

# Engaging Transit Riders in Public Awareness Programs

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## Abstract

*In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the transit industry emerged as a leader in leveraging the value and power of the public's "eyes and ears" to promote system security. Although a public awareness program is widely viewed as a core component of a transit agency's system security plan, efforts to assess whether the messages are reaching transit riders and to identify obstacles to participation have been limited. This paper highlights strategies and tactics to engage transit riders in public security awareness programs based on interviews with transit agency representatives, the analysis of transit rider survey data, and transit rider focus groups.*

## Introduction and Background

The transit industry emerged as a leader in leveraging the value and power of the public's "eyes and ears" to promote system security in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. In 2002, New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) launched the first transit security awareness and public engagement campaign under the tag line "If You See Something, Say Something™." This was followed by the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) release of the Transit Watch Program in 2003. Transit Watch was developed in partnership with the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

ty's (DHS) Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and designed to provide transit agencies with technical assistance and tools to encourage transit employees and their riders to report suspicious packages and behavior. Ready-to-use templates allowed transit agencies to customize materials for their own systems while maintaining consistent messaging across the industry.

By 2005, more than 200 agencies had implemented some form of public awareness materials (Shaw 2011), and TSA had identified public awareness and preparedness campaigns as a priority area to provide the essential foundation for effective security programs. An updated version of Transit Watch was released in 2006. In 2010, the DHS licensed the use of MTA's "If You See Something, Say Something™" slogan for its anti-terrorism efforts in surface transportation and other key sectors.

The Transportation Systems Sector-Specific Plan contained in an Annex to the National Infrastructure Protection Plan (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2010) outlines goals and objectives for continuously improving the risk posture of U.S. transportation systems. The implementation of security awareness campaigns specifically supports the following goal and corresponding objective outlined in the plan:

**Goal 1:** Prevent and deter acts of terrorism using, or against, the transportation system.

*Objective:* Increase vigilance of travelers and transportation workers. The travelling public and transportation workers can serve as force multipliers to Federal, State, and Local law enforcement.

Although a public awareness program is widely viewed as a core component of a transit agency's system security plan, there has been little formal evaluation of these efforts.

Edwards, Haas and Rohlich (2010) attempted to explore the effectiveness of transit security awareness campaigns in the San Francisco Bay area. However, they found that none of the agencies interviewed actively sought to measure the effectiveness of their security awareness efforts.

In theory, an evaluation of the effectiveness of surface transportation security initiatives, including public awareness campaigns, can provide meaningful information from which to determine whether strategies are achieving the intended results and to target any needed improvements (U.S. Government Accountability Office 2010). In practice, a one-to-one relationship between a security measure and a specific terrorist event is rare. The absence of a terrorist attack could mean either that

security was effective as a deterrent or that no attack was ever contemplated. In addition, determining whether it is the preventive security measures by themselves that have deterred a terrorist attack apart from the array of other actions and policy instruments, including the destruction of terrorist organizations, is virtually impossible (Jenkins 2011).

Although the impact of public awareness campaigns on preventing and deterring acts of terrorism against public transportation cannot be calibrated, agencies can evaluate whether their efforts have increased rider vigilance. This paper shares findings and recommendations from a collaborative research effort conducted by three National Transportation Security Center of Excellence (NTSCOE) institutions: the Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) at San José State University; the Center for Transportation Safety, Security and Risk at Rutgers University; and Tougaloo College. The research explored whether security awareness messages are reaching transit riders and identified obstacles to participation.

## **Research Methodology**

This article summarizes key findings from research conducted for the National Transportation Security Center of Excellence. Phase I, completed in August 2011, focused on the engagement of transit riders in awareness campaigns in collaboration with the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA). The findings indicated that existing security awareness campaigns were reaching transit riders; however, additional strategies could be implemented to enhance the impact of campaign materials, remove obstacles to reporting, and build positive relationships between an agency and all its customers (Haider et al. 2011).

Phase II, completed in June 2012, and was conducted in conjunction with the Greater National Capital Region (NCR) Transit Security Working Group's 2011 transit security awareness campaign. The Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) served as the project manager. The design and structure of the campaign was consistent with many of the recommendations developed by the research team as a result of the Phase I findings. The Phase II research identified opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of public security awareness campaigns and documented best practices and lessons learned from the NCR 2011 transit security awareness campaign (Haider et al. 2012).

