

Entrant:	Argyle Communications & Metrolinx
Campaign:	New Transit for Toronto: Involving the Community in the Crosstown
Award Category:	Division A: Entries with prior awards from national competitions or GA member associations
Sub Category:	Public Service
Project timeline:	August 2012
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OVERVIEW

The challenge: After many years of public debate, Metrolinx, an agency of the Government of Ontario, is bringing new transit to Toronto – starting with the Eglinton Crosstown line, one of the largest transit infrastructure projects in the world today. Argyle Communications was challenged to increase participation in public consultations and community support for the project. Barriers included a legacy of false starts, low awareness, public confusion and concern about eight years of construction ahead.

The solution: Using a wide array of digital tools, Argyle built and managed a platform for effective public engagement that raised public participation by 81 per cent, with more than 85 per cent of participants expressing support for the project and a desire for future information and education.

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Audiences/stakeholders	Key characteristics	PR/communications implications
Primary - Local residents and businesses: Residents and businesses, and their respective associations, along Eglinton Avenue (a major artery of the City of Toronto), including non-riders who would be affected by the construction and/or attracted to use the line in the future. For this, our target “sweet spot” was residents and business owners most directly affected by the Crosstown construction.	This audience included a diversity of incomes, education levels, ages and ethnic backgrounds. Middle-income residents under 55 would be the core target for this <i>digital consultation</i> program, given both this segment’s large size and its higher level of internet penetration.	This group would have concerns not only with issues surrounding The Crosstown line itself, but also regarding changes to their neighbourhoods, construction and traffic impacts.
Secondary - Transit riders: All transit riders in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, Canada’s largest media market and the fourth-largest urban area in North America. Our “sweet spot” was residents and workers in the City of Toronto.	Argyle’s research showed that Toronto residents are passionate about transit, even lines operating outside of their neighbourhoods. Toronto is one of the world’s most culturally diverse cities, and this audience included an exceptional diversity of incomes, education levels, ages and ethnic backgrounds.	The key opportunity with this audience was to inform them and place the Crosstown within a larger context as a part of <i>The Big Move</i> , Metrolinx’s larger transit plan for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

Research and Analysis

Argyle Communications began the strategic development process by reviewing quantitative research and commissioning qualitative research to understand reactions to transit expansion, and test key messages and creative.

- 1. Understand the challenge:** Research showed a low level of public awareness that the new transit line was going ahead, thanks in part to prolonged political debate over competing visions for Toronto’s transit expansion. Of Torontonians surveyed, 91 per cent agreed that “smart transit planning is done for the long term and should not be changed every time a new government is elected.” People were open to “modest changes” to the plan, but were “impatient” about changes that add cost or time. Research also showed concern over construction and impacts on business (*Source: Leger Marketing*). These challenges would be compounded by the fact that public participation in transit consultations is typically very low and concentrated in affected neighbourhoods. **Insight:** *To grow engagement, it would be critical to create new ways for people to participate in the consultation process.*
- 2. Demystify light rail:** There was also public confusion over light rail transit (LRT) – the line’s mode of transportation. Torontonians demonstrated slight preference to subways over light rail (50% versus 40%), but when looking at the specific proposals that were available, they backed Toronto City Council’s light rail plan by a healthy margin (51% versus 38%) (*Source: Leger Marketing*). **Insight:** *These results not only gave confidence to the project team, but demonstrated the opportunity for communication to demystify light rail transit and achieve greater public support.*

3. **Qualify the audience:** For the focus groups, participants were drawn from a diversity of socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, age groups and genders to reflect our cosmopolitan audience of riders, residents, businesspeople and non-transit road users. Since the line will cut across the city (11 wards), this audience included a diversity of incomes, education levels, ages and ethnic backgrounds. There was cautious support for the project, but research showed that those who lived near the Eglinton corridor were no better informed about the upcoming expansion than others. (Sources: Leger Marketing, Ward Profiles). **Insight:** Middle-income residents under 55 would be the core target for this digital campaign, given both this segment's large size and its higher level of internet penetration.
4. **Messaging insights:** Focus group participants told us communications should be fact-based, simple and web-accessible. The groups provided strong direction on Argyle's proposed brand identity ('The Crosstown') which would be used in all communications about the project. (Source: Leger Marketing). **Insight:** Messages should be honest, informative and realistic, not generic, fluffy, a "sales pitch," or "too official." By bringing the consultations online, we would help broaden the opportunity for public participation in Toronto's largest-ever transit expansion project.

Communications strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Research	Analysis / Insight
Issue research	<p>Strength: Research showed consensus that transit expansion in Toronto is beneficial, and urgently needed.</p> <p>Weakness: General confusion regarding the details and status of the project; history of limited or concentrated public involvement in consultation process.</p> <p>Opportunity: Use online channels – backed by a memorable brand – to communicate the details and benefits of the project in a simplified manner.</p> <p>Threat: Prolonged public confusion caused by competing political visions for the project in the news media.</p>
Audience research	<p>Strength: A large and well-defined audience.</p> <p>Weakness: Low awareness of The Crosstown line, even along its planned corridor;</p> <p>Opportunity: (1) Build broad public support for The Crosstown through clearly articulated benefits. (2) Target audiences based on geographic proximity. (3) Solicit feedback from the public to be considered as the project evolves.</p> <p>Threat: Criticism from those with alternative visions for transit expansion.</p>

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Since the campaign made use of multiple digital and in-person communications tools, Argyle set goals and objectives using a variety of metrics. These included:

Goal: Attract significant **public participation** in consultations using online presentations and surveys on The Crosstown website.

