# Promoting Alternative Modes Through Online Viral Marketing



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April 21, 2009

### Welcome

- About Bruins for Traffic Relief (BTR)
- How did BTR use online marketing tools to
  - Help pass Measure R?
  - Launch a movement: Los Angeles Wants Google Transit
- Ideas for promoting alternative modes through "online viral marketing"
- Conclusion: Online social networks helps people connect on any topic, including commuting



### **About Bruins for Traffic Relief**

- Founded by Misha Silin '09 and two friends from his fraternity in Spring 2008
- □ Why?
  - Misha's response to traffic in LA
  - He often spoke of Moscow's subway system
  - Empowered to do make a difference in a tangible way
- Why did I join?
  - I am the club's Chief Strategist



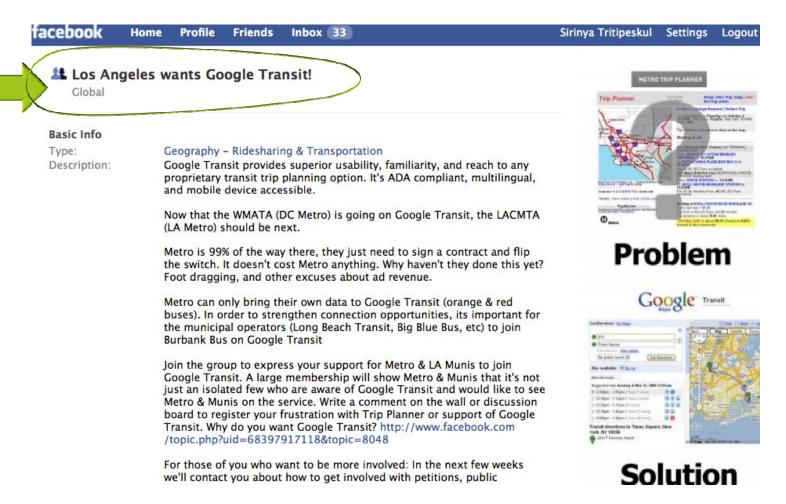
Misha Silin, Founder of Bruins for Traffic Relief

## Bruins for Traffic Relief's accomplishments



- Grassroots campaign to pass Measure R
- Gather signatures to show support for Westside Extension Study
- Advocated for better bus infrastructure at Westwood Expo station

## BTR's current project: Los Angeles Wants Google Transit



### BTR's current project: City Council District 5 Debate, 4/20/09



#### Students host run-off debate

By Samantha Masunaga

Updated: Monday, April 20, 2009 at 2:48 a.m. Published: Monday, April 20, 2009



Vahedi, Council Member



Kortez, Assembly Member

A run-off debate between the two candidates for the Los Angeles City Council 5th District seat will be hosted at the Charles E. Young Grand Salon in Kerckhoff Hall at 6:30 p.m. today.

The event, which will be taped for broadcast by KABC-TV, will consist of six questions compiled by students that relate to issues such as housing in Westwood and land-use policies.

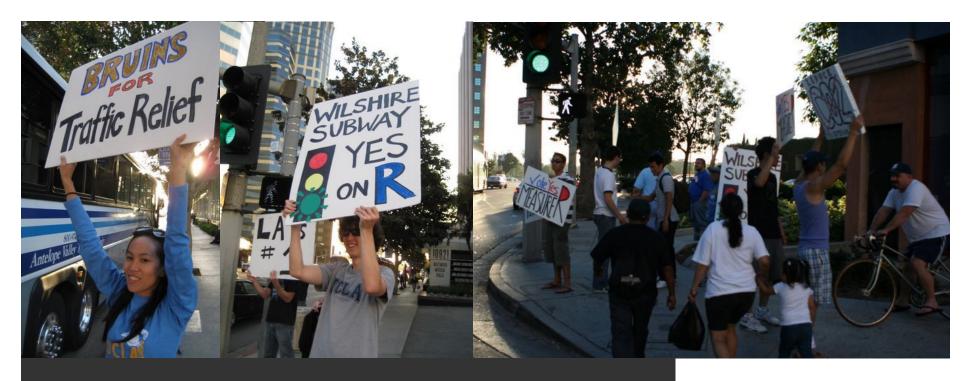
The debate, which is between candidates Paul Koretz and David Vahedi, is hosted by the student group Bruins for Traffic Relief and is sponsored by the Graduate Students Association and the Undergraduate Students Association Council. ABC7 newscaster Adrienne Alpert will serve as the debate's moderator.

"I think it's important for students to get involved with local politics because these issues can be taken care of by (local politicians)," said Mikhail Silin, a fourth-year communication studies student and the president of Bruins for Traffic Relief.

