



GETTING PEOPLE “ON THE BUS”:

An Analysis of the Successful Marketing of Small Transit Systems

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INTRODUCTION

As planners, we often find ourselves trying to entice the public to change their behaviors in order to provide an environment more conducive to good planning practices. The Town of Chapel Hill has made a commitment not to widen or add roads, despite the inevitable growth in both population and jobs. Chapel Hill Transit will help share the burden of new traffic to the area, but its profile in the community will need to rise.

What convinces the public to utilize public transportation? Strict parking restrictions and high transportation costs ensure that people have no other alternative but to use transit, and Chapel Hill Transit has supported the university and hospital population well. But what about those sectors of the population that are not being captured by these regulations - those people living in Chapel Hill Transit's service area who do not have to utilize the transit system daily? How can they be made aware of the services Chapel Hill Transit provides to their neighborhoods and be enticed to use the system? The existence of a generally highly educated, liberal, and environmentally conscious public seems to provide favorable conditions for a transit system to thrive. How can this public be encouraged to use public transit more frequently?

The purpose of this project is to establish a set of best practices for the marketing of small transit systems, by examining several case studies of similar transit systems to Chapel Hill Transit. The conclusions drawn from these case studies will then provide the basis for recommendations to Chapel Hill Transit on how to best market their services and how to reach the larger communities of Carrboro and Chapel Hill.

CHAPTER 1:

Transit Marketing

In the eyes of some, public transportation has long been at odds with Americans' love affairs with their automobiles and the personal freedom, mobility, and independence they provide. Nevertheless, in today's growing and expanding communities and metropolitan areas, public transportation provides a valuable solution to increased congestion, pollution, and need for access. Each day the imperative for public acceptance and use of public transportation increases. (TCRP 2000, p.3)

Chapel Hill Transit administers to a service population of over 52,000, spread throughout the towns of Chapel Hill and Carrboro. Annual ridership has been rising steadily the past few years, but there are still significant portions of the market that are not riding transit (Chapel Hill Short Range Transit Plan, 2006). What are the best ways to promote transit to a certain population? As the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has realized, traditional transportation demand management (TDM) tools to reduce single occupancy vehicle use have proven to be very successful in boosting other forms of transportation, like public transit. However, while tactics like reducing the availability of parking can have a marked effect on transit's mode share in a market where people have no other choice but to utilize alternative forms of transportation, what about the potential transit users who are not constrained by the lack of parking? To examine this issue, researchers are increasingly looking at the efficacy of "soft measures" like marketing to encourage the use of public transportation (Brog, 1998; Fujii and Taniguchi, 2005; Taniguchi and Fujii, 2007)

Before launching into a discussion of transit marketing in particular, it is important to establish that marketing is an entire field unto itself, and could extend far beyond the scope of this project. For the purpose of this project, I will be focusing on the sub field of social marketing, an approach generally used to enact social change. Social marketing has been defined by Kotler and Roberto

(1989) as "the use of marketing principles and techniques to advance a social cause, idea, or behavior," a practice that seems particularly fitting for a campaign to attempt to change or, at the very least, modify one of the most ingrained American behaviors – driving one's car (p.24).

There are very few sources (if any) that explicitly join the fields of social marketing and transit marketing; however, many of the guides and "handbooks" written for successfully marketing transit lay out basic marketing principles and their capability for enacting behavioral change (TCRP, 1999, 2000). However, one of the consistencies between almost all of the transit marketing sources is that they identify barriers preventing behavioral change, a key principle in social marketing (Andreasen, 1995; Kotler and Roberto, 1989). In many cases, this barrier is identified as a lack of access to information (sources). As Brog (1998) declares, "hindering the use of public transport is a lack of experience and motivation to use it" (p.116). If potential transit users only knew more about the transit service available to them, they might be more inclined to use it. In a 2003 study, Garvill, Marell, and Nordlund explored how habitual behaviors (e.g., automobile use) could be affected by introducing new information about available travel modes. While they allowed that improving alternative modes of transportation and increasing travel costs for automobile users was an essential part of changing driving habits, making people aware of different modes of transportation could also have a measurable effect on breaking habits (Garvill, Marell, and Nordlund, 2003). Websites such as publictransportation.org have long taken the approach that making people aware of transit services is the first step towards getting them to use transit, and the Urban Mass Transportation Administration's "Mobility Manager," a mechanism for effectively disseminating transportation information, actively provides all available local transportation information to the customer from one easy-to-access source (UMTA, 1991).

One of the most popular techniques advocated in the literature to overcome the information gap between transit providers and consumers is not to spread information through mass media, but to communicate to potential transit users personally



through methods classified by Fujii and Taniguchi as “travel feedback programs” or TFPs (2005, p.2320). These programs can range from the simplest incarnation of sending out non-personalized transit information (such as individually mailed transit guides) to individualized marketing, where potential transit users are first contacted to discover their travel behaviors (usually through a survey) and then given personalized information aiming to modify their travel behavior. (Brog, 1998; Brog, Erl and Mense, 2002; Fujii and Taniguchi, 2005). And while providing personalized information has been successful in increasing transit ridership (Brog, Erl and Mense, 2002), it also seems that adding an additional step of asking people to make a implementation plan for exactly how and when they will change their travel behavior increases the efficacy of TFPs (Fujii and Taniguchi, 2005).

Another social marketing strategy is behavioral modification – the idea that if you give people the correct tools or training to change their behavior and reward them accordingly for the correct implementation of that new behavior, their habits will change (Andreasen, 1995; Kotler and Roberto, 1989). Fujii and Kitamura (2003) examined this technique in a study where they hypothesized that a temporary change in transit service – in this case, a one-month free bus pass given to study subjects – would result in a permanent change in travel behavior. Although they concluded that the experiment would need to be repeated on a larger scale for the results to be generalized, they found a 20% increase in transit use among the subjects who had been given a free bus pass, after their pass had expired. This information seemed to support their hypothesis that, given the tools to modify their behavior and the reward of finding the transit system less onerous to use than they previously thought, potential transit users could effect a permanent change in their attitude or habits. Brog (1998) also came to the conclusion that giving potential users experience with a transit system through a temporary free pass could improve their attitudes towards using transit. Of course, with Chapel Hill Transit being fare-free every day, a bus pass would not be an effective way of marketing the system. However, dedicated “try transit” days or special events like those outlined in transit

marketing literature could be an effective measure of changing people’s attitudes about transit by exposing them to the system (TCRP, 1999).

One of the most important steps to take in social marketing is to understand the audience and modify the marketing approach to fit their needs (Andreasen, 1995; Kotler & Roberto, 1989). The various handbooks on transit marketing outline the conventional ways to become familiar with your audience – through survey data, ridership statistics, and service area characteristics (TCRP, 1999, 2000). Once the audience is identified (in other words, market segmentation is achieved), the next step of the campaign would be to design marketing campaigns that address the values and needs of each segment (Andreasen, 1995; Kotler and Roberto, 1989). While the idea of thoroughly understanding your audience is a large part of individualized marketing efforts (Brog, 1998; Brog, Erl and Mense, 2002; Fujii and Taniguchi, 2005), several case studies outline marketing strategies that are more specifically focused on market segmentation. The Ann Arbor Transportation Authority, for example, appeals to the city’s environmentally concerned citizens by featuring the system switchover to new hybrid buses very prominently on their website, a major source of information for users. In schools where environmental issues are important, a “Clean Air Challenge” where students are encouraged not to drive, or a program for middle-schoolers that pairs information on air pollution and alternative forms of transportation with local transit information can have an impact on transit ridership (TCRP, 1999). This kind of targeted technique could work well in a place like Chapel Hill, where environmental values are very strongly defined and shared by a large number of residents.

In a 2004 study of transit marketing, 186 transit agencies across the United States were surveyed to get an idea of their marketing resources. Of those surveyed, 73% are bus-only agencies, 43% are public transit agencies (as opposed to private agencies providing transit services), and 40% serve populations of 100,000 or less, all characteristics shared with Chapel Hill Transit. Of the 51% of agencies responding that they had a dedicated marketing department, 51% have between one and



three employees in that department. With 49% of agencies reporting that they did not have a marketing department, it would appear that transit marketing is widely neglected. However, 64% of agencies surveyed believed that they did not dedicate enough resources towards marketing, suggesting that agencies are aware of this neglect.

In terms of the money spent on marketing, 51% of respondents had a budget of over \$100,000, and 29% had a budget of \$30,000 or less. The employee and budget numbers provide hope for any agency believing they simply don't have the resources for marketing, implying that transit marketing can be done on a fairly small scale (Cronin and Hightower, 2004).

The most valuable sources for this project are those that recognize that marketing is an essential part of the operation of any transit system, not just an afterthought to be dealt with when the time is convenient. It is important for transit providers to reach out to all members of the community, not just the ones who take transit because they have no other choice. As Brog observes, getting people to change their behavior even slightly, to make transit an option for a "possible" trip, can add up to positive increases in transit ridership (1998, pp.116-117). Whether this effort is like Transport for London's "My Other Car is a Bus" bumper sticker campaign, or the dedicated shopping shuttle provided for off-peak travelers in Lubbock, Texas, and Queen Anne's County, Maryland, dedicated attempts to capture the people who are not currently riding transit is something that every transit agency should be making (TCRP, 1999). As part of a comprehensive program with other TDM measures, transit marketing can have a significant effect on getting people on the bus and out of their cars.

CHAPTER 2:

CHT Service Area Characteristics

Before designing a social marketing scheme for Chapel Hill Transit, it is important to identify exactly whom the agency would be targeting with its efforts. As previously outlined, Chapel Hill Transit serves Chapel Hill, Carrboro, and the University of North Carolina. As the system went fare-free in 2002, the operating expenses are split between federal and state grants, and funds from the three entities it serves.

According to the data submitted to the National Transit Database in 2006¹, Chapel Hill Transit's service area² is 25 square miles, encompassing most of Chapel Hill and Carrboro, which together measure over 30 square miles in area. This service area includes a population of 53,440,³ just over 80% of the two municipalities' combined population of 65,500. In 2006 reported data, Chapel Hill Transit had a fleet of 77 buses running on 25 fixed routes.⁴ These fixed routes carried just under 6 million passengers in 2006 (FTA, 2006). Chapel Hill Transit also runs a demand responsive service,⁵ E-Z Rider, which for the purposes of this study, is not included in the search for peer systems or the recommendations (See Figure 1 for a map of the service area).

