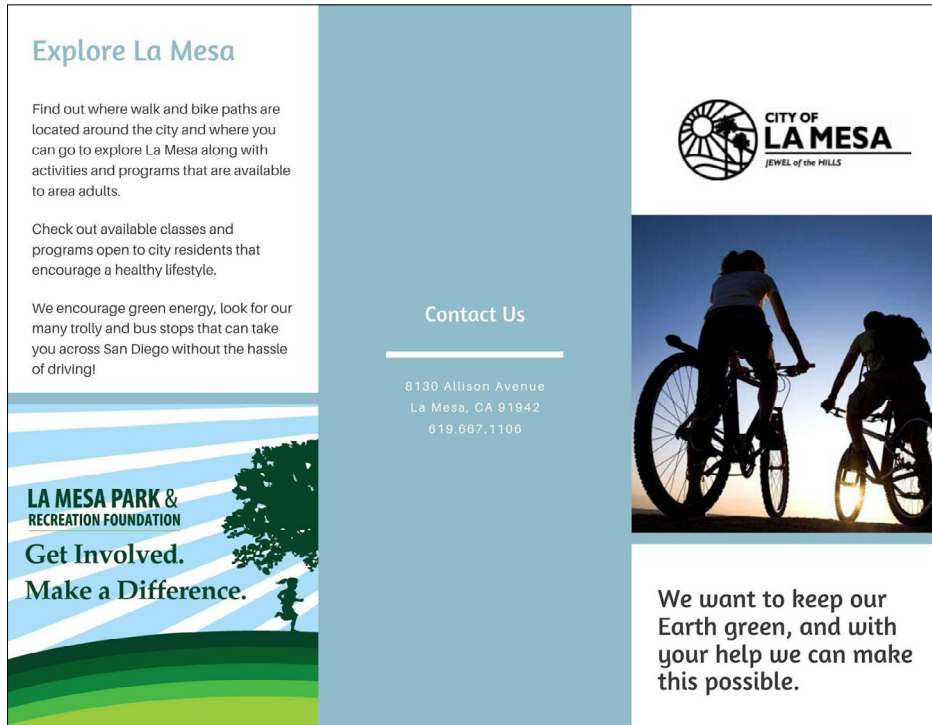


Figure 8: Sample brochure.

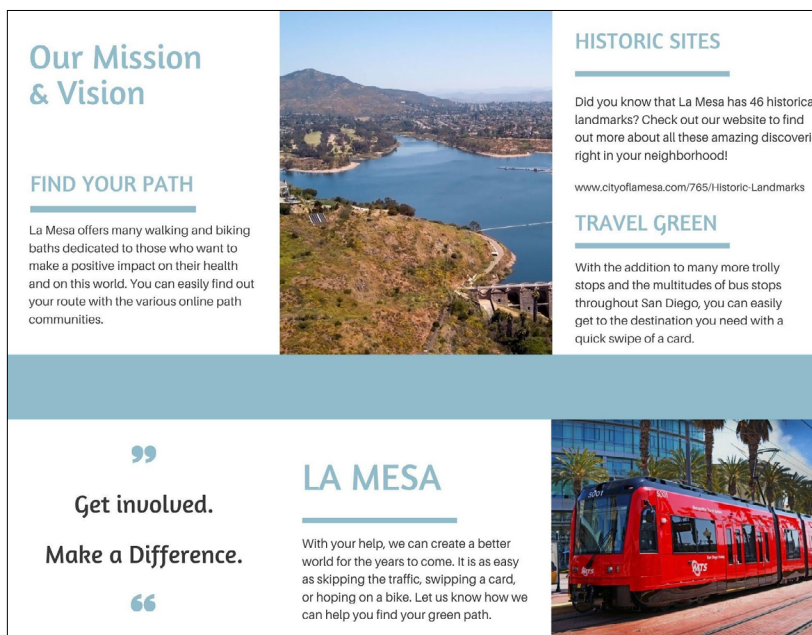


Figure 9: Sample brochure.

## Budget

### Low-Cost Budget Plan: \$25,000

A low-cost budget, by nature, would require less overall spending while still meeting the communication goals set for the promotional campaign. This would allow for more spending to be allocated towards other projects or used as a flexible spending budget to adjust the suggested media plan. In addition, this would allow for minimal wasted coverage of media spending. With less spending going towards a broader media plan, there is a smaller chance that promotional efforts would go to waste to resistant consumers. While still retaining the same levels of print advertising, this low-cost proposal would only have a smaller presence in radio, billboard and internet advertising. A low-cost budget breakdown is provided in Table 2.

