



APT STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

American Public Transportation Association
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APTA Bus Rapid Transit Working
Group

BRT Branding, Imaging and Marketing

Abstract: This *Recommended Practice* provides guidance for developing a brand image for bus rapid transit systems and on marketing the brand to the public.

Keywords: bus rapid transit (BRT), branding, image, marketing

Summary: This document establishes guidelines for branding, imaging and marketing bus rapid transit services. It is intended to guide transit agencies and their partners through branding a BRT service and the best practices for implementing a BRT branding scheme.

Scope and purpose: This *Recommended Practice* on branding for bus rapid transit systems is part of a series of APTA documents covering the key elements that comprise a BRT system. Because BRT elements perform best when working together as a system, each *Recommended Practice* may refer to other documents in the series. Agencies are advised to review all relevant reference documents for elements to be incorporated into their BRT services. In addition, some BRT system elements also apply to other types of service.

This Recommended Practice represents a common viewpoint of those parties concerned with its provisions, namely, transit operating/planning agencies, manufacturers, consultants, engineers and general interest groups. The application of any standards, practices or guidelines contained herein is voluntary. In some cases, federal and/or state regulations govern portions of a rail transit system's operations. In those cases, the government regulations take precedence over this standard. APTA recognizes that for certain applications, the standards or practices, as implemented by individual rail transit agencies, may be either more or less restrictive than those given in this document.



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Contents

- 1. The role of branding in BRT service.....1**
- 2. Branding strategy and implementation.....1**
 - 2.1 Developing a branding strategy 1
 - 2.2 Brand strategy tactics and implementation 3
 - 2.3 Communication vehicles and tactics..... 9
 - 2.4 Performance measurement and feedback 9
- References.....10**
- Definitions10**
- Abbreviations and acronyms.....10**

1. The role of branding in BRT service

Branding a product or service creates an identifiable, marketable and common theme that extends across the product and all related touch points, such as opportunities the customer has to interact with the brand.

Branding a BRT service gives it a distinct identity, which results in clear and positive public recognition and improved acceptance of the service. In addition to creating or enhancing positive public acceptance of the service, creating a relevant and compelling brand for a BRT system can deliver the following benefits:

- **Clearly differentiated transit service:** Branding can create a premium, higher-quality rapid transit feel for a BRT service, distinguishing it from standard or more conventional services.
- **Enhanced outreach efforts:** A common brand proposition among the various components of a BRT system will simplify marketing efforts and will allow a transit agency to more effectively reach its target customers.
- **Increased customer loyalty:** A consistent brand identity will help customers navigate the system by making the BRT system easily identifiable and distinguishing it from other services. Consistent delivery of the brand promise will create loyal customers.
- **Improved employee satisfaction and retention:** A consistent and compelling brand creates pride and a sense of contribution for employees.
- **Increased brand value,** as measured by added revenue and increased market share.
- **Potential for attracting development activity:** An attractive and compelling brand can help attract new economic development or intensify existing land uses around the BRT corridor.

Some industry studies among recently deployed BRT services have suggested that branding and imaging alone can contribute to 10 to 20 percent ridership increases. In addition, branding and imaging have been identified by the U.S. Federal Transit Administration as an element of BRT service that, absent a dedicated roadway, helps define candidate BRT projects as eligible for funding under the Small Starts Program. Thus, from both a planning and a policy perspective, branding should be an important consideration from the beginning of a BRT project's development.

2. Branding strategy and implementation

A branding strategy for a BRT service gives transit agencies the opportunity to proactively define the way people think and feel about the service. The branding strategy can create a targeted brand experience for customers and allow them to form relationships with the brand. Brand strategies for a new service cannot be developed in isolation, however. In order to be credible and effective, the branding strategy for a BRT service must build on and incorporate the core brand equities and values of the agency and meet customers' expectations.