¹ NOTE: Transit statistics (service area, service area population, number of routes, etc.) for most transit systems included in this paper are drawn from the Federal Transit Administration's National Transit Database (NTD) 2006 figures. In cases where the transit agency does not report data to the FTA, data is drawn from the agency's self-reported numbers. Population and demographic statistics for most transit areas are drawn from the 2000 Census. More recent statistics for Chapel Hill Transit are drawn from the Town's Short Range Transit Plan [Draft].

² "Service area" is the area served by a transit system

³ A "service area population" is the population living within the service area served by a transit system.

⁴ "Fixed routes" are regularly scheduled bus routes that run on a daily basis along unchanging paths.

⁵ A "demand responsive service" is a bus that makes requested stops scheduled by passengers. It does not run along a fixed path with regular stops. This service is usually reserved for those who cannot use a system's fixed routes, because of mobility issues or other reasons.

To better understand the characteristics of Chapel Hill Transit's service area, it is useful to look at the demographic information for the area. According to the 2000 Census, Chapel Hill has a population of 48,715. In accordance with recent growth, this number has grown, with the most recent estimate from 2006 being 49,919. Neighboring Carrboro has a population of 16,782, as recorded by the 2000 Census, although 2006 estimates put the population closer to 16,577. (American Factfinder).

The population in Chapel Hill Transit's service area tends to have higher levels of education than the rest of the nation, with 94% holding high school degrees or higher, and nearly 74% holding bachelor's degrees or higher, as compared to national rates of 80% and 24%, respectively. Chapel Hill also has a high rate of those holding a graduate or professional degree, at over 40% of the population. Carrboro has similarly high rates, with 90% holding high school degrees or higher, nearly 70% holding bachelor's degrees or higher, and over 30% holding a graduate or professional degree. The area's population is younger, as well, with a median age of 24 in Chapel Hill and 28 in Carrboro, compared to a national average of 35.3. In both municipalities, 20-to 34-year-olds make up the largest portion of the population, a statistic that is not surprising considering the proximity of the University (American Factfinder).

Some statistics that do not bode well for increased transit use are the area's relatively low travel times and high automobile ownership. The population in this region benefits from faster commute times than the rest of the nation. As compared to people across the nation who spend an average of 25.5 minutes traveling to work, Chapel Hill's workers only spend 18.4 minutes and Carrboro's commuters spend 20 minutes doing the same. While congestion may have increased since 2000 with the rapid population growth within the Triangle, this statistic is unlikely to have changed that much, given the high rates of automobile ownership – nearly 89% of those living in Chapel Hill and nearly 92% of those living in

⁷ Chapel Hill's slightly lower numbers could be attributable to the large numbers of students living on UNC's campus who are not allowed to bring cars their first year.

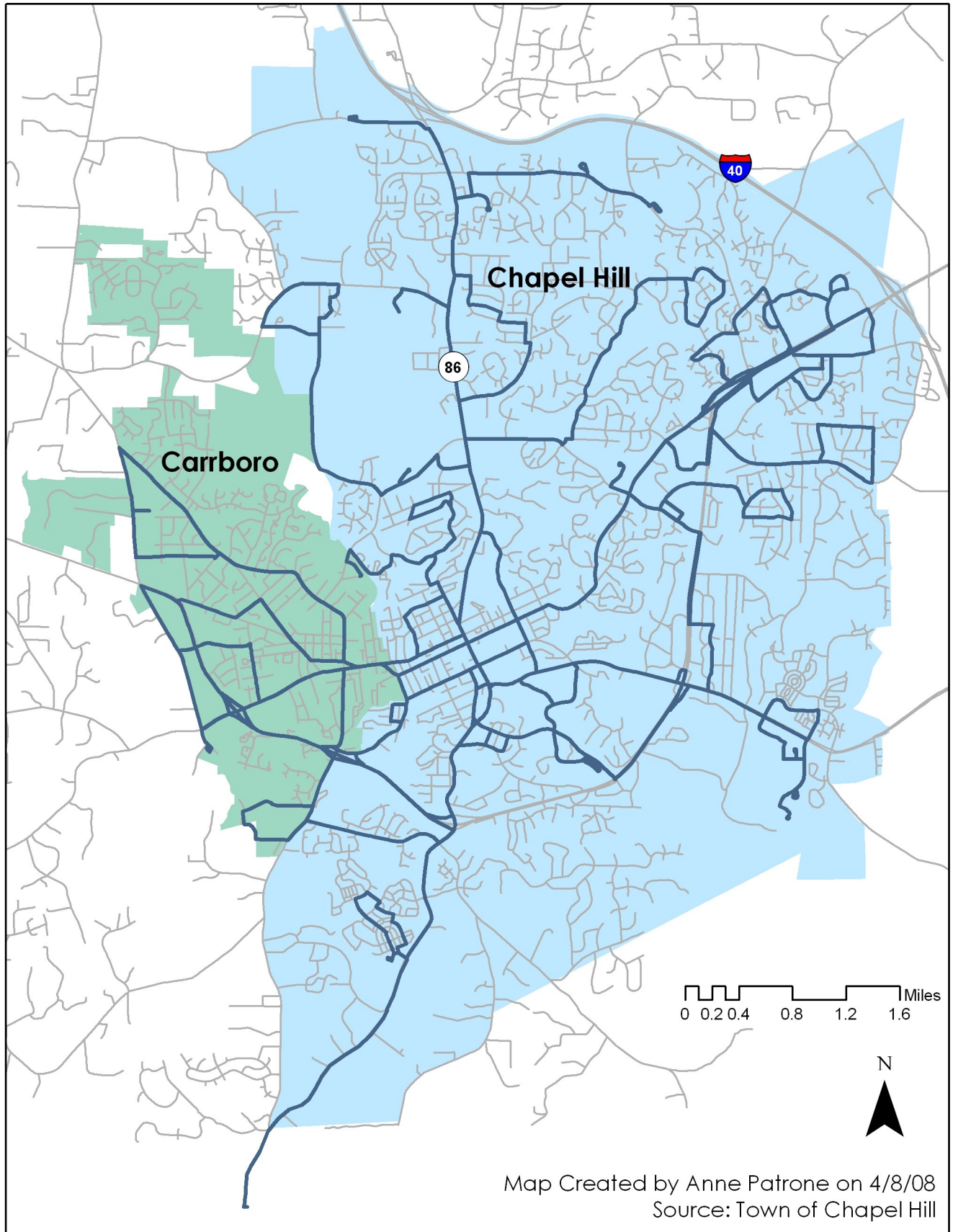


Figure 1: Chapel Hill Transit service area and routes

Carrboro have 1 or more vehicles available to them (American Factfinder).⁷

However, one aspect of Chapel Hill Transit's service area that provides a welcoming atmosphere for transit is the area's focus on climate change and commitment to carbon reduction. In June of 2006, Chapel Hill and UNC became the first U.S. members of the Carbon Reduction Program, a UK-based project for reducing carbon dioxide emissions (CRED website). In addition to this pledge, in which the Town and University jointly pledged to reduce emissions by 60% by 2050 (Town of Chapel Hill, 2006), Chapel Hill and Carrboro had also been members of Cool Cities, a nationwide partnership of American cities committed to reducing harmful emissions, since 2005 (Cool Cities website).

While the carbon reduction pledges are promises made solely by Chapel Hill, Carrboro, and UNC, many community groups have an environmentally conscious emphasis. UNC has a number of official student groups dedicated to protecting the environment, such as the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC), and the Carolina Environmental Student Alliance (CESA) (Carolina Union website), as well as sustainability themed housing in one of the newly renovated freshman dorms (UNC Sustainability Office website). East Chapel Hill High School has an environmental science club (ECHHS website), and Chapel Hill High School has a chapter of SURGE (Students United for a Responsible Global Environment), a locally based organization that looks to encourage student activism (SURGE website). Town government also provides opportunities for citizens to get involved. Chapel Hill maintains a Sustainability Committee, which advises the planning board (TOCH website), and Carrboro has an Environmental Advisory Board, which advises the Board of Aldermen (Carrboro website).

Concern about the environment also appears on a more regional level. The 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan drawn up by the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization, which coordinates transportation planning for the three municipalities and their surroundings, was developed with considerable input from both local planners and many of the region's stakeholders. Its "Goals and Objectives"

section has an objective that embodies the local commitment to reducing the population's impact on the environment: "Develop and implement a transportation system that supports the reduction

Rider Characteristics

Before determining what segments of the market Chapel Hill Transit could reach out to, it is useful to look at the populations it is currently serving well. CHT does not seem to have a difficult time reaching the university student market, as about three-quarters (73%) of passengers surveyed in a 2003 on-board survey were students. Almost all of these students were in college, with 67% attending full-time, and 4% attending part-time. Over 95% of these students attend UNC (On-Board Survey, 2003).

It seems, however, that Chapel Hill Transit could work harder at capturing the high school and middle school market, a total of over 6,000 students, and a population that is largely without access to cars until age 16 – and in some cases, even after that (NC Schools Report Card website). Four routes⁷ serve the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City School system, five routes⁸ serve the Chapel Hill YMCA, two routes⁹ serve Hargraves Community Center, and most routes run past other popular destinations downtown (CHT website). However, barely 2% of CHT riders are non-university students – almost 2% are high school students, and 0.3% are middle/junior high students (On-Board Survey, 2003).

Chapel Hill Transit is also serving the commuting population well, especially those heading to UNC, where most of the routes converge. According to the on-board survey, 20% of riders rode the bus 3-4 days per week, and 66% of riders rode the bus 5+ days per week. This seems to suggest that the nearly 86% of riders taking the bus more than 3 days a week are regular commuters, a conjecture supported by the fact that nearly 89% of CHT passengers surveyed work at or go to school on the UNC campus. Many of these users do not have easy

⁷ HS, J, NS, T

⁸ A, G, HS, NS, T

⁹ A & CW

access to parking, and therefore must take the bus, regardless of whether or not they have an automobile available to them for that trip (On-Board Survey, 2003).

Casual riders – those who ride 1-2 days per week or less – made up less than 10% of those surveyed on a weekday but nearly 32% of those surveyed on a weekend day. Weekend data also shows that while all other income levels show a drop-off of numbers on weekend days, those in the highest income bracket (\$75,000 and over) consist of nearly double the percentage of riders on the weekend than they do on weekdays (see Figure 2). Higher weekend numbers might seem to support the conjecture that people are taking advantage of the bus on weekends, when there is more time for leisure activities and parking in downtown Chapel Hill is more scarce. However, it appears that weekend

passengers are far less likely to be choice riders (those with a vehicle available to them for the trip) than those on the weekday (see Figure 3). This difference could be explained by the likely fact that “no convenient parking” accounts for a much higher percentage of riders’ responses on the weekday than it does on the weekend, where UNC parking is less restricted (see Figure 4) (2003 On-Board Survey). Targeting casual users, especially those with a car already available to them, could be a key strategy for introducing more of the service area population to CHT’s transit services.

