



# FROM HERE TO THERE

A creative guide to making public transport the way to go

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EMBARQ catalyzes environmentally and financially sustainable transport solutions to improve quality of life in cities.

Since 2002, it has grown to include five offices, located in Mexico, Brazil, India, Turkey and the Andean Region, that work together with local transport authorities to reduce pollution, improve public health and create safe, accessible and attractive urban public spaces. EMBARQ employs more than 130 experts in fields ranging from architecture to air quality management; geography to journalism; and sociology to civil and transport engineering.



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## Introduction: A Competitive Marketplace

**Motor companies like Toyota, Ford and Tata** spend tens of billions of dollars per year creating and maintaining their images, cultivating their customers and selling their products.

According to *Advertising Age*, in 2009, major auto companies spent a whopping \$21 billion worldwide on advertising, with General Motors, alone, shelling out more than \$3.2 billion.<sup>1</sup> These companies have armies of employees working in marketing departments and some of the world's best ad agencies on retainer.

The target for an increasing percentage of this spending is emerging markets, where auto companies see huge growth prospects. And for good reason. India, for example, has experienced a 20-fold increase in the number of motor vehicles in the last several decades.<sup>2</sup> In Brazil, likewise, the number of personal automobiles sold per year has jumped from 1.2 million in 2001 to 2.6 million in 2010.<sup>3</sup>

For anyone interested in the sustainability of developing world cities, these trends don't bode well. While private vehicle usage rates are an indicator of newfound wealth and prosperity, they also go hand in hand with deteriorating air quality, longer commute times, increased greenhouse gas emissions, higher rates of traffic fatalities and the destruction of public space.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, governments have routinely turned their backs on public transport, instead spending vast sums on new auto-centric infrastructure, such as expressways and ring roads, that encourage more private vehicle ownership and use.<sup>5</sup>

To reverse these consumer and development trends, public transport advocates need to make public transport a competitive and desirable alternative

# \$21 BILLION

Advertising dollars spent by major auto companies in 2009

# \$3.2 BILLION

Advertising dollars spent by General Motors in 2009



***In Brazil, the number of personal automobiles sold per year has jumped from 1.2 million in 2001 to 2.6 million in 2010.***





# FACTS AND FICTIONS

**FICTION** Marketing is a luxury transit agencies can't afford.

**FACT** Marketing is a core investment. A better public image attracts riders, leading to higher revenue and greater demand for transit service. In turn, higher revenue and greater demand increase the likelihood of service expansion and improvements, making public transport even more attractive to riders. In short, marketing can lead to a virtuous cycle of ever growing demand and service.

**FICTION** Public transport is a subsidy. There's no need to reach out to a wider audience because those who need or want to use public transport already do so.

**FACT** Public transit is not a subsidy for vulnerable populations (elderly, persons with disabilities and low income individuals/families), but an integral part of a high-functioning city that can retain jobs, attract investment and support a high-quality of life. Transit is a public good that benefits riders and non-users alike.

**FICTION** Branding and marketing by a transport agency is government propaganda, something to be avoided.

**FACT** Increasing transit use has tangible benefits for all. If an agency is nervous about marketing its service, then it should never have invested in the service to begin with.

to the private automobile. If this is done, cities will be more likely to invest in public transport projects, leading to increased personal mobility and a healthier urban environment.

## The importance of institutional structure

Successful marketing, branding and communications require an institutional structure that prioritizes their importance. Transit agencies should have an upper-level management position with decision-making power and budgetary control whose exclusive responsibility is this domain.

## A guide for beating the competition

The purpose of this guide is to help transit agencies develop strong and successful strategies for achieving three important goals:

- 1 Attract new users that currently use private transport such as cars and motorcycles;
- 2 Retain existing public transport users who might feel compelled to buy a private vehicle and;
- 3 Secure political and financial support from government officials.

This guide takes a cue from the private sector, which routinely and successfully influences consumer behavior. It adapts these eight branding, marketing and communications lines of work and applies them to the public transport sector.

- 1 Brand and identity
- 2 Internal communication
- 3 User education
- 4 User information systems
- 5 Marketing campaigns
- 6 Public relations and external communication
- 7 User feedback systems
- 8 Online engagement

Neither the list nor the recommendations within it are intended to be exhaustive. Instead, the goal of this guide is to encourage cities and transit agencies to think critically and creatively about how to make public transport the preferred way to travel.

For some time, it has been clear that cities need to create high-quality public transport systems to improve the urban environment. However, not until recently has it become clear that cities must also convince the public that these high-quality systems are in fact high-quality.

Finally, this guide focuses on bus rapid transit projects because BRT has become the solution of choice for developing world cities looking for fast, cost-effective ways to solve their transport problems. Of course, these elements are also applicable to non-BRT transport projects, such as rail systems and bicycle systems.





## Brand and identity: Build a Strong Brand

### Marketing expert Marty Neumeier puts it nicely:

“A brand is a person’s gut feeling about a product, service, or company.” If each customer feels vastly different about the values a company holds, that company has failed to create a strong, coherent brand.

*A brand is not a logo. A brand is a person’s gut feeling about a product, service, or company.*

–Marty Neumeier,  
author of *The Brand Gap*

To create a successful brand, then, a public transport system should start by defining its core values. Most public transport systems strive for a brand that clearly presents their services as modern, efficient, rapid, reliable, convenient, comfortable and safe. In many cases, extensive market research about current and potential passengers will reveal any other values that need to be incorporated in a successful brand.

These values become the foundation of the brand and should be injected into every part of the public transport system. Think of it this way: your bus (and station, map, signage, etc.) is your mission statement, your billboard and your annual report; everything about it represents your brand to the public, from the way it looks, to the way it runs, to the quality of service it provides.

Depending on your budget and the skills and competencies of your staff, you may want to consider hiring an external marketing and branding firm to implement many elements of this plan. If you choose to go this route, there should be at least one senior member of your agency with marketing experience who manages the contractor throughout the process.

### Choose to stand out

If other public transport services are already offered, it is essential to decide whether to closely connect the brand of the new system with that of the established system or to differentiate the new one entirely.

This choice may depend largely on the public perception of those other services. If the public perceives the current system poorly, it might be a



information

- > Values
- > Name
- > Logo
- > Color scheme
- > Identity system
- > Slogan
- > Vehicle design
- > Station design
- > Typeface/Color

### MACROBÚS BRAND

Guadalajara’s Macrobus has a modern, fun and colorful brand.



**Generally speaking, a prospect in your target market must be exposed to your message seven times before he or she begins to pay attention.**

—Belynda Johnson, *“Modern Transit Marketing III: How to Make it Work”*

good idea to differentiate the new brand. Another way of avoiding the stigma often associated with traditional bus transport is to not use the term “bus” in the new system’s name.

York Region, Canada is a great example of a city that took a creative approach to addressing this issue. In York Region, the majority of residents did not hold the public bus service in high regard. As a result, the city made an explicit decision to differentiate its new VIVA BRT service from existing bus services and position VIVA as a new, high-quality alternative. Once VIVA was successfully positioned and received positive feedback from the public, York Region then rebranded all other bus services under the new VIVA brand.

On the other hand, if other transport services are effective and popular, it makes sense to brand the new service in a way that connects it to the existing service. Los Angeles Metro is an example of a transit agency that chose this approach, positioning its new Orange Line, the city’s first BRT corridor, as an extension of its existing Metro rail system through the use of standard design elements and information systems, such as the system maps and website. Still the service maintained a distinctive identity through the use of the color orange in all of its marketing and communications materials.

Monterrey, Mexico is another example of a city that developed a unified brand to connect its bus and metro services. It gave the local and regional bus systems names that conformed to the Metrorrey Metro brand: TransMetro for the BRT,

Metrobús for local buses and Metroenlace for regional buses. The brand strategy, like that of Los Angeles Metro, was to position the integrated bus services as part of the city’s larger transport system. The logo, color scheme, maps and other materials also clearly associate TransMetro, Metrobús and Metroenlace with Metrorrey.

