

## TRANSIT STRATEGIES

# BRANDING AND MARKETING

At its most elementary level, transit marketing provides customers the information they need to make informed transportation choices. But just as importantly, successful branding and marketing creates a dynamic, captivating public image that helps agencies retain and attract riders while cultivating support within the larger community. Agencies can redefine their image and boost ridership by creating clear graphics and compelling narratives that effectively communicate the advantages of public transit. Establishing a good name is nearly as important as creating a good product.

There are many techniques a transit agency can employ to improve its image and effectively communicate its services, and most fit into two categories: marketing and branding.

**Marketing** can be defined as a process through which transit agencies communicate transit's benefits to riders, agency employees, and the general public.

**Branding** is the identity and aesthetic a transit agency expresses to the public. **Rebranding** is a tool that creates a specific image for an existing service that is either similar to or different from an existing brand image.

Successful transit attracts not only riders who have no other travel options, but also riders who do have choices. Aside from providing efficient, comfortable, and safe service connecting meaningful destinations, successful branding and marketing is perhaps the most effective means of capturing the choice rider.

### Marketing and Branding Areas

Marketing and branding can be used in many areas of a transit agency's work, including:

- Brand and identity
- Rider communication
- Rider education
- Information systems
- Marketing campaigns
- Public relations
- External communications
- Rider feedback systems
- Online engagement

A comprehensive marketing strategy should begin when a service launches and continue throughout the life of the service.

## MARKETING

Instead of merely publishing route pamphlets and engaging in limited on-vehicle advertising, 21st-century transit agencies aggressively court public interest and pursue riders through well-branded and savvy multimedia campaigns emphasizing transit's benefits. Marketing is one way a transit agency can communicate its values to employees and the general public. While marketing should be a continual effort to maintain a positive image for the transit agency, a successful marketing strategy can also be crucial to the success of new or revised transit service.

VIVA STANDARDIZED MARKETING POSTER



LA METRO TARGETED MARKETING CAMPAIGN



Marketing works best when it promotes high-quality transit, as it is not enough to simply *say* that buses are safe, clean, and reliable, or that service is fast and frequent. Marketing is not a tool for distorting the truth; it is simply a way to convey the benefits of a service and to position good transit as a desirable commodity. If the service being offered is outstanding, marketing can help create a positive brand image and a loyal customer base.

Highlighting the ability to surf the Internet, work, or watch movies on the ride home has been effective at drawing new riders to high quality services. Marketing departments should also be at the table at the early stages of any new service planning. Agencies can then launch well-branded advertising in advance of new service, much as Apple and Microsoft tease new hardware and software months before release to generate consumer excitement.

## BRANDING

A brand is an agency's identity and aesthetic, a reflection of its values. The look and feel of that brand permeates—and is reinforced at—every public interface: not only logos, stations, system maps, and vehicle exteriors and interiors, but also websites, social media presences, and traditional marketing campaigns.

A good brand can help create a positive image of an agency and its services. An important part of branding is choosing a unified design standard, colors, or a logo that can be part of all services. This helps to create a visual identity for the transit agency and its services.

For example, in 2003 the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (branded as Metro) became the first transit agency in the country to hire a creative director, and has since established the nation's largest full service in-house design studio. In the years since, it has successfully branded many of its newer, more robust services as fashionable alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle in its car-loving market.

ROCHESTER TRANSIT UNIFIED DESIGN FOR PRINT MEDIA



LA METRO BRT ORANGE LINE



When creating a new brand, a transit agency must answer three questions:

- **What values should the brand convey?** Some typical brand values for transit agencies include reliability, convenience, comfort, environmental friendliness, and freedom (to work, read, etc.). Values can be ideas that the agency thinks are important (for example, “cool” is one of Los Angeles Metro’s core values), or they can be benefits that customers will get from using the service. Along those lines, King County Metro’s branding strategy reminds people that commuting by bus gives them time to do things on their daily commute besides gripping a steering wheel.
- **Why should people care?** The second question facing an agency focuses more on the story the brand should carry. What is the narrative of the transit agency? How is the new brand a part of or separate from that legacy? All internal and external-facing publications should work to tell this story through graphic and visual messaging.
- **Is the branding strategy authentic?** Because branding campaigns are aimed at attracting and keeping new riders, especially it is not enough for an agency to simply change the image of a transit service. If there are aspects of service that are discouraging potential riders from using transit, it is essential to address those issues in conjunction with a branding campaign. A transit agency must be the brand it says it is.