In conclusion, it appears that Chapel Hill Transit would do well to target the portions of the population that are either underrepresented among transit riders or that seem likely to ride transit. Exactly how to attract these segments, including casual riders, young people, and those with concern

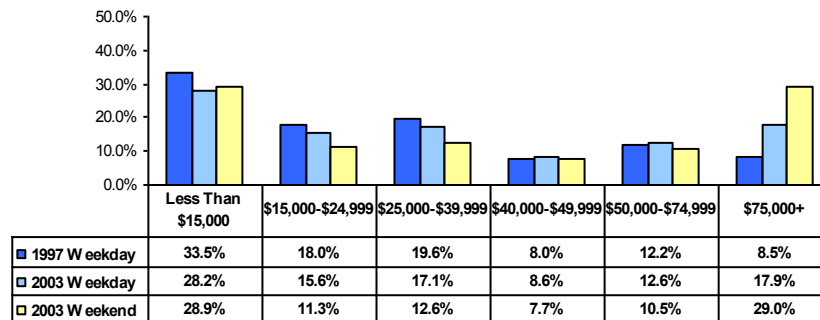


Figure 2: Rider income, CHT (Source: 2003 On-Board Survey)

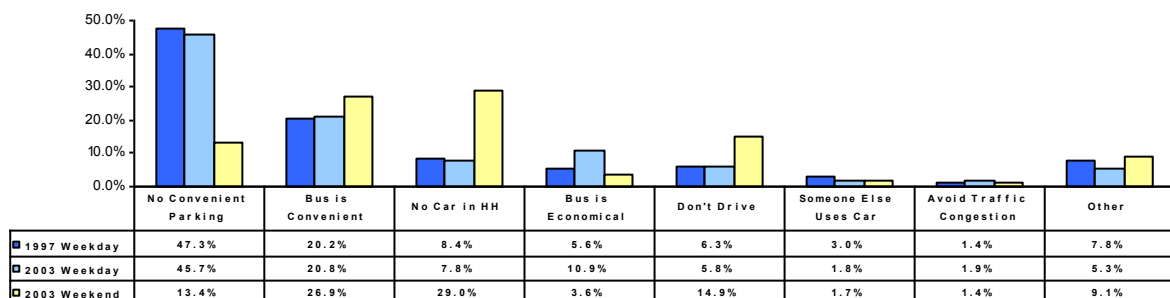


Figure 3: Reasons for riding transit, CHT (Source: 2003 On-Board Survey)

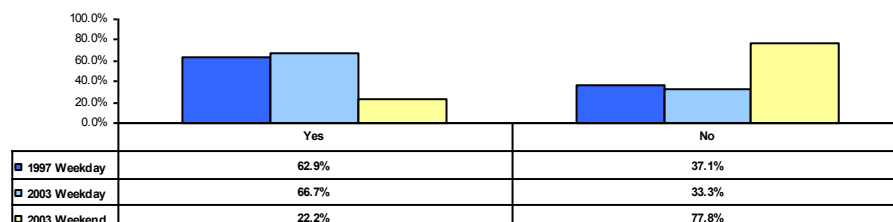


Figure 4: Responses to the question, “Was a motor vehicle available to you for making this trip?” (Source: 2003 On-Board Survey)

CHAPTER 3:

Transit Marketing

Best Practices

Best practices in transit marketing can be most clearly identified through an examination of what other similar transit agencies are successfully implementing. But before searching for peer transit systems in order to provide case studies of marketing strategies, it is important to identify which areas I am specifically interested in researching. I have broken down transit marketing into four areas that I think would be useful for Chapel Hill Transit:

- Providing information,
- Attracting casual riders and underserved populations,
- Appealing to environmental values, and, perhaps most importantly,

Information

Providing clear and easy-to-interpret information to riders (and potential riders) is one of the essential roles of any transit agency, and affects the public's perception of its service and convenience. Transit agencies can disseminate information through a variety of media, including maps, brochures, direct mailings, websites, and even system signage.

An interesting local example of an informational campaign is the Federal Transit Administration's Individualized Marketing Demonstration Program, piloted with Triangle Transit (formerly the Triangle Transit Authority) and three other transit agencies across the country.¹⁰ Using a model of individualized marketing that had been conducted in Europe and Australia (discussed in Chapter 1), households in West Durham were given a survey to document their travel behavior, and gauge their interest in learning about public transportation. Receptive

households were given the opportunity to request information about different types of alternative modes of transportation, either by mailed materials or by a personalized visit. A follow-up survey gathered new information on travel behavior and attitudes, and compared these results to the initial survey (MELE Associates, 2006).

Compared to a control group, the portion of the population that received personalized information saw a 4% decrease in car use and increases in walking, cycling, and transit use. Measured in terms of trips per person per year, the group receiving the information saw a 15% increase in walking, a 25% increase in bicycling, and a 35% increase in transit use, plus a 530,000-mile total decrease in annual vehicle miles traveled (VMT). In all respects, this campaign appears to have been a success. The results from Durham are comparable to those found in similarly surveyed populations from around the country, and around the world, suggesting that this kind of targeted marketing can be successful anywhere. Although results may be statistically small, the authors are convinced that a larger-scale project would have similarly scaled results (MELE Associates, 2006).

Casual Riders

What about the people who don't ride transit every day because it would be too difficult to commute to work? How can these people be enticed to take transit for recreational trips or weekend excursions – trips that don't require so much precision for arrival and departure times? Special events that target these kinds of riders allow people who aren't regular transit riders to experience what it's like to use transit. A successful campaign will change negative perceptions about transit and familiarize new riders with the transit system.

There are many examples of campaigns that target casual riders, including "try transit" days and seasonal shopping shuttles. Transit systems can also publicize leisure destinations that differ from work or school destinations. Successful campaigns will attract a segment of the population that has great potential for riding transit, but has been overlooked (often unintentionally) in the past.

¹⁰ Bellingham, WA; Cleveland, OH; Sacramento, CA

Values

An effective way of reaching certain segments of the population is to appeal to their values – what is most important to them in their daily travel decisions. A marketing campaign that strikes a chord with the local population could be successful in at least getting some members of that population to think about changing certain harmful or socially discouraged behaviors.

In places where the environment is an important issue, like Chapel Hill, transit agencies can present themselves as a solution to the negative environmental impacts of single-occupancy commuting. And for places where this persuasive argument would have little impact, agencies can appeal to the other values that drive the behavior of potential riders – presenting transit use as a cost-saving device, for example, or a time-saving practice for busy commuters. In an area where the majority of commuters surveyed (nearly 36%) responded that they would change their commuting habits if they “could save money,” this tactic may have a considerable impact (Employee Mobility Surveys,

website will only strengthen public opinion that the system itself is confusing. Most important, however, is to recognize the connection between the agency’s image and its web image – the online brand and the offline brand are one and the same to users of the system (Baggerman, 2001, p.22).

Design/Image

A system can greatly improve its public image through attention to how it presents itself to its riders. Transit is a service to many, but can still be seen as a product in search of an audience – and therefore, a product in need of branding. Present customers with an attractive, appealing product, and more of them are likely to take advantage of it.

Many transit agencies have taken this advice to heart and have revamped aging or outmoded systems to create a new public face. Whether it is to attract a new market or to change public opinion (often negative) about the system, a re-launch often offers a transit agency a new start.

Websites are often an extension of the visual character of a transit agency. These sites serve a utilitarian function – to deliver information to riders with Internet access – but they also can shape public opinion about a system. A difficult-to-navigate

METHODOLOGY

I have decided to further explore these four areas of best practice by highlighting one or more case studies from each area described above. Many of these case studies have been selected from the marketing campaigns that have been awarded the American Public Transit Association's (APTA) annual AdWheel awards (APTA website).

For case studies dealing with information, I will be examining transit agencies that reach out to underserved populations through information campaigns. An evaluation of transit agencies that offer special events to entice new riders to use their service will provide case studies for appealing to casual riders. An evaluation of successful value campaigns will look at transit agencies that have appealed to their riders through the delivery of an environmentally responsible message. The design case study will look at transit agencies that have re-launched their fleets and/or redesigned their websites.

In the course of researching this project, I realized that choosing peer systems for the purposes of evaluating best practices in transit marketing was not as rigorous of a process as choosing peer systems to compare effectiveness or efficiency measures. I chose peer systems based on similar characteristics to Chapel Hill Transit and its service area, like the existence of a well-educated population, an institution of higher learning, or a commitment to conserving the environment. Where I was not able to find case studies from ideal peer systems to Chapel Hill Transit, I contacted systems of similar or smaller size, in order to approximate the amount of resources available to Chapel Hill Transit in implementing a marketing campaign. While realizing that larger transit systems with greater resources do not provide a suitable comparison to Chapel Hill Transit, I have referred to larger transit systems in some cases for short case studies of successful campaigns and to provide inspiration for campaigns more suited to an agency the size of Chapel Hill Transit.

CHAPTER 4:

Information

The dissemination of clear and accurate information is essential for any transit agency. Common barriers identified by potential and new riders often include uncertainty about how to use the system or understand the system maps. It is important for an agency to realize that even if potential riders willing to switch transportation modes exist, they are unable to do so without being aware of alternatives. A successful distribution system, whether focused on personalized marketing or the mass distribution of general system information, is critical for attracting new riders and keeping existing ones (Brog, Erl, and Mense, 2002).

A marketing campaign designed to effectively disseminate information will consider its audience carefully. First, the agency will define exactly who they are trying to reach, and then determine what means would be most successful to reach that segment of the population, whether it is new residents or the disabled or senior citizens.

In a study conducted in Stockholm, Sweden, the transit experience of new arrivals to the city was examined in order to discover how user-friendly the transit system was. It was found that the system was hard to use without having a few days' experience using the system, making mistakes, and learning from these. The study concluded that first-hand experience was the best way to learn about a transit system, but that the better dissemination of information throughout the transit system, including detailed, easy-to-understand maps and a clear stop system near identifiable landmarks, could ease both new and practiced riders into better and more frequent use of the system. (Dziekan, 2007).

