

Marketing Sub-Committee, Long Range Metro Transit Ad Hoc Committee
Recommendations

In order for Metro to achieve long-term financial success, the organization must reach beyond its current upward ridership trend. To meet higher ridership goals, Metro must implement a strong, strategic Marketing and Customer Service plan that's supported with a Marketing and Customer Service budget to adequately meet Metro's growth needs.

The Marketing Sub-Committee offers the following recommendations based on public feedback from the mid-term report survey, discussion within the committee, and support provided by staff.

Build upon efforts to provide a positive customer experience – The golden rule of marketing is it is more cost-effective to invest in the current customer base than to invest in finding new customers. Metro's number one marketing priority is and should be to continually improve the customer experience to keep current customers and increase their usage. In order to see a significant rise in ridership, Metro should improve the customer experience to make riding the bus as convenient and user-friendly as possible. Before Metro can successfully market its product, the system must be one that people want to participate in.

The marketing committee recommends the following customer service expansions and improvements.

- Installation of "next bus" real time digital signs at all transfer points and at stops with higher number of boardings.
- Installation of current paper schedules at all stops.
- Acquisition of enhanced customer notification technology including software that would improve upon Metro's current Rider Alert e-mail alert system by expanding text and voice notices beyond the work and home computer to cell phones and PDA's.
- Greater emphasis on Metro's customer feedback. Metro should not only ask for feedback, but should continue and expand efforts to gain feedback, reply to feedback, and use feedback to improve Metro's systems.
- Improved telephone assistance. The marketing committee suggests Metro conduct an internal analysis of current and expected customer service staffing and communication needs and budget accordingly in 2010.
 - Confirm that phone operators identify themselves.
 - Increase customer service phone staff. Due to increased ridership, phone calls and emails to the customer service center has greatly increased in recent years.

- Expansion of customer service hours. Metro should expand customer assistance through later hours into the evening with the goal of providing assistance to match Metro's actual bus service time. Currently, Metro phone operators are only available to customers until 6 PM on weekdays, and 4:30 PM on weekends/holidays. Customers with fixed-route questions or paratransit travel concerns are left with little customer service support during these times.
- Finish implementation process with Google Transit by 2009. The marketing sub-committee supports and encourages Metro's efforts to work with Google to provide its bus schedule via Google Transit. The marketing committee also encourages all outside City of Madison agencies involved with this process to support Metro in finalizing its relationship with Google so that this valuable service can be provided as soon as possible.

Recommendation Publicity/Matrix: The Marketing Subcommittee has created a matrix to offer marketing strategies for communicating the Ad Hoc Committee's final recommendations. The marketing strategies will be on two levels – core, daily marketing activities and higher level, targeted strategies. The matrix will serve as a guide for Metro staff and the Committee in the following ways:

- a.) Inform the public of the committee's recommendations.
- b.) Ensure that the work of the Committee will move forward after the group has dissolved.

**Unlimited Ride Pass Agreement for Small Businesses and beyond:
*PENDING FULL AD HOC COMMITTEE DISCUSSION***

The unlimited ride pass agreement structure lends itself to be a viable option to pool together small businesses in order for employees to receive the free ride pass that other larger institutions such as UW-Madison and City of Madison employees currently receive. A small business unlimited ride pass pool could increase ridership for Metro while providing an attractive employee benefit and parking demand reduction for small businesses. In 2008, Metro should propose a plan for the 2009 budget to internally manage and deliver a new program to sell unlimited ride passes to small businesses

Considering the success of current unlimited ride pass contracts, Metro should more actively pursue businesses and organizations interested in entering into an unlimited ride pass agreement. These agreements offer Metro guaranteed revenue and a new pool of riders who may not have otherwise considered commuting via bus.

Increase the Marketing Budget: Metro's marketing budget of \$163,000 is small and comprises only 0.4% of Metro's overall budget. When compared to Metro peer systems, its marketing budget ranked last. Metro peer system budgets averaged \$492,600 and 1.5% of overall budget. A strong marketing budget is essential to continue increasing ridership.