Radio:	\$150/ad	x	3 ads/day x 20 days = \$9,000
Billboard:	\$1,950/month	x	1 billboard x 3 months = \$5,850
Mobile:	\$300/month	x	10 buses = \$3,000
Facebook:	\$50/day	x	90 days = \$4,500
Flyer:	\$0.07/flyer	x	5,000 flyers = \$356.87
Brochure:	\$0.09/trifold	x	5,000 brochures = \$492.84
<b>TOTAL = \$23,199.71</b>			

Table 2: Low-cost budget by media type.

## Mid-Cost Budget Plan: \$30,000

A mid-cost budget is the recommended spending proposal for this promotional campaign. Differing only slightly from the low-cost budget, this budget would increase the number of billboards from 1 to 2. This would allow the key message to reach more of the primary target market as they are more influenced by traditional media. While slightly more expensive, this media budget would target a large portion of consumers more likely to use public transportation. A mid-cost budget breakdown is provided in Table 3.

Radio:	\$150/ad	x	3 ads/day x 20 days = \$9,000
Billboard:	\$1,950/month	x	2 billboards x 3 months = \$11,700
Mobile:	\$300/month	x	10 buses = \$3,000
Facebook:	\$50/day	x	90 days = \$4,500
Flyer:	\$0.07/flyer	x	5,000 flyers = \$356.87
Brochure:	\$0.09/trifold	x	5,000 brochures = \$492.84
<b>TOTAL = \$29,049.71</b>			

Table 3: Mid-cost budget by media type.

## High-Cost Budget Plan: \$35,000

A high-cost budget would be a more effective media budget in targeting the secondary target market. This would be achieved by allocating more of the budget towards radio ads, mobile billboards, and Facebook ads. Instead of increasing the frequency of these advertising mediums, this proposal would increase the effectiveness of the advertisements by selecting better media slots. The secondary target market would be more effectively segmented because of their higher engagement with internet advertising. However, this budget would increase the likelihood of wasted coverage. A high-cost budget breakdown is provided in Table 4.

Radio:	\$193/ad	x	3 ads/day x 20 days = \$11,580
Billboard:	\$1,950/month	x	1 billboard x 3 months = \$11,700
Mobile:	\$400/month	x	10 buses = \$4,000
Facebook:	\$75/day	x	90 days = \$6,750
Flyer:	\$0.07/flyer	x	5,000 flyers = \$356.87
Brochure:	\$0.09/trifold	x	5,000 brochures = \$492.84
<b>TOTAL = \$34,879.71</b>			

Table 4: High-cost budget by media type.

## Media Schedule: Pulsing

A pulsing media schedule will assist in maintaining top-of-mind consideration of La Mesa's various public transportation networks and capitalize on higher activity periods throughout the year. During the spring and summer seasons, public transportation use in La Mesa will be higher due to better weather conditions. As such, residents of La Mesa are more likely to engage in outdoor activities, providing an opportune time for greater media coverage. Billboard advertising will have a stronger concentration of effort during the summer when outdoor advertising will be most effective. To complement this, radio and mobile advertising will be emphasized in the spring so that awareness builds up towards summer. Moreover, billboard, mobile, and radio will overlap so that our media coverage works cohesively.

During the remainder of the year, print and internet advertising will remain constant. Facebook ads will have a 90-day length that can be separated throughout the year at the city's discretion. Print advertising will only be limited by quantity. Posters and flyers will be posted year-round, and brochures will be distributed on an as-needed basis.

A pulsing schedule that omits radio, mobile and billboard advertisements for a specified period will ensure that there is less media coverage during the year, minimizing the costs to implement the marketing campaign. Furthermore, the rising and falling nature of media coverage will prevent burnout among consumers caused by overexposure to advertisements. A break from promotional efforts will allow consumers to adopt the key message as more novel and significant.