The research plan incorporated a mix of study methods including the following:

- Interviews were conducted with marketing and security/police personnel from each agency participating in the campaign to establish a context for the research.
- An analysis of MTA's 2010 and 2011 annual Customer Ridership Study (CRS) was conducted to identify potential shifts in rider perceptions that could be attributed to the campaign.
- Transit rider focus groups were conducted in Baltimore County and Montgomery County, Maryland and Washington, DC.

The CRS collects data from approximately 2,200 to 2,500 transit riders each year regarding their travel habits, needs, perceptions, and levels of satisfaction with MTA services overall (Maryland Marketing Source 2012). Both the 2010 and the 2011 CRS asked general questions about personal safety; specific questions regarding security awareness campaigns were added to the 2011 study at the recommendation of the research team.

Transit rider focus groups conducted in Atlanta as part of Phase I provided valuable insights into the opinions, perceptions, and behavior of frequent transit riders relevant to improving the effectiveness of public awareness campaigns. To expand upon this knowledge and provide a basis of comparison, additional groups of NCR transit customers were conducted. A total of 88 people who were generally representative of the riding public in the area based on ridership and demographic factors participated in the groups. The following topics were explored:

- Riding behaviors
- Situational awareness
- Awareness of communications
- Perceptions of transit security
- Willingness to engage in public awareness campaigns
- Reactions to NCR campaign materials

## **NCR 2011 Public Security Awareness Campaign**

The 2011 NCR campaign ran from July through December 2011; however, printed materials such as bus cards remained posted until they were damaged or replaced by other advertising. The components were designed to build upon the success-

ful “If You See Something, Say Something™” tag line through innovative concepts, message continuity, sustainable instructional information, and improved public participation. The campaign components were organized in two levels, allowing regional partners the flexibility to select tools that enhanced their existing transit security efforts and that could be effectively implemented at their agencies (Integrated Designs, Inc. 2012). In addition, all materials were available in English and Spanish.

Level One included:

- Access to a main campaign website ([www.securetransit.org](http://www.securetransit.org))
- Radio advertising on 20 stations
- Cinema advertising including on-screen messages and a lobby stand-up display with information cards in six theaters
- Collateral and Information Materials
  - 4" x 9" Informational card
  - Wallet card
  - Currency jackets
  - Coffee sleeves
- On-site transit events at major train stations
- Transit station decals

The campaign website provided information on what to look for, who to tell, and how an individual can help; links to transportation security resources, such as TSA press releases; and a DHS “If You See Something, Say Something™” television spot.

Level Two offered participating agencies a “menu” of artwork that could be installed locally. The menu included:

- Print advertisements
- Interior car cards
- Exterior bus signage (transit kings/queens and transit tails)
- Platform posters
- Window decals

- Bus wraps
- Kiosk posters

The agencies actively involved in the campaign included:

- Washington, DC
  - Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA, also known as Metro)
  - Maryland
  - Maryland Transit Administration (MTA)
  - Montgomery County Ride On (Ride On)
- Virginia
  - Virginia Railway Express (VRE)
  - Fairfax Connector
  - The Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC)
  - Arlington Transit (ART)

These agencies range in size from WMATA, the nation's fourth largest system, to ART, the nation's 272nd largest system based on unlinked passenger trips. Table 1 shows the relative size of the agencies involved in the campaign based on average weekday unlinked passenger trips and total unlinked passenger trips (American Public Transit Association 2011).

Experience with public awareness programs, the resources available to invest in these efforts, and the level of involvement in the NCR campaign varied based on agency size and operating area. A key advantage of the regional initiative was that the smaller agencies could benefit from Level 1 mass marketing activities that, under other circumstances, would be too costly. For example, all riders were able to access the campaign website, [www.securetransit.org](http://www.securetransit.org), to get more information and the radio advertising covered all jurisdictions in the region. In addition, although most of the events were held at Metrorail stations, those selected had high volumes of customers transferring from one of the smaller agency's services to Metrorail.

