Outreach for Transit Strategy Story Map

OVERVIEW

The ConnectSF team prepared a draft Transit Strategy that outlines its short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations and actions for San Francisco's transit system. The investment strategy included findings and recommendations from development of the Transit Strategy, which included major capital transit project concepts.

This memo outlines the steps taken to publicize the strategy and obtain feedback on its components. Following the development of the Transit Strategy, the recommended concepts will be evaluated further in individual corridor studies, which will include conceptual design, public outreach, and cost benefit analysis to explore whether and how each concept should move toward implementation.

OUTREACH APPROACH

The core materials for this outreach effort included a Story Map that summarized the proposed Transit Strategy. A Story Map is a web-based narrative format that illustrates content by using text, maps, photos, and interactive tools, such as time sliders, pop-ups, and swipes. For this project, the Story Map presented recommended transit improvements and concepts geared toward meeting travel needs identified through other public outreach activities and an analysis of changing travel patterns. This includes:

1. Making the system work better with maintenance and restoration;
2. Focusing on on-street improvements for reliable transit service citywide, optimally at five-minute frequencies;
3. Increasing speed, reliability, and capacity of Muni Metro; and
4. Building rail projects where bus service won't be able to meet demand.

The Story Map remains viewable online at: https://arcg.is/1vz5G.

A non-scientific survey accompanied the Story Map from April to May 2021, and included an incentive to be entered into a random drawing for a $100 gift card.

The ConnectSF team conducted both broad and targeted outreach to publicize the Transit Strategy. It also had to refine the approach to adapt to the direct and indirect challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ConnectSF team's usual best practices to reach underrepresented communities, especially people of color and those who live in low-income households, such as in-person pop-ups at community events and door-to-door conversations, were not recommended under the City's public health guidance during the outreach period.

Instead, the ConnectSF team used several alternative methods to help include populations who are less likely to be effectively reached by online surveys. This included paid partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve San Francisco youth, seniors, individuals with

mobility challenges, low-income residents, and those who speak languages other than English; online webinar; email outreach to 270 CBOs to share information about the engagement opportunity, ConnectSF's 150-member Futures Task Force, and the ConnectSF email list of 1,465 addresses; and digital ads across multiple online platforms.

ConnectSF staff used findings from the survey to understand the future needs of different demographics in San Francisco and affirm the recommendations of the Transit Strategy.

More information about these tactics is included below.

SURVEY DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS

The survey at the end of the Story Map asked participants about their preference for the types of transit improvements that the City should invest in the next 30-50 years. It contained three main questions that queried viewers about trade-offs they would make for certain long-range transit investments, asked respondents why they made that choice, and then asked an open-ended question on what other transit investments the City should make.

It also asked the SFMTA's standard demographic questions on age, gender, household income, race, and ability for statistical purposes. After examining the 970 raw responses and removing 421 bot-generated responses[1], staff analyzed the remaining 549 responses.

Since the survey was non-scientific, the ConnectSF team cross-tabulated the survey responses from marginalized demographic groups who were underrepresented in the results so that their feedback could be better understood and incorporated, especially for topics where feedback their differed from overrepresented groups.

Demographic questions looked at age, race, gender, ability, and income. Of all the demographics, age, ability, and income were the most proprortional to the population as a whole, with income slightly skewing toward the higher end relative to the city's population. Race and gender were the least proportional, with white overrepresented and other racial groups underrepresented and with males well overrepresented and females underrepresented in the survey responses. Despite this obstacle, there were respondents from low-income and marginalized groups who did use the survey to provide feedback. ConnectSF staff analyzed demographic subsets for all categories to better understand the responses of those groups, described at the end of this section. See Figures 1-5 for demographic charts.

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[1] Staff discovered bot-generated responses during manual review of the survey responses. Bot-generated responses were identifiable because they had the following characteristics:
- They had emails with names that did not match the names entered in the name fields.
- They included repetitive text across multiple responses.
- They were submitted at or near the same times.
- For the non-English bot responses, the language of the responses did not match the language of the survey version taken.