2.1 Developing a branding strategy

There are three steps in developing a branding strategy:

- **Who:** identifying and characterizing the target audience
- **What:** determining the "brand promise" to be made to the audience
- **How:** determining how all the audience "touch points" will communicate the brand

2.1.1 Target audience

Successful branding strategies begin with a clearly identified target audience. Research to generate both demographic and psychographic insights into the target audience can be useful at this stage. The following information about the target audience will be critical to developing and implementing a branding strategy:

- demographic information about the target audience, such as age, income levels, education levels and residence
- data on the target audience’s origins and destinations for both work and non-work (educational, social, entertainment/cultural) purposes
- the audience’s current perceptions about transit and potential barriers to its use
- the audience’s current perceptions about the benefits provided by the competition, including passenger cars
- the target audience’s expectations, including the mandatory elements that will attract the audience to the service
- the most effective communication tactics to reach the target audience

2.1.2 Brand promise

Once the target audience has been identified and characterized, the next step is to determine how to make BRT relevant and compelling to this group. Establish the brand promise based on the wants, needs and expectations of the audience. The brand promise should be engaging and relevant and clearly communicate the benefits of using the service. For example, the brand promise could emphasize the BRT as a premium service distinct from other public transportation offerings, its environmental benefits, its speed and frequency, or its passenger amenities. The brand message also should explain the brand architecture, or the fit and role of BRT service within the overall system.

The brand promise is not a tagline or advertising copy, but serves as the strategic platform for all tactical marketing elements. **Table 1** provides some examples of existing brand promises.

TABLE 1
Brand Promises and Messages of BRT Services

City	Service	Features	Brand promise/attributes	Comments
Boston	Silver Line	Mixed and dedicated roadway and tunnel operations; some LRT-type stations	Part of rail network, quality	Also generates significant land-use development around stations.
Cleveland	HealthLine	Dedicated and mixed roadways; precision docking stations, doors on both sides	Fast, safe, first class, “rail like”	Original brand name was “Silver Line.” Naming rights were sold to a major health care institution.
Eugene, Ore.	EmX	Dedicated lanes, bi-directional in places, stations, attractive landscaping, dedicated & distinctively designed vehicles	Fast, environmentally friendly	EmX is short for “Emerald Express” (Eugene is known as “the Emerald City”).
Everett, Wash.	Swift	Dedicated lane, stations	Fast, environmentally friendly	Use of bird logo taps into the environmental ethic of the U.S. Northwest.
Kansas City, Mo.	MAX	Arterial BRT	Fast, frequent, convenient, stylish	

TABLE 1
Brand Promises and Messages of BRT Services

City	Service	Features	Brand promise/attributes	Comments
Los Angeles	Metro Rapid	Arterial BRT	Faster, more frequent	Sales slogan “Fast. Frequent. Fabulous.” taps into L.A. ethos.
Los Angeles	Orange Line	Dedicated roadway, light rail-like stations, dedicated and distinctively designed vehicles	Part of rail network	Color chosen to reflect citrus heritage in valley.
Las Vegas	MAX	Arterial BRT	Faster, glitzier, futuristic	Use of the MAX acronym connotes “maximum” service.
Pittsburgh	Martin Luther King Jr. East and West Busways	Dedicated roadway, distinct station design, linear park along East Busway	Fast, frequent, flexible service	Significant development at several stations on East Busway
York Region, Ontario	Viva	Arterial BRT	Frequent, convenient, modern, innovative, fun, environmental	York Region Transit logo designed was updated to reflect connectivity with Viva services.

2.1.3 Touch points

The next step in the branding strategy is to develop the “how.” How will the brand communicate with the target audience? What are the touch points where the audience will interact with the brand? How can a consistent message be delivered across all touch points?

In the case of BRT branding, there are many touch points, including but not limited to the following:

- branded aspects of the BRT system, such as stations and vehicles
- interaction with drivers and other system employees
- public information such as signage, maps and schedules
- publications, media and marketing information
- public events and promotion, including the service launch
- advertising and website

2.2 Brand strategy tactics and implementation

A comprehensive tactical plan will address how each of the following system components consistently communicates the brand promise:

- name of service and lines
- color schemes, graphics and logos
- elements of the BRT system
- operating features and performance
- customer information such as signage, maps and schedules
- publications, media, public relations and marketing information
- employee selection and training

2.2.1 Name of service and lines

The names of the service and the lines should be simple, easy to remember and easily identifiable in a map or publication. The names should resonate with the community, possibly by including a geographic reference or by embodying an area's image.