"Since there's apathy in student voting, politicians don't count them as part of the constituents," he added.



Debate planning led by Misha Silin



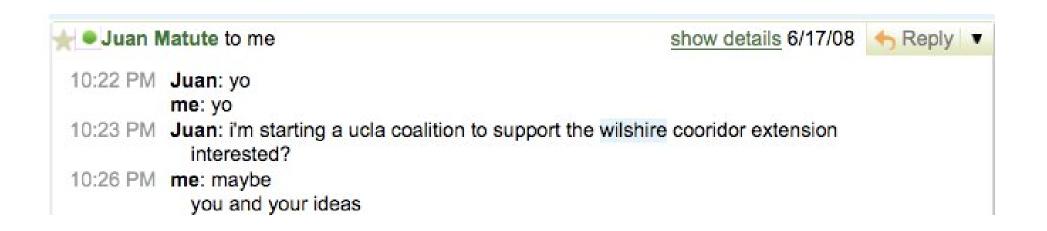
How does BTR use online social networking in its projects?

### Vote Yes on Measure R!

Bruins for Traffic Relief launched a grassroots campaign to pass a \$40 billion dollar sales tax measure to fund transportation improvements



## The genesis of a Big Idea



 Sometimes, good ideas take place over Gchat (Google's Instant Messenger product)

## The genesis of a Big Idea



- And over lunch at El Pollo Loco...
- We came up with the idea of testing the potential for social networking, new media, and viral marketing to pass a local ballot measure.
- Luckily, that same day, we had our first meeting of Bruins for Traffic Relief.
- We needed people for a rally: The founders had fraternity pledges.
- And we had a plan to grow the events

### The plan

- Four Friday afternoons in October2008 between 4 and 6PM
- Sought to leverage the snowball effect
  - We took photographs on Week 1 to communicate what we were doing to both the traditional and new media
  - Post pictures on Facebook
- Two goals:
  - The goal was to reach out to people usually dismissed as apathetic -MY generation, the Millennials



2. Create genuine awareness of Measure R



### UCLA Bruins Want Their Wilshire Subway

A group of UCLA students, under the auspices of <u>Bruins for Traffic Relief</u>, hit th support for <u>Measure R</u>, the countywide ballot initiative that would raise the sale an estimated \$40 billion for transit over the next 30 years. "As the largest trip-a daytime population of 55,000, UCLA stands to greatly benefit from new transport e-mails Juan Matute, an urban planning student and director of the <u>UCLA Sust</u>





WESTWOOD: Here's a shot of that rally for Measure R that's currently underway at by Damien Newthe corner of Wilshire and Westwood during rush hour. Editor Neal, who took the photo, reports: "Small turnout, but many supportive beeps. An old crazy man

### Results: New media coverage

Well-regarded local blogs posted about Week 1 in advance of Week 2, some came to scope out Week 2.

### Results: Traditional media coverage



## Students take to the streets for public transit With the election looming, Bruins fight for Measure R to bring Metro to Wilshire

By Carolyn McGough

Updated: Wednesday, October 22, 2008 at 7:05 p.m.

Published: Wednesday, October 22, 2008

Bruins for Traffic Relief, a new student group encouraging alternative public transportation options for UCLA students, has kicked it into high gear lately in light of the forthcoming November presidential election.

Undergraduate and graduate students are involved in supporting the cause, including Bruins for Traffic Relief external vice president Mikhail Silin and Juan Matute, a graduate voice the student group.

Silin said he believes it is of utmost importance to relieve traffic congestion in Los Angeles County and to support alternatives to driving in cars.

Several of the members of Bruins for Traffic Relief have been hitting the streets of Westwood, holding signs and speaking with public transportation users especially about Measure R, a half-cent sales tax increase that would fund up to \$40 billion over 30 years in Los Angeles.

The group took to Wilshire Blvd. last Friday in support of Measure R, and they will be back on Wilshire and Gayley Avenue this Friday to show their support for the measure.