### Appeal to your passengers

If the brand of a new public transport line or system embodies local values and context, potential riders will be more likely to relate to it. It’s important to account for existing brands in a city or country when designing a brand so as to avoid unintended conflicts or unwelcome associations.

When contemplating the branding of a new BRT line, it is important to understand who the primary ridership groups will be. If the service is targeted at local residents, it may be important to entrench the brand in local associations. In Ahmedabad, India the city named its new BRT Janmarg, meaning “people’s way” in Gujarati, to foster a sense of local pride and ownership. Similarly, in Johannesburg, South Africa, the city chose Rea Vaya, which means “we are going” in Sotho.

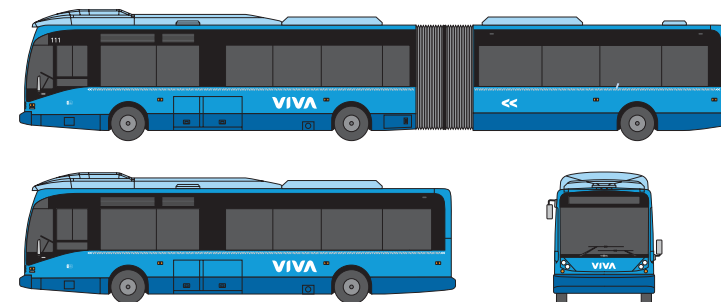
### Stay on brand

Communicating the values behind a brand requires persistence and repetition. If various elements of your system convey different messages through their design, content, color and quality, users will be confused, making marketing efforts less effective.

VIVA™



YORK  
REGION  
TRANSIT



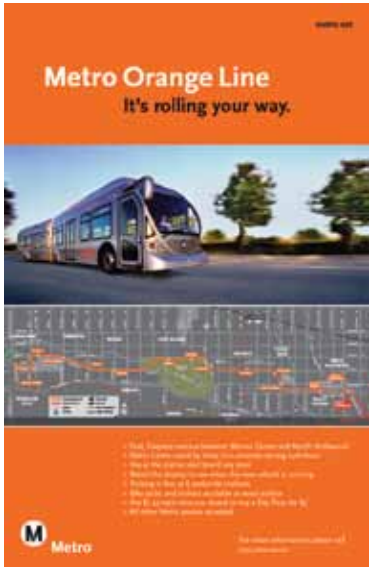
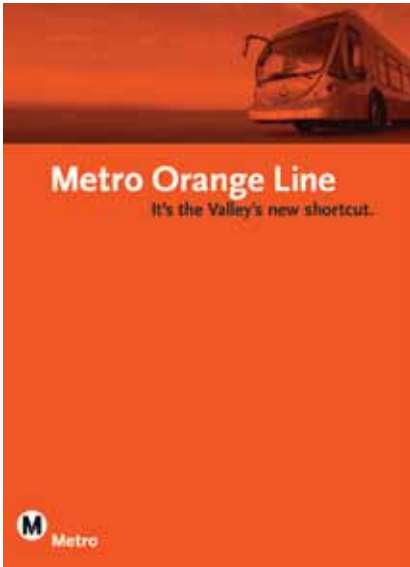
### A TOTAL BRAND SOLUTION

The VIVA BRT system in York Region, Canada created a powerful corporate brand and applied it throughout every aspect of the system from network maps and advertisements down to seat upholstery. Even the bus drivers’ uniforms fell under brand guidelines: the drivers’ vests used custom fabric on the back that was a hound’s-tooth-style design using the VIVA logo.



LOS ANGELES METRO

Through a unified brand and clear messaging, Metro has proven that it can capture the attention of riders in the most style-conscious of cities.



Go Metro

metro.net



PUTTING BRT ON THE MAP

Los Angeles Metro includes the Orange Line on its system map, sending the message that it provides the same quality of service as rail.



Metro Rail lines and stations	
Red Line	Green Line
Purple Line	Gold Line
Blue Line	
Metro Liner lines and stations	
Orange Line	Silver Line
	Street stop
Transfers	
Metrolink & Amtrak	
LAX FlyAway	
LAX Shuttle (free)	
Free parking	
Paid parking	
Bike parking	
DEC 2010	
Subject to change	

## Internal communication: Sell Your Values

**Every employee of a public transit agency**, from a bus driver to a senior engineer, should be thought of as a brand ambassador. In Société de Transport de Montréal (STM), Montreal's transit agency, half of its more than 8,600 employees work directly with customers.<sup>6</sup>

These interactions are important opportunities to maintain and reinforce the agency's core values and brand. But this constant contact means that every employee needs to understand and be invested in those values.

Private companies throughout the broader transport sector take this seriously. FedEx includes a primer on its global brand in each new employee's orientation. Southwest Airlines frequently invites its employees to be filmed in the company's commercials. Tactics like these can help employees recognize that they are, in some cases quite literally, the public face of your brand.

Employees can also be a testing ground for an agency's brand. Members of an agency likely represent a relatively wide cross-section of the population from lower-income, less educated and transit-dependent, to upper-middle

class, highly educated and car-owning. If employees can't identify with the brand or are not enticed to ride your service, chances are the general public won't be either.

### Communicate up

Communicating your agency's values and brand to all employees is an important example of communicating down, but good internal communication will also include an emphasis on "communicating up." This includes having protocols for street-level employees to report issues they've observed or encountered, as well as channels to communicate the importance of certain projects, decisions and events to high-level decision makers.

Because good transport projects don't always originate at the highest level of government, effective internal communication strategies

*The 290,000 team members understand that the powerful FedEx brand is our most important asset. Our brand is managed with a system of tools and guidelines to ensure that it is protected and consistently represented by team members. In other words, our team members "are" FedEx. They are the brand.*

—Gayle Christensen,  
managing director of  
brand, FedEx



information

- > Training manual
- > Strategic plan
- > Employee surveys
- > "Town hall" meetings
- > Idea box







*The streetcar project used to be a four-letter word in DC when I took over. After selling my vision to small groups across the agency, we created our Action Agenda, a two-year vision document that aligned the entire agency, to promote and communicate the goals of the streetcar project and everything else to nearly 1,000 staff members of the agency. Once that vision was accepted within our agency, we took it to external stakeholders and used it to gain their support.*

—Gabe Klein, former director, District Department of Transportation

establish channels for employees to express ideas and help persuade high-level decision makers to support these ideas.