**Table 1. Overview of NCR Agencies**

State	Agency	2009 Average Weekday Unlinked Passenger Trips	2009 Total Unlinked Passenger Trips	National Rank Based on 2009 Total Unlinked Passenger Trips	Transit Modes
DC	WMATA (Metro)	1,460,135	435,858,900	4	Bus, heavy rail, paratransit
MD	MTA	417,773	123,697,400	10	Bus, light rail, heavy rail, commuter rail, paratransit
MD	Ride On	97,043	29,739,300	47	Bus
VA	Fairfax Connector	33,139	9,576,600	101	Bus
VA	VRE	15,681	3,868,000	160	Commuter rail
VA	PRTC	12,200	3,179,200	185	Bus
VA	ART	5,296	1,537,100	272	Bus

## Findings and Recommendations

Campaign materials reflected the diverse transit ridership in both Atlanta and the NCR. In-system advertising, including posters, car cards, and announcements, were the primary components of the public awareness campaigns. The MTA CRS revealed that more than 70 percent of transit riders attributed their increased awareness of how to respond if they see something suspicious to posters and signs they had seen while riding transit and other information provided at MTA locations (Greenberg et al. 2012). Feedback from the focus groups indicated that transit riders' daily experiences dealing with the transit system, individual employees, and other riders had the most significant impact on their likelihood to report suspicious activity. For the most part, these experiences varied by ridership patterns such as mode, frequency, and time of day rather than race, age, gender, etc.

### ***Addressing Barriers to Reporting***

Public awareness efforts are a form of social marketing focused on motivating transit riders to voluntarily modify their behavior to help prevent terrorism and other criminal acts. The goal is to prepare riders to act when they see something suspicious. In addition to overcoming inertia, the research revealed the reasons why people cannot or do not make reports. They include:

- Lack of trust in the transit agency and its employees
- A reluctance to report something that could be nothing
- Anticipated inconvenience
- Communication challenges

The tendency to plan and implement public awareness activities in isolation from other agency issues and operations limits their potential to effect real change. If riders believe an agency and its employees are concerned for their welfare and trying to meet their needs, they are more likely to respond to requests for support and cooperation. During the focus groups, several participants echoed this perspective by questioning why they should help the transit agency by reporting suspicious activity when many transit employees, including police, station agents, and bus drivers, did not treat them with respect. Some had even attempted to report situations and felt rebuffed by employees. The CRS data also revealed that riders' willingness to report suspicious activities increased with their overall satisfaction with MTA (Greenberg et al. 2012).

Indeed, the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) "Guidance for Building Communities of Trust" (Wasserman 2010) cites lack of trust as one of the greatest obstacles faced by American policing and has a direct impact on the ability to address issues of crime, disorder, and the prevention of terrorism. The document provides advice and recommendations on how to initiate and sustain trusting relationships, particularly with immigrant and minority communities that support meaningful sharing of information, responsiveness to community concerns and priorities, and the reporting of suspicious activities and behavior that may legitimately reflect criminal enterprise or terrorism precursor activities. The basic construct is that active engagement results from positive relationships and that the level of engagement will not improve until inherent problems in the relationship are addressed.

For those who might be willing to respond to an agency's request to report suspicious activity in theory, what happens in practice can be influenced by several other factors. For many, doubt will serve to paralyze their actions by fueling their ability to rationalize away the suspicious activity they may be witnessing with a variety of plausible explanations. The doubt can come from many sources such as the level of perceived terrorist threat or lack of confidence in knowing what activity is, indeed, legitimately suspicious. However, whatever its origin, it leads to a reluctance to report something that "could be nothing." A London Metropolitan Police



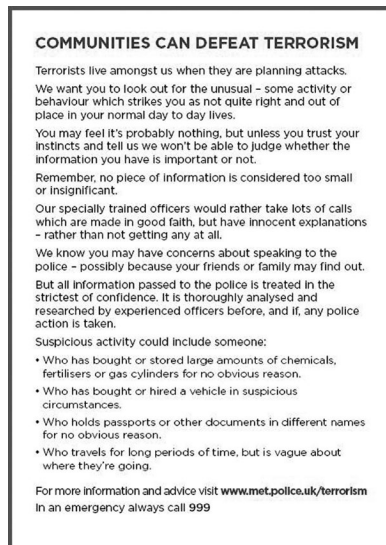
security awareness campaign launched in February 2012 attempts to address this obstacle. The campaign includes radio advertisements, posters, and flyers with the tag line “It’s probably nothing but ...” and encourages the public to give specially trained police officers the opportunity to be the judge. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the front and back of a campaign flyer (London Metropolitan Police 2012).