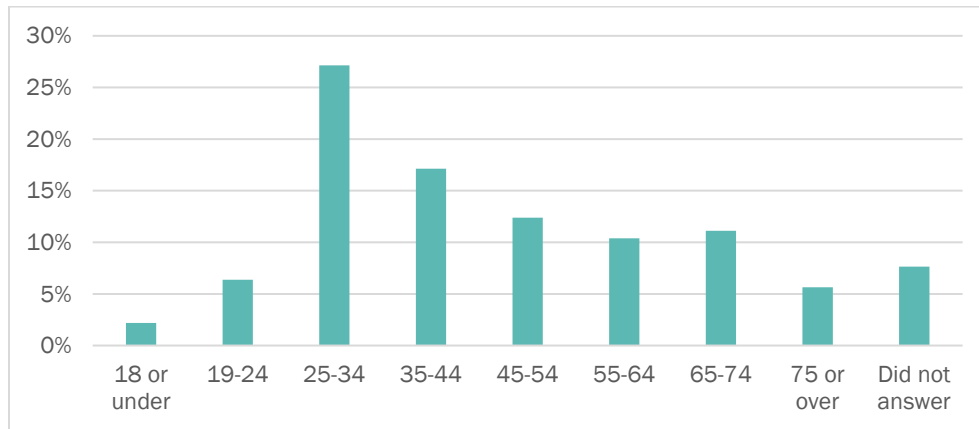Figure 1 Age of respondents

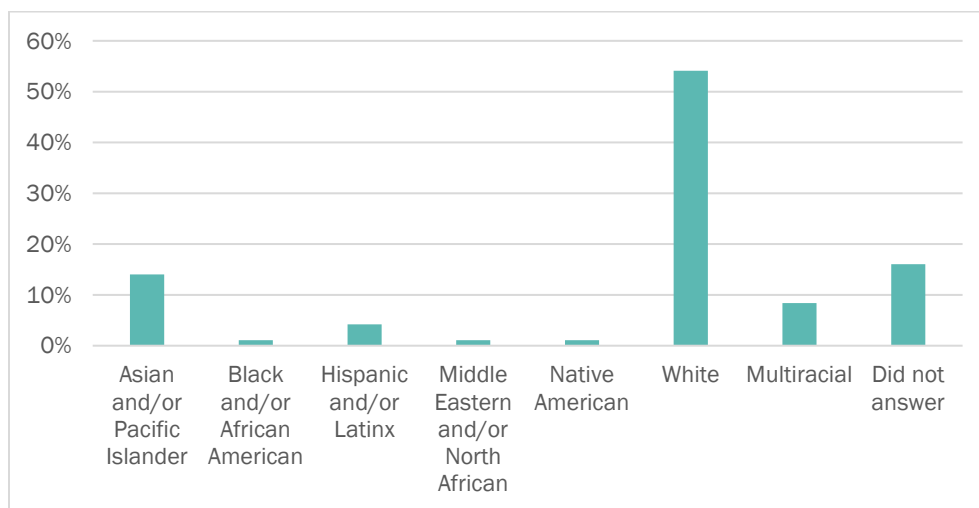Figure 2 Race of respondents
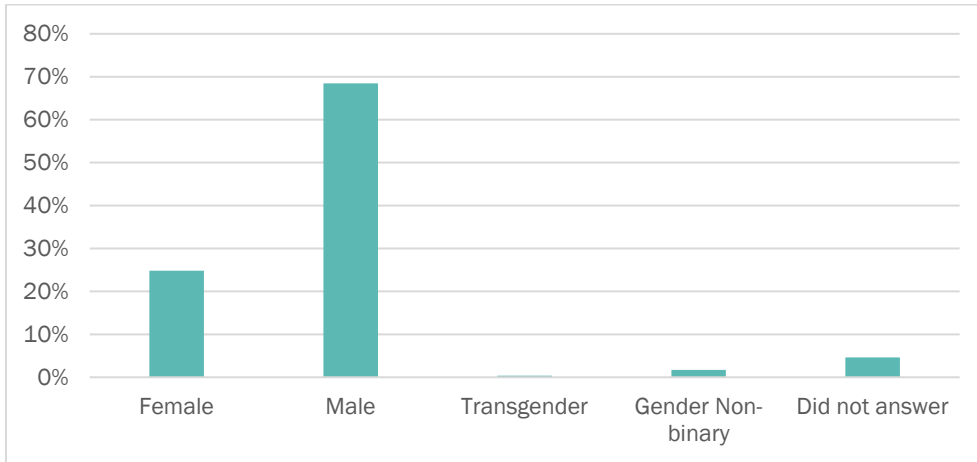
Figure 3 Gender of respondents