When creating a brand, it is important to define what *is in* the brand and equally important to define what *is not in* the brand. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to align a new brand with existing brands to gain access to the established customer base. If an existing brand suffers from a negative public image, the agency may want to position a new brand as distinct from existing services.

## REBRANDING

Any rebranding effort should clearly communicate the values that are important to the new brand and should convey those values through a unified graphic and visual presence that communicates a clear story about the brand. Rebranding can be much more difficult than creating a brand from scratch, especially when the rebranding effort will require combining two distinct brands into a single brand. Merging brands can be challenging because it can threaten the name recognition and associated consumer base for both brands. However, careful and thoughtful rebranding can create a new image for existing services that better frames the benefits both services provide.

After deciding to rebrand and selecting a new visual identity, the agency must **advertise the new brand**, reminding current and potential riders that transit saves them time and money and is the best way to get around the city. Often, a transit agency rebranding effort is accompanied by changes in service, whether adding service or realigning existing services to better serve areas of high transit demand. It's important for an agency to **announce any service changes**, emphasizing that the rebranding is intended to increase the relevancy and benefits of the service for customers. Finally, an agency should celebrate rebranding by **holding a grand opening**. This can get customers involved in the new brand and help to build connection to the community.

RIBBON CUTTING IN COLUMBIA, MO TO ANNOUNCE COMO CONNECT REBRAND



## BRANDING AND REBRANDING IN PRACTICE

Transit agencies across the country have used a variety of branding techniques to grow ridership and improve public perception of transit service. This can involve distinguishing new service from existing service to avoid stigmas; incorporating existing service into a premium brand to elevate its image; systemwide rebranding to overhaul an entire agency's image; and even combining the brands of multiple agencies to present more legible regionwide service.

## SINGLE-SERVICE BRANDING

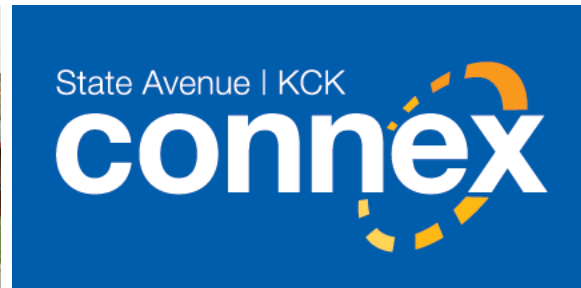
Single-service branding allows agencies to distinguish a new, higher-quality product from existing service that might have a reputation as slow, unreliable, or uncomfortable. Distinct branding prevents negative connotations associated with existing service from stigmatizing the public perception of new bus rapid transit (BRT), streetcar, or light rail service.

### MAX and connex (Kansas City, MO)

The Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA) operates two MAX BRT lines and is working to implement a third. These lines provide frequent service with limited stops, high quality passenger amenities, and some dedicated bus lanes.

KCATA also recently began operating premium bus service between Kansas City, KS, and Kansas City, MO, a service that is uniquely branded and provides high quality passenger amenities. However, it provides much less frequent service than the MAX lines. In order to avoid diluting the MAX brand but still differentiate the premium service from regular bus service, KCATA used a different name (“connex”) with a similar logo that will link the two brands through similar design elements to denote that both provide premium service.