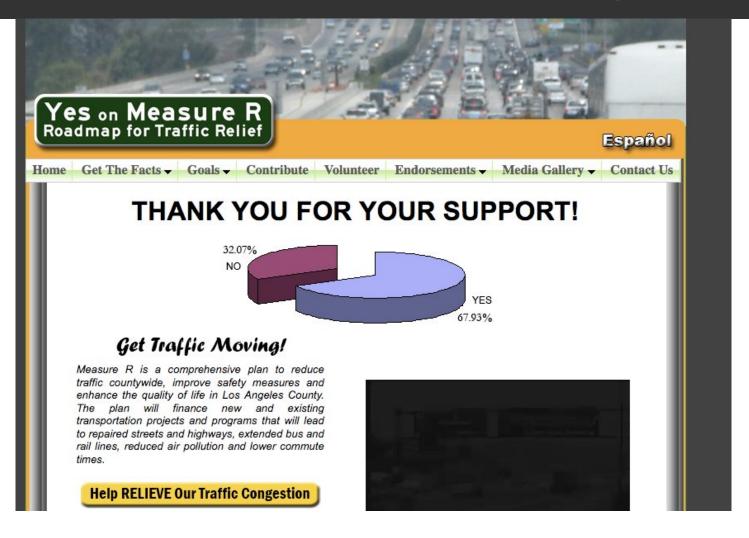
"We went out on Wilshire on Friday from four to six holding up signs for Measure R, talking to people on the bus stops and telling people about it," Silin said.

### We inspired individual supporters



This is Brigham Yen. He lives in Pasadena. He heard about our campaign through the blogs, and he came out to join us. He also campaigned in Century City, Dockweiler Beach, and close to home in Old Town Pasadena.

### We inspired a real campaign



### We even inspired a counter-response



- Politicians in the San Gabriel Valley carried signs to show their opposition to Measure R.
- Note:
  - Signs share that same homemade with marker aesthetic as BTR's.
  - This picture was posted on LA Streetsblog

### Results: Measure R passed



And we got to meet the mayor

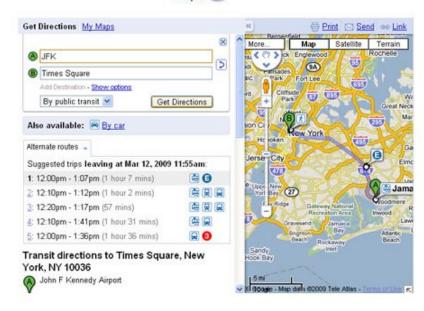
### Los Angeles Wants Google Transit

BTR's project to get Metro to participate in an online trip planner

METRO TRIP PLANNER







## **Problem**

## Solution

### On-going: LA Wants Google Transit

## Greater Washington

The Washington, DC area is great. But it could be greater.

#### Metro refuses to participate in Google Transit

by Michael Perkins

Three years after the launch of Google Transit, which gives dire Google Maps, and after constant requests by riders and blogger:

Heard from friend in Washington, DC about a DC-based blogger's attempt to bring Google Transit there



- Questioned why we didn't have it here in Los Angeles
- Asked the club whether we could lobby Metro to switch to Google Transit ourselves
  - Considered online petition
  - Ruled out litigation

## And when we saw that WMATA agreed to go on Google Transit...

### Greater Greater Washington



Metro "punts": Will release transit schedule data for Google and others

by Michael Perkins

Metro listened to the riders. Yesterday at the DC Council <u>oversight</u> <u>hearing</u> for WMATA, General Manager John Catoe announced that Metro will release schedule and routing information in the open





Home

**Profile** 

Friends

Inbox

33

Los Angeles wants Google Transit!

We started a Facebook group

Basic Info

## Los Angeles Wants Google Transit

- Bloggers had written previously about the topic, but nobody had ever started a Facebook group to rally people around the cause
- 100 members within 17 hours
  - Every time we hit refresh, more people joined the group!
  - 500 members within a week
  - 716 members now
- People invited their friends
  - One of my friends from elementary school invited his entire address book
  - Typically you do this judiciously





Politicians and Metro board members





Post #11

Eric Garcetti

Thanks everyc Metro and pus progress. Keel Garcetti



Richard Katz Los Angeles, CA

Friends, former students, even friends who are NOT transit-geeks, but are on Facebook and saw the relevancy of this issue



Tam Truong Los Angeles, CA



Katherine Schneider
USC

Key decisionmakers and "regular" people alike joined the group

### Power of the Facebook newsfeed

Write a comment...



Gabe Cardenas wants everyone to come out to the Westwood Brew Co this Friday at 9 for the best karaoke and dance music around. It's one big party, I'm the host! KARAOKE SONGS UPDATED MONTHLY!

2 hours ago · Comment · Like



Franz Loza establishing national education standards. hard to believe this is something the US does not already have. all this time we were trying to fix a system we could not even begin to diagnose accurately.



How to Raise the Standard in America's Schools - TIME

Source: www.time.com

Our students are falling behind their counterparts in the rest of the world, threatening the U.S. s economic future. Why national education standards are the only way to fix the system

2 hours ago · Comment · Like · Share



Jenny Teague Apparently our picture of the Ooolllllldsmobile shows up on page 6 of Google Images if you look up 76 Oldsmobile Delta 88!!!









things to have when zombies attack!!!!!! by Jenny

Remington 870, Purple Rain LP, Cricket Bat, 1976 Oldsmobile Delta 88 and Food & Water.