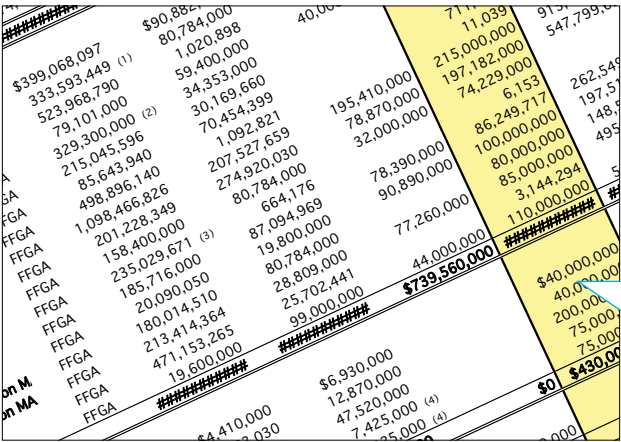
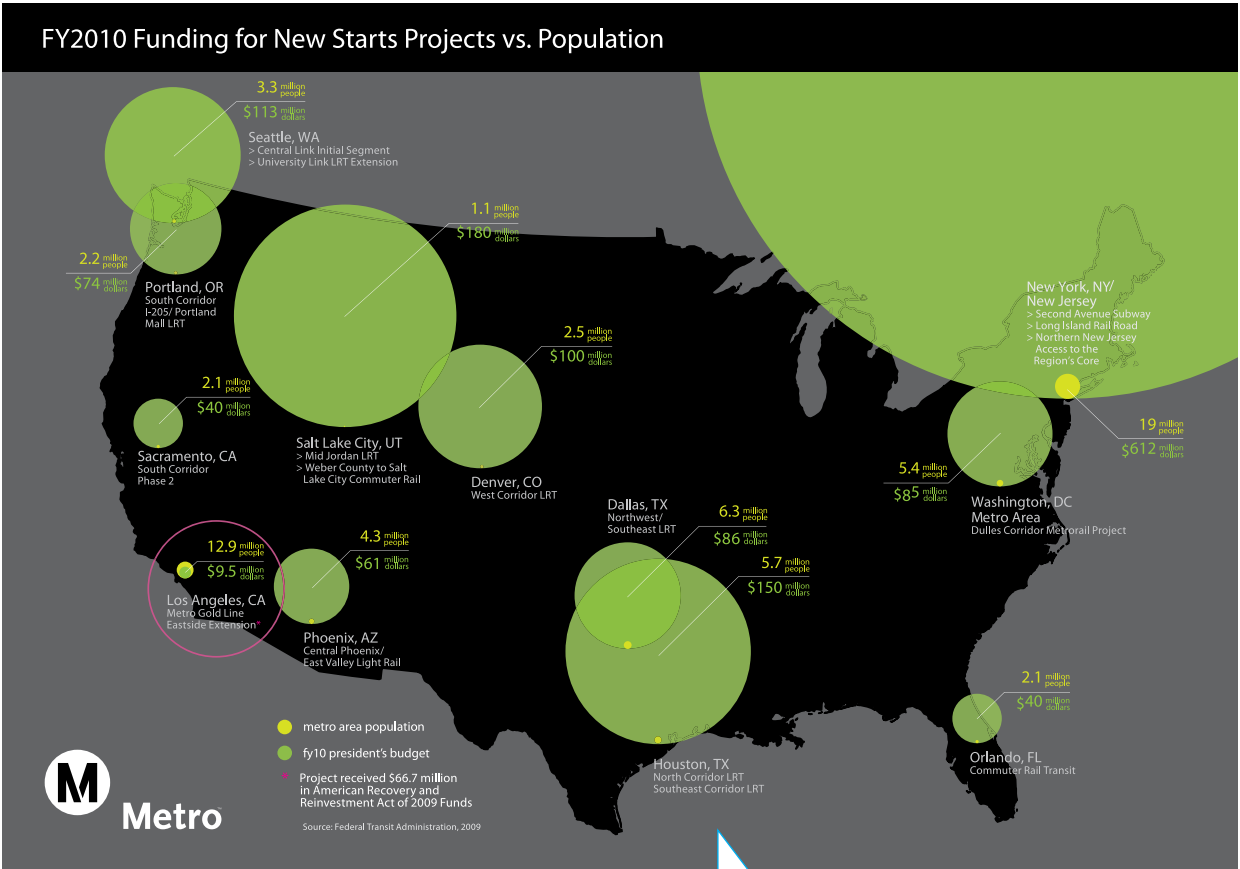
In 2009, the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) in Washington, D.C. resurrected a discarded plan to build streetcar lines that would crisscross the city. To build high-level support within the government for the project, DDOT created a well-designed “Action Agenda,” setting out clear goals

and milestones for the streetcar system. This strong internal communications tool gave life to a forgotten project lost within the bureaucracy, indicated the city’s commitment to the plan and created a common point of reference for all employees and politicians, including the mayor and city council members, to understand the department’s priorities. The first streetcar line is under construction and the surrounding residential and commercial development has begun to take off.



**PUT YOUR BEST FACE FORWARD**

Collectivo drivers in Mexico City often look disheveled and unprofessional. (top) The new Metrobús BRT stressed professional appearance of its drivers, creating a more welcoming and passenger-friendly service. (bottom).



**GOOD DESIGN IS GOOD POLITICS**

“Design played a key role in [Los Angeles Metro] governmental relations efforts. One of Metro’s key messages was that Los Angeles had not received a proportional “fair share” of federal transportation funding relative to its population and pivotal role as a national economic engine. [Metro’s creative services team] took the data from a spreadsheet and translated it into a simple but effective map that better tells the story. This map was the one piece of information L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa handed President Obama during a 5-minute meeting on the tarmac outside Air Force One.”

—Michael Lejeune, creative director, Los Angeles Metro

## User education:

# Get Started Early

**In Santiago, Chile,** city and federal officials decided to restructure the city's bus system. When the new system was finally launched, most Santiaguinos, as residents of the Chilean capital are known, were completely uninformed about the changes that the new system would bring to their daily commutes.

User education concentrated on high-level messages, using iconic personalities like soccer star Ivan Zamorano, but failed to address the specific and practical needs of users. The problems of insufficient service and incomplete infrastructure were exacerbated by the fact that citizens had not received enough personalized information about Transantiago — where it would run, how much it would cost, or how customers would pay, board and transfer. The new route map was released less than two weeks prior to the opening day and was poorly designed, making it difficult for passengers to navigate the new system.<sup>7</sup>

Confused citizens, not knowing where the new buses traveled, crowded the city's metro, nearly crippling the

rail system. The city's snarled public transport system created such a public outrage that the Chilean president issued a public apology and the Transport Minister resigned.<sup>8</sup>

Transantiago's problems went beyond poor communications, but the chaos was significantly amplified by citizens who had been left in the dark.

Transantiago's problems have been well-documented and are widely understood. What's not so well known is that most new BRT systems in developing countries have had similar communication problems during implementation, and a lack of funding and institutional capacity is usually the root cause of insufficient user education.<sup>9</sup>

### FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

Many cities, such as Guadalajara, Mexico, have recognized the effectiveness of educating children about public transport to boost ridership.



information

- > Information kiosks
- > Outreach in schools
- > Trial periods
- > Station ambassadors
- > Local news segments





*When we surveyed potential riders of the new Orange Line, it became clear that they weren't quite sure what it was. A train? A bus with stations? A different fare structure? To answer the questions — and impart even more information — we anchored the campaign with language that consistently begins with "It's..." This allowed us to point out the many new and appealing features of the line, the vehicles and the advantages for riders.*

—Michael Lejeune,  
creative director, Los  
Angeles Metro

### Make your system familiar

Citizens who consider riding public transport, particularly those who have the option to drive, can be deterred by the unfamiliarity of a system — where it goes, the fare collection, the boarding process — basically every aspect of using it. Agencies can overcome this hurdle with extensive user education, particularly prior to the opening of a new line.

Once a BRT station design has been chosen, consider installing a prototype station in an area of heavy pedestrian traffic so that potential riders can familiarize themselves with it. In Ahmedabad, India, the city built a sample station a year before operations began. The prototype allowed the city to showcase the station design and help educate the public about how it would operate. At the same time, the prototype allowed the city to test and tweak certain design elements.

Many cities have recognized the effectiveness of educating children about public transport to boost ridership. The basic idea of this approach is that

children will be likely to share what they've learned with their friends and family. Johannesburg, South Africa for example, hired a theatre production company to perform a Rea Vaya-themed play in primary schools to teach children how to use the system. Likewise, Leon, Mexico held Optibús-themed children's events.

### Answering the right questions

User education should help potential customers answer six fundamental questions:

- Who** is affected?
- What** is it?
- Where** does it go?
- When** does it start?
- How** do I get from here to there?
- Why** should I ride it?

Johannesburg helped prepare its citizens for the opening of the Rea Vaya BRT by setting up a kiosk in a major mall near a future route in Soweto to educate the public and give them an opportunity to ask questions about Rea Vaya.

### LEARN FROM RAIL

Dijon, France converted a centrally located office into La Maison du Tram (The House of the Tram), an exhibition designed to educate users on the nuts and bolts of its new light rail system. They branded the building using bright colors from the system's color palette and placed educational exhibits about the rail line in its interior. In the first year it was open, the exhibit attracted more than 20,000 visitors.







**GET THE WORD OUT**

For the launch of Optibús Phase 2, an extension of Leon, Mexico's BRT system, the city employed a cadre of employees who went door to door to explain the expansion and answer any questions.