Travel Training Programs

Travel training programs enable transit agencies to reach out to those members of the community who may feel intimidated by or unsure about using regular fixed routes. These programs aim to increase familiarity with the system, its capabilities, and its destinations. "How-to-ride" programs tend to target the population that is already using demand-responsive service, often the elderly.

In a study conducted to examine which strategies could best change the elderly population's perceptions about transit, it was found that seniors "desire more information about...available services." This information, delivered in the form of explanatory materials – "brochures describing the schedule" – or assuredness about the reliability of a system, like real-time transit indicators (similar to CHT's NextBus signs) would increase the seniors' likeliness to take transit, based on the results of a stated-preference survey (Rashidi and Mohammadian, 2008, p.16). Another study looking at the effectiveness of a transit training video aimed at senior citizens identified the limitations inherent in simply providing information, as "the video messages that educated viewers about how to obtain information on transit schedules, costs, and payment generated a significant and positive attitudinal change; however, those that addressed difficulties reading schedules and climbing stairs did not, perhaps because these tasks require a level of physical ability that cannot be fully addressed by the video" (Shaheen and Rodier, 2007, p.2). The study implied that a greater level of personal interaction would be necessary to overcome the obstacles preventing seniors from taking transit – advocating a more intensive approach that is evident in the case study from Santa Rosa, CA.



School Outreach Programs

A popular outreach component of many transit agencies is a school education program, primarily directed towards elementary school children. These programs expose a young audience to transit, and can help to create positive opinions about transit from an early age.

Online Resources

In a community where Internet access is high, a campaign targeting the Internet savvy can reach a large portion of the population. The Internet can provide a platform for information resources that require constant updating or that need to reach a wide audience. The case studies from Ann Arbor, MI, and State College, PA, describe information sources that are best displayed on the web.

Santa Rosa CityBus

Learn to Ride CityBus

Travel Training Program

Santa Rosa, California, is a city of over 285,000 people just north of San Francisco. Its CityBus system has 29 buses on 17 fixed routes, carrying 2.8 million passengers annually. Santa Rosa has a slightly higher percentage of residents over age 65 than the rest of America (13.8%, compared to the national average of 12.4%.) (American Factfinder). Consequently, Santa Rosa is host to several large senior communities and a vibrant senior population. CityBus feels a responsibility to serve these communities, especially to teach them more about taking the buses.

Soon after arriving to the agency, the current transit marketing and outreach coordinator for CityBus was put to work revamping the agency's "Bus Buddy" program, which partnered volunteers with local area seniors to teach them how to ride the bus. The program had concerns about the screening of volunteers and the time that was required of city employees who had volunteered.

To remedy this situation, the agency compiled information on riding the bus – schedules, maps, fares, tips for riding, etc. – and designed a classroom presentation that only took about half an hour to present. In the spring of 2006, this presentation was launched as a monthly class held at the senior center, usually attracting around 10 attendees. This class was immediately followed by a ride on a regular fixed-route service in order to familiarize themselves with the system they had just learned about. This route is a popular one, and one that is relevant to the class attendees, since it stops at the four major senior communities in Santa Rosa, the library, and the main commercial center.

The program has generally been a success. The resources needed to implement it are minimal. The marketing and outreach coordinator, a regular member of staff, conducts the classes and the subsequent trips on the buses, a total of about 3-4 hours per month after the initial start-up time. The program is advertised at no extra cost in the bus

schedule and in Santa Rosa's parks and recreation activity guide.

There is no formal system for feedback, mostly because CityBus currently lacks the resources to create such a system, but the seniors are very appreciative of the experience. And, according to the marketing and outreach coordinator for CityBus, the classes are fun, both for the facilitators and the attendees. In addition to neutralizing some negative opinions of the bus system, the program also serves as a social activity for seniors in the community to meet up and learn something new together.

In the future, CityBus is looking to offer this service at their screenings for paratransit riders, in order to divert some of the potential riders away from expensive demand-responsive service and show them that fixed-route service is not as intimidating as they first thought, and that the fixed-route buses can even accommodate scooters and wheelchairs. As the nation's population ages, programs like this will be even more necessary to give this population the mobility they seek (Gipson interview, 2008).



Source: Joy Gipson, Santa Rosa CityBus

Central Arkansas Transit Authority

School Outreach Program

Central Arkansas Transit Authority (CAT) is the transit system for the Little Rock area. The system has a service area of nearly 100 square miles and approximately 167,000 people. Forty-six buses on 24 routes carry 2.4 million passengers annually (FTA, 2006).

CAT runs a school outreach program that provides instruction to about 4,000 to 5,000 schoolchildren a year. Two related programs help to supplement the schools' curriculum in transportation and introduce a new audience to local transit. When possible, operators visit the school with one of the system's buses, give a presentation on CAT, and then take the class on a ride. When resources don't allow for this kind of visit, CAT provides school groups with free fares and bus schedules to plan a trip on any one of the system's fixed routes. The groups are given an opportunity to explore the bus, see how fares are collected, speak to the operator, and take

a ride.

The program consumes a fairly small amount of resources. The program is so well-known among the area's schools that CAT doesn't even need to advertise – the only promotion is a page on CAT's website. The field trips are on fixed routes that would be running in any case, with operators that are already working normal hours. The school visits utilize off-duty buses and operators, who reportedly love the experience.

The school outreach program is a great way to reach a portion of the community that may have never considered using bus services before. Associating riding transit with a field trip or special school lesson gets children excited about riding the buses, and forms a positive first impression of transit. The hope is that these students will go home, share their experience with their families and friends, and remain transit riders for years to come (Wineland



An operator teaching a class about CAT's buses.

Source: CAT website

The University of Michigan operates a separate transit system from AATA, the agency that serves the rest of Ann Arbor, running 60 buses on ten fixed routes that connect the three campuses and the medical center (UM Transportation website). The routes serve a population of over 58,000 in the center of Ann Arbor (UM website). In fiscal year 2007, the system carried nearly 6 million passengers (UM Transportation website).

Inspired by a freshman engineering class that worked with the transit system, an engineering student came up with the idea of piloting a system that would let riders know when their bus was approaching its stop. He approached Parking and Transportation Services and secured funding for the project, and then enlisted the help of faculty member Chris Ruf. While that student has since graduated, his legacy lives on.

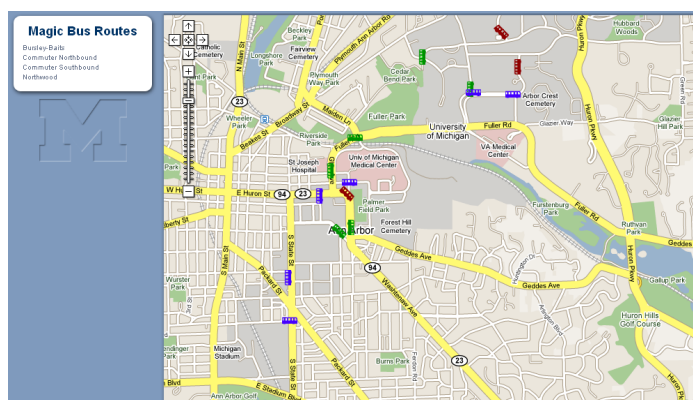
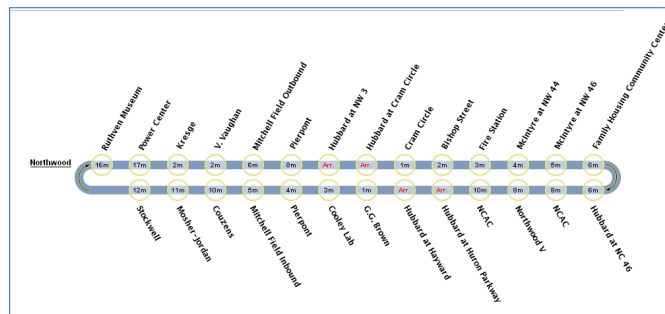
Professor Ruf heads a senior engineering class of about 30-40 students that works to improve the system, and the same freshman class that inspired it all provides 100-150 students per year to collect data and monitor the system. Former class members stay

on to maintain the system, which is still running strong. Aside from the start-up costs of purchasing parts for the GPS systems inside each bus, and purchasing one mobile phone for each bus (the phone acts as a modem, sending information from the bus back to the central server), the main cost remains the monthly phone bill for each bus' phone, as students provide free labor for constantly monitoring and improving the system. The team is currently looking for ways in which to end the monthly phone bill by using wireless technologies in the buses instead.

Magic Bus has proven to be a great success, allowing people to know exactly when their bus would reach the stop. The website can be filtered by route and stop, and provides one large map showing all the routes. Chapel Hill Transit has taken steps towards this with its NextBus system and its real-time arrival boards at some stops. However, the most attractive aspect of Magic Bus lies in the fact that the system was virtually developed for free through the innovation of students. This fruitful partnership demonstrates how the untapped resources of nearby UNC could serve to help Chapel Hill Transit improve its image and promote itself in the community (Ruf interview, 2008).

Line view, isolating one route.
The times change in real time as
the buses approach the stops.

Source: Magic Bus website.



Map with routes. The buses (color-coded for each route) move along the map in real time.

Source: Magic Bus website.

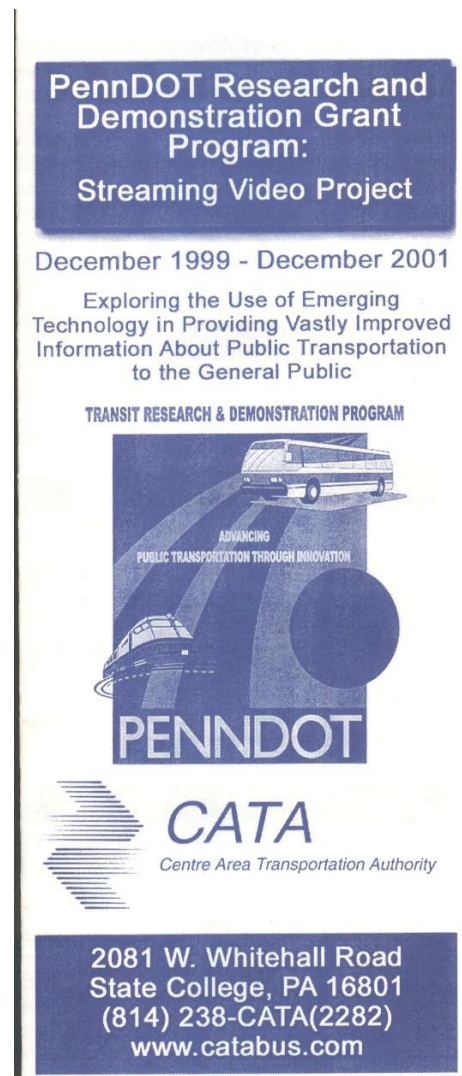
Centre Area Transportation Authority *Streaming Video Project*

The Centre Area Transportation Authority (CATA) is located in State College, a college town of 38,400 in central Pennsylvania. The agency covers a service area of 133 square miles, encompassing several local townships, and a population of approximately 83,000. Fifty-two buses run on 20 fixed routes, and over 6 million people ride CATA annually (FTA, 2006).

