

Caltrain RIDE Panel Program Overview

**Community Advisory Committee
August 19, 2026
Agenda Item 11**



Background

RIDE: Riders Influencing Decisions and Experiences

A new rider research panel that helps Caltrain gather quick and actionable feedback through studies and surveys on customer-focused initiatives.

Organizational Need for RIDE Panel

- Timely, frequent opportunities to gather cost-effective rider feedback.
- Targeted research with smaller scope to inform decisions on rider experience and service.

RIDE Panel Mission & Objectives

Objective 1: Build and maintain a community of active Caltrain users.

Objective 2: Collect and implement actionable feedback for Caltrain programs and initiatives.

Mission

To empower public transit riders by providing a platform for regular, meaningful feedback that helps shape and improve the services they rely on every day.

Objective 3: Provide a sustainable, cost-effective, and nimble research tool for more rapid decision making.

Objective 4: Increase trust and improve customer satisfaction by visibly integrating customer input into planning and communications.

Building the Panel

1. Recruitment

- Opt-in via established surveys (Triennial, Customer Satisfaction)
- Social media (Discord, Bluesky, X, Instagram, Nextdoor)

2. Invitation

- July 2025 survey invitation to collect data (demographics, rider characteristics) and sign-up panelists

3. Pilot

- Completed Nov 2025 and April 2026

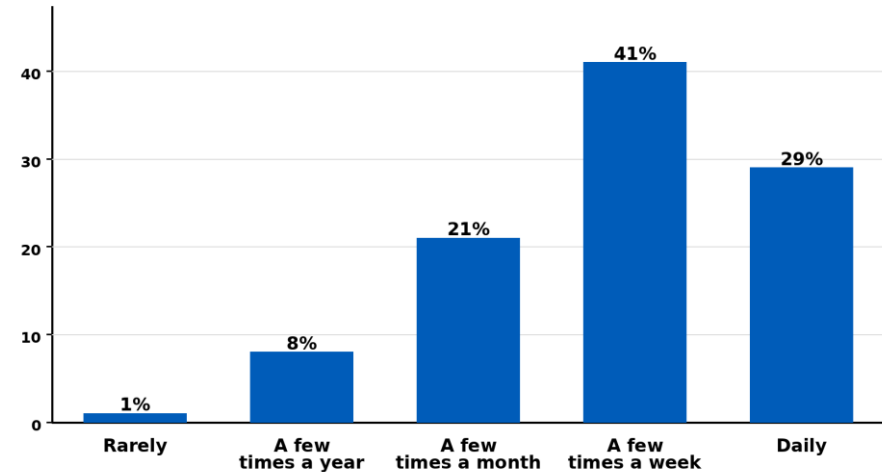


Meet the Panel

Caltrain Panel

- 870 members
- Predominantly frequent riders
- 60% use SFK station, 1 in 3 use Palo Alto and SJD stations
- Strong satisfaction (4.5/5)

How often do you ride Caltrain?



Using the RIDE Panel

The RIDE Panel is best used for rider-focused projects that would benefit from feedback grounded in the real-world experience of Caltrain riders.

Design Testing

Inform decisions and selection of concepts, prototypes, or proposals.

Examples

- Customer information materials
- Train design elements
- Service & schedule changes

Baseline Evaluation

Measure awareness, satisfaction, and effectiveness of existing programs, services, and tools.

Examples

- Website or mobile tools
- Rider amenities
- Customer information materials

Project Scoping

Gather rider insights early to shape project requirements and priorities.

Examples

- Capital improvement projects
- Customer-facing technology
- Rider policies

Out of Scope for RIDE Panel

Studies with Non-rider Segments

- Residents
- Corridor users
- *Potential* riders

Examples: public comment, transportation spending priority studies

Systemwide Studies

- Triennial Customer Survey
- Customer Satisfaction Survey

Internal or operational topics

- Testing campaign materials

Out of Scope for RIDE Panel

Methodology	Type of Data	Description	Total Time	Biggest Lift	Deliverables
Survey	Quantitative	• Online survey max ~5 questions per segment	~6 weeks	Analysis & reporting	• Raw data • Slide deck report
Interviews*	Qualitative	• 30-45 min. individual guided interviews • 3-6 sessions	~8 weeks	Recruitment & execution	• One-page report
Focus Group*	Qualitative	• 60 min. moderated sessions • 2-3 sessions (4-5 people)	~8 weeks	Recruitment & execution	• One-page report

*Capacity for up to 1-2/yr

Case Study: Caltrain Text/Email Alerts

Background and Purpose

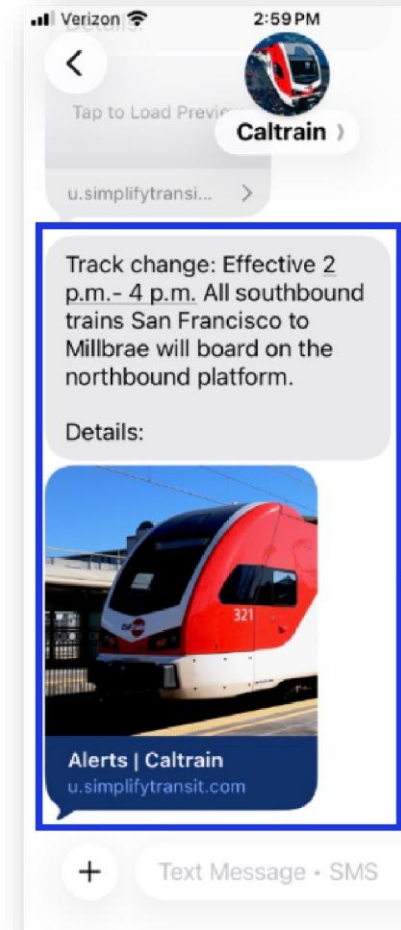
A year after the launch of Caltrain text and email alerts, Customer Experience (CX) aimed to baseline program performance and identify areas of improvement.

Methodology

- Survey of program users & non-users.

Panel Impact

- Implemented **customer sign-up materials** to promote program.
- Improved **service disruption communications** for alerts.
- Helped **prioritize improvements** to alerts content and delivery.



Next Steps for Panel

Starting Fall 2026

Quarterly surveys on topics aligned with Caltrain priorities.

Keeping the Panel Current

- Opt-in via other surveys.
- Periodically assess how well the panel reflects Caltrain riders.
- Use additional outreach channels, as needed, to fill gaps.

Request for CAC Input

Suggestions for additional community channels to recruit RIDE panel participants.