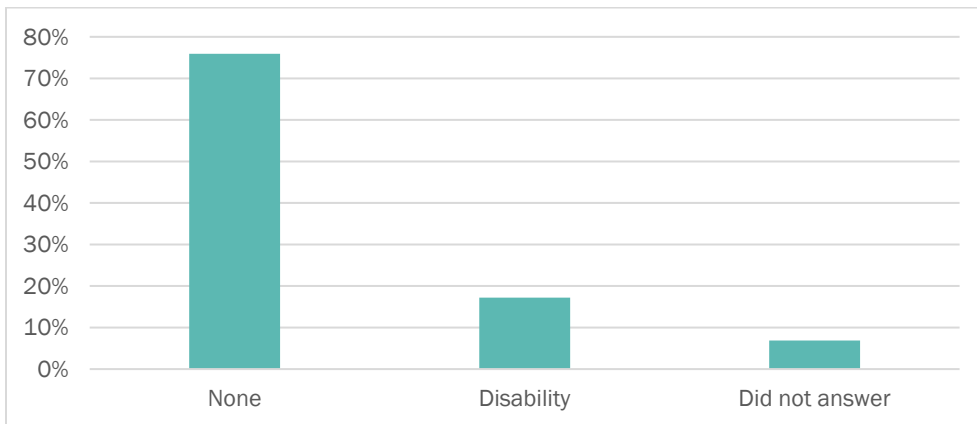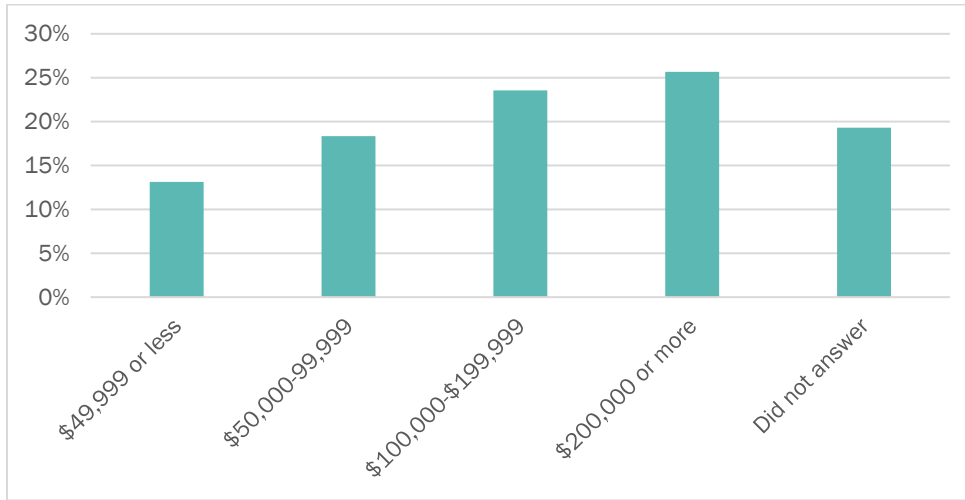Figure 4 Ability and disability status of respondents

Figure 5 Income levels of respondents

The survey asked participants what types of transit concepts listed are most important, with "1" being the highest priority. Based on the Transit Strategy, they included:

1. Cost effective improvements to prioritize buses,
2. Improvements to the light rail system, and
3. Major rail investments (10+ years).