**Figure 1.**  
**Front of London**  
**campaign flyer**



The flyer is a vertical rectangular poster with a black background and white text. At the top right, it features the URL 'met.police.uk/terrorism' and a small logo for 'TERRORISM INFORMATION'. The main headline is 'IT'S PROBABLY NOTHING, BUT...' in large, bold, white capital letters. Below this, smaller white text reads: 'IF YOU SEE OR HEAR SOMETHING THAT COULD BE TERRORIST RELATED, TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS AND CALL THE CONFIDENTIAL ANTI-TERRORIST HOTLINE. OUR SPECIALLY TRAINED OFFICERS WILL TAKE IT FROM THERE.' The phone number '0800 789 321' is prominently displayed in a large, bold font, with the tagline 'YOUR CALL COULD SAVE LIVES' underneath. At the bottom, there are four logos: 'METROPOLITAN POLICE TOTAL POLICERS', 'CITY OF LONDON POLICE WWW.WOOLLSWORTHY.COM', 'METROPOLITAN POLICE', and 'LONDON AIRPORT POLICE'. A small graphic of a signpost is also present on the right side.

**Figure 2.**  
**Back of London**  
**campaign flyer**



The back of the flyer is a white rectangular area with a black border. It contains the following text:

**COMMUNITIES CAN DEFEAT TERRORISM**

Terrorists live amongst us when they are planning attacks. We want you to look out for the unusual – some activity or behaviour which strikes you as not quite right and out of place in your normal day to day lives.

You may feel it's probably nothing, but unless you trust your instincts and tell us we won't be able to judge whether the information you have is important or not.

Remember, no piece of information is considered too small or insignificant.

Our specially trained officers would rather take lots of calls which are made in good faith, but have innocent explanations – rather than not getting any at all.

We know you may have concerns about speaking to the police – possibly because your friends or family may find out. But all information passed to the police is treated in the strictest of confidence. It is thoroughly analysed and researched by experienced officers before, and if, any police action is taken.

Suspicious activity could include someone:

- Who has bought or stored large amounts of chemicals, fertilisers or gas cylinders for no obvious reason.
- Who has bought or hired a vehicle in suspicious circumstances.
- Who holds passports or other documents in different names for no obvious reason.
- Who travels for long periods of time, but is vague about where they're going.

For more information and advice visit [www.met.police.uk/terrorism](http://www.met.police.uk/terrorism)  
In an emergency always call 999

Service delays or being required to “stick around” to answer questions, were also cited by focus group participants as negative consequences from reporting something. Metrorail riders—who have endured station closures and service delays because of “suspicious packages” that turned out to be discarded or forgotten items—were particularly sensitive to this concern. In addition, one well-meaning participant who had reported something to a station agent was detained until police arrived and interviewed him. By the end of the ordeal, the person felt he was being treated like a suspicious person rather than appreciated for taking the time to make the report.

Finally, even if the aforementioned obstacles could be overcome, the challenges associated with actually making the report come into play. To consummate a report, a person needs to know how to safely reach someone who can receive the report. The majority of focus group participants in both Atlanta and the NCR expressed a preference for telling an easily-accessible police officer or transit employee if they saw something suspicious. Many lamented that, often, especially in the heavy rail environment, police and other employees are not present on the trains or station platforms. The perception was that police tended to be clustered at station entrances. Several participants were familiar with emergency call buttons to reach the train operator and/or emergency phones in the stations, but many were not, and some questioned the reliability of these communications mechanisms.

Calling in a report also presented challenges. Most focus group participants were not aware of the number they should call and indicated that they would most likely rely on 911. In both Atlanta and the NCR, riders were instructed to call a 10-digit number. The majority of participants felt these numbers were too cumbersome to remember, even if they included a mnemonic like the Virginia Terrorism Hotline, 877-4VA-TIPS. Spotty cell phone coverage along the rail right-of-way, particularly underground and in tunnels, and the fear of suffering retaliation, if overheard, were also major concerns. The value of being able to text in a report was organically raised in every focus group. Offered as a solution to many of the issues discussed, it was viewed as a safe and convenient way to make a report. Subsequent to the completion of the research, several transit agencies outside the study areas implemented this option.