**OPEN IT UP TO THE PUBLIC**

Johannesburg, South Africa built a prototype BRT station before operations began and allowed users to see for themselves how the new system would work.



**TARGET YOUR AUDIENCES**

Macrobus of Guadalajara, Mexico conducted a comprehensive user education campaign, reaching out to current bus riders and school children.



*Public transport can add real value to the city by being better integrated within its wider context.*

*–TfL “Interchange Best Practice Guidelines*

# User information systems: Systematize Your Information

User information systems are placed throughout a transport system to help all riders— no matter their ability, age or literacy level — navigate it with ease.

Transport for London (TfL), the agency that oversees the British capital’s buses, trains and roads, has taken a rigorous and systematic approach to user information. Part of what makes TfL so successful is that it adheres to strict design guidelines across its transport network. Four design rules for TfL’s interchange facilities and signage – places where passengers transfer between modes – are good governing principles for all user information systems:<sup>10</sup>

**Efficiency** Place user information at decision points where pedestrians can easily read it without obstructing the movement of others. Design systems that are simple to manage and maintain. Provide space for displaying temporary information as well.

**Usability** The design and placement of signage, maps, kiosks and ticket machines should make

the transit system easy to use for all passengers, including people with limited mobility. Use vandal-proof materials and ensure information is illuminated at night.

**Understanding** Make navigation and movement easy by designing information systems that are intuitive for all users and well-integrated into their context. Clearly identify connections to routes and destinations. Place signage and information where passengers need it. Use technology to support wayfinding.

**Quality** Use high-quality and well-designed materials to help improve the user experience and enhance a transit system’s values of modernity, cleanliness and quality.

## Think Outside the System

Customers’ trips don’t begin when they enter the station and don’t end when

  
information

- > Diagrams and maps
- > Schedules
- > Fare and ticketing
- > Station markers
- > Information kiosks
- > Wayfinding signage
- > Real-time arrival information
- > Audible announcements

Central Station  
CITY CENTRE

↑ WEST END  
Buchanan Street  
Queen Street Station  
George Square  
Sauchiehall Street  
← BROOMIELAW IFSD



## THINK LIKE A PEDESTRIAN

Clean, simple and user-friendly signage helps pedestrians navigate London.





**Passengers want to see their public transit operators buying into a set of common standards based on their needs and wants.**

-Tyrone Pardue,  
founder and CEO,  
Pardue Associates

they exit. You should not only help customers navigate within the system but help them navigate throughout their entire trip, which begins and terminates within the surrounding urban area. Therefore it is important for wayfinding signage, information kiosks and other information systems to be provided in the neighborhoods around the stations.

Naming and designing stations in ways that take into account local landmarks can help riders find popular destinations easily. Include nearby points of interest on station wayfinding materials, provide good station-area maps and place directional signs to stations in high traffic areas. Maps, signs and other materials should clearly indicate opportunities to transfer to other lines or modes.

### Maintain the brand across all user information systems

A transit agency should have consistent branding across its user information systems. Outside the bus, customers have the most contact with these visual guides, so it is important to ensure that they are visually associated with the rest of the brand. This can be done through uniform typefaces, color schemes, logos, layout, print materials and other design elements.

### Keep it simple... but informative

There are two common mistakes that transit agencies make when designing user information systems. The first is inundating the user with too much information. Route timetables, for example, may contain plenty of information, but they are hardly simple to use. LA Metro created a 15-Minute Map showing only buses that arrive at least every quarter-hour, eliminating the need for passengers to check data-heavy timetables.

The second common mistake is not providing enough information. Not everyone possesses the same level of understanding about stations, routes and schedules as transport planners who are most familiar with the system. Designers of user information systems need to think more like novice users and less like transport planners.

### THINK ABOUT:

- > What information will your user need at key decision points in his/her journey?
- > Can children and elderly see and understand the information?
- > Is the most basic information conveyed in a way that reduces or eliminates language and literacy barriers?
- > Can the information be updated in a timely and efficient manner if the routes or system changes?
- > Is the information conveyed in accessible ways for people with disabilities?
- > Do users need information in multiple languages?



### MAKE A MARK

In Copenhagen, Metro stations feature "totems" that are both functional and iconic.



### STRICT GUIDELINES

Transport for London uses strict guidelines to ensure that all user information systems are standardized and clear.





**FIND YOUR WAY**

Legible London is a wayfinding system to encourage walking. Developed by Transport for London, the system follows strict brand guidelines and uses beautiful design to make the city friendly and accessible.

**KNOWING IS EVERYTHING**

The new BRT system in China uses digital displays to indicate when the next bus is arriving, eliminating the uncertainty that can deter potential riders.



## Marketing campaigns: Know What Riders Want

### Marketing is not a substitute for high-quality service.

For example, it's not enough that a clean well-lit station helps riders feel safe; the station has to actually be safe. Marketing is most powerful when it promotes something that actually exists.

Riders' perception of transit service is often influenced by five factors:<sup>11</sup>

- 1 Reliability
- 2 Frequent service
- 3 Safety and cleanliness
- 4 Service hours
- 5 Cost and savings

If your service can successfully deliver these things, you are at a good starting point. But it's not enough. Remember, do something good and tell people about it. That's good marketing.

### Building political support

While marketing campaigns should

focus primarily on attracting new riders, they can also help build public and political support for a project. This means getting the support of people who won't necessarily use the system and educating them about the broader benefits of high-quality transport.

Los Angeles Metro's "Opposites" campaign and larger organizational rebrand not only contributed to an increase in discretionary ridership from 24% to 36% of riders, it also helped pass Measure R, a proposed ½ cent tax increase to fund major capital projects of the transit authority.<sup>12</sup>

*Travelers' perception... [of] public transport systems [must] be thoroughly comprehended by marketing concepts and strategies so that a newly built public transport system... can be successful.*

—C.H. Wei and C.Y. Kao, "Measuring Traveler Involvement in Urban Public Transport Services"



information

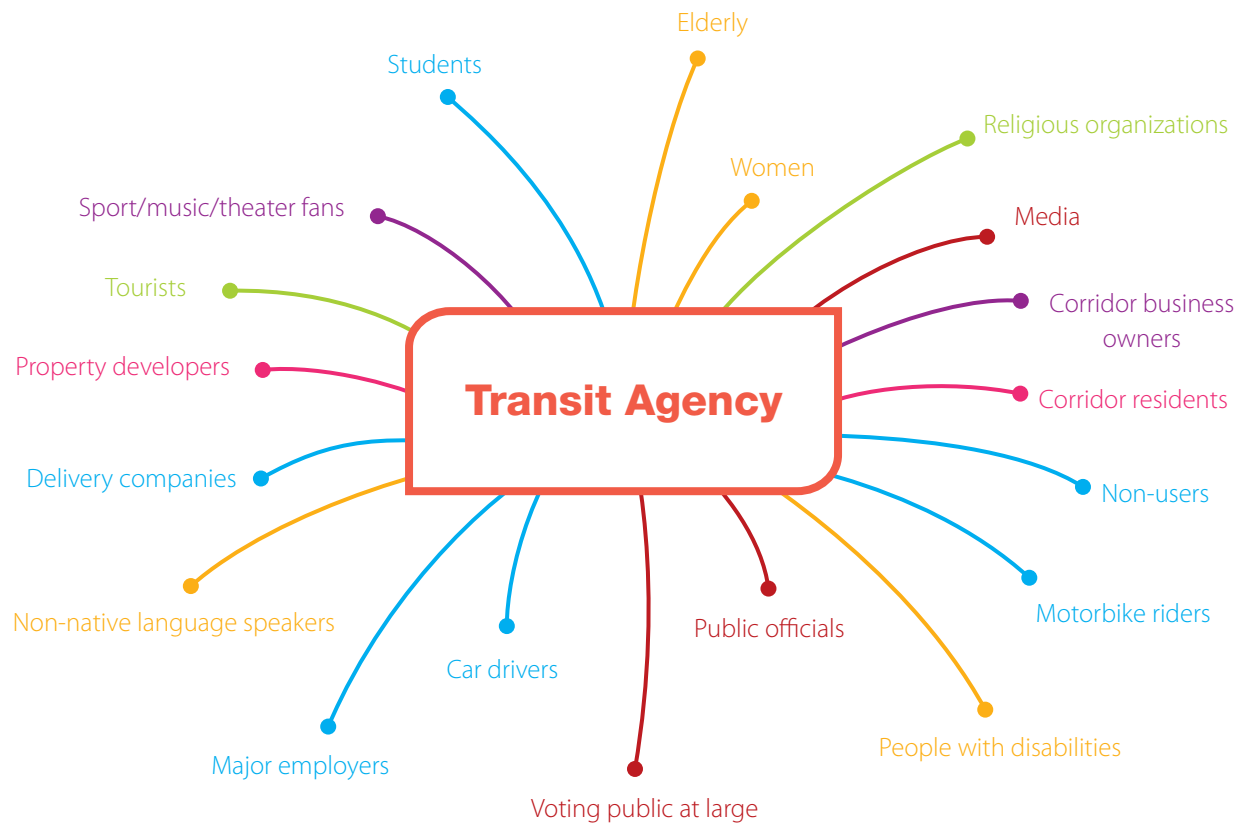
- > Television/radio ads
- > Billboards
- > Stickers and postcards in local stores
- > Kiosk at events
- > Bus ads
- > Internet campaigns
- > Novelty items (t-shirts, bags, etc)
- > Free service prior to launch