State College has some similar statistics to Chapel Hill and its surrounding area. Because of Penn State, the population is generally young, with a median age of 21.8. The population is also well educated, with 69% of the population holding a bachelors' degree or higher, and 40% with a graduate or professional degree (American Factfinder).¹¹

In the autumn of 1999, CATA was awarded a research grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to develop an online tool for delivering transit information to potential riders, especially college students – of which a large majority has good and consistent access to the Internet. Partnering with a local technology firm, CATA developed streaming video “how-to” videos for their website. Several focus groups provided the topics for these videos, based on their ideas of what could be challenging about riding transit, especially for the first time. The videos were promoted on the home page of CATA’s website and in all regular radio and print ads (CATA, 2001).

The campaign appears to have been a success. The streaming videos, located prominently on the home page of CATA’s website, are viewed a couple of thousand times per month, and the agency has received feedback from students and other new arrivals to the area about how helpful they found the service. Of course, it is difficult to quantify the benefits of an informational campaign in regards to ridership, but the sheer existence of the videos and the frequency with which they are viewed suggest that riders searching for assistance navigating CATA can find some help online (Shader interview, 2008).



Brochure outlining the results of the project



Source: Jacqueline Shader, CATA

¹¹ To put these numbers in perspective, compare them with the national averages in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 5:

Casual Users

In Chapel Hill's 2007 Employee Commuting Survey, over 1028 people (26% of all respondents) replied that they did not use transit service to commute to work because it was not frequent or convenient enough for their purposes (Employee Mobility Surveys, 2007). UNC boasts a high number of employees that use transit, but they achieve these amounts through a restrictive parking policy that forces employees to look for other ways to get to work, no matter how inconvenient they may seem (UNC Commuting Survey, 2007). Faced with no other alternative, transit is their only way of getting to work.

While it may not be feasible for transit agencies to expect everyone to use transit for commuting or for other daily tasks, it may be worth the agency's time to appeal to choice riders for their leisure travel. The following case studies present some transit agencies that have done just that, and have introduced new riders to transit at the same time.

Laketran "Red Hot Ride"

Laketran is a regional transit authority for Lake County, Ohio, centered in Painesville, about 30 miles from Cleveland. It operates a fleet of 37 coaches and buses on 6 fixed routes and 6 commuter routes (to central Cleveland). From a service area of 295 square miles and over 200,000 people, nearly 1 million trips are taken on Laketran per year (FTA, 2006).

In Lake County, the population 65 and older makes up 14.1% of the population, slightly higher than the national average of 12.4% (American Factfinder). Laketran was looking for a way to encourage the senior population to use regular transit, as it sensed the seniors were overusing the Dial-a-Ride service (which provides 30% of overall service, but consumes 70% of the agency's budget) at the expense of the fixed routes. So, partnering with the local Chamber of Commerce, Laketran designed a day of shopping and activities that would utilize existing stops along the fixed routes in order to show potential riders how easy taking these routes to their destinations could be. The group that was seen as ideal participants for this outreach event was the Red Hat Society, an organization for women over 50 whose mission is literally, to have fun (Red Hat Society website).

The event provided about a dozen different itineraries using the six fixed routes, with activities ranging from miniature golf to a martini tasting to a visit to a local bagpipe manufacturing plant. Each itinerary had a "celebrity guide" – a notable person from the local community that kept the women on schedule and provided them with helpful



Source: The Heart of Lake County Magazine

information about riding the bus. All the itineraries left from the Great Lakes Mall, a central location where the women could park and feel comfortable coming to, and conveniently, the hub for many of the fixed routes.

The event was an overwhelming success. Over 450 senior women participated in this event, and feedback from the event (collected through an exit survey) was extremely positive. Many people said they learned how easy it was to get around on the buses, and how accessible they really were (Baginski interview, 2008). All participants were given copies of their itineraries so that they could reproduce the trip on their own time. Laketran estimates that "Red Hot Stops" was "the largest bus-training event ever planned by a public transit system" (Baginski, 2006, p.88).

The event was also relatively easy to run, as it did not consume too many resources to achieve. The itineraries utilized stops along existing fixed routes, and drivers that would be driving the routes in any case provided the labor. The entire advertising budget for the event ended up being only \$1000 for print ads and other promotions.

A few groups have followed up on this event, and have asked for a refresher on how to ride the bus, and an itinerary. While changes in ridership as a result of this event are hard to measure, introducing people to transit in the 9th-most auto dependent county in Ohio (out of 88 counties) can only bring about positive benefits (Baginski interview, 2008).¹²



Source: The Heart of Lake County Magazine

¹² According to the interviewee, Lake County, OH has more registered cars than registered voters.

Everett Transit

Partnership with the Imagine Children's Museum

Everett Transit is the transit authority for Everett, Washington. Thirty-six buses run on 12 fixed routes, serving an area of 30 square miles and a population of over 100,000. In 2006, 2.2 million trips were made on Everett Transit (FTA, 2006).

Everett Transit runs an outreach partnership with the local Imagine Children's Museum. The partnership came about in 2002, as a result of the museum's initial lack of parking and their efforts to attract more families to the museum. Everett Station, the transit agency's headquarters and a route hub, had plenty of free parking, making it easy for museum patrons to park there and take a bus to the museum. Everett Transit had also been looking for ways to start an educational outreach with kids in the community, but lacked the staff resources.

This initial partnership of convenience grew into a flourishing collection of initiatives. Both organizations' websites promote taking the bus to the museum – in fact, the website for the museum lists taking the bus first in its "Directions" section, even before driving directions. Today, the museum does anywhere from one to two thousand field trips a year, many of them involving the bus system. Educators have the option of choosing a "2 for 1 Transit Field Trip" when they take their class on any of Imagine's field trips. This trip begins with a tour of Everett Station, and includes a bus ride to the museum for the rest of the field trip. A new interactive video produced by the museum allows children to learn about the environmental benefits of taking transit as they follow two children taking Everett Transit. This exhibit, which provides a simulated bus ride, is well-suited for larger groups that cannot take the fixed-route buses to the museum because of space constraints. Both Imagine Children's Museum and Everett Transit have been able to benefit from the partnership, sharing assets when resources were scarce (Eaton interview, 2008).



Source: Imagine Children's Museum website

Transport for London

"My Other Car is a Bus"

Transport for London (TfL) is the transportation authority for Greater London, directly operating or regulating bus, subway, light and heavy rail, ferries, taxis, pedestrian and cycling facilities, and roads. TfL serves a population of over 7.6 million (in London alone – this does not include significant numbers of commuters from outside the city), and the bus service alone carries 6 million passengers per week – the same amount Chapel Hill Transit carries in an entire year (TfL, 2006). But although TfL is a much larger agency with greater resources for marketing, it offers an interesting example of a campaign targeted at non-regular riders.

In 2004, Transport for London launched a campaign where they distributed bumper stickers that proclaimed "My Other Car is a Bus." The playful campaign alluded to the hope that seasoned drivers would leave their cars at home and utilize transit instead, in an effort to ease congestion in the more suburban areas of Greater London, where residents are more likely to own cars and to drive. The campaign was especially directed towards families and schoolchildren, perhaps to encourage them to use transit for leisure trips with less time-sensitivity (TfL, 2004). A similar campaign could be successful in Chapel Hill, encouraging non-regular riders to use the bus for trips that are less time-sensitive than commuting.



Source: http://photosofnitin.blogspot.com/2007_03_01_archive.html



Source: Transport for London
<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/corporate/media/photos/pressimages/gallery.asp>

CHAPTER 6:

Values

Social marketing campaigns have targeted populations as varied as smokers, drivers, and parents, all aimed at changing habitual behaviors. However, in the past, they have been most successful as public health campaigns, and hardly anyone has attempted social marketing for transit. But what if a transit agency appealed to the collective values of a population – in this case, their environmental values? Could people be persuaded to change their behaviors based on an appeal to the part of their nature that values environmental quality over convenience in travel?

A study of consumers conducted in 1992 by The Roper Organization estimated that nearly 25% of the American public could be classified as “green consumers.” Of this number, 20% are what they classify as “true-blue greens,” consumers whose “actual behavior is consistent with...concerns about the environment” (Coddington, 1993, p.80). As this study is nearly 10 years old, we can expect the numbers to have gone up since it was conducted. While this was a study of consumers, the sheer amount of those willing to let their environmental concerns shape their spending behavior bodes well for transit agencies. Following are two approaches to courting the environmentally concerned public.

Ann Arbor Transit Authority "Eco Bug"

Ann Arbor, Michigan, is a city of 114,000 centered on the University of Michigan (American Factfinder). The Ann Arbor Transit Agency (AATA), in addition to the University of Michigan bus system (see Chapter 4), serves a population of nearly 205,000 in a service area of 81 square miles. Fifty-eight buses are operated on 26 fixed routes, carrying 5.5 million passengers per year (FTA, 2006).

Ann Arbor is very similar to Chapel Hill in terms of the characteristics of its population. The population is young, with a median age of 28, and 20-34-year-olds making up the biggest percentage of the population. The educational profile is also similar, with 69% of the population holding a bachelor's degree or higher, and 39% of the population holding a graduate or professional degree. The median household income (in 1999 dollars) is \$46,299 (American Factfinder).

In many ways, the Ann Arbor Transit Authority seems the perfect peer for Chapel Hill Transit. Their community's commitment to the environment is equally strong – Ann Arbor is also a member of the Cool Cities campaign that Chapel Hill joined in 2005, and there is a wide variety of local and university groups supporting the environment. The existence of a large university and medical center in the center of town strengthens the link between the two cities, and as mentioned above, several demographic measures are very similar.