### ***Improving Public Awareness Campaigns***

Armed with an understanding of the market and the factors that influence an individual’s willingness to engage, public awareness program planners can move forward with designing campaign messages, selecting communication tools,

identifying performance measures, and ensuring that internal groups that will be impacted by campaign activities or responsible for receiving customer reports are prepared to support the initiative. These can be daunting tasks, but planners have the advantage of being able to learn from prior and existing transit industry efforts.

### **Campaign Messages**

Public awareness campaigns should communicate the following in ways that will resonate with transit riders:

- *What to look for* – The research clearly indicates the importance of educating transit riders on what could be considered suspicious.
- *What to do when they see it* – Straightforward and simple directions (i.e., call or text a certain number, inform a transit employee, etc.) regarding what to do when a suspicious activity or package is spotted are critical.
- *What's in it for them* – There was resonance among riders with the message that “we’re all in this together.” It is important to stress the idea that reporting a suspicious activity or package is for self-preservation, as well as the safety of others.
- *Not to hesitate* – Similar to the concepts conveyed in the London campaign, public awareness campaigns need to be responsive to the natural hesitation of riders to “second guess” their instincts as to whether a certain situation is, indeed, suspicious.

A review of public awareness campaign pieces from around the country reveals a tendency to either omit one or more of the above in the quest for brevity or to include too much detail in order to cover all the bases.

It is important to use both text and graphics to communicate the message and strategically match the design of campaign components to the environments in which they will be placed. For example, materials placed in areas where transit riders will be rushing through should contain as little text as possible since they will not have the time or inclination to stop and read them. Conversely, materials posted in vehicles or places where people are waiting for vehicles can include more text since many people may actually pass the time by reading them.

The creative components of a campaign should reflect the character, idiosyncrasies, and realities of the markets in which they will be placed. Many commonalities were revealed among focus groups participants in Atlanta and the NCR, but

reactions to sample campaign materials varied. However, some basic constructs became evident that will start the design effort off in the right direction:

- Promote single, simple, doable behaviors one at a time.
- Remind and motivate transit riders to be vigilant; do not scare them.
- Reflect the diversity of transit riders.
- Depict situations and scenarios that are realistic and relevant to area transit riders.
- Provide visual examples of what to look for.
- Use color or other graphic design techniques to catch the viewer's eye.
- Limit the amount of text by communicating the message in a clear and concise manner.
- Do not overly complicate the instructions for making a report; use a single, easy-to-remember telephone number and feature it prominently in the copy.
- Encourage riders to program the telephone number for making reports into their cell phones.
- Select a limited number of themes/approaches and create different versions of it to maintain interest and reinforce the message.
- Link messages through the use of the same logo, slogan, tagline, and/or other device.

Although it can be tricky, the use of humor seemed to garner the attention of many focus group participants and was memorable. Featuring "success stories" that highlight the value of reporting to the riding public also appeared appealing. It was viewed as a way to reinforce the notion that one person can make a difference and overcome the stigma of being a "snitch."

Pre-testing different ideas or creative executions is an important step that should not be ignored. The feedback obtained will help the development team choose the most effective approaches, and more importantly, raise red flags regarding an option that could offend some people.

### **Communication Tools**

A wide variety of communication tools is available to transmit public security awareness messages. Tables 2 and 3 summarize the research team's findings rela-

tive to the communication tools available to transit agencies and the benefits and challenges associated with each. The selection of communication tools should be based on ridership demographics, organizational realities, and resource constraints. A best practice in the NCR campaign was to offer regional agencies a menu of options, allowing them to choose the communication tools that “fit” with their operations and contractual agreements regarding system advertising.