The Marketing Committee recommends that Metro increase its marketing budget to \$500,000. By increasing the marketing budget, Metro will have the financial means to carry out important, new marketing activities. The Marketing Committee believes that an

investment in the following marketing recommendations (in order of priority) will pay off by increasing ridership and meeting growth projections.

- Customer Service Training (\$5,000) – Customer service operators are on the front line in terms of encouraging people to use Metro service as well as providing solutions to those who call in with complaints. Professional customer service training is recommended to give these employees the tools needed to market the service as well as to professionally manage customer concerns and complaints. will again consider using the service. Providing professional training may reduce employee turnover and frustration.
- Annual Marketing Research (\$50,000) – The Marketing Sub-Committee recommends that Metro implement three targeted market research surveys to identify key audiences, to gain a better perspective on public perception and customer satisfaction, and to provide a base for strategic marketing planning. Three different surveys include:
 - Current customers through an onboard survey
 - Core Madison service area
 - New areas for potential growth

Using an integrated approach to surveying including telephone, email, and focus group surveys is encouraged. Previous marketing surveys completed in 2004 were conducted by a paid consultant. In the future, Metro may financially benefit by partnering with large research-orientated institutions such as the WI Department of Transportation or UW-Madison to assist in conducting and analyzing the research.

- New full-time outreach/business liaison staff person and outreach materials (\$90,000 for staff, \$10,000 for materials) – Currently, the Marketing Department consists of 4 full-time staff people. This is not enough staff to carry out the marketing needs for a \$55 million organization. A full-time outreach/business liaison would concentrate on activities that promoted Metro within the residential and business community. Potential activities could include management of an unlimited ride pass program for small businesses, outreach with neighborhood groups, coordination with local of Metro, coordination with civic groups, and attendance at local networking events.
- Expand sponsorship participation (\$30,000) – To increase its visibility as a supportive community organization, Metro should pay a more significant role in sponsoring events that are health-oriented, environmental, cultural, and business-related. Strategically sponsoring events will offer Metro publicity opportunities and a chance to connect with the community.
- Direct Mail/New Customer Promotion Pilot Program: (\$125,000) – In the past, Metro has not used direct mail in large amounts, primarily due to limited resources. The Marketing Sub-Committee recommends the creation of a postcard direct-mail pilot program which targets neighborhoods of under-utilized bus routes to promote awareness of the routes and gain new riders to increase the efficiency of these under-utilized assets. Other mailers may include a city-wide audience near earth day, or a mailing to businesses for

small business bus pass.

Further use of direct mail could include targeting new riders by conducting special promotions, such as offering 10-Ride cards, as incentives to try service for free.

- Photography (\$3,000) – Metro’s currently has a graphic artist/photographer on staff. Utilize archived pictures as well as new to produce promotional items such as posters, calendars, etc. to capture the image of Metro through riders and leaders in the Community using Metro Transit.

Increase co-marketing and partnership opportunities:

City and County

- Preferred entry at city/county events for those who arrive by transit
- List Metro info (web links, general info) on Overture and other city/county websites
- Promote Metro services at city/county-sponsored events (County Fair, Halloween Festival, Dane Dances, etc.)
- Co-market Metro with Monona Terrace “green building” certification
- Increase collaboration work with RideShare, Etc. and UW Transportation.

Large businesses

- Expand unlimited ride pass contracts
- Expand Commuter Choice Program
- Purchase passes for employees
- Coordinate brown bag lunches to educate employees on how to use Metro
- Increase business sales outlets
- Make schedules and Metro information available at the workplace
- Sponsor customer amenities such as benches and shelters

Environmental organizations – Employees and members of environmental organizations should be Metro “ambassadors” by communicating Metro’s good work to the public and leading by example. Metro should be active and well-connected in Madison’s strong environmental community.

Support of Advertising to Fill Funding Gap: The Long Range Metro Planning Ad Hoc Committee (LRMPAC) supports the use of advertising to fill some of the funding gap that Metro is currently experiencing.