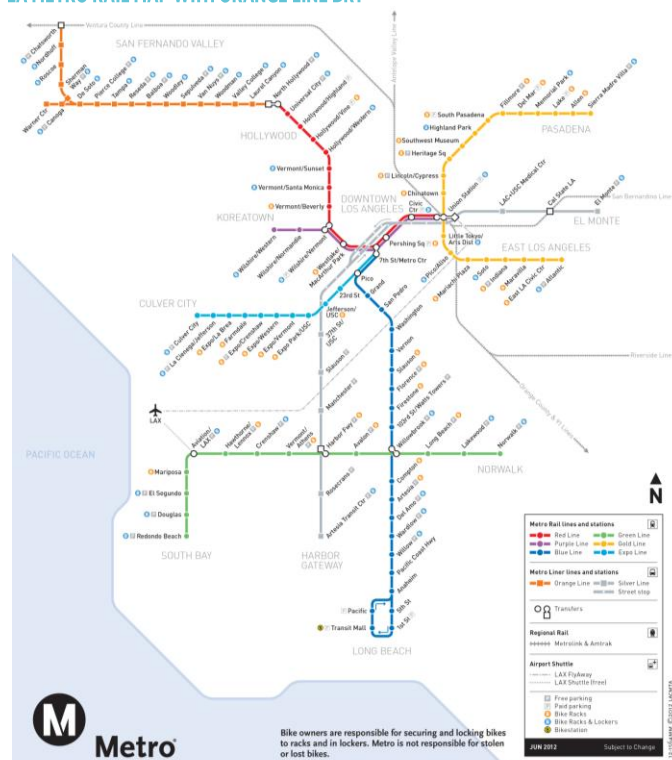
### CONNECTED BRANDS FOR KCATA SERVICES



### LA Metro Orange Line (Los Angeles, CA)

LA Metro’s bus and rail operators handle nearly 1.3 million boardings each weekday. When the agency introduced its Orange Line BRT in 2005, Metro marketed the service as part of its rail network to convey that BRT is as fast and convenient as light rail transit. It included the Orange Line on its map of rail service (see image at right) and used visual and graphic design cues to indicate that the new service was part of the light rail brand.

### LA METRO RAIL MAP WITH ORANGE LINE BRT



### VelociRFTA (Roaring Fork Transportation Authority, CO)

With the launch of the nation's first rural BRT service, Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) spent \$46 million to convert its express bus service to BRT and to reduce travel time between Glendale and Aspen, CO. The new BRT system was branded as "VelociRFTA," a variation on the name of the speedy velociraptor dinosaur, to emphasize the speed with which riders would move up and down the valley.

The project included new buses, stations, exclusive lanes, and transit priority signals as well as a service branding effort that carries into the station design (where sitting rocks are shaped like dinosaur eggs) and driver uniforms (safari-style shirts, shorts, and hats). With slogans like "My other ride is a dinosaur," the VelociRFTA brand has become so popular that the agency sells branded t-shirts, bags, water bottles, and even underwear.

#### VELOCI RFTA BUS, MAGNET, AND STATION SEATS



## SYSTEM REBRANDING

In some markets, transit agencies are seen as providing service only for those with no other options, particularly low-income residents and people with disabilities, rather than as a viable or desirable travel option for those with the resources and ability to own and drive a car. For other agencies, service is perceived as inconvenient and difficult to understand. In response, many agencies have rebranded to better highlight the usability and convenience of their system and to attract more choice riders.

### Oklahoma City

In anticipation of redesigned bus service and the introduction of streetcar service, the Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority (COTPA) decided to rebrand. The new public-facing brand, EMBARK, replaced the METRO Transit brand on Oklahoma City transit services. Rebranding occurred in response to relative lack of awareness about METRO Transit service in the city, along with a desire to attract choice riders who might not otherwise consider using transit.

#### BEFORE AND AFTER EMBARK REBRANDING



#### Little Rock

Since 2004, the Central Arkansas Transit Authority (CATA), serving the Little Rock region in Arkansas, has operated two transit services, the Metro Bus, a local circulator, and the MAX BRT system. The two brands were initially kept separate to avoid the new BRT system acquiring the stigma associated with the Metro Bus. After a decade of successful BRT service and thus improved public opinion, the agency decided to rebrand and incorporate both services into one brand in early 2015.

The rebranding effort includes a new name—Rock Region Metro—as well as a new color scheme and new vehicle design. Rebranding the agency was part of a systemwide strategic plan and service redesign and is intended to help communicate the system’s overhaul to the public. The brand is designed to reflect the “citizen-focused, forward-thinking organization” CATA has become.

Rock Region Metro’s new branding is geared toward making transit more attractive to choice riders and increasing ridership. All vehicles have been repainted to match the new design guidelines and the website and print communications have been updated to reflect the new brand. Passenger amenity improvements are also planned: all fixed-route and express buses now offer free Wi-Fi and a new smartphone app will provide easy access to bus departure and arrival times.

#### BEFORE AND AFTER ROCK REGION METRO REBRANDING



## LOS ANGELES METRO REBRAND

LA Metro has long been one of the largest transit service providers in the country, but at the start of the 21st century its customer approval ratings were mired in the 40th percentile and choice riders accounted for only 26% of ridership. To combat the agency's negative public image, Metro created an in-house ad agency and tasked it with reimagining all visual and graphic material to make Metro "cool."