**Table 2. Internal Communication Tools**

<b>Tools</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Agency website	Increasingly the #1 source used by the public to find information about public transportation. Low or no incremental cost. Information can be updated quickly and easily.	Content should be updated frequently to maintain interest.
Existing printed materials (newsletters, rider guides, schedules, transit passes, fare cards)	Riders refer to these documents frequently and may carry them throughout their trip. Lower incremental cost.	Competition among a variety of public information requirements for limited space on materials. May be produced in mass quantities, which will limit ability to update easily.
Brochures, flyers, seat-drops	Ability to provide more detailed information. Can be retained for future reference.	Many customers will discard without reading.
Interior vehicle advertising	Riders more likely to read while confined to vehicle. Riders can refer to advertisement if they observe suspicious behavior while onboard. Cost-effective in reaching target market.	Must be engaging to break-through advertising “clutter.” Depending on agency’s contractual arrangements, advertising space may be controlled by third party and limited and/or costly.
Exterior vehicle advertising	High visibility.	Depending on an agency’s contractual arrangements, advertising space may be controlled by third party and limited and/or costly. More likely to be viewed by non-riders.
On-board announcements	Low cost. Most likely to be remembered by riders if repeated frequently. Very cost effective for reaching transit riders.	Message content should be short and varied to maintain interest. Repetition may be irritating to some customers.

**Table 2. Internal Communication Tools (cont'd.)**

Tools	Benefits	Challenges
In-station advertising	Cost effective in reaching target market.	Depending on agency's contractual arrangements, advertising space may be controlled by third party and limited and/or costly. Must be engaging to break through advertising "clutter." Message content should be limited as most riders will view while quickly passing through station.
Station announcements	Most likely to be remembered by riders if repeated frequently. Very cost effective for reaching transit riders.	Competition with other required announcements. Message content should be short be varied to maintain interest. Repetition may be irritating to some customers.
Platform/bus stop advertising	Message content can be more detailed since riders will be waiting for train/bus to arrive. Riders can refer to advertisement if they observe something suspicious. Cost-effective in reaching target market.	Must be engaging to break through advertising "clutter." Depending on an agency's contractual arrangements, advertising space may be controlled by third party and limited and/or costly.
Variable message sign postings	High visibility. Very cost-effective in reaching target market.	Limited message capability. Competition among a variety of public information requirements for limited space on signs.
Station events	Personal exchange of messages is impactful. Event staff can distribute handouts (i.e., brochures and/or promotional materials). Ability to foster dialogue with customers and answer questions.	Some riders will be resistant to engaging with event staff because they are focused on getting where they need to be. Can be expensive to execute depending on staffing requirements and costs.
Promotional items	Particularly appealing to some market segments. Items can be selected that will reinforce an overall security message (i.e., flashlights, whistles) or will be carried on person while riding public transit.	Limited imprint space. Expensive. Some may view as a waste of taxpayer dollars.

**Table 3. External Communication Tools**

<b>Tools</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Press releases	Ability to provide more detailed information. Can generate free media coverage. Effective method for publicizing special events or “success stories.”	Media coverage not guaranteed. Limited control over ultimate content published.
Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)	Popular communications forum, especially for certain market segments. Information can be updated quickly and easily.	Must be monitored and have staff assigned to stimulate ongoing dialogue and respond to rider posts in a timely manner
Outreach efforts (e.g., community meetings, special events)	Personal exchange of messages is impactful. Staff can distribute handouts (i.e. brochures and/or promotional materials). Ability to foster relationships with key market segments.	Time/labor intensive. The audience may include a high percentage of non-riders
Print advertisements	Ability to provide more detailed information. Allows riders to “digest” materials at their own pace.	Expensive. Audience will include a high percentage of non-riders. Must be engaging to break through advertising “clutter.”
Radio advertisements/public service announcements (PSA’s)	Non-traditional approach that may reach people who tune out messages while riding transit. If memorable, may stimulate word-of-mouth promotion of message. PSAs could be cost-effective if free or reduced rate media available.	Paid advertising is expensive. Audience will include a high percentage of non-riders. Must be engaging to break through advertising “clutter.”
Television advertisements/public service announcements	Message can be communicated verbally and non-verbally. Non-traditional approach that may reach people who tune out messages while riding transit. Depending on media buy, can result in high visibility of the message. If memorable, may stimulate word-of-mouth promotion of message. PSAs could be cost effective if free or reduced rate media available.	High production costs. Paid advertising is very expensive. Audience will include a high percentage of non-riders. Must be engaging to break through advertising “clutter.”