### FRONT AND CENTER

The HealthLine in Cleveland, Ohio promotes its service with large and playful advertisements along the bus corridor.



Once you know your audiences, you can begin tailoring your messages to them.

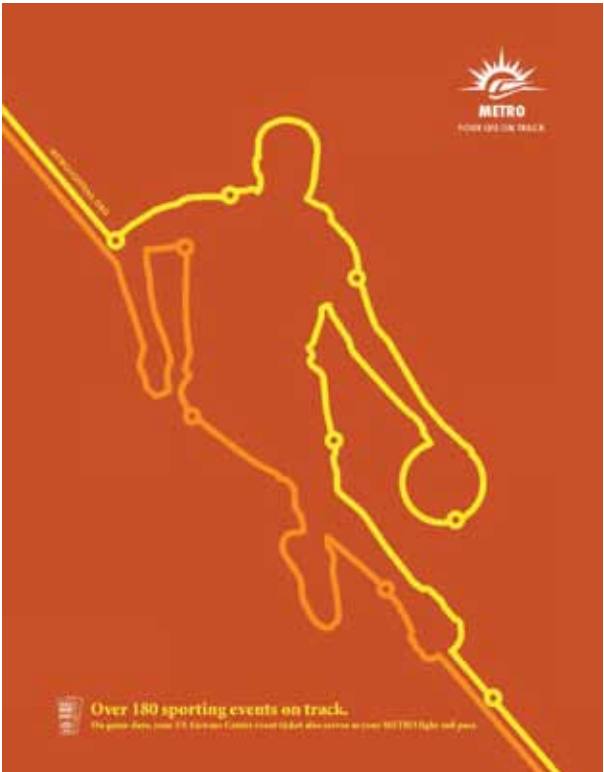
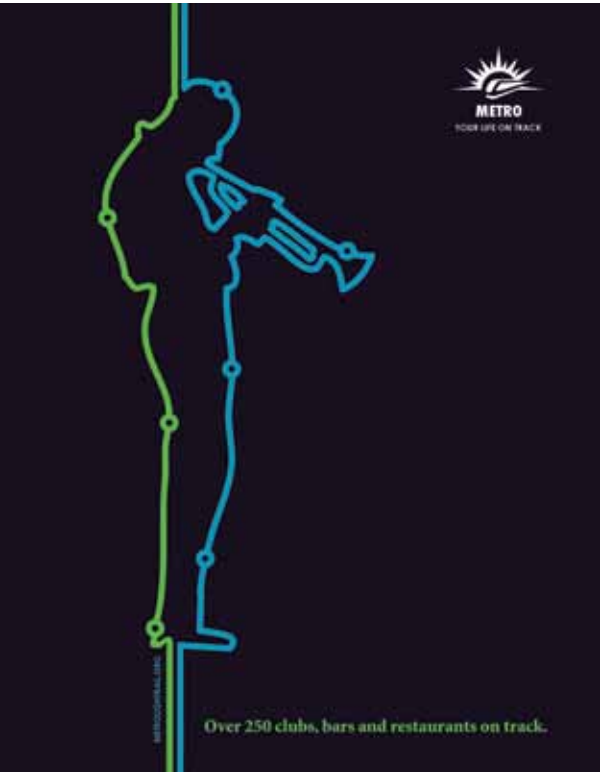
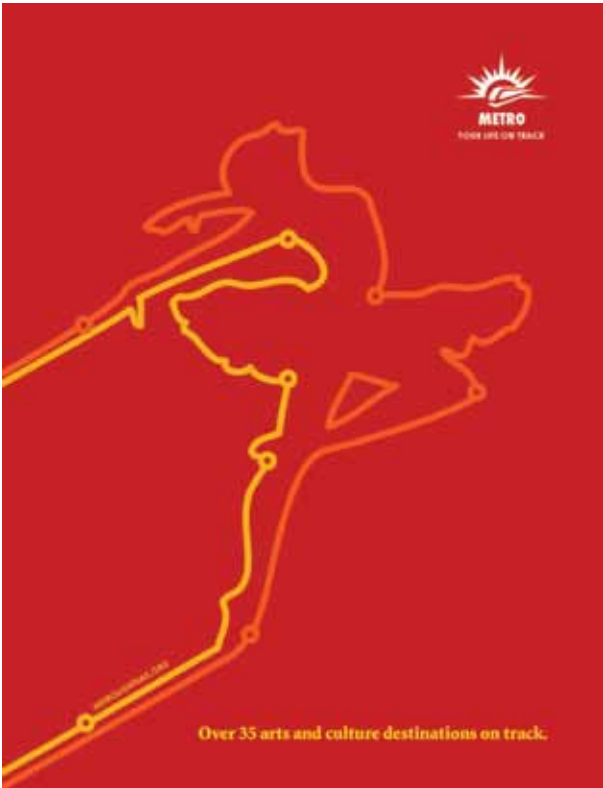


MESSAGES

- Jump on, jump off! It's the quickest commute.
- Worried about parking? Avoid the hassle.
- The city's economic lifeline.
- Accessible to all!
- The best spot to live is near the station.
- Your ticket to the hottest acts in town.

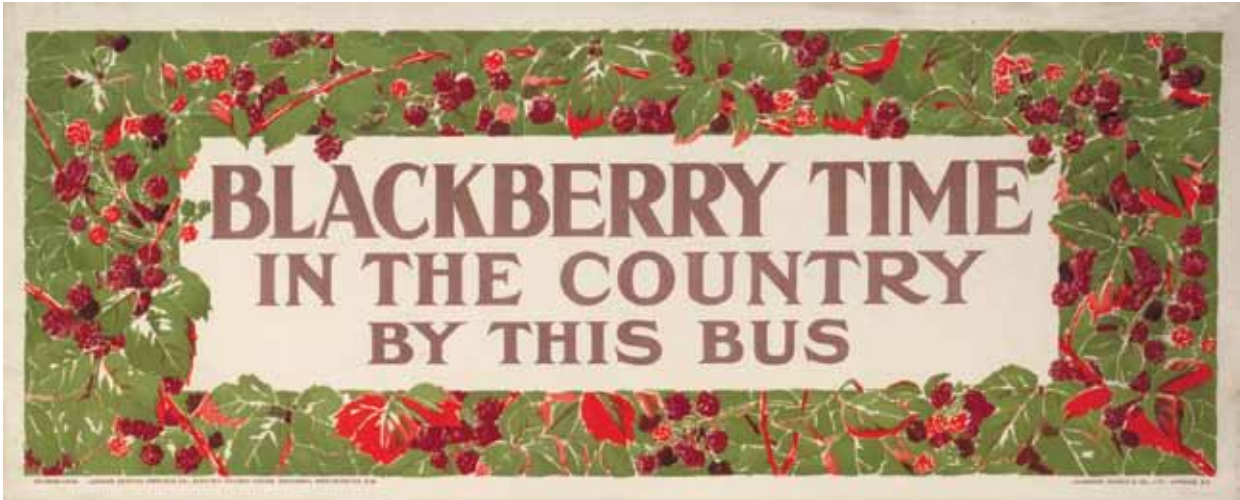
YOUR LIFE ON TRACK

The Phoenix/Tempe area METRO Light Rail in the United States reaches beyond typical commuters with this ad campaign promoting nightlife options along its corridor.