- Many group members joined after seeing their friends had joined through FB's newsfeed
  - When you log in, you see is a "newsfeed", which shows your friends' latest status changes, pictures, groups, quizzes, etc
  - Dubbed "Stalker-feed"
- This is how I know that Google Transit didn't only interest "transit geeks"

## Los Angeles Wants Google Transit

- The Facebook group gave us a way to communicate with people who wanted the same thing
  - We messaged members about how they can get more involved by getting more people to join the group, posting online,

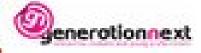
#### Results:

- Generated more new media/blog coverage
- People called/e-mailed/wrote into Metro
- Councilmember Eric Garcetti posted on Saturday that he had assigned his deputy to advocate for this cause
  - This meant people inside Metro were talking always good!
- Now, we cross our fingers and monitor the situation

## What does this mean for you?

- Millennials and the tech savvy prefer to use passive travel modes. People can use Facebook, Twitter, and other websites from their phones during their commute.
- Online social networking can be another way for you to communicate the merits of using alternative modes





































































Ideas for promoting TDM/alt modes through online marketing and Web 2.0

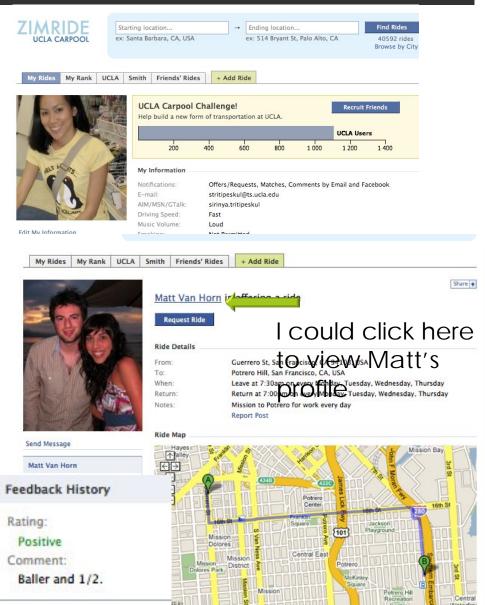
### Facebook Online social networking



- Corporate Network likely already on Facebook
- You can advertise to your corporate network on Facebook
- Start a group restricted to your corporate network for people interested in alt-mode commuting. Publicize on internal web site.
- You can send messages to those who have joined the group. They can also use the groups discussion feature & wall to interact with each other
- Maybe your company has a few people commuting by bicycle from the same neighborhood.
  - They can use this group's page to discover each other and interact, possibly forming a bike train for some commutes.

## Online ridematching meets social networking

- Today, there are many online ridematching options
  - UCLA uses Zimride, which offers solutions tailored to a custom network (ie, your larger corporation) for a fee.
  - Others: PickupPal, Carticipate
- Users can review profiles of potential carpoolers before getting in the car
- Commute with friends or friends of friends who you may not otherwise

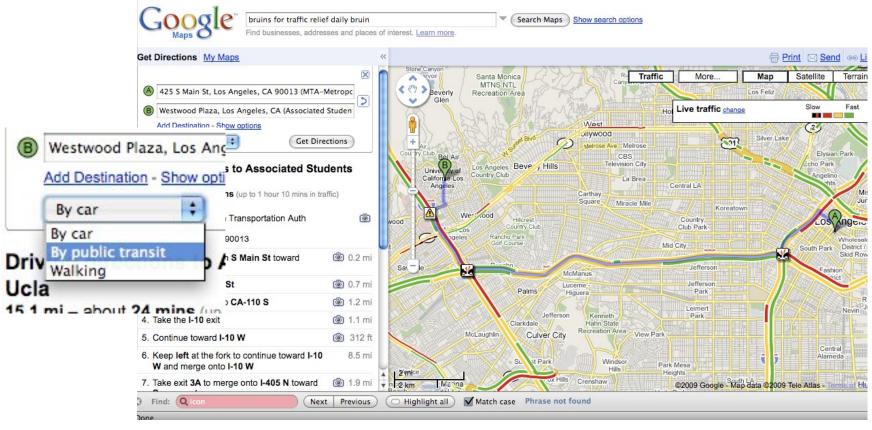


- Why mention smartphones during a talk about viral marketing and alt modes?
  - Smartphones increasing in popularity as cost falls
  - Smartphones are a tool that alt mode commuters can use to access useful and necessary information for planning their trips
    - Bus and train schedules
    - Itineraries
    - Maps
    - Station outages
    - When is the next bus coming?
- With innovation increases the potential to turn solo-drivers into choice riders