Of those choices, participants indicated that cost-effective improvements to prioritize buses and major rail investments with a 10+ year project timeline as higher first-choice priorities over improvements to the light rail system. Over 50% of respondents ranked improvements to the light rail system as their second choice (see Figure 6):

- Over 40% of respondents ranked cost-effective improvements to prioritize buses as their first choice, and nearly 30% ranked it as their second choice.
- Nearly 40% of respondents ranked major rail investments with a 10+ year horizon as their first choice and over 20% ranked it as their second choice.
- Nearly 20% of respondents ranked improvements to the light rail system it as their first choice and over 50% ranked it as their second choice.

When asked why they made these choices, respondents cited "I want San Francisco to invest in major transit projects that will have the greatest impacts" and "I want to bring improvements to our transit system as fast as possible" as the primary reasons why they preferred more immediate improvements.

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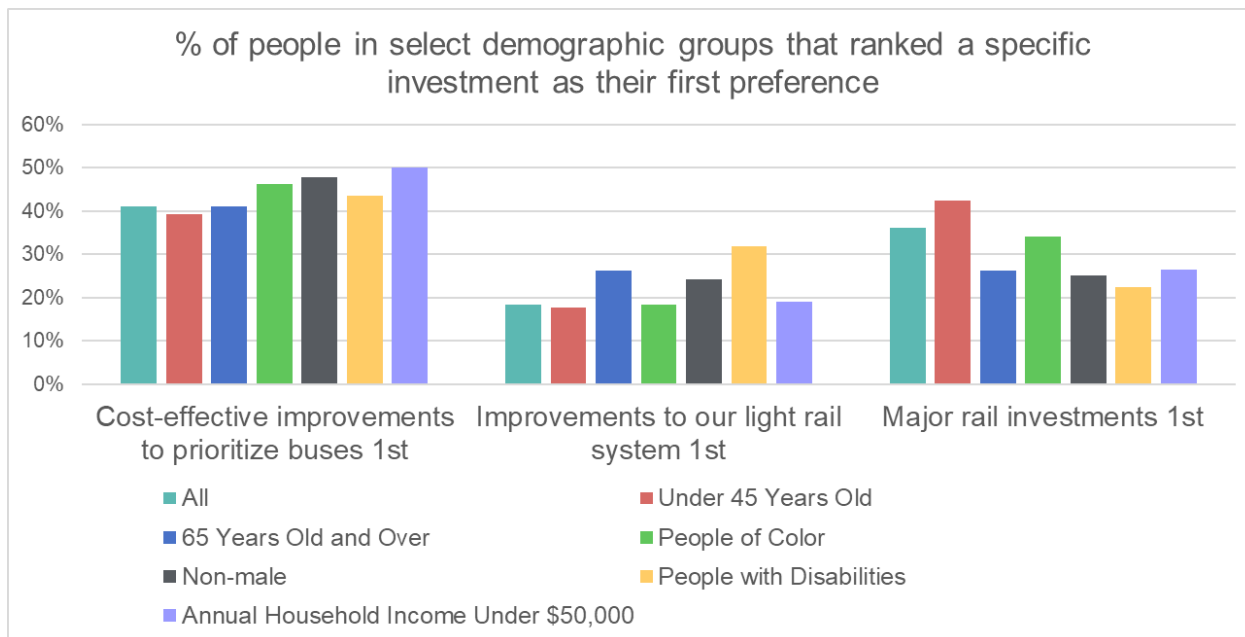Figure 6 Priority ranking of different transit investments
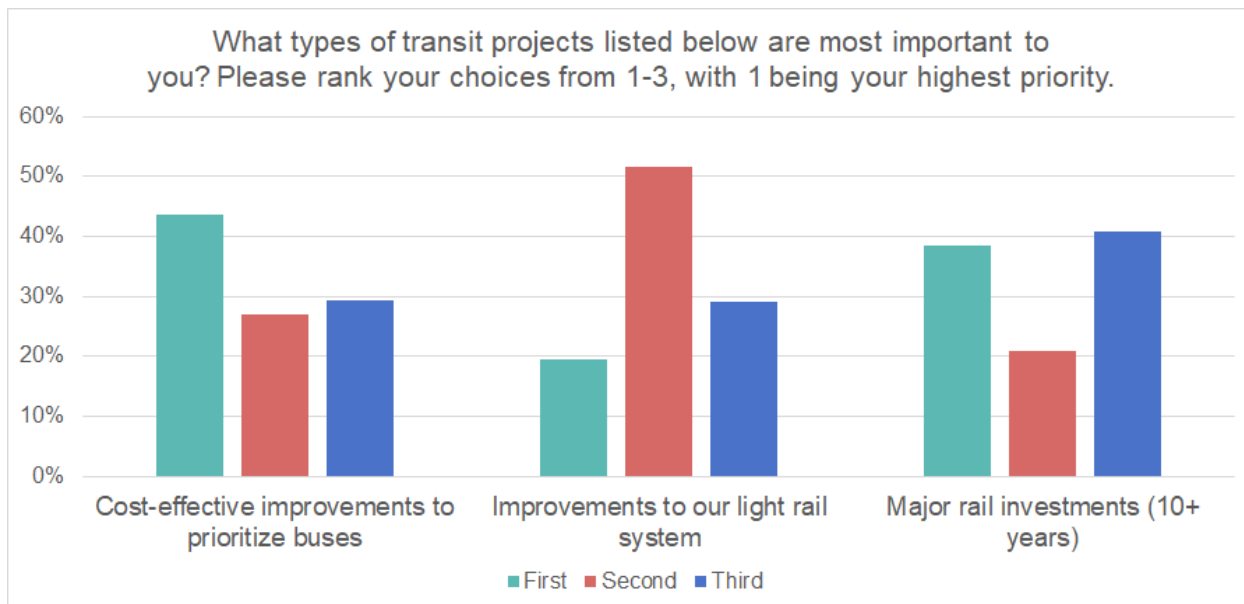
Staff analyzed responses to specific demographics to get a better understanding of how different populations responded to the survey. Since white respondents and male respondents were overrepresented in the survey results relative to the city's population, staff specifically looked at overall responses of people of color and non-male people to get a better understanding of transit preferences for those populations. Additionally, staff looked at how people over 65, people under 45, people with annual household incomes under $50,000, and people with disabilities responded relative to other respondents.

Breaking down responses by demographics revealed differences in preferences among demographic groups.

- First, respondents in every demographic group except people under 45 years old ranked bus improvements as their overall first choice. People under 45 were nearly 10 percentage points more likely to rank rail expansion as their first choice than the other respondents, possibly reflecting the longer time horizon that major rail investments take.

- Second, while people with disabilities also selected bus improvements as their overall first choice, they also voted for light rail improvements as their first choice more than twice as much as the general population, possibly indicating the need for accessibility improvements on light rail.

- Third, while most demographics ranked bus improvements as their overall first choice, people with annual household incomes under $50,000 were the only demographic to rank bus improvements first more than 50% of the time, possibly indicating the high importance or utility of the city's bus system to low-income people and the more urgent need to improve the bus system. See Figure 7.