A PIECE OF HISTORY

In the early 20th century, the London Underground and other transport providers had various advertisements that promoted public transport as a means for workers to commute, for shoppers — at the time almost exclusively women — to reach stores and for families to take leisure trips.



OPPOSITES ATTRACT

Los Angeles Metro created an advertising campaign called "Opposites" that presented LA Metro as an attractive solution to various problems, each targeting different values and tastes. To get trendsetters to help spread their message, LA Metro gave out free branded t-shirts to baristas in fashionable neighborhoods who then promoted the campaign.





# Pardon our dust.

We're making improvements to this Metro Rail Station.

## WHAT'S GOING ON?

Building good will involves explaining the purpose of road closures and construction activities to both riders and the general public.



## Public relations and external communication:

# Control the Narrative

**External communication can be extremely effective** at controlling a transit agency's image and the story it tells about a project.

Although the press typically reacts to negative occurrences, you want to attract press coverage that you can control and steer. As a general rule, it's important to address problems and negative perceptions proactively, rather than wait to be called for comment on a reactionary story.

In Delhi, India, the first phase of the city's BRT was plagued with operational and communications problems from the start. In the absence of strong communication from the city, media seized on the shortcomings and skewered the BRT, focusing particularly on the problems the new system caused for car drivers.<sup>13</sup> Although many of the operational issues have since been remedied, the negative press has contributed to doubts about the viability of BRT, which has significantly slowed system expansion in Delhi.

### Develop relationships with media

The more comfortable journalists feel contacting a transit agency, the easier it is to disseminate facts and key messages about the service. It's important to be as accessible as possible to journalists otherwise you run the risk of them not getting the facts straight or spreading a negative story.

Outside of Toronto, Canada, York Region Transit constantly worked with the local media to help them understand the new VIVA priority bus network. Alina Kelly, a transport marketing expert whose firm conducted the marketing and communications for VIVA, said they strove to give the media as much information as possible. "Government entities are often afraid of media and tend not to communicate with them, taking a "duck and hide"



*Government entities are often afraid of media and tend not to communicate with them, taking a "duck and hide" mentality. With VIVA, we had a person whose only job was to feed the media stories about the project.*

—Alina Kelly, president, AKelly Consulting, Inc.



information

- > Press kits
- > Mailing lists
- > Media interviews
- > Outreach at events
- > Construction updates







**People-to-people interaction is possible on a study tour. That informal interaction helps cross-learnings and forms this cohesive group so that people, after going on the study tour, can remember a lot of things.**

—SK Lohia, *Official on Special Duty, Mass Rapid Transit Systems, Ministry of Urban Development, India*

mentality,” Kelly says. “With VIVA, we had a person whose only job was to feed the media stories about the project.”

This relationship building was hugely successful. The editorial board of *Toronto Star*, the region’s largest local newspaper, had been terribly critical of the idea to bring “rapid transit” to the suburbs, but was handily won over by the launch of the new service. “They ran a two-page spread about VIVA which was almost verbatim a piece we had prepared,” Kelly said. “My whole budget couldn’t have bought that kind of publicity in the *Star* and we got it for free.”

Your stakeholder relationships don’t end when construction finishes; neither should PR and external relations. Public relations efforts should be closely tied to the daily operation of your transit service.

### Tailor the story

Journalists with different beats will be interested in different aspects of the system depending on their topics of interest. For example, a health reporter might want to know how BRT increases physical activity, whereas a business reporter would want to know how a BRT corridor spurs real estate development. Consider each journalist and outlet independently and what will engage and attract his or her readers.

### Organize tours

Construction tours of the new system and study tours of iconic systems like Bogota and Curitiba offer good opportunities to develop relationships with journalists. If your agency plans to visit another city where a similar project has been implemented, invite local journalists along.

Include vocal opponents openly and deliberately in tours. At worst, they will continue to be skeptical, but the more you approach them and include them in the process, the better your chances of “converting” them will be. VIVA’s experience with the *Toronto Star* speaks strongly to this point.

### Get endorsements

Consider the various vectors of influence on your ridership and access them. When important “taste makers,” such as popular musicians, athletes or local media personalities are more informed about the operations of the system and its benefits, the more likely they are to spread the word. Las Vegas, for example, used entertainment show the Blue Man Group to market the launch of its MAX BRT line.

Being nominated for international awards can also be a great way to elevate the status and prestige of a project. The annual Sustainable Transport Award created by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy has helped

raise the profile of the Metrobús BRT in Istanbul and the Janmarg BRT in Ahmedabad.

### Anticipate and avoid criticism

Give the community as much information about your new line even before construction begins. This will help keep the public informed and will decrease the chance that it is caught off-guard by road disruptions. Before the start of construction, identify major phases that will require new community updates. Communications for each new phase should include potential travel disruptions, alternate routes to avoid them, updates on construction progress and completion timetables.

### Manage expectations

Be clear about what benefits future

passengers can expect from the BRT line and don’t oversell potential benefits. In Boston, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) made this mistake, vigorously promoting its new Silver Line bus service as a subway on tires. While it was an improvement over the previous bus service, to some the Silver Line didn’t live up to the expectations MBTA had cultivated in the public.<sup>14</sup> The gap between expectations and reality led to disappointment, making it more difficult to fund or expand the system in the future.

Alina Kelly said of York Region’s VIVA project: “In Phase I we didn’t promote ‘rapid’ because it wasn’t much faster. In transit marketing, like anywhere else, you simply can’t sell what you don’t own.”

**Being nominated for the 2010 Sustainable Transport Award is not only motivating, but it also shows that Macrobus is recognized as an international best practice. This award means more than honoring buses, infrastructure and technology. Ultimately, it helps us promote a cultural change towards a more organized and sustainable transport system.**

—Diego Monraz Villaseñor, *director general, Sistema de Tren Electrico Urbano, Guadalajara, Mexico*



Los Angeles Metro developed an extensive public relations plan around the construction and launch of the Orange Line BRT. Each piece of press material adhered strictly to the previously established brand and identity system, creating a comprehensive narrative about the project. The agency shot video of Orange Line footage in 6 languages and distributed it to every TV station in the Los Angeles area. They used sound walls around the construction site as advertising space, not for other advertisers, but for the Orange Line itself. Metro distributed construction updates and notices through community newspapers, meetings, events, employer locations and even delivered fliers to doorsteps.



**GET ENDORSEMENTS**

Las Vegas used popular entertainment show, Blue Man Group to market the launch of its ACE BRT line.

**BLUE MAN GROUP RIDES GREEN.**

**ACE**  
New Hybrid Vehicles

Introducing ACE. The new rapid transit system. Featuring fuel-efficient hybrid vehicles. Connecting Downtown to the Strip, Henderson to North Las Vegas. It's the latest way to travel quicker, cleaner and greener from your RTC.

rtcsonv.com **RTC TRANSIT**


**WALK THIS WAY**

Guangzhou led a series of walking tours, opening the system up for local residents to explore and learn.

**CONSTRUCTION TOURS**

Johannesburg held regular construction tours of their Rea Vaya system for journalists.

**CELEBRATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

President of Mexico, Felipe Calderón celebrates the launch of Guadalajara's Macrobus by riding the bus.