It also supports gaining a broader perspective of advertising on buses including doing cost analyses on revenue potential for various advertising modes, conducting interviews with rider and general citizen focus groups regarding Metro’s use of advertising and the bus wrap advertising program, as well as conduct formal or informal surveys of riders and Madison citizens to get a flavor of how Metro’s advertising endeavors are being perceived. The LRMPAC also encourages Metro to conduct a cost/benefits analysis of full bus wraps compared to partially wrapped buses.

In addition to further research into public perception, the LRMPAC further supports advertising opportunities such as advertising in shelters, on benches at stops, and full and/or partially wrapped buses.

Another way to reach the advertising goal, is by selling naming rights for existing shelters and transfer points. Businesses could also play a role in improving the customer experience by sponsoring new benches and shelters in exchange for advertising or naming rights.

Proactively approach the Media: Metro Transit has an excellent story to tell. Ridership is at a record-setting high, new hybrid bus technology supports the green trend, and Metro has one of the lowest per rider costs among peer groups. Unfortunately, it's the negative press that appears more often in the papers. Recently, Metro has begun to forge a stronger relationship with local and statewide media. The Marketing Committee recommends that Metro continue to build relations with local media representatives and proactively pitch stories on a routine basis that are intriguing, current, and reflect the many positive aspects of Metro Transit.

Re-brand Metro: *PENDING FULL COMMITTEE DISCUSSION*

Metro should work towards improving its brand and image. The image to reinforce is the positive experience of riding the bus and the sense of community experienced while sharing the ride. Metro's main message and image should be based upon results from market research and staff input. The message and image should be simple and be marketed through rider testimonials and pictures to capture a more personal connection with Metro.

There are a variety of avenues Metro can take regarding a re-branding process that range in price. One proposed solution is for Metro to hire a marketing firm to guide Metro through a re-branding process, including a new logo.

In addition to the cost of the marketing firm, costs of re-branding Metro signs and equipment with a new look are a significant budget consideration.

Members agree that efforts to portray the positive experience of riding the bus and the sense of community experienced while sharing the ride should be important elements of Metro's marketing future.

Narrow Target Audiences: Metro Transit is available to most Madisonians over age 18, however, there are certain populations who are more likely to become riders. Metro should increase efforts to hit these target audiences and strategically prioritize them according to market research results.

Potential target audiences may include:

- Environmental Organizations staff and members
- Other civic organizations including health, education, social, etc.)
- Residents and businesses in heavy bus corridors
- Residents and businesses in densely populated, mixed use neighborhoods with lower parking per capita
- Downtown businesses
- Large centers of employment
- Senior citizens
- Working families
- University faculty, staff, and students
- People who participate in other forms of alternative transportation – ride sharers, car sharers, bikers, walkers, etc.

Pilot Program: Ride the bus to work for free day: During the past two summers, Metro has partnered with the City of Madison to give free rides on Clean Air Action days. The days are determined by the DNR and there is usually less than 24-hour notice.

Metro may see more positive results if a special promotion days/events could be set months ahead of so as to give plenty of opportunity to market the event and urge new riders to try out Metro.

These special promotion events could include special print and media promotion ahead of time encouraging people to try the bus on a certain promotion day. On this particular day, ambassadors at transfer points and the Capitol Square could greet riders and give assistance and guidance to anyone trying Metro that day for the first time.

Special drawings, giveaways, and refreshments could be provided to encourage and welcome new riders while also acknowledging all the current riders using Metro on a continuous basis.

Investigate the potential for a 501(c)3 Friends of Metro Transit Group: The purpose of this group would be to fundraise for Metro and assist in legislative education. Potential activities of the Friends of Metro group may include:

- Advocate for Metro at both local and state governmental levels – The Friends group can partner with other governmental and non-profit groups with common interests to push policy that will support Metro's goals and growth. The Friends group may also lobby for increased funds directed to transit.
- Business Advisory Group – This group may also act as a liason with the business community by recruiting key business leaders to communicate Metro's message the business community.
- Fundraising support – The Friends group may solicit donations from individuals, businesses, and foundations to support Metro's mission. Possible activities may include membership drives, an annual dinner to thank supporters, and corporate giving.

Metro has contacted peer groups to learn about their foundation programs. The Marketing Committee recommends that Metro continue their investigation into the feasibility and potential benefits of forming a non-profit foundation.