With the unveiling of its new hybrid fleet of buses (there are currently 20, with plans to eventually convert the entire fleet to hybrid buses), AATA wanted to highlight the environmental values that they had long espoused. Although the agency has had a long history of recycling, promoting carpooling and vanpooling, and pursuing other energy-saving measures, the new hybrid buses would serve as the most visually obvious symbol of the agency's commitment to the environment. Working with an outside consultant, AATA came up with the idea of a mascot for the new buses: one that would represent the environment, and, in the words of the agency's administrative assistant for



"Scooter" and a view of the specially painted hybrid bus

Source: Lois Crawford, AATA

community relations, be "fun, colorful, and kid-friendly." An artist produced a butterfly-like insect that was painted all over the hybrid bus, revealed in a community unveiling in October of 2007.

Public reaction to the "eco-bug," as the mascot was called, was very positive. The brightly colored, smiling mascot brightened the buses he was painted on, surrounded by vibrant flowers and greenery. This is in sharp contrast to many of AATA's current painted buses, which are covered in local advertising. The vivid paint job brings people's attention to the hybrid buses, emphasizing the positive impact the agency is aiming to have on the environment.

AATA grabbed the public's attention even more with a naming campaign, designed to give the "eco bug" a recognizable moniker. More than 200 entries were received for the contest, advertised on AATA's website and in a press release sent to local media. The name that was eventually chosen was "Scooter," a playful choice that also applies well to the transportation functions of the agency. A school essay contest was held concurrently with the naming contest, asking local schoolchildren what made them an environmental steward, and the winning class won a pizza party and a ride on the "Scooter Bus," emphasizing even further the connection between the transit agency and the environment.

Riders have taken well to Scooter, with a common comment being that he's "adorable". This bright, fun campaign has enlivened the hybrid bus fleet, put transit in a positive light, and perhaps most importantly, appeals to riders' or potential riders' environmental sensibilities when choosing their

Metro Transit

"Fix It" Commercial

Metro Transit is the transit authority for Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN, carrying over 73 million trips per year. The agency has a service area of 565 square miles and a population of 1.7 million – certainly not an apt peer system for Chapel Hill Transit. However, even though Chapel Hill Transit does not have the same amount of resources as such a large agency, one of Metro Transit's recent campaigns provides a good example of appealing to values, especially those of an environmental nature (FTA, 2006).

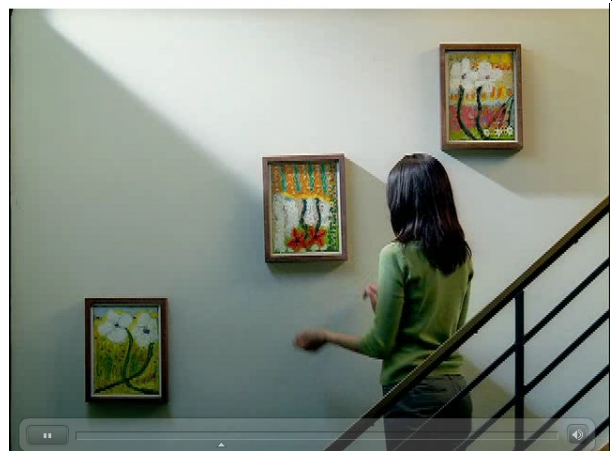
When the "Fix It" commercial aired in the spring of 2007, it was meant to be a stand-alone ad, but fit well into "Go Greener," Metro Transit's overarching environmental campaign. As opposed to the Ann Arbor Transit Authority, Metro Transit wasn't necessarily reaching out to an audience whose priorities had long included concern for the environment. The "Go Greener" campaign was both an attempt by the agency to stay ahead of the "green" trend, which they saw was just gaining momentum, as well as a genuine effort to create a strong organizational focus on environmental stewardship (Cone interview, 2008).

The commercial, developed with the help of a local advertising agency, shows various scenes, including a mother putting a bandage on her child's knee, an uncomfortable-looking couple in therapy, and a man tinkering with a motorcycle.¹³ A voiceover explains that we fix all sorts of things, and as an image of Earth appears, it encourages viewers to "fix the most important thing" through riding transit as often as they are able.

While this commercial obviously has an environmental focus, building on the recent heightened public awareness of global warming and other issues, it definitely has a different focus than most environmental campaigns. In the words of Maria Cone, Metro Transit's Marketing Specialist, the agency wanted the commercial to be "less factual [than the majority of the Go Greener

campaign], more pulling at the heart strings to do what's best" (Cone interview, 2008). The child from the beginning of the commercial appears in the end, as the voiceover entreats viewers to take care of the Earth to preserve it for "things you cherish most." There is a moral responsibility in taking transit implied here, delivered without too much of a moralistic tone.

The commercial is a success, having won national awards and helping raise the profile of the Go Greener campaign. Its tempered message – take public transit even once a week and help contribute to the solution – is appealing, as are the attractive, seemingly well-to-do residents in the well produced commercial. It makes environmentalism seem like something everyone can participate in, having the potential to reach a wider audience than one simply



Images from the "Fix It" commercial

Source: Metro Transit website

¹³ The commercial can be viewed on Metro Transit's website, <http://www.metrotransit.org>

CHAPTER 7:

Design/Image

Good design is a difficult thing to define. It is an ever more difficult thing to quantify, but researchers in the United Kingdom have tried just that. By analyzing the rates of commercial success in new products with a strong design focus, the researchers found that 89% of the products analyzed were commercially successful. This study seemed to support their hypothesis that good design does matter, but other research looking at firms with a strong design reputation produced inconclusive results (Roy, 1994).

So why pay attention to design? Will good design really make a transit agency more successful and attract more riders? Professor Tom Campanella of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill used the example of retail giants Target and WalMart to prove his point about good design being an attractive attribute to potential consumers. Laura Rowley posits that Target is so successful with its customers because its clean, inviting stores stock “imaginative and stylish” products at an affordable price. Making good design so readily available, Rowley argues, makes customers feel like they’re respected – like “everyone, not just the wealthy, appreciates and deserves beauty”(2003, p.4).

This principle, applied to transit agencies, could have a large impact on the way they are perceived, as riders and potential riders are in many ways consumers, looking for the most attractive product on the market. In an article in *Public Transport International*, designer Siep Wijsebeek makes the point that car manufacturers have long emphasized design as a way to market and sell cars, and that transit must do the same. Not until a transit system exists that “pays attention to the customer’s status and comfort,” Wijsebeek argues, can transit truly be seen as a viable alternative to the personal automobile and start attracting new riders (2003, p.2). In a world where good design is becoming so accessible – from designer clothes at Target to modern furniture at IKEA to customizable athletic

Re-branding

Creating a unified corporate identity or brand is an important goal for any transit agency. A unified design can make a transit system easily identifiable and at the same time unique. But it is also important for that identity to represent a positive image in the minds of the public. The brand, for the public, will be a visual reminder of the agency, and bring to mind all their perceptions, both negative and positive. Source after source stresses that the branding, more than anything else, is an assurance of quality.

For many agencies, the need to re-brand themselves eventually becomes necessary – their image becomes out of date, the agency wishes to reinvent itself to court a new audience, or worst of all, the agency is plagued by negative public perception due to issues of service, safety, or other concerns. In the re-branding process, the agency must be careful not only to change its visual image through flashy logos and new paint, but its public image as well. The International Association of Public Transport (UITP) identifies four essential components for any agency looking to establish or re-establish a brand – vision, mission, values, and brand personality, defined as the qualities a brand wants to emphasize. (UITP, 2003, pp.2-3) Establishing these substantive components well before launching the new fleet will give a transit

Websites

In places with high levels of Internet access, a clear and accurate website can be one of the public’s greatest resources for learning about the local transit system. Information can be accessed quickly and conveniently, and users can search for the exact information they need. As outlined below, a website can even be targeted towards one segment of the population, in an attempt to specifically address that group. Whatever the purpose of the website, it is essential that it is well designed, in order for it to be easy to navigate and to project a positive image of the transit agency to the public.

South Bend Public Transportation Corporation *"This is My Transpo" Commercial*

The South Bend Public Corporation ("Transpo") serves an area of 68 square miles and a population of over 154,000. Forty-nine buses on 17 routes carried approximately 3.4 million trips in 2006. South Bend is also home to Notre Dame, a university with approximately 10,000 students (Notre Dame website).

Looking to improve its public image and to change perceptions about common destinations, Transpo released a series of simple commercials showing riders shopping at the mall, traveling to the airport and the doctor's office, and taking a day trip to the zoo.¹⁴ The aim was to bring riding the bus into the mainstream and reach an audience that may not have considered riding the bus before by presenting an "upscale" image. The commercials show attractive, well-dressed riders who are relaxed and smiling, and appear to be a good cross-section of the population, including a commuter in a nice suit, a mature-looking student, and a number of families. Scenes showing riders walking through a verdant park and boarding buses at an upscale mall and outside a suburban home present an image of middle-class comfort. The buses themselves are hardly the focus of the commercial, often off to the edge of the frame. The narration throughout the commercial – "This is my commute," "This is my shopping," "This is my neighborhood" – as well as the tag line "This is My Transpo," are all intended to give riders a sense of ownership of the system, in the sense that it is available for all the activities in their daily lives.

All in all, the commercials do well to improve upon Transpo's formerly negative public image. The agency wanted the public to know about the upgraded condition of many of the buses, and the wide range of activities made accessible through the agency's routes. The commercials promote awareness of the system for the general public, but more importantly, make public transit seem like the transportation choice for all, not only those who have no other options (Sullivan interview, 2008).



Images from the "This is My Transpo" commercial

Source: Transpo website

¹⁴ The commercials can be viewed on Transpo's website, www.sbtranspo.com.

Monroe County Transit Authority

Transitional Branding Campaign

The Monroe County Transit Authority (MCTA), or the “Pocono Pony,” serves riders in Monroe County, PA. Its four fixed routes serve the more populated areas of Monroe County, PA, measuring 611 square miles. Fifteen buses carried over 177,000 riders in 2006-07 (Doyle interview, 2008).

In the summer of 2004, the MCTA, spurred on by a new director, decided to change its existing logo, a symbol that “didn’t have a whole lot of meaning” for the agency. The agency devised a new logo of a blue and green horse, symbolizing some of the region’s characteristics: its rural nature (the horse), its mountainous topography (the green color), and the clear sky (the blue color). The resulting “Pocono Pony” was hoped to attract new riders, and to raise public awareness of the system, which was low.