## User feedback systems:

# Be Responsive to Riders

**In a customer-driven industry, such as public transport,** communication channels should be bi-directional. Without effective methods to communicate feedback, both positive and negative, riders can feel unimportant.

### Let riders try it out

A number of public transport systems have opened new services to the public for several days free of charge. In these examples, user education efforts can be nicely combined with feedback systems, helping customers learn how to use the system and at the same time gathering feedback that can be incorporated into the final design.

Ahmedabad's Janmarg operated for free for the first 100 days of service. While this lengthy trial period cost the city nearly \$700,000, it enabled many citizens to use the system and get accustomed to it. Janmarg is now widely considered a best practice of BRT.

Bogota's TransMilenio also held free trials for its first BRT corridor for three

weeks between December 2000 and January 2011. The trials were only during non-peak hours (9:00 AM-4:00 PM) and helped thousands of users understand how the system worked. These users became multipliers, helping other new users get acquainted with the system.

It's important to note, however, that free trials can backfire if not properly planned and delivered. Both Metrobús in Mexico City and Macrobus in Guadalajara had extremely high passenger volumes during the free trials, resulting in chaotic operations. Although the systems eventually improved, the public's first impression of a crowded, poorly run system prevailed for years to come, especially among non-users.



information

- Call center/SMS service
- Comment cards
- Periodical surveys
- Online contact methods: e-mail, website comment form, social media, electronic kiosks

### PLEASE COME IN

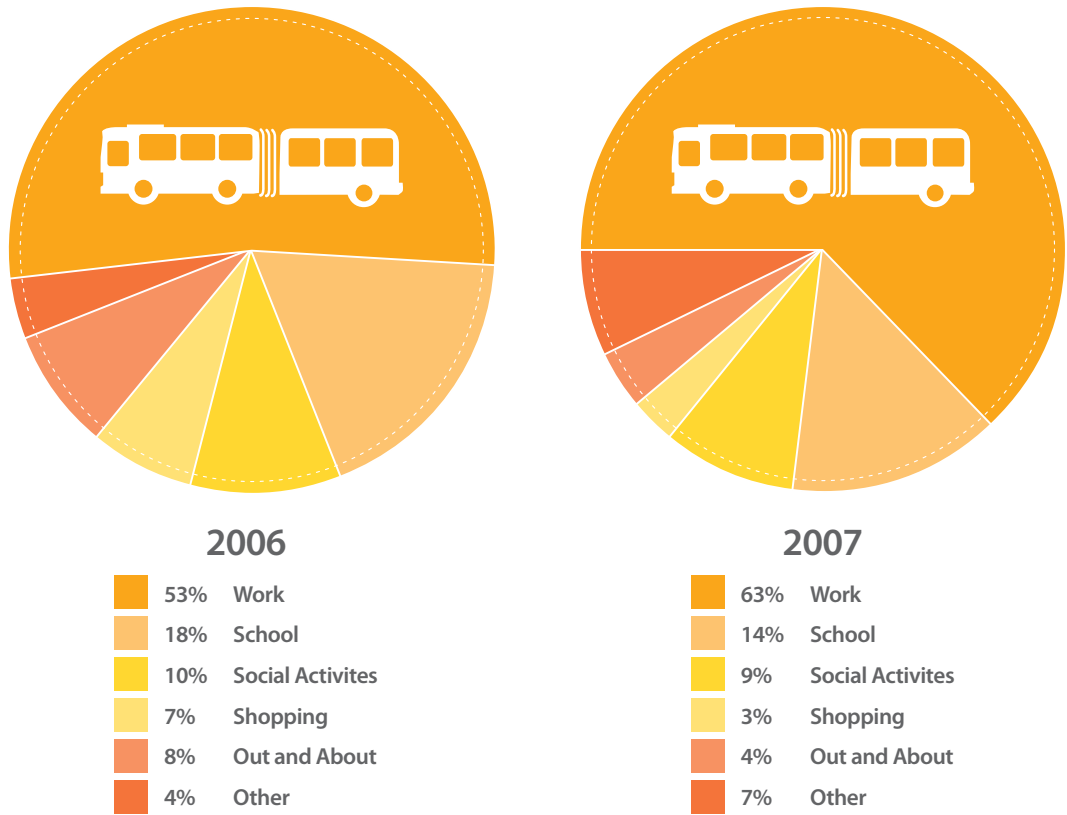
Los Angeles Metro's Customer Center is colorful and inviting.



SURVEY PASSENGERS

In Mexico City, Metrobús surveys riders every six months to measure user perception and determine if it needs to make any changes. Bogota's TransMilenio surveys its riders on a monthly basis to track customer satisfaction as well. The surveys include evaluations of different aspects of the system — access, stations, fare collection, trunk services, feeder services, support personnel and personal security, among others. In addition to functioning as a managerial tool, the surveys, along with reliability and punctuality metrics, are used along with performance indicators to award the best bus operators.

Metrobús, Mexico City: Users by purpose of trip



FEET ON THE GROUND

The Las Vegas RTC has student transit ambassadors spend time on the system answering questions and gathering feedback from riders.



FACELIFT

Los Angeles Metro hired a well known architect to convert its customer service center from a dark, unwelcoming structure into a cheerful, friendly office. The message the new design sends is loud and clear: please come in.





## Online engagement: New Ways to Access Information

### The ways in which people access information

have undergone a huge transformation in the last decade, with more and more people going online to find information they need.

Yet many transit agencies still don't have comprehensive online strategies. This is a huge problem that must be remedied. The good news is that establishing a sophisticated online presence is relatively cheap and can have a large impact on riders.

#### Reach users before they arrive

The first thing potential riders want to know before deciding to use public transport is whether it can get them to their desired destination. A website that features cleanly designed maps and schedules can provide this information to passengers before they ever leave their homes. It can also tell them expected travel times, potential delays or any other information that would effect their commute. All these things make public transport more user-friendly, reliable and accessible, increasing

the chance that discretionary riders become loyal customers.

It's important to note that just having a website featuring this information is not enough. The website must be user-friendly, well-designed and conform to brand standards.

#### Be Proactive!

Managing your online presence also serves a crucial "defensive" role. By not having an online presence, you leave the door open for someone else to create one for you — one over which you have no control. Buy all appropriate web domains as soon as the BRT system name is chosen. Also consider taking cues from politicians and buy domains of websites that you would never want to exist, such as "ihatetransmilenio.com." This can go a long way in preventing outspoken opponents from publicly slandering a project.

#### AT THE TIP OF YOUR FINGERS

In Boston, Governor of Massachusetts Deval Patrick learns how to get arrival time information for Boston's buses on his mobile phone.



information

- > Passenger-friendly website
- > Facebook
- > Twitter
- > Orkut
- > Mobile/SMS tools



### ONLINE TIPS

Register domain name, Facebook, Twitter and other accounts early

Monitor local online forums and blogs for feedback

Post online copies of any printed item riders can pick-up in-system

Keep names, brand consistent across all online platforms

Open data to users and developers

### Go social

The Transportation Research Board is investigating the potential of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, to increase ridership, reach new audiences, promote closer relationships with customers and communicate real-time information more efficiently. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York City, for example, uses Facebook and Twitter to communicate with thousands of riders every day, keeping them up to speed on service changes and construction developments. Similarly, Johannesburg has used Twitter as a medium to promote its new high-speed rail system, hosting a “tweetup” — a public gathering organized on Twitter — which was attended by hundreds of people.

Often transit agencies fall into the trap of hiring a junior-level employee to set the social media strategy. However, it’s important that this person be experienced in the field.

### Keep your finger on the pulse

There’s a great chance that customers are talking about your service among their peers, on blogs, e-mail lists, social networks or other websites. These conversations offer invaluable insight into the perceptions and

experiences of riders, insight that might otherwise cost you significant time and money to collect. Stay aware of the online conversation and opportunities it presents to collect feedback and promote service changes, improvements or extensions.