The in-house team adopted a bright, California-inspired palette to replace historically drab bus design, branding each class of service with its own color. There are four types of bus service: Metro Liner BRT (Silver), Metro Express (Blue), Metro Rapid (Red), and Local (Orange).

### LA METRO BUS FAMILY OF SERVICE BRANDING



The agency also changed its name from MTA to Metro, recreated its logo, conducted a countywide ad campaign, and invited local artists to contribute art to bus stops and stations. By 2008, the rebranding had become so successful that the agency was nominated for a design award. The transformation is holistic and comprehensive. As a result, Metro service has become an iconic part of the Los Angeles landscape and choice ridership has increased by 10%.

### LA METRO'S 2008 "OPPOSITES" MARKETING CAMPAIGN



## REGIONWIDE REBRANDING

In communities served by multiple agencies, branding is often balkanized and disjointed, presenting riders a jumbled and illegible array of brands and services. At the present time, transit in Middle Tennessee is provided by several agencies, including Nashville MTA, the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), Clarksville Transit Service (CTS), Murfreesboro Rover, and the Franklin Transit Authority. As is commonly the case in areas where there are multiple transit operators, the services that these agencies provide are branded differently.

Alternately, some areas with multiple transit providers present all services to the public as part of a single cohesive system. This approach could be used to present Nashville MTA and RTA regional services as part of a single system where the sum is greater than the individual parts.

## Valley Metro (Phoenix, AZ)

Perhaps the best example of regionwide rebranding comes from the Phoenix area, where the services offered by four different providers are all presented to the public as Valley Metro, and most passengers view individual services as part of a single system.

The Valley Metro Regional Public Transportation Authority was founded in 1993, comprising 16 member agencies representing communities in and around Phoenix committed to funding the regional transit system. Valley Metro Rail formed in 2003 as a nonprofit public agency charged with building and operating the region's 57-mile high-capacity network. The agencies merged in 2012 under a single chief executive officer to take advantage of potential efficiencies, to improve service, and to provide a single, more legible public-facing brand. Valley Metro Rail, Valley Metro LINK, and local buses all share the same brand and a single fare structure.

### VALLEY METRO REGIONAL BRANDING



## Go Triangle (Raleigh and Durham, NC)

In March 2015, the regional bus services in North Carolina's Research Triangle were rebranded to share a similar name: "Go." Triangle Transit, Durham Area Transit Authority (DATA), and Capital Area Transit (CAT in Raleigh) received a grant from the North Carolina Department of Transportation for the rebranding, which is part of a marketing campaign to get more people out of their cars and on buses. All regional buses have incorporated "Go" into their names, as in "Go Triangle," "Go Durham," and "Go Raleigh." The services offered by the agencies will remain the same, and new logos on buses will be phased in over the next few years.

### REGIONAL REBRANDING IN THE TRIANGLE





### RideKC (Kansas City Area)

In 2014, the Kansas City Area Transportation Association (KCATA) signed an interlocal agreement with the Johnson County Commission for joint transit management and administration, saving the two agencies an estimated half-million dollars in personnel costs. Using the construction of a new downtown Kansas City streetcar as an opportunity to rethink transit branding for the entire region, KCATA and partner agencies then launched RideKC in 2015.

The new brand will present an intuitive and unified face to transit riders across the region, regardless of municipal or county borders or transit agency jurisdiction. Customers served by five different agencies (KCATA, KC Streetcar, Johnson County Transit (The JO), Inde-Bus, and Unified Government Transit (UGT)) offering dozens of local, express, and BRT routes can visit a single RideKC-branded website to access trip planners, route maps, bus tracking, and fare information. Fleet, stop, and station rebranding began in fall 2015 and is expected to be completed in 2016. A regional day pass already exists, and officials are studying a simplified regional fare structure and single transit card.

#### RIDEKC BUS AND STREETCAR BRANDING AND REGIONAL PARTNERS



## APPLICATION TO NASHVILLE MTA AND RTA

There are two key branding opportunities for Nashville MTA and RTA: 1) to develop a unified brand, and 2) to establish a brand for individual (particularly premium) services. These opportunities can build on the work of the RTA's ad hoc committee on rebranding, a group of RTA board members and transit providers from Clarksville, Franklin, and Murfreesboro who worked with local researchers to begin exploring rebranding the regional system.

