

LUCASLEVERETT



Observations on MTA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objective

As the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority enters a new era of leadership and prepares for new planning activities, citizen feedback is key in gaining broad perspectives and inclusive support. Each individual will bring their own strengths to the discussion, and as mine are in the presentation of ideas and the crafting of overall brand experiences, this proposal seeks to express those in an appealing and thoughtful way.

Goals

- Establish and/or contribute to conversations about various MTA topics of immediate concern.
 - Follow up with actions in volunteer citizen groups or freelance services to MTA.
 - Aid in spreading the word about progress made on the topics enclosed.
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FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

At the risk of being a collection of “easier said than done” notions, the following ideas may be vital parts of a recipe for the future of MTA. These are not original thoughts in every sense, but presented here as solutions to the challenges Nashville currently faces in public transportation.



Combat the self-inflicted racial/demographic divide.

MTA is a victim of its own poor outreach. It is not “cool” to ride the bus, and the image is one not well-matched with younger and hipper groups. Additionally, there is a lack of diversity fostered by this image issue. An effort should be made to combat this on various fronts, including amenities such as onboard power outlets, routes that run later to “hipper” locations, and personnel changes from drivers to upper management. A re-examination of the food/drink policy may also be in order, as prohibiting sips of the morning coffee of upwardly-mobile urban dwellers of any color is a deterrent to commuter ridership, no matter how lax the policy seems to be in practice.

Stop marketing to people who already ride.

There will always be people who have to take the bus. While communicating to them is wise, advertising to them is a waste. An evaluation should commence concerning the return on investment in these areas, and how to redirect those efforts and funds to new target markets. Among these efforts should be an examination of the odd price amounts of fares to make them hit more even dollar-marks, as well as the re-addition of credit card acceptance to the busses. Offsetting the cost of that effort can be accomplished with the aforementioned price adjustments. An increase to \$1.75 would enable a rider to put \$7 into the bus and get back a more useful multi-ride change card, and subsidize the fees of the credit/debit transactions, for example.

“Get” social media.

The best tools for supporting the communications and messaging needs of MTA exist on the internet for free. Yet, the organization seems to suffer from a lack of expertise in this area, or an institutional avoidance of communications in general. Social media is an ideal pairing with mass transit. With plentiful young talent in the city, there is no excuse for this to be an area found lacking. Preference needs to be given to new blood as opposed to typical civil-service cronyism and qualified experts should be consulted to aid in best-practices where applicable.

You are who you advertise.

There is a big difference in the types of ads seen on the back page of the Nashville Scene and those on the inside covers of Nashville Lifestyles. The image of a brand can be boosted or hindered by the company it keeps. With busses adorned with bail bonds and fast food, a casual observer will draw conclusions about where that bus goes and who rides it. Attracting higher-end brands and higher-end advertising dollars can only happen if bus routing can become matched to these advertising messages. An advertiser seeking eyeballs in 37215 will not write a big check when there is a 50/50 chance their product will be uselessly exposed to those in 37207. Instead of randomizing the busses on their routes each day, routes need to become guaranteed to advertisers.

When was the last time the brand was refreshed?

The busses currently in use by MTA are not decades-old. Why is the logo? It is time to revisit the dated and bland visual identity of the organization. All of the measures in brand management suggested herein will be more successful if paired with a total rebranding - including the logo, livery, and all official typefaces.



Make it look like someone cares.

There is a major inconsistency in the condition and cleanliness of MTA bus stops, benches, and shelters. In some cases, trash receptacles are overrun and seats have been created from the improvisational use of things like overturned shopping carts. Bus interiors and exteriors can also vary in appearance standards. These are the sorts of things that should not be hard to fix, but simply require the resolve to do so.

Fight big conservative money with big liberal money. And faces.

Sure, transit confronts the goliath coffers of car and gas peddlers in any region. Transit also has well-monied allies, especially in an entertainment capital like Nashville, which also happens to lay claim to Mister Environment himself, Al Gore. It's not just about money either, it is about the leverage of big voices. MTA could benefit from some famous faces. What if Tim McGraw, Jack White, and Connie Britton were outspoken supporters of transit? What if the mayor and members of council established some regular ridership of their own, and not just for PR?

AN "IT" CITY WITH AN "IT" SYSTEM

Almost is not good enough. Nashville is not "almost" happening anymore. It is happening. The time for taking "no" for an answer from anyone inside or outside MTA has long gone. These are just a sample of the ideas and energies that need to be tapped as transit catches up to the pace of the city and becomes a leading element of Nashville's future.