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Figure 7 Priority ranking of different transit investments by demographic

% of people in select demographic groups that ranked a specific investment as their first preference

Legend:
- All
- Under 45 Years Old
- 65 Years Old and Over
- People of Color
- Non-male
- People with Disabilities
- Annual Household Income Under $50,000

ONLINE TOWN HALL

ConnectSF staff held an online town hall open to the general public on April 21, 2021 to provide an overview of the Transit Strategy. This event was advertised through email to the ConnectSF Futures Task Force and ConnectSF Email List. The content for this virtual program mirrored the structure of the Story Map. The webinar was one hour long, with 15 minutes allotted for a plenary presentation and the remaining time for general questions and answers. Staff encouraged attendees to complete the survey in order to submit their feedback on the Transit Strategy. The recording of the webinar is available here: https://youtu.be/Ow6sTaH9Js4.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Restrictions associated with COVID-19 meant that the ConnectSF outreach team was unable to rely on in-person outreach to promote the Story Map. Major community events, like Sunday Streets, were canceled, removing key opportunities to connect with San Francisco residents. Street intercept outreach, another tool used to connect with San Francisco residents who may not learn about the project from passive communications, was also not possible. Other best practices, such as door-to-door conversations, and attendance at existing community group meetings, were also not as widely available during the pandemic.

In light of these challenges, the ConnectSF team pivoted to focus on paid partnerships with CBOs who work closely with San Francisco youth, seniors, individuals with mobility challenges, low-income residents, and those who speak languages other than English. CBOs with active online presences were also considered, so that social media messages could reach a larger audience. A $300 stipend was granted to each group to promote the Story Map on their communications channels (e.g., social

media). Of the 23 CBOs engaged, seven agreed to support in promoting the Story Map: Code Tenderloin, Community Youth Center, Huckleberry Youth, Parents for Public Schools, Self-Help for the Elderly, Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation, and WalkSF.

ConnectSF staff provided these groups with language for use in social media posts or other digital communications, a graphic to illustrate the post, and an invoice template to streamline the payment process. CBOs were given the option to select one or more channels to post the information and were encouraged to update the text language to better match the tone they use when reaching out to their networks, clients, and/or members. The results were a variety of different posts, including posts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

The study team also learned from the CBOs who declined to participate.

- One CBO that chose not to participate explained that their staff was too busy helping members to meet basic needs to redirect resources to promoting this survey.
- Another said that they had been asked to promote feedback opportunities for too many transportation projects recently and that they did not want to ask members to engage on this topic again at this time.
- Two other CBOs said they did not have capacity to schedule additional social media posts. This signaled the strain CBOs and their members are experiencing – both from challenges of the pandemic, and from outreach fatigue due to the high number of requests being made of them from various city projects and studies.
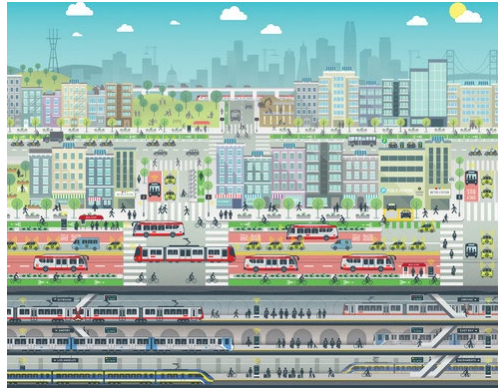
ConnectSF staff continued to offer CBOs one-on-one presentations with staff so they could participate at times when they had the availability to do so. ConnectSF staff also learned they should work with CBOs earlier to work around the CBOs timelines and provide a timeline so CBOs can plan ahead.

EMAIL OUTREACH

Email outreach was another critical element of connecting with San Franciscans. Emails were sent to 270 San Francisco-based CBOs, ConnectSF's 150-member Futures Task Force, and the ConnectSF email list. The content of the emails is shown in Figures 8 and 9.

For the ConnectSF email list, there was an open rate of 29%, which is higher than the average 15-25% open rate for electronic newsletters. Of the 284 recipients who opened the email, 71 went on to open the survey, 34 registered for the online Town Hall, and 18 visited connectsf.org.

