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Draft Marketing Recommendations and Comments
for Long Range Metro Transit Planning Committee

Summary

1. *Recommendation Matrix*
2. *Increase Marketing Budget*
 - a. *Improved customer information and technology*
 - b. *Research*
 - c. *Outreach*
 - d. *Ombudsman*
 - e. *Sponsorships*
 - f. *Expand and Improved Customer Service*
 - g. *More Resources for Use of Graphic Art*
 - h. *Increased Partnerships*

Unfortunately, timelines were not discussed.*

1. **Recommendation Publicity/Matrix** helps provide a systematic way to conceptualize and work out the pertinent issues of the entire committee. The matrix will serve as a guide for Metro staff and the Committee to ensure that the work of the Committee will move forward after the group has dissolved. This should be done immediately as it will assist in making recommendations
2. **Increase the Marketing Budget:** Is this medium term as budgets are made in advance? Peer systems allocate their marketing division about 1.5% of overall budget, which for Metro would be about \$500,000 rather than its current \$160,000. An itemization of what this might entail coupled with the cost of doing so would be:
 - a. **Improved customer information and technology** – Examples include:
 - i. installation of more “next bus” real time digital signs at stops (**\$240,000 for 30 signs**)
 - ii. installation of current paper schedules at all stops (**\$250,000 for all 2,100 bus stops**) If only a subset of stops are dealt with, what does that do to the cost?
 - iii. Customers should be able to use a Smart Card in the fare box (est. ?)
 - b. **Research (est. \$50,000? annually)** . This could involve:
 - i. Current customers through on-board survey (questionable methodology here);
 - ii. Core Madison Service Area (to find out what people want – we already know a lot but are told that there isn’t money, so let’s spend more money to come to that conclusion).
 - iii. New areas for potential growth
 - iv. Use of focus groups
 - v. Other (?)Metro could financially benefit by partnering with large research-oriented institutions such as the WI Department of Transportation or UW-Madison to assist in conducting and analyzing the research. Metro could help set a standard for the type of information WisDoT or consultants should collect for transit systems throughout the State
 - c. **Expand outreach to community (maybe \$90,000 for staff and \$10,000 for materials although I would double that at least)** Unfortunately, we asked for an itemization of what an increased marketing budget might add. In my mind, that meant a crude itemization of different outreach activities but that did not materialize. So I am disappointed. Below are a few ideas:
 - i. **To Neighborhood Associations.** Go to annual meets and write articles for neighborhood newsletters and websites. What have to be city-wide issues on Metro’s web sites can be made specific to the neighborhood. Since there are many neighborhoods, it could take 3-5 years to systematically visit them all. Less time would be required to write articles. Metro staff could

elicit feedback and also be ready to suggest to neighborhoods what they could do to support Metro, such as:

- (1) identify outlets for the sale of Metro tickets
- (2) ask for amenities for Metro stops from business/residential/association/city sources such as benches or concrete platforms

ii. **To Media (press, radio, web sites)** – Metro Transit has a story to tell that needs to be told but it should not overstate its case either. Metro needs to forge better relations with the press, different radio personalities, and locally-oriented media web sites. Unfortunately, the press tends to be negative rather than balanced while one bad personal experience can be more memorable than 50 good experiences. Metro should build relations with local media representatives and pitch stories on a routine basis that are intriguing, current, and reflect upon how Metro Transit is working to be as good as it can be. What needs to come across are achievements tempered by the knowledge that Metro can do better. There is an educational opportunity here for showing achievement and also showing how increased support/funding can make it even better. For instance,