Nashville MTA and RTA should also explore new opportunities to market transit services throughout Middle Tennessee. The agencies have promoted their services in the past, but with a renewed focus on the need for new mobility options in the region, the time is right to consider new ways to encourage people to try transit.

## NASHVILLE MTA AND RTA PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS



## PRESENT NASHVILLE MTA AND RTA SERVICES AS PART OF A UNIFIED BRAND

Currently, Nashville MTA and RTA services are presented differently to the public because they are two different agencies. This means that riders generally need to go to different websites to find information and services are branded differently. There are limited examples of joint marketing on Nashville MTA's website and system map, such as the inclusion of RTA bus routes on the map. Social media platforms—such as Twitter and Facebook—also present information from both agencies, including special event service on the Music City Star.

Building on these examples, some areas with multiple transit providers present all services as part of a single, cohesive system. Presenting Nashville MTA and RTA services as part of a single system could help to communicate that the sum is greater than the individual parts.

### NASHVILLE MTA BRANDED BUS



### RTA BRANDED BUS



Additional examples of dual or joint branding between Nashville MTA and RTA exist, such as on Route 96X Nashville/Murfreesboro Relax & Ride. This is an RTA service that is operated by Nashville MTA, and the buses used for the route include both Nashville MTA and RTA branding (see photo below). Transit riders typically do not care who operates a service, and most 96X riders likely have no idea that they are using an RTA route that just happens to be run by another agency. Moving to a unified brand would communicate to riders that transit service in Middle Tennessee is seamless, regardless of how services are funded or operated. Rebranding can help to increase awareness of service and any improvements, such as those being explored through the nMotion Strategic Plan.

#### ROUTE 96X BUS INCLUDES BOTH MTA AND RTA BRANDING



### REBRAND INDIVIDUAL SERVICES

Many systems brand individual services, either for specific services or for entire “families of services.” The most common reason to brand individual services is to draw attention to the services and differentiate them from other services. Typically, the special branding is used widely, on informational materials, stops, and buses.

Nashville MTA currently uses special branding for two of its services: “BRT lite” for Rapid Bus service that operates on the Charlotte Pike, Gallatin Pike, and Murfreesboro Pike corridors, and “Music City Circuit” for two circulator routes that operate through downtown Nashville. Music City Circuit buses are specially branded, but BRT lite buses are not.

In addition to lacking buses with special branding, the “BRT lite” moniker undersells the service that is provided. Most transit systems use names that present the message that premium or specially branded service is somehow better than regular bus service. For example, Kansas City and Las Vegas use the name “MAX,” and San Antonio uses the name “Primo.” Other systems incorporate speed into the name, such as Los Angeles’ “Metro Rapid.”

Conversely, the BRT lite name is based on an industry term (BRT) that may be unfamiliar to some people, and the term “lite” could imply something less rather than something better. As Nashville MTA upgrades additional routes to “BRT lite,” a comprehensive rebranding used on buses, at stations, and on other materials could heighten awareness of the service and its benefits.

#### BRT LITE BRANDING



#### MUSIC CITY CIRCUIT VEHICLE



RTA uses the “Relax & Ride” brand for its regional commuter bus services, and the commuter rail service is branded as the Music City Star. The Music City Star is easily identifiable as a special service because it is the region’s only commuter rail line; however, RTA has carried the brand through to Music City Star stations and materials as well. In addition, there are occasional Music City Star services that are specially branded, such as the “Game-Day Express” to Tennessee Titans football games.

#### MUSIC CITY STAR TRAIN AND STATION



Branding of RTA’s bus services is less recognizable. Most RTA services are operated by Gray Line and, as a result, most buses feature the Gray Line brand much more prominently than the RTA Relax & Ride brand. At times, such as to highlight the launch of a new service, RTA has made its branding more prominent. Moving forward, this should become the norm rather than the exception.

STANDARD RTA BRANDING ON GRAY LINE BUS



ENHANCED RTA BRANDING



In addition to better branding of its vehicles, RTA should expand branding of its park-and-ride lots. Very few park-and-ride lots have any RTA branding, making it difficult to find the lots and to understand where to park or catch the bus. Whether the lots are shared or built exclusively for RTA, expanding the use of banners, signs, and special shelters can make RTA's services more recognizable to the general public.

JOELTON PARK-AND-RIDE LOT LACKS RTA BRANDING



DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD LOT WITH RTA SIGNS