## Measuring Effectiveness

Measuring effectiveness allows the communication plan to be evaluated, determining what worked and what did not. In order to observe the movement of residents through the consumer funnel, it is necessary to determine where the target market is currently in the consumer decision funnel and where it is after the campaign period. After the campaign period comes to an end, it is vital to measure the number of people who have moved down the funnel, along with determining what led them to that position. With this measurement, the next campaign can be adjusted to move more residents down the consumer decision funnel towards action to achieve the City of La Mesa's overall communication objectives.

As stated, the goal for this marketing campaign is to increase the proportion of respondents who were moved into the consumer decision funnel category, "consideration," from 15% to 25%. An improvement that is attainable given the current market situation. Moreover, other measures, such as awareness, interest, and trial, will be evaluated to reassess where residents have moved along the consumer decision funnel. In order to determine whether the goals set for this campaign have been achieved, a post-campaign survey must be distributed to La Mesa residents.

## Post-Campaign Survey Distribution

To determine the overall effectiveness of the campaign, various surveys are to be distributed after the campaign period through in-person events, newspaper and magazine inserts, and online mediums.

In-person events can include the La Mesa Farmers Market, annual city celebrations, and Town Hall meetings. The initial survey for this primary research occurred at the La Mesa Farmers Market, which provided feedback about the usage of public transportation and paths for La Mesa residents. Conducting a post-survey at the same location where the initial survey was implemented would provide data about how residents have moved through the funnel that can be used to identify areas that need to be improved. Annual celebrations, such as La Mesa's Oktoberfest, can also host a booth for survey distribution to reevaluate residents' attitudes and perceptions towards public transportation infrastructure. In addition, Town Hall meetings can provide surveys to those who attend for feedback about transportation and path usage in the city. Collecting data at a variety of events will increase the representativeness of the sample, providing more accurate and comprehensive data for city staff to interpret.

Newspaper and magazine inserts can include a short survey that is distributed to La Mesa residents through outlets, such as the La Mesa Courier, to determine the percentage of the target segment that has begun to consider and use La Mesa's public transportation.

Online methods can target the secondary market by providing surveys through Facebook, NextDoor, and email. Local Facebook pages can target La Mesa residents to determine their position within the consumer decision funnel. The City of La Mesa can also post surveys on their NextDoor page or distribute surveys via email for residents to complete after the campaign period.

Additionally, Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) scanner data can be used to track the usage of bus and trolley lines. While any change in usage cannot be determined to be directly causal, it can be a valuable piece of tertiary data to illustrate the larger picture of La Mesa's public transit use. Increased use of these services can be correlated with the timing of the pulsing media schedule to identify, generally, whether there were increases in public transportation use during periods of peak media exposure.

## Post-Campaign Measuring Opportunities

In addition to measuring campaign effectiveness, redistributing the survey will provide additional insights into areas of opportunity to increase usage of La Mesa's transportation infrastructure. These post-campaign metrics can guide decisions to continue increasing awareness or refocus efforts on other areas of the funnel.

Implementing a questionnaire to measure awareness of individual media forms will provide information that can help to optimize media purchases to the platforms that are yielding the highest return on investment. These measurements should be conducted periodically over an extended period to identify how effective the campaign has been in increasing public transportation usage in La Mesa.

## Conclusion

The transportation initiatives presented in the City of La Mesa's Climate Action Plan, including bike lanes, walking paths, and the MTS, are underutilized due to a general lack of consideration from residents. Based on the results of the conducted market analysis, consumer awareness and interest are at an acceptable level, and the focus of this campaign should be on moving residents through the consideration phase of the consumer decision funnel.

The primary factor obstructing the use of public transportation infrastructure is a preference for personal vehicles. Personal vehicles offer a variety of benefits, primarily related to convenience and comfort. To achieve the best results, it is recommended that public transportation is not positioned as a substitute for cars. Instead, it should be positioned as a complementary alternative best used for leisure activities.

Because a considerable portion of La Mesa's older population falls into the retired demographic, a recommended strategy is to focus on leisure and the utilization of free time. Facebook, print, and radio are passive media outlets that were selected because they are the most effective at targeting and influencing this demographic. Furthermore, this strategy will also be useful for reaching younger people as a secondary target.

With this plan, the City of La Mesa can increase resident consideration of public transport and walking/biking paths by ten percent, resulting in additional use of alternative transportation and a positive impact on the City's Climate Action Plan goals. The success of this campaign should be verified by post-campaign measures in the form of surveys and MTS usage data.