In regions with rail service, the BRT system can be closely branded or identified as an extension of the rail or other family of services. In regions with only bus service, the BRT system can be branded or identified as a typical rail system would be: to identify it as a premium service.

Examples of service naming

The EmX in Eugene, Ore., operated by the Lane Transit District, is an example of a name using a local geographic reference. "EmX" is short for "Emerald Express" and is a reference to Eugene's nickname, "The Emerald City." In Pittsburgh, the busways were named the South Busway, the Martin Luther King, Jr. East busway (often abbreviated to East Busway) and the West Busway, to provide a geographic reference.

Some cities with rail service have given their BRT services color-coded names, such as Boston's Silver Line. These color-coded lines carry with them a rail-like designation and convey the message that the BRT service is a component of an area's rapid transit network instead of a separate bus system.

In Las Vegas, the name MAX was used, representing "Metropolitan Area Express." This name communicates the rapid and regional nature of the network, which is still expanding, but also connects to the concept of "maximum" service features. York Region Transit chose a unique name, VIVA, based on marketing research into names with an impact.

In Ottawa, the strongest branding elements are the stations along the Transitway, the actual Transitway facility on which the BRT service operates, and the very frequent service that customers can rely upon. A Transitway logo is used to mark stations, directional signs and other public information. The Transitway identity carries over to most of the OC transportation system because most routes in the city operate on a section of the Transitway and every bus route in the city connects with at least one Transitway station.

Examples of line naming

The Lane Transit District named its first EmX line the Green Line. This name was intended to reflect the environmental branding of the EmX. York Region Transit used random colors for its VIVA line names: Blue, Pink, Purple, Orange and Green.

In Boston, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority named the Silver Line BRT lines according to their geographic location: for example the Washington Street service and the Waterfront service.

In Los Angeles, the dedicated BRT service in the San Fernando Valley has been named the Orange Line. This name serves two purposes. It is homage to the region's citrus agriculture history, and it also reflects that the BRT has been branded and designed as part of the region's rail rapid transit network, with rail-like stations and prepaid fare collection. This is distinct from Metro Rapid, the surface arterial BRT service launched earlier by the same public transportation operator. Both enjoy both distinct brand identities that communicate different service characteristics.

Another example is one that not only used geographic location to help identify the line, but also generated more than \$10 million for the agency. As the Silver Line brand was being fully developed in Cleveland, the BRT system sold the naming rights to a team of health care institutions that are directly served by the line and changed the name to the "HealthLine."

2.2.2 Color schemes, graphics and logos

Color schemes, graphics and logos can carry the brand from the vehicle to the stations, to the signage and to the printed materials, unifying the elements under one brand identity. It also can serve as a unifying element among the larger family of services and can aid passengers in wayfinding, boarding and transferring among interconnected services.

2.2.3 Elements of the BRT system

The physical elements of the overall BRT system have a major impact on the brand or image. These physical elements may include the following:

- rapid transit vehicles
- station design and configuration
- running way, including grade separation, exclusive lane or mixed traffic, and lane markings
- fare collection, off-board or onboard the vehicle
- traffic signal prioritization
- level boarding
- use of advanced ITS features

Rapid transit vehicles

The vehicles themselves, which in many cases are highly identifiable, are often a major component of the brand identity. Some issues to be considered:

- Is the styling distinct and appealing?
- Do the paint and the graphics package support the brand?
- Do the interior features such as seating support the brand identity?

It is best to ensure that BRT vehicles are easily differentiated from the other buses and bus services in the region. For example, in Boston, the vehicles for the Silver Line are painted silver. In Los Angeles, the vehicles for the Orange Line are silver, to resemble the Los Angeles rail cars, but a bold orange graphic extending nearly the entire length of the vehicle clearly identifies it as an Orange Line bus. Metro Rapid buses are stylized and painted with a distinct red and gray theme to distinguish them from local buses. In Las Vegas, the selection of expensive, distinct vehicles resonates with a community that is used to “glitz.” In each case, the BRT vehicles are unique in their communities. **Table 2** provides the specifications of some selected BRT buses.

TABLE 2
Examples of BRT System Vehicles

City	Bus theme	Other color coding	Bus type/length	Styled vehicle?	Boarding/exit doors	Capacity	Ridership increase	Time savings
Boston	Silver	Stops, stations	Artic 60'	No	3/3	97	>80%	—
Cleveland	Silver	Stations	Artic 60+	Yes	5/5	107	N/A	N/A
Eugene	Logo, green	Stops	Artic 60'	Yes	3/3	62	100%	N/A
L.A. Orange Line	Silver, orange graphic	Stations	Artic 60'	Yes	3/3	57	>60% (opening day to present day)	N/A

TABLE 2
Examples of BRT System Vehicles

City	Bus theme	Other color coding	Bus type/length	Styled vehicle?	Boarding/exit doors	Capacity	Ridership increase	Time savings
L.A. Metro Rapid	Logo and red/gray	Stops	40/45/60'	No & Yes	1/2	51	40%	25%
Oakland	Color coded	Stops	40' Van Hool	Distinct from regular service	3/3	70	35%	17%
York	Blue/white		40/60'	Yes				

Source: WestStart-CALSTART, Henke

When a more standard vehicle or bus is used, the distinctive branding can come from a unique paint or graphic package, easily identifiable as different from conventional buses' paint and graphics packages.

Vehicle length also can help establish the brand. A vehicle longer than the standard 40-foot bus, if needed for capacity considerations, can be important to the brand development by differentiating the service from other bus service and by more closely resembling rail vehicles. Buses that are smaller than the standard 40 feet may also be an option. Other rail-like features on the vehicles, such as doors on both sides, also can support the brand.

Figure 1 shows the distinctive branding on some BRT vehicles.

FIGURE 1
BRT Vehicle Branding Examples



EmX Line (Eugene, Ore.)



MAX Line (Las Vegas)



Metro Rapid (Los Angeles)



Silver Line (Boston)

FIGURE 1
BRT Vehicle Branding Examples



MAX Line (Kansas City, Mo.)

Stations

As with the vehicles, stations should be highly identifiable and a major component of the brand identity. The agency should consider whether the station styling is distinct and appealing.

It is best to ensure that the stations are easily differentiated from the other conventional bus shelters in the region. In addition, tying the look of the stations to other branding components, such as the vehicle color and style, can further reinforce the brand. For example, for Boston’s Silver Line, the stations are silver to support the silver vehicles — all contributing to the brand identity.

In cases where the BRT station is shared by non-BRT services, the BRT brand should remain prominent.

In cases where a more standard bus shelter is used, the distinctive branding can come from a unique paint or graphics package, easily identifiable as different from the standard shelter. For example, while standard buses and bus shelters are being used for the “Gold Coast BRT Corridor” in Cleveland, both buses and shelters were painted and/or graphically identified with the color gold to promote the brand.

To further identify the BRT brand, provide passenger amenities at the BRT stations that are different from the amenities provided at non-BRT stations or stops. Some examples:

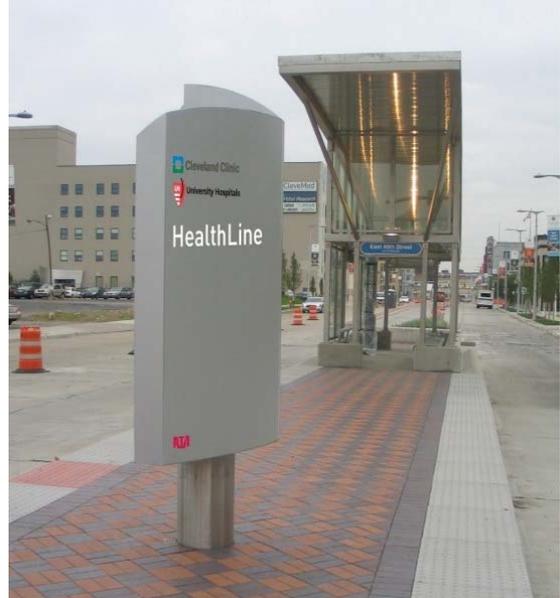
- upgraded signage and system maps
- real-time passenger information systems
- Internet access
- TV monitors
- public address systems
- security cameras and emergency phones
- platform loading markings
- level boarding
- off-board fare collection
- vending facilities (e.g., newspaper stands)
- bike facilities
- good access for pedestrians and people using wheelchairs
- transit-supportive land use and policies
- park-and-ride facilities
- connections to other local transit modes and intercity bus and rail services
- landscaping
- lighting

Figure 2 shows examples of BRT stations and stops with distinctive branding:

FIGURE 2
BRT Station Branding Examples



VIVA (York, Ontario)



HealthLine (Cleveland)



MetroLink (Halifax, Nova Scotia)



MAX Line (Kansas City)

2.2.4 Operating features and performance

The operating features and performance of the BRT system will have a significant impact on the brand. Features to consider include the following:

- frequency and span of service
- reliability of service
- safety
- travel time

- customer comfort

2.2.5 Customer information

Signage, maps, schedules and fare media must reinforce the brand. If the goal is to brand the BRT system as being similar to other rapid transit services such as traditional light rail, then the signage, system maps and schedules should be designed and presented in a way similar to signage, maps and schedules on a rail system. The map and schedule should be presented in the most simple, easy-to-understand way possible (e.g., schematic instead of detailed). In many cases, the relative simplicity of the BRT route will support this concept. The user information should be coordinated with the same brand image (including the logo, type style, and graphical elements).

Information technology, such as real-time passenger information and trip planners, also can support the brand.

2.2.6 Publications, media, public relations and marketing information

All publications and marketing information must work to create and support the brand.

2.2.7 Employees

Employees are an extension of the BRT brand. Every action of an employee serves either to build the brand or to erode it. Employees must deliver a consistent message at each contact point with the customer by maintaining the transit system's dress code, customer greeting, conflict resolution process, etc. This can be an opportunity to explore innovative staffing measures jointly with your staff, contractors and union. In Las Vegas, for example, BRT drivers were selected from the pool of bus drivers and received specialized training in diesel-electric propulsion, center-drive position and other features of the vehicles. Drivers also were given distinct uniforms and customer service training.

2.3 Communication vehicles and tactics

There are a variety of communication vehicles and tactics that can be used to implement and promote the BRT brand. Market research among target audiences may reveal optimal methods, but the more common tactics include the following:

- public events and promotions, including the service launch
- media
- advertising campaigns
- ongoing public relations
- signage
- direct mail or targeted at-school or at-work programs

2.4 Performance measurement and feedback

As with any branding initiative, it is critical to conduct ongoing assessment of the implementation and performance to ensure that the brand remains relevant and is consistently communicated.

Obtain feedback both from employees and the public and ridership. Feedback can be collected through formal tools such as online surveys, onboard surveys or telephone interviews, as well as informal, directional input obtained via customer comments and complaints.

Additionally, monitoring metrics such as new versus repeat customers, customer loyalty, employee retention, ridership increases and revenue growth can be useful in ongoing planning initiatives and communication strategies.

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Definitions

brand: The sum of all experiences, images and perceptions people have about a product, service or company. A brand includes logos, icons, colors, fonts, product names, personality, values, heritage, reputation, functional attributes (e.g., employee/customer service, product offering, pricing, service delivery) and emotional attributes (e.g., flexible, dependable, trustworthy).

federal New Starts/Small Starts program: The federal government's primary financial resource for supporting locally planned, implemented and operated major transit capital investments. The New Starts program funds new and extensions to existing fixed guideway transit systems, including commuter rail, light rail, heavy rail, bus rapid transit, streetcars and ferries.

Abbreviations and acronyms

BRT	Bus Rapid Transit
EmX	Emerald Express (Eugene, Ore.)
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
ITS	intelligent transportation systems
LRT	light rail transit
TCRP	Transit Cooperative Research Program