Through an awareness campaign including print, billboard, and television advertising and a ticket promotion that won an APTA AdWheel award, the MCTA gradually revealed their new image. A mascot, “Miles,” was debuted at an event at a local mall with giveaways and photo opportunities for kids. Tourist maps were distributed – the Poconos area is very popular with tourists, even if mostly locals ride the MCTA – and MCTA coordinated with local realtors to give the agency’s media kit to new homebuyers in the area.

MCTA’s new image has proven popular with its service population, and has allowed the agency to present a cohesive public image to the community. Both existing and recently purchased buses are painted with the agency’s new signature colors, creating a uniform fleet that presents a sharp contrast to when the agency used to sell advertising space on buses, allowing them to be “wrapped” with a single advertiser’s images. Of course, it is impossible to attribute MCTA’s ridership increase over the past two years to any specific initiative (or to a growing population), but it is clear that the system’s re-branding has given it a new image in the community, and a new opportunity to serve the local population (Doyle interview, 2008).



Before and after: MCTA’s previous look and a bus sporting the new logo.

Source: Jane Doyle, MCTA



“Miles,” MCTA’s new mascot.

Source: Jane Doyle, MCTA

Triangle Transit

Re-branding campaign

Triangle Transit (formerly the Triangle Transit Authority, or TTA) is a regional transit agency that serves North Carolina's Triangle region's most important population and employment centers, encompassing a very large service area of over 1,500 square miles and a population of over one million. About 1.2 million trips are made on Triangle Transit annually, on 49 buses running on 25 routes (FTA 2006).

A few years ago, after not receiving federal funding for a light rail system, Triangle Transit decided it wanted to revamp its bus fleet. The old monochromatic logo had been designed ten years ago, when the agency had a very different objective, the colors were outdated, and the aging buses looked shabby. In addition to its visual image, Triangle Transit had been plagued with breakdowns because of the age of its fleet – some of the buses have outlasted their 12-year lifespan. Without a new rail system to bolster its image, Triangle Transit decided it needed to completely re-brand itself.

A series of community meetings and focus groups were held to discover exactly what improvements to service the public desired. In the "Transit Design Game," people were given 20 pennies to allocate among different amenities that could go on the new buses. "Festibus" was an event held in local communities where the public could comment on several different kinds of buses. Local mayors put together a plan for bus expansion, and Triangle Transit's board had "visioning" sessions to create a new mission statement for the agency. Based on the feedback of all these groups, Triangle Transit's internal re-branding committee, made up of members of staff from every department in the agency, decided on the details of the re-launch, including a new logo (and a new look) that is radically different from Triangle Transit's former image.

New buses were ordered, the new logo was commissioned, and the website was redesigned to go along with the new look. The re-launch was made official on March 17th, 2008, but the most important feature of this rebranding effort is not the shiny new buses or the vibrant colors of the new logo. It is the community outreach effort that Triangle Transit created for its re-launch – the public involvement in the actual rebranding. In the words of the agency, without the "promise to the region" of better service and a new, attentive transit agency, all the new buses in the world would do very little for improving ridership. This community-focused endeavor made an effort to engage the public in the re-launch of the system, and therefore,



Before and after: The former Triangle Transit Authority buses and a new one with the agency's updated colors and logo

Source: Amy Armbruster, Triangle Transit



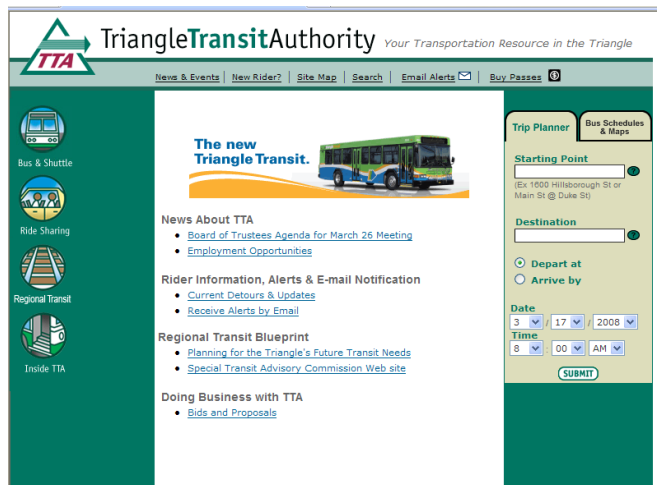
Triangle Transit "Redefine Travel" website

In addition to the agency's GoTriangle website, which presents information on alternative transportation options in the region, Triangle Transit designed a website in 2005 to appeal directly to the large student population in the area, centered around UNC - Chapel Hill, Duke, North Carolina State University, North Carolina Central University, and Meredith College. The idea was to give students a direct link to their university's transportation page, without making users search through the larger GoTriangle website. The website also had a design that was radically different than GoTriangle's or the former TTA's main website (even though GoTriangle's design is already a little whimsical), with a collage-style home page, where users could click on a set of keys to find out about carpool options, or a college ID to get to a university-specific page.

The website has not been an overwhelming success, which could potentially be due to the website's lack of exposure – the www.redefinetravel.org web address is not directly related to the Triangle Transit's www.triangletransit.org or GoTriangle's www.gotriangle.org, although there is a link from GoTriangle's website. But perhaps the biggest obstacle to Redefine Travel had been the disconnect between the whimsical, college aesthetic of the website and the grim public image of Triangle Transit's buses – an obstacle that Triangle Transit's re-launch may help to overcome. While the website may have been trying to update Triangle Transit's image in the eyes of younger riders, until recently, the agency's less polished and dull fleet may have sabotaged this intent.

However, things are poised to change. Triangle Transit has realized that the Redefine Travel website has not reached as many students as they would have liked, so they are relaunching the website – in what has been described as a more "sleek" and "updated" aesthetic – in concert with a five-week marketing campaign in which Triangle Transit staff visit each of the five major college campuses in the Triangle, advertise in college

newspapers, and reach students through social networking media such as the Facebook. The redesign and radically increased exposure of Redefine Travel, joined with the introduction of Triangle Transit's new buses (see above) may have















Screenshots from respectively, the Redefine Travel, GoTriangle and former TTA website.

Sources: Redefine Travel website, GoTriangle website, TTA website

CHAPTER 8:

Recommendations

After analyzing the area population and researching the case studies and marketing practices presented in the previous chapters, it is possible to determine which strategies and campaigns fit best with Chapel Hill Transit and those living in its service area. Below are recommendations for marketing efforts, drawing upon the best practices examined throughout this report.

Marketing Type		Case study/Agency	
Informational campaigns	Travel training	Santa Rosa CityBus	
	School outreach	Central Arkansas Transit Authority	
	Online resources	University of Michigan "Magic Bus"	
		Centre Area Transportation Authority	
Casual users campaigns	Special events	Laketran	
		Everett Transit/Imagine Children's Museum	
	Awareness	Transport for London	
Value campaigns	Environmental issues	Ann Arbor Transit Authority	
		Metro Transit	
Design/image campaigns	Image	South Bend Public Transportation Authority	
	Re-branding	Monroe County Transit Authority	
		Triangle Transit	
	Websites	Triangle Transit	

WEB-BASED MARKETING

Web-based marketing has proven effective in getting specific information to users in a quick and convenient way. Of course, this kind of outreach has the potential to exclude a portion of potential riders because of the barriers to universal Internet access. However, web-focused marketing like this would appear to work well in an area where many of the residents and commuters are students with consistent, reliable Internet access. All of the residence halls at Chapel Hill are wired for high-speed Internet, and there are multiple computer labs located across campus offering access for all students (Carolina Computing Initiative website). Local schools and the Chapel Hill library also provide free Internet access, opening up this avenue for those who may not have a personal computer or an Internet connection at home. Although it is difficult to quantify how much of the general population has Internet access, it is estimated by some that numbers in the Triangle (Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill) may be as high as 45.7% (Scarborough Research, 1999).

A redesign of Chapel Hill Transit's website to further mesh with the new paint scheme and logo, and to create a site free from the informational clutter of Town of Chapel Hill's website would be invaluable. Currently the site, located by clicking through a long list of "Departments" from the Town home page, is difficult to find and lacks its own character. Anything that makes transit information easier to access and understand will be a benefit for users of the system (or potential users). A clear, attractive website could be used as a marketing tool for visitors to the area or incoming students, and could be a convenient forum for disseminating information to the general public. Instead of making it difficult for people to find them, Chapel Hill Transit could increase awareness of the system by promoting a dedicated website.

UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

While University students aren't exactly the youth market, The University of North Carolina, with over 31,000 students and faculty, can seem like an underutilized resource for Carrboro and Chapel Hill. Every year, students in the City and Regional Planning Department in UNC's Graduate School serve as "consultants" for a client, providing services at no cost. Many of these projects have been for local clients, and have proved successful. A University also serves as a fertile field for innovation. If Chapel Hill Transit wanted to pursue a new undertaking, whether it is transit or creating new technology for the buses, it seems that tapping into the University population would be the best option for the lowest cost. Like the "Magic Bus" project at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, what begins as a small student project can evolve into a successful system that improves transit service and perhaps even increases ridership.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Holding special events is a good way to expose a new population to riding transit – riders who may have been too intimidated, busy, or confused by transit to attempt riding in the past. “Try Transit” days are not likely to have a great impact on Chapel Hill Transit’s ridership, as the system runs fare-free every day. However, a shopper who uses a Christmas shuttle, or a club member who completes a day’s activities with her friends may form new opinions about transit and their likeliness to use it. Turning a simple transit ride into a special or festive event could be the welcoming introduction to transit that many potential riders need.

Shopping shuttle

A holiday shopping shuttle connecting Chapel Hill and Carrboro’s commercial centers in order to make it easier for holiday shoppers to visit multiple locations without the hassle of driving to each of these centers and finding parking, could be a viable option that requires less preparation than a special event more akin to Laketrans’ “Red Hot Ride.” The shuttle would also be popular with local merchants, as it encourages patronage of locally owned businesses, rather than the big-box stores outside the city limits.

Outings

Much like Laketrans’ “Red Hot Ride,” Portland’s TriMet created a special daylong event to introduce members of the local community to transit and to teach them how to use it. But instead of the senior citizen population, TriMet designed a scavenger hunt for younger riders. The “Teen Transit Adventure” outfitted teenagers with a pass, a map, and a schedule, and gave them clues to follow to reach certain destinations. Local businesses were a partner in this event, providing some of the prizes available to the participants. The event was a success, introducing a new market to the ease of taking transit and demonstrating all the desirable destinations transit could reach (Community Transportation, 2004). Because of the long headways of some of its routes, a scavenger hunt on this scale is most likely beyond the scope of Chapel Hill Transit. However, offering an event like this on one of the fixed routes during off-peak hours could be an exciting and educational experience for classes looking to go on a field trip.