Objective: Average 50 *online* participants per consultation, an ambitious target based on low past participation and limited promotional resources.

Goal: Have participants self-report having a **'good' understanding** of The Crosstown project through the consultation process.

Objective: 75% of participants report having a good understanding of project.

Goal: Increase interest in **ongoing participation** in The Crosstown's consultation initiatives.

Objective: Target: 75% opt-in to receive email alerts on future consultations and initiatives.

Goal: Earn **favourable local opinion** for the project, notwithstanding the substantial inconvenience during the long construction period. We reasoned that many would be supportive of greater transit, as likely participants in consultations are often those with concerns or opposition to express.

Objective: Target: 75% agreeing project is good for their neighbourhood and Toronto.

PLANNING

There were five key elements of Argyle's strategy:

1. **Mirror the in-person experience -- online:** The core concept was to offer participants the same quality of consultation they would get from coming to the open houses we held in person – but from the convenience of their own homes. Online consultations opened *on the same day* as the public open houses, and we used the *same presentation and survey questions* at in-person events and online. This made the online opportunity attractive, and also ensured a consistency in data collection.
2. **Leverage established tools:** With limited resources (see 'budget,' below), Argyle recognized that a comprehensive (and cost-effective) online consultation experience could be achieved using established online tools including the Crosstown website, SurveyMonkey and SlideShare.

3. **Cross-platform promotion:** To ensure that the most relevant people were participating in the consultation process, the team promoted the consultations to local residents who would be most affected by construction as well as transit riders in Toronto via the Crosstown website, e-newsletter, and Facebook and Twitter profiles.
4. **Connect to the big picture:** Although each consultation focused on a specific station or issue, communications focused on connecting each consultation to the bigger picture of The Crosstown line's future effect on Toronto transit.
5. **Transparent and timely reporting:** The team analyzed and featured all survey data from in-person and online consultations in consultation reports, which were published on The Crosstown website. The Crosstown team committed to posting all consultation reports within 10 days of the close of each online consultation.

Budget:

The project budget was CAD \$37,730, which included the research, drafting and revisions for the preparation of 9 consultation reports, the posting of consultations and surveys online at The Crosstown website, the creation of a text summary version of materials for accessibility and promotion of the consultation via social media content integrated with The Crosstown.

EXECUTION

For **each local community**, Argyle created custom presentations that showed future plans for specific station stops in detail; used online surveys to capture feedback about both local and larger plans for The Crosstown; analyzed and incorporated data into a consultation report that was posted publicly on The Crosstown website; and, where appropriate, feedback was incorporated into project plans and revised plans were taken back to the affected community for further consultation.

Plans and tactics included:

1. Solicited feedback at both in-person and online consultations using a survey with qualitative and quantitative questions;
2. Made translation services available at open houses in areas with large population of non-English speaking residents;
3. Used SurveyMonkey and Slideshare to recreate the open house consultations online, hosted on The Crosstown website;
4. Analyzed results and prepared summary reports that highlighted feedback trends, published on The Crosstown website;
5. Promoted sessions to local residents via email, advertisements in local newspapers and Canada Post mail deliveries;
6. Promoted the online consultation on The Crosstown website, Facebook page and Twitter profile; and
7. Included a brief overview of the big picture in each consultation presentation.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

The Argyle team had to manage four significant constraints:

1. **Transit plan history:** Toronto's transit expansion had a legacy of false starts: an Eglinton line was started in the 1990s, only to be stopped. In 2010, the high-profile 'Transit City' light-rail plan (including an earlier version of the Eglinton line) was cancelled. This led to scepticism that this latest plan was really happening. This history demanded that we use a hyper-local consultation strategy with multiple means of input to earn credibility.
2. **Website requirements:** The requirement to meet "AAA" Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) for people with disabilities meant having to find creative ways to execute the program while maintaining a compelling visual experience for the majority of users. Argyle created text summary versions of all materials, ensured materials had appropriate colour contrast and that all images had alt and description tags to ensure they could be read through the use of screen readers.
3. **Timing:** Station renderings included at open houses often changed up to the day of the in-person event. This meant we had to have resources available on 'event day' to launch the online version in conjunction with public meetings.
4. **Complexity of information:** We often had to take technical information from engineers and transform it into understandable information for residents.

RESULTS

Objective	Results (November 2011 – June 2012)
Increase opportunities for public participation in consultation process (target: average 50 online participants per consultation).	696 users participated in nine online consultations on thecrosstown.ca (an average of more than 75 per consultation), expanding public participation in the consultation process by 81%.
Increase understanding of The Crosstown project through consultation process (target: 75% of participants agree to having good understanding of project).	82.6% of participants agreed that following the consultation they had a good understanding of the Eglinton-Scarborough Crosstown project.
Increase interest in ongoing participation in The Crosstown project (target: 75% indicate interest in learning more about the project).	85.2% agreed they were interested in learning about the construction of the Crosstown, including how stations will be designed and built.
Achieve favourable local opinion for the project, notwithstanding the substantial inconvenience during the long construction period (target: 75% agreeing project is good for neighbourhood and Toronto).	86.3% of participants either agreed or somewhat agreed that The Crosstown would be good for their neighbourhood and for Toronto.