**Table 3. External Communication Tools (cont'd.)**

Tools	Benefits	Challenges
Non-traditional target marketing (i.e., theatre advertising, coffee sleeves, cash jackets)	Non-traditional approaches may reach people who tune out messages while riding transit. Provides alternatives for short reinforcement type messages such as tag line/phone number printed on a coffee sleeve. Conversely, options such as theatre advertising allow for a more targeted approach to exposing an audience to television-type advertisements. Can target efforts based on rider demographics and/or relatively small geographic areas so it can be more effective in reaching riders than other external tools.	Requires research and planning to maximize effectiveness. Can be relatively expensive.
Venue marketing (i.e., stadium advertising)	Non-traditional approach that may reach people who tune out messages while riding transit. Can target efforts based on rider demographics to increase effectiveness in reaching riders. Can be effective in reaching occasional riders that use public transit to get to/from special events like football games, etc. Potential partnership opportunities with venue management.	Must be engaging to break through advertising “clutter.” Can be relatively expensive. Selection of venues needs to be based on ridership patterns to maximize effectiveness.

The primary audience for public security awareness programs should be regular transit riders since they are more likely to spot something out-of-the-ordinary. Therefore, internal communications tools ought to comprise the majority of the effort. Communicating with riders when they are about to choose between alternative, often competing, behaviors (i.e., being alert or tuning out, reporting something or ignoring it) is key. These “just-in-time” messages can include both primary campaign executions and simple reminders.

External tools can complement internal efforts and reach riders when they are not expecting it. However, they must be well researched and budgeted to ensure that the “media buy” is sufficient enough to be impactful on the target audience(s). The research revealed that although radio can be a viable method for targeting specific demographics, it may not effectively reach transit riders. Many riders reported that they listen primarily to the radio while driving; however, they are not in their cars for long periods of time since they use public transit.



Finally, although outside the scope of this research effort, a recently released Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) report, “Uses of Social Media in Public Transportation,” suggests that a potentially powerful tool for enhancing the effectiveness of public awareness campaigns, especially among minorities, could be social media. It cites Pew Center research in reporting that minority Americans are more likely than white Americans to believe that government use of electronic communications helps keep citizens informed. Nearly one-third of African Americans and Hispanics said it was “very important” for government agencies to post information and alerts on social networks compared to only 17 percent of white Americans (Bregman 2012). Indeed, a large percentage of focus group participants were technology savvy and indicated that they relied on their smart phones and computers to access information about public transit. Many transit agencies are experimenting with social media and weighing the benefits of various applications versus the resource requirements associated with ongoing maintenance and monitoring. The report did not include any public awareness campaign examples. However, social media’s ability to connect with transit riders and measure their responses using built-in statistics or numerous free and fee-based third-party applications makes it an option worth exploring.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the widespread implementation of public awareness programs in the transit industry, there are little data assessing the effectiveness of these efforts. Evaluation can be a difficult and complex task, but performance measures are essential to the prudent allocation and management of available resources. Investments in identifying a baseline level of awareness and facilitating the systematic tracking of customer responses to campaign elements will yield significant returns in terms of more informed decision-making. By understanding the current level of awareness and the relative effectiveness of campaign messages and communication tools, program managers can set reasonable expectations and determine what they need to do to meet them.

It is important to understand that a public awareness campaign involves much more than developing posters and brochures. Two critical factors that influence transit riders’ willingness to report are the ease at which they can make a report and their perceptions of how they will be treated by agency employees. The need for safe and reliable reporting mechanisms such as easy access to transit personnel, easy-to-dial telephone numbers, and electronic forms of communication (i.e., via text message) was repeatedly mentioned in the focus groups. In addition, partici-

pants recounted situations where they had tried to report a security concern only to receive a negative reaction from a transit employee. An implementation plan that stresses the important role employees play in the success of the initiative is needed. Specific strategies will vary by agency, but communication and training are essential components. Employees that interact with the public should be informed about what the public is being told, when, and how, as well as how to appropriately respond to customers reports with interest and respect.

Finally, ongoing research into the role of social media in promoting transit security awareness and the impact of