ENVIRONMENT

As explored in earlier chapters, Chapel Hill Transit's service area has a commitment to the environment – perhaps a greater commitment than other areas in the United States. Campaigns that highlight the emissions reduced by riding public transportation, or that draw attention to the more environmentally friendly aspects of a transit system, such as hybrid buses, may appeal to potential riders in a way that no other marketing campaign could. In an atmosphere like the one that exists in Carrboro and Chapel Hill, emphasizing its environmental responsibility may be the greatest marketing tool available to Chapel Hill Transit.

Personal appeals

Metro Transit's appeal to parents and others who want to protect the Earth for future generations is a great example of finding a way to make environmentalism a personal concern, in that your commuting habits today could make life better for your children. Once environmental degradation is seen as a personal problem, rather than a global one, it is easier to make it a concern, and doing your part by riding transit seems like a feasible solution.

Incremental change

Environmental campaigns don't need to take an all-or-nothing approach, either. By emphasizing that "Each time you don't get behind the wheel helps, but that doesn't mean you have to do it every day," Metro Transit's Go Greener campaign gives potential riders an easy and incremental first step to riding transit (Metro Transit, 2007). The hope is, like in many campaigns targeted towards casual users, that once these people have tried transit and get over the learning curve, they will use it more often. Making environmentalism an easy thing to do, like many municipalities have done with recycling by distributing containers and providing regular pickups, may be the step to making environmentalists out of ordinary citizens.

The environmental agency

Coddington outlines several strategies for companies looking to foster a "greener" image – recommendations that are also pertinent to a transit agency looking to pursue the same image. Presenting a unified environmental product is an important first step. For example, agencies shouldn't just tout their hybrid or biofuel buses, but should emphasize other ways in which the agency is caring for the environment, like the Ann Arbor Transit Agency does (especially since alternative fuel vehicles often make up a small portion of an agency's entire fleet). The new Town Operations Center (TOC), where Chapel Hill Transit is headquartered, was built using many environmentally sound principles, and is especially sustainable and energy efficient. Promoting their commitment to the environment by publicizing the TOC's sustainable features could be an effective strategy for CHT to entice environmentally

Public education/partnership

Educating the public about environmental issues is another of Coddington's recommendations – the more people know about the environmental issues that transit is trying to ameliorate, the more they are likely to value transit (1993, p.182). Partnering with an environmental organization is a good way to do this, as they provide a good source of authority for environmental education. CHT has already pursued this, with its partnership with the Million Solar Roofs Initiative to pilot a solar-powered bus stop in downtown Chapel Hill.¹⁵ Partnering with another popular local organizations, like SURGE or one of the high school groups, could prove advantageous to CHT in attracting riders who believe strongly in these organizations. (A good question to ask, however, is how many of these adherents are already using transit because of their environmental beliefs?)

¹⁵ The stop in question is on Franklin Street, just west of the intersection with Columbia Street and in front of Caribou Coffee.

Age-specific marketing

Environmental marketing messages may resonate more with a younger audience than an older one. Children today have grown up in the era of “An Inconvenient Truth” and widespread awareness about global warming. Ann Arbor Transit Agency and the partnership between Everett Transit and the Imagine Children’s Museum have appealed to children’s environmental sensibilities through AATA’s essay contest and the museum’s interactive video. Imagine’s educators are now looking at ways to reach an older age group with an educational program focused on the environmental benefits of transit, believing that this will strike a chord. These agencies are clued into the fact that the children of today will be the transit riders of tomorrow – and that they can be trusted to carry transit’s environmental message to others, including adults. In the words of UITP President Roberto Cavaleri:

“In order to promote the evolution of a public transport system that will mesh with the basic concept of sustainable development of our cities, it is crucial that we do so through our youth: they will filter inevitably through the adults and opinion leaders of the world” (Sadoux, 2006).

YOUTH OUTREACH

The youth market in Chapel Hill seems like an untapped market, with children under 15 making up over 12% of the population in Chapel Hill and 16% of the population in Carrboro (American Factfinder), but students under 18 making up only 2% of Chapel Hill Transit riders (On-Board Survey, 2003). Granted, many of these children very young, but it still seems like there is a significant amount of potential riders for Chapel Hill Transit to target.

Targeting the market

Like most transit agencies, Chapel Hill Transit does not specifically track its youth or teenage riders (Cain, 2006). In fact, Chapel Hill Transit does not even seem to track for age, as the 2003 On-Board Survey, an important information-gathering tool, did not have a question asking respondents to state their age. In his study of transit marketing programs aimed at teenagers, Cain observed that transit agencies that collected data on their younger riders were better able to understand this age group's needs and "to cater service provision to these needs" (2006, p.147).

Getting involved

Other agencies have found that getting youth directly involved in some of the decision-making behind transit was a good way to encourage them to ride transit. In Fairfield, California, and southeast Virginia, two transit agencies have created youth commissions to advise the agencies, much like a transportation board does. (Both Carrboro and Chapel Hill have a transportation board, and both are made up completely of adults, like the majority of town boards and commissions.) These two agencies, the Fairfield Transportation Division and Hampton Roads Transit, utilize the youth commission's findings to address young people's concerns with the system and to improve transit for this age group and others (Wilson, 2004).

School outreach

With a population of over 10,000 schoolchildren in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro school system (4,000 of which are in elementary schools), a school outreach program seems an ideal way to teach a segment of the population about riding transit, and hopefully encouraging them to start doing so (CHCCS website). School outreach requires a small amount of resources, and these could be minimized by teaching multiple classes in one day.



For children, transit has fewer of the negative connotations that adults associate with it, and has more of a sense of adventure. It is the younger generation that will need to turn the tide against single-occupancy vehicle use, and perhaps it is wisest to target these potential riders while they are still in school. Creating positive associations with transit at a young age may have some impact on this generation's future travel decisions

Museum partnership

A related outreach campaign for children could be a museum shuttle much like the one run by Everett Transit. The Kidzu Children's Museum, located in the middle of downtown and very close to many of the routes, would be an ideal destination for casual riders looking for a weekday or weekend activity for children. A ride on transit could be an adventure for children, and could also encourage their parents to ride, as well. A potential limitation to this type of program is the reduced service on Saturdays and the lack of service on Sundays; however, the program could be run during the week for younger children, and even when the system is running limited service on Saturdays, most of the routes run through town.

Dealing with teenagers

The majority of transit agencies who participated in Cain's study emphasized the largest obstacle to getting teenagers to ride transit – the image issue (2006, p. 145). Those in this age group are old enough to travel on their own, and many of them will not own their own cars even when they get their



drivers' licenses, but the social stigma of riding the bus is often too great to outweigh the positive benefits of riding transit, like independence from parents (or other drivers) and cost savings over owning and maintaining an automobile. However, a teenage focus group in Cain's study indicated that cost savings were an attractive reason for using public transit, and that even those with access to cars would ride transit to save money (p.143). Chapel Hill Transit, fare-free every day of the year, seems to have a lot to gain by courting the teenage market. Perhaps appealing to the cash-strapped sensibilities of this group would be an effective way to encourage them to ride transit, especially if marketing was done in close cooperation with the high schools, the YMCA, or other organizations that attract a large number of teenagers. However, overcoming transit's poor public image is an important first step to attracting this market.

RE-LAUNCH/RE-BRANDING

Chapel Hill Transit has already taken steps towards rebranding themselves, concurrent with the arrival of the new buses in 2007. The color scheme is roughly the same as the one on the old buses, but the text in the logo is different, and has appeared on the bus guide and stop schedules. However, although the system's bright new low-floor buses present a positive image to the community, Chapel Hill Transit should focus on what is perhaps the most important part of re-branding – the “promise to the riders” that Triangle Transit committed to. Instead of just putting new stock on the road, Chapel Hill Transit could make an effort to reach out to the community and detail the improvements they are making to the system, through public meetings or a widely distributed newsletter. An effort like this was made at the ribbon cutting for Chapel Hill's new operations center, but that event was attended mostly by Town employees and transit professionals, not the general public. Presenting the new buses in prominent positions at fairs downtown, farmers' markets, or other local events could go a long way towards promoting the new look and quality of Chapel Hill Transit to the greater community.

CONCLUSION

While researching this project, I have come to the inevitable conclusion that marketing is a field unto itself, and that its many subtleties lie beyond the scope of this report. However, the case studies presented in this project illustrate the necessity of not only providing good transit service, but promoting it as well. Good design and thoughtful community outreach can have an impact on the public's perception of transit, and subsequently, on its use. As commute times continue to rise, and single-occupancy transportation continues to have significant negative impacts on the environment, transit will become more and more essential to the health and well being of this nation. It is essential that transit agencies seriously consider marketing as a vital component of any provision of service.

Future transit marketing trends seem largely tied to environmental issues, as climate change becomes more of a publicly accepted issue and more cities commit to reducing carbon emissions. Transit will play a key role in these reductions, and enticing the public to ride, whether through moral obligation or cost-saving measures to offset the rising price of fuel. Environmental campaigns targeted at youth may be even more successful, and recruit a new generation of transit riders.

But no matter what their concerns about the environment, people cannot be forced to ride transit. The private automobile remains a comfortable, convenient, and cost-effective (at least for now) option for many travelers, and it will require a large effort on the part of transit agencies to make their systems seem like a viable alternative to this well-established mode of transportation. To do this, transit agencies don't necessarily need to upgrade their entire fleet, or put in popular light rail lines, or increase service dramatically. What they need to focus on is changing perceptions.

Almost all the case studies in this report sought to do one thing – to change the public's opinion about transit, whether that opinion is that it's too confusing, too inconvenient, or too unreliable. While people still hold a negative opinion of transit, they cannot be convinced to ride on it, despite an agency's best efforts. Changing that negative perspective – associating transit with quality, comfort, and reliability – is one of the most important things a transit agency can do.

In conclusion, it appears that the best way to market a transit agency is to make its values and commitment to the community transparent to the larger public. Marketing, then, is simply a highly public symbol of the agency's values – whether that symbol is a promise to riders, a well-received event, or a brightly painted new bus. But the symbols must have some substance behind them – as a UK study of bus marketing discovered, marketing messages fail when transit does not meet the needs of their potential customers (Beale & Bonsall, 2007, p.284). By committing wholeheartedly to the values they communicate to the public, transit agencies can raise their services from a more marginal role to an accepted and valued mode of transportation.

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