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Mass Transit Tokens Serve Dual Purpose for Red River, NM

Located at the southern edge of the Rocky Mountains, Red River, New Mexico bills itself as “a ski vacation paradise, summer vacation heaven, conference center and resort town all rolled into one.” Tourists are clearly a big part of the town’s economy, and the public transportation system to move them around town is equally important.

Each year approximately 17,000 people ride the 2 Miner’s Transit buses as they loop around town. About half of the riders use “Free ride” tokens that are supplied to area lodges, inns, motels, and bed & breakfasts.

“The community charges a lodgers tax” says Bob Perry, Red River Planning Director.

“We use the funds to offset the costs of transportation system. We provide free tokens to lodges and hotels, bed & breakfasts, and others because we do not want to double charge their patrons for a service that they’ve already paid for.” The free tokens also serve as a barometer for the mass transit usage. “We collect the tokens from the fare box and

compare tokens to cash. In the height of tourist season it is probably a 50/50 split between riders who pay cash and riders who use tokens,” continues Perry.

Shared Funding Reduces Out-of-Pocket Costs

Out-of-pocket costs for the tokens were minimal because funding was available from multiple sources. In addition to the lodger’s tax which provided about ½ of the cost, federal funds were also available on a matching program. When accounting for all of the various funding sources, Perry estimates that his out of pocket costs for the purchase of the 50,000 tokens are minimal. Sized between a nickel and a quarter, the tokens are “just the right size.”

Because the tokens last for decades, they can be used many times before they wear out. Durability is not the issue in Red River, however. “The tokens are a beautiful bright gold color and have The Town of Red River stamped on one side. People carry them home with pocket change to remind them of their trip.”

Although the online vendor, TokensDirect, (www.tokensdirect.com) offered many standard designs, Perry elected to have a custom die made for the token front. A standard design including an eagle and stars adorns the reverse side of the token, to elicit a patriotic feel. When stockpiles run low, Perry figures he’ll switch to a custom die for the reverse, harkening back to the towns origin as a mining community, and promoting a nostalgic feel. It will also help to explain how Miners Transit got its name.

More Than A Token Opportunity for Retailers

In addition to providing tokens on a no-charge basis to lodging establishments, they are also available for sale to local merchants. “We package them in bags of 100 tokens, and sell them for \$35 per hundred” comments Perry. Retailers can then provide the tokens with change, make them available on counter displays, or use them as incentives to stimulate store traffic.

Public Transport A Draw for Conference Center & Meeting Planners

“The public transportation in Red River is a very large draw to groups using the Red River Conference Center” comments Red River’s Economic Development Director, Rebecca Hastings. “Meeting planners focus so much on post-meeting activities and events, so Miner’s Transit is a great incentive. With transportation to a number of activities in the area, conference attendees are enjoying their off hours, and the events are being viewed more favorably. We also offer groups a discounted rate, ensuring that individuals can move around at their own leisure, truly enjoying their experience at the meeting or conference and in Red River.”

The program is working well on all fronts. The lodgers’ tax and federal funding pay for the majority of the token cost, so out-of-pocket costs for Red River are minimal. Lodgers who elect to use the service get a free ride – allowing them to enjoy their trip without the

stress of driving in unknown areas, while saving fuel, and reducing auto emissions. If they return home with a token or two amidst their pocket change, so much the better for them to remember their trip to Red River, New Mexico. Maybe they'll tell (and show) their friends, thus stimulating more tourist travel (and more transit usage!).

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