- (1) ridership may be at a record-setting high, but the proportion of Madison's population that uses the bus as its major mode of transportation may well be at an all-time low, especially once the UW student population is omitted from the figures. Places on the periphery of Madison cannot be served by Metro because it is not being given the funds to provide adequate service although people clearly want that service, a situation that could be improved by better State aid, having an RTA etc.
- (2) Metro's hybrid buses are consistent with the City's desire to be "greener," but its new acquisitions will use diesel technology. It is unclear that the most cost-effective approach is to purchase more hybrids at this time and Metro wants to spend tax dollars wisely.
- (3) Metro has one of the lowest per rider costs among peer groups but those peers do not provide particularly demanding benchmarks. Madison hosts many world-class travelers who are accustomed to much better public transit systems and expect likewise.
- (4) Metro is a leader in having Mainline buses equipped for disabled passengers and in providing Paratransit services that exceed ADA requirements but Metro must stay ever-vigilant about incorporating new technology that assists disabled passengers.
- (5) Metro buses can run during weather that makes it impossible to travel by any other means, but sometimes it cannot and has to better alert potential users of the situation.
- (6) "Metro is working for you" Tell the public what item an ad funds to bring home the helpfulness of ads.
- (7) Metro's Customer Service assists people get around the city (stories) but it also needs constant feedback to continually improve its information.

iii. **Better Utilizing Space in Buses etc.** Metro could better utilize space near the top of buses that is now empty. It can run more public service ads, Metro promotions, art, poetry etc. Utilizing its resources better makes sense but also takes time and ironically, yet more resources.

iv. **To Target Audiences** who are more likely to be or become riders. Annual market research can assist staff in identifying key audiences while Focus Group research could assist in identifying what services to emphasize, modify, delete or add. Potential target audiences may include:

- (1) Civic (health, environmental, educational, cultural, social etc.) organizations;
- (2) Residents and businesses in heavy bus corridors
- (3) Residents and businesses in densely populated, mixed use neighborhoods with lower parking per capita
- (4) Downtown businesses
- (5) Large centers of employment
- (6) Senior citizens
- (7) Working families
- (8) University faculty, staff, and students

- (9) People who participate in other forms of alternative transportation – ride sharers, car sharers, bikers, walkers, etc.
- v. **Other** Metro needs to leave information material all around—not just Ride Guides and maps but posters, information about where the bus stop is etc. When I was in an unfamiliar neighborhood recently, nobody could tell me where the bus stop was or anything. When I visited the downtown Senior Center, I could not find any information about the bus.
- d. **Ombudsman to advocate for Metro with other government agencies (no estimate given)**
 Metro has assets to protect and must assert its interests vis a vis other agencies. These are governmental (City, County, State), educational (MMSD, UW, MATC, Edgewood etc.), and health (hospitals and clinics) Otherwise, space on streets is taken for parking, “bus signs” are located for the convenience of car drivers rather than bus users, snow is not cleared from bus stops until all streets and parking lots have been cleared etc. There is cost shifting going on. Oftentimes, agency staff are not even aware that an action would have a deleterious effect on Metro and its passengers. Metro has to have more resources to devote to PR vis a vis other agencies.
- e. **Expand sponsorships (est. \$30,000)** – To increase its visibility as a supportive community organization, Metro should more prominently support health-oriented, environmental, cultural, business and other community events.
- f. **Expand and Improve Customer Service (est. \$10,000?)** This could include any combination of extending hours of phone service, adding information on the web site, monitoring cameras etc. An important component of Customer Service is the behavior of drivers. Thus some issues that need to be addressed include:
 - i. Make feedback a more prominent issue, not just “we want to hear from you.” I do not think passengers or potential passengers believe that for a moment. Rather you need to tell people how to give feedback, and that you want all kinds of feedback, especially suggestions of how to make things better that would not cost much or anything.
 - ii. The Ride Guide and the number of routes need to be made much more intelligent. Now, a route number is simply added (there are what 90-something routes for 200 buses?) even as the #2 goes on different roads at different times, as does the #3 etc. Prime routes that ran 7-days/week used to be in the prime numbers, but no longer. Slim down the overall number of routes, reinstall some intelligence to the scheme, and identifying variants with letters – e.g. 3A (for Division) and 3B (for Winnebago).
 - iii. Callers need to be informed that they can lodge a complaint about a rude or unhelpful phone operator and that the phone call is “being monitored for quality assurance”
 - iv. Phone Operators need to identify themselves;
 - v. Current schedules, flyers, detours, and maps should be on every bus;
 - vi. Drivers should be informed of detours prior to leaving the station and should announce when they are deviating from the regular route;
 - vii. Inoperative stops need to be identified as such
 - viii. Materials in Spanish need to be on the buses - Metro staff could work with Centro Hispano to ensure that Spanish speakers know how to use the bus and are comfortable
- g. **Expand Resources for Utilization of Graphic Art (est. \$3,000)** Additional resources are needed to convert photographs into posters etc.
- h. **Increase Partnerships for win-win actions (part of outreach?)** Some examples include:
 - i. Co-market Metro within city and county
 - (1) Preferred entry at city/county events for those who arrive by transit
 - (2) Ensure that Metro info is part of the web site (not just driving directions). This could be particular bus lines that go there; also general info)
 - (3) Promote Metro services at city/county-sponsored events (County Fair, Halloween Festival, Dane Dances, etc.)
 - ii. Increase co-marketing with Ridshare, etc. and UW-Transportation Services
 - iii. Partner with large businesses