## The San Francisco webcam network

- You can see footage of traffic from different webcams on your Smartphone!
- This is an iPhone application

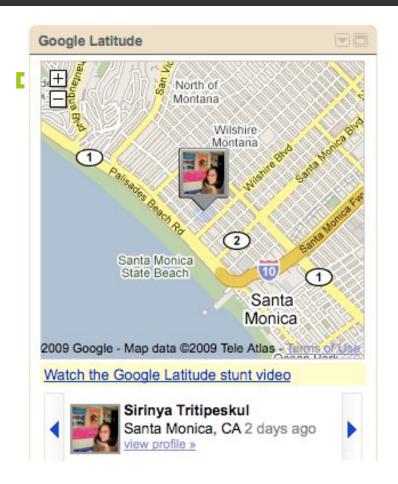




- Google Maps
  - Figure out driving, walking or transit directions
  - Figure out traffic conditions

#### Google Latitude

- See where friends & coworkers are using Google maps on your smart phone.
- Coordinate rides.
- Driver of shared-ride service (carpool, vanpool) can use Latitude so that passengers know where they are and when they're on their way.
- Also available on Google maps web site.



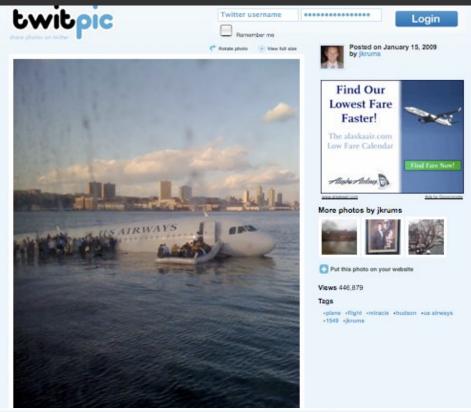
### Twitter

- What is Twitter?
  - Free
  - Communicate your status within 140 characters (size of a text message)
  - Sign up to follow other people's feeds
  - Updates in real time
  - Accessible via internet and smartphone



## Twitter can communicate breaking news

- First words
  about the US
  Airways plane
  accident over
  the Hudson
  river was via
  Twitter.
- A rescuer took his Smartphone, took a picture and posted to Twitpic



There's a plane in the Hudson. I'm on the ferry going to pick up the people. Crazy.

Login to logyo a comment

### ...and whether the CalTrain bike car is full

- Caltrain commuters can sign up for a CalTrain feed
  - Completely grassroots
  - Idea is that people can send tweets to this account about delays, congestion
- Example: Up in the Bay Area, there is a separate stream for bicycle commuters on CalTrain
  - Limited spaces for bikes mean that bike commuters need to be able to communicate how many bike spaces remain



#### bikecar

### NB383 2 old with front sign T17:40

3 minutes ago from web

Train 267 gallery style w 2 bike cars T16:53
about 1 hour ago from web

264 1 new. Stay cool, drink lots of water. T16:36
about 1 hour ago from web

SB134 two old; 2nd car with 40 spots T09:19
about 8 hours ago from web

SB332 one new; two bumped at 22nd T09:06
about 9 hours ago from web

230 2 old. South car 40 spots T08:42
about 9 hours ago from web

231 2 old. T08:28
about 9 hours ago from web

NB225: one old T08:02

Name bikecar Location SF Bay Area, CA Web http://cow.org/c/... Bio Caltrain bicycle car status provided by riders. See URL for instructions to update.

6 214 followers

Updates

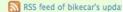
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Favorites

Following







# How can you use Twitter to encourage commuters to try alt modes?

- Tweet open seats in shared ride vans or carpools
- Have an alternative mode commuter tweet his/her commute and post the feed on an internal web site
- Create your own Twitter account to tweet announcements related to using alt modes to your commuters
  - Announce road and/or transit closures
  - Announce fun stuff related to your TDM program
  - Remember: Make it fun and interactive and people will opt-in.

## Closing thoughts about online viral marketing

- People want to feel connected, even if it is remotely through online social networking
- To change travel behavior and ultimately, that is what ETCs seek to do – you have to figure out how to reach out to your target population
  - If your target population is a cohort that is educated, technologically savvy, then you have to meet them through their social mediums
  - Create buzz give people something to talk about
- Online social networking, Web 2.0, and other options have the potential to provide useful information when alt mode commuters want or need it.

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