Figure 8 Email Message to CBOs, ConnectSF Futures Task Force, and ConnectSF Email List

Thank you for your interest in ConnectSF, the City's collaborative process to build an effective, equitable, and sustainable transportation system for San Francisco's future.

The ConnectSF team has developed an investment strategy to bolster San Francisco's transit system and regional transit connections. As we begin to emerge from the pandemic, transit will be critical for our economic recovery and to manage growing traffic congestion.

We'd like to share our ideas for reinvesting in San Francisco's transit system and get your feedback on the types of transit improvements most important to you. We would like to invite you to do this in the following ways:

Online Feedback

Learn more about the Transit Investment Strategy and share your feedback.

Online Town Hall

WHEN: Wednesday, April 21, 2021; 5pm-6pm

HOW: Register at this link. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

As ConnectSF continues its work, we'll follow up with you later this year with information about the San Francisco Transportation Plan and Transportation Element.

For questions, please email us at connectsf@sfgov.org.

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628.652.7550

Figure 9 Reminder Email to CBOs, ConnectSF Futures Task Force, and ConnectSF Email List

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DIGITAL ADVERTISING

A digital ad placement firm was engaged to advertise the Story Map and survey to a broader audience of San Franciscans. The study team sought to engage residents who were unlikely to see messages from the CBOs mentioned above and were also unlikely to participate in the survey organically or as a result of joining the ConnectSF email list.

To that end, a strategy was developed to advertise to residents with an annual income under $100,000 annually and who spoke English, Chinese, or Spanish.[2] Monolingual ads in each of the three languages were developed in a variety of sizes to fit digital platforms on tablets, computer screens, connected readers, and mobile phones. Ads ran from April 9-30, 2021 and received 227,022 total impressions[3], with the following breakdown by language:

- English: 129,227 total impressions with 125,000 unique viewers

- Chinese: 48,624 total impressions with 37,736 unique viewers

- Spanish: 49,171 total impressions with 38,821 unique viewers

Figure 10 Statistics for Digital Ads

Top-Performing Placement Sites	Impressions	Clicks	Click-Through Rates
Wordscapes	30,753	80	0.26%
Sudoku	27,621	26	0.09%
americasbestpics	8,833	26	0.29%
Solitaire	203	19	9.36%
Wordscapes Search	9,220	17	0.18%
MailOnline	1,061	17	1.60%
Word Connect	5,744	16	0.28%
www.sfgate.com	551	12	2.18%
www.insider.com	237	9	3.80%
com.dailymail.online	2212	9	0.41%

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[2] ConnectSF staff learned from the consultant team through its work on other projects that, for many Filipino speakers, English is the preferred language for written communications. Based on that info, resources were placed into English ads rather than Filipino ads.

[3] An impression represents each time an ad is viewed. A unique viewer is the number of individual users who viewed the ad.

All ad groups had a click-through rate[4] (CTR) 0.30%, which is above the industry benchmark of 0.20% to 0.30%. The strongest performance was seen by the Chinese language ad group, with an overall CTR of 0.40%, followed by the Spanish ad group with an overall CTR of 0.32%.

Other data to note:

- Top placement (by clicks): Wordscapes, followed by Sudoku

- Top placement (by CTR): Solitaire, followed by www.insider.com

- Top placement (ad size): 728x90 pixels

- The device most used to view the ads were smart phones (66%) followed by tablets (24%).

NEXT STEPS

Beyond its use in the development of the final Transit Strategy, this feedback will also inform future, related planning efforts. ConnectSF will have further opportunities for public outreach in the ConnectSF Streets and Freeways Study, the Transportation Element update of the General Plan, and the San Francisco Transportation Plan.

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[4] The click-through rate (CTR) is the percentage of individuals viewing a web page who view and then click on a specific advertisement that appears on that page. Click-through rates measure how successful an ad has been in capturing users' attention.