Many of the newer online communications options, particularly social media, can be used to create more feedback systems. Sometimes your existing customers can attract new riders more easily with new media than your agency ever could through traditional marketing. In cities throughout the U.S., fans of sustainable transport have built grassroots networks of supporters, epitomized by New York City’s Streetsblog.org. Some transit agencies have capitalized on these groups to get information out about new services and to get feedback and suggestions for improvements.

### Open your data

Open source software projects have proven that informal groups of users can create useful tools with little or no resources beyond their own time. Transit agencies can harness this power by opening up their operational data — travel times, bus schedules, stop locations, GPS feeds — not only for the public to see but for developers to create extraordinary applications: trip

planners, real-time arrival websites, mobile applications, customized maps and much more.

Google Transit directions are a prime example of what agencies can do by opening up their data. Many cities around the world now offer comprehensive transit trip planning through Google Maps. In Northern California, Redwood Transit System combined the data it submitted to Google Transit, with additional mobile and web-based information services and a new bus pass program and saw ridership increase 30%.<sup>15</sup> The transit agency in Duluth, Minnesota recorded a 12% increase in ridership in the year after introducing Google Transit directions.<sup>16</sup>

The District Department of Transportation in Washington, D.C. is installing large informational screens in bus stations and at busy pedestrian locations throughout the city that display real-time information about the nearest bus and Metro routes, car and bike sharing stations, as well as current weather and service disruptions.

### Go mobile

Mobile phone applications are another innovative practice that cities are adopting to make public transport

more attractive. Through applications like NextBus, city dwellers in places like New York, Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles can check the real-time location and projected arrival times of buses from their mobile phones. This type of information reduces the uncertainty of using public transport.

Even in cities where transit agencies have not opened their data, entrepreneurs are coming up with innovative ways to share public transportation information. For example, Mobile 4 Mumbai used data collected by social media to build a mobile application allowing users to find bus routes in the city. Social media consultant and Mobile 4 Mumbai user Moksh Juneja explains that the new application has been a big success, “This application is a blessing and we need not be dependant on anyone to reach a particular destination,” he said in an interview with *DNA*, a leading Indian newspaper. “This application has given renewed confidence to the individual bus passengers.”

While entrepreneurs like those that run Mobile 4 Mumbai continue to innovate, it’s important for transit agencies to view them as allies and support them by making data open to the public.



### MAKE IT USER-FRIENDLY

Throughout American cities, Nextbus provides smartphone users with real-time bus arrival data, making it easier for passengers to schedule their trips.



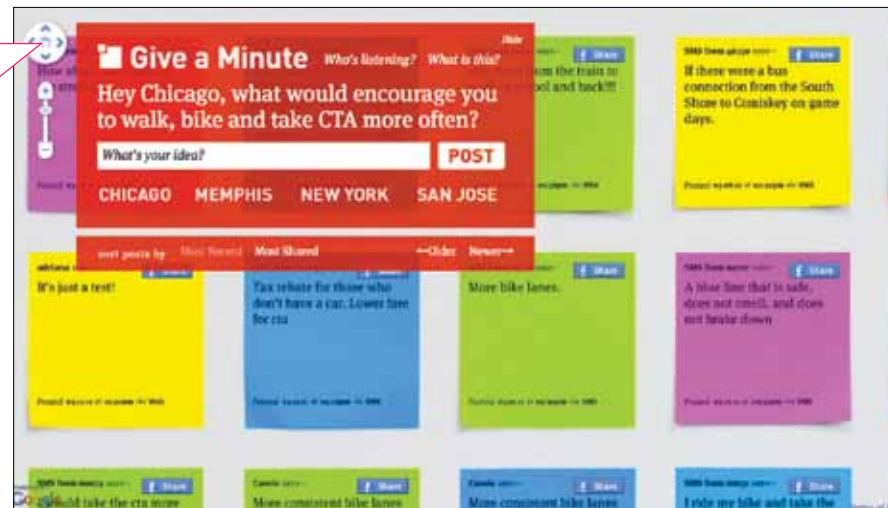
### ENGAGE CUSTOMERS ONLINE

Transjakarta operates a website with a route planner, Facebook and Twitter pages, online route and system maps, comment forms, a rider poll, live station security camera video feeds and even a way that customers can send feedback through SMS.



### GET CREATIVE

Chicago partnered with a group of foundations on "Give a Minute" to ask citizens how the city could encourage more transit use, biking and walking. Ideas could be submitted online, or by text message.





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Governor Patrick; pg. 48 Transjakarta, Give a Minute; pg. 49 PezMico.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of Dario Hidalgo, Rejane Fernandes, Richard Katz, Rhys Thom, Kavita Ramakrishnan, Ozen LeCompte, and Burhan Kocaman. Special thanks to Erica Schlaikjer for lending her sharp eye and editing skills and to Jeffrey Riecke for his research assistance. Alina Kelly and Michael Lejeune also provided invaluable input. We would also like to acknowledge the following people and organizations for their help with the media contained in this report: Elda Flores, Leon, Mexico, General Direction of Mobility; Lesa Rair, Matthew Dickens, American Public Transportation Association; Jackie Dennis, RTC of Southern Nevada; Karl Fjellstrom, Dani Simons, Ting Ting Wang, Liang Yin, Institute for Transportation & Development Policy; Jette Banke, Knud Holscher Design; Maïté Picq, Sophie Hazera, Grand Dijon; Jerry Masek, Greater Cleveland RTA; Wendy Neville, Paulette Kirby, London Transport Museum; Hillary Foose, Valley Metro; Kimberly Moser, Brampton Transit; David Ellis and Alice Lambert, Transport for London.

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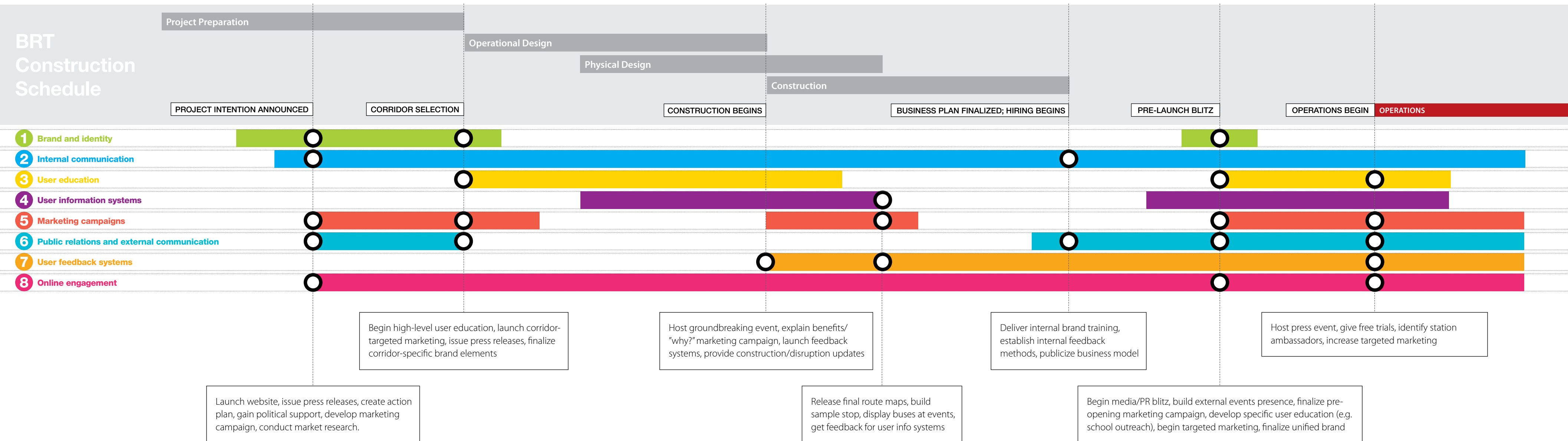




# CREATIVE TIMELINE

The lines of work we've identified are laid out in basic chronological order and are by no means a strict ordering, similar to the chapters outlined in the "Bus Rapid Transit Planning Guide" published by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP).

## BRT Construction Schedule



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