- (1) Expand unlimited ride pass contracts
- (2) Establish “gold” and “silver” level supporters list, as well an annual award ceremony, to encourage businesses to become active Metro supporters. Examples of actions companies can take include:
 - (a) pledge to orient all new employees on how to commute to their work site by bus and offering several weeks of free passes for new employees
 - (b) keeping bus route info handy for employees and customers
 - (c) encouraging bus riding among employees by running regular newsletter articles on bus topics, organizing internal promotions and prizes (e.g. having “commuter of the month” awards), organize “bus buddies” and conduct surveys to better identify employee obstacles to using transit
 - (d) organizing group trips on transit.
- i. Partner with various civic/environmental organizations. [This is a good idea Amanda but it might be better as outreach.](#)

In January of 2007, the Ad Hoc LRMTPC enumerated the following issues to be dealt with by a marketing/PR subcommittee:

1. advertising
2. heightened marketing, including website
3. increased community involvement in transit system
4. reach out to demographics not currently riding the bus
5. explore incentives like decreasing your taxes if you ride the bus, etc.
6. expand use of smart commute
7. address false images or public perceptions
8. build the brand
9. understanding and meeting consumer demand
10. continue to address security, especially at transfer points
11. explore promotions to increase ridership (ex. free buses to downtown during holiday shopping or “try transit” week)
12. rewards programs (ex. discount at a restaurant if you take the bus)
13. having complimentary programs (like Community Car - if a person has taken the bus and has to go home for a sick child)

In July 2007 the committee issued an interim report. A summary of the report’s treatment of the subcommittee’s activities is as follows:

1. **Recommendation Matrix:**
2. **Business Advisory Committee:**
3. **Market Research and Target Audiences:**
4. **Analysis of Marketing Budget Spending:**
5. **Analysis of Metro’s Customer Service Approach:**

It also reported “The Marketing Subcommittee may also address the following issues:

1. The perceptions of “too many empty busses” [we never did although I tried](#)
2. The PR value of Metro management riding the bus

3. Expanded opportunities for advertising, including bus stops
4. Partnerships with cultural organizations to promote art, music, poetry, etc.

The report concluded by saying that *The final report will include a timeline of recommended actions (hopefully with priorities) and who is responsible for implementing each recommendation.* I do not recall we ever getting that far

This document relies heavily on the documented produced by Amanda White on January 25, 2008 but with extensive modification. Thus it eliminated any mention of:

1. Business Advisory Committee - because this idea did not seem oriented toward what Metro would do;
2. Unlimited Ride Pass Agreement for Small Businesses and beyond - because we had never talked about this; in general we want unlimited ride passes to become more common among various groups but never discussed this specific issue.
3. Direct Mail as a marketing strategy. This may have been mentioned - I don't remember. But I don't think it a good way to spend \$75,000 given alternatives.
4. Promotion Budget - I don't agree with this although some people think \$1.50 is going to change someone's behavior. Given the big difference between the cost of driving vs. commuting to work, I do not think so. Remember, \$100,000 costs people 7 totally wrapped buses advertising gambling, booze, and anything else.
5. \$500,000 Advertising Revenue Goal - because this is not a marketing issue
6. Re-brand Metro - because that is not the most important perception issue and is more costly than other ways to deal with perception.
7. Ride the Bus to Work for Free Day - because it is a promotional item and I have already addressed that.
8. Investigate the potential for a 501(c)(3) Friends of Metro Transit Group - because, similar to a Business Advisory Committee, this is a good idea but not one that is part of our mission here.