

Taking Photos for Marketing Your Transit System

Good photographs are an important part of telling a story; they catch people’s attention and draw them into your message. The Marketing Transit Toolkit Photo Library is a collection of “stock” photos that can be used as is, or you can look at them as references for taking your own pictures. Because people are especially attracted to pictures of subjects they recognize, taking your own pictures can be a good choice.

Smartphones and digital point and shoot cameras make it easy to capture great photos that you can use in ads, brochures, posters and on your website. Here are a few simple tips to help you get useful pictures whatever kind of camera you are using.

1. Plan your shots and think about the project in storytelling terms:

- Who
- What
- Where
- When
- Why

Who

People respond to images of other people. Think of the markets you want to reach and ask people who are representative of those markets to allow you photograph them (be sure to have them sign a photo release).

Tip: Photograph people you might like to sit next to on the bus.

What

- People using your buses: getting on, getting off, reading or working on a computer, sitting with their children, loading a bicycle, etc.
- Vehicles and shelters
Outside views of the bus, such as people boarding, will show the colors your system uses and possibly all or part of the logo. The logo also will be evident on bus stop signs, where people wait for the bus to arrive.

Where

The environment and the vehicle should reflect the location. For wide shots, with background showing in the photo, take your pictures in areas where people normally see your buses; i.e., in neighborhoods or on roads and streets the buses use.

When

In most instances, you will take photos during daylight hours – when buses are running.

Tip: If your buses do not run in the evening, avoid shooting in evening light.

Why

People ride for mobility. Whether the bus is their only option or it is a choice they make, the bus can get most people where they need to go. In some cases, age or disability makes riding the bus the only option; in others, it's a choice. Bus riders may use your system for shopping and carrying grocery bags; going to work; going to school; going to medical appointments; visiting friends. How they are dressed and what they carry can tell you why they are using the bus.

Tip: Look for pleasant expressions, smiling interactions and open eyes.



In this picture, the subject is a senior using an assistive device and boarding a transit vehicle. He is smiling as the driver helps him.

Messages:

- Boarding this bus is a pleasant experience
- The bus operator is friendly and helpful
- The bus provides mobility

2. Prepare

- Charge your batteries and dust your lenses. A cell phone in your pocket easily picks up lint. Use a lens cleaner or a soft cloth first for a clean picture later.
- Know your camera and/or review the manual before you begin the session.
- If your camera offers different resolutions (image sizes), set it for high resolution. This will give you more flexibility in using the photos at different sizes.
- Ask Permission
When you set up specific shots with people – someone using a wheelchair lift or waiting at a bus stop, for example – you'll identify people in advance and have them sign a photo release that gives you permission to use their pictures in your marketing. In general, photo releases are not required in a public situation, such as

shooting a candid shot of people gathered at a bus stop, but courtesy demands that you ask their permission – and a signed release is even better. A photo release form is included at the end of this document. A word version of the form is included in the Other Tools section of the Marketing Toolkit Website.

- **Practice in Advance**
Review some sample shots to be sure you are getting what you want and then make adjustments as needed.

3. Take Pictures

- **Be a Director**
Visualize the photo you have in mind and ask your subjects for what you want – move in closer to one another, look up, put glasses on or take them off, etc. When photographing a group, position people the way you think they look best together. Pay attention to varying heights and the colors they are wearing.
- **Crop in the Camera**
It's easier to rely on your eye and your camera to get the shot than to hope for the best and lean on your photo-editing program to fix problems. Take a little time to be sure the shot is what you want. If you see extraneous items when you look through the viewfinder, change your position or zoom the lens to better frame the shot. A telephone pole behind someone's head is awkward, unwanted and hard to edit from the image.
- **Shoot at Eye Level**
For engaging shots of people, hold the camera at their eye level. For children, you may need to get down on one knee.
- **Watch the Light**
When you are shooting outdoors, sunlight that is directly behind you can be harsh. It also can throw your shadow into the picture. If you step to the side, side lighting the bus, the angle will soften the light. Midday light also is glaring, so schedule your photo sessions in mid-morning or mid-afternoon, when the sun is at an angle.
- **Use Flash Outside**
Turn your flash on outside, especially when photographing people, to fill in shadows. Be sure to check your manual for the flash range on your camera; for the flash to be effective, you probably will need to be no more than 10 feet from your subject

- **Move Around**
When you're setting up your shot, look through your viewfinder or at your screen as you move around. You might be surprised to find a perspective that you like better than the one you had planned.
- **Lock the Focus**
When you're preparing to take the shot, first lock the focus on your main subject by depressing the shutter halfway. Then, holding the shutter button, fine-tune, or frame, the shot and take the picture.
- **Shoot Many Frames**
Take many pictures to be sure you have at least one with all eyes open. Remember to move around; take pictures from different vantage points to see what you like best.

NOTE: If you are using a camera with interchangeable or zoom lenses, bear in mind that the image captured at 50mm most closely replicates what the naked eye sees. Taken through a wider view, such as 35mm or 28mm, the image may appear distorted. Sometimes this is a desirable outcome; usually, however, pictures of people are more pleasing taken in the 50mm range.

Photo Talent Release

I, _____, give permission for my photo to be used by (Agency) _____. Uses may include, but not be limited to, newspaper ads, brochures, posters, websites and presentations. I understand that my image will not be sold or used for any other purpose than to promote ridership and support of public transportation.

Print Name

Phone

Street Address

City

State

Zip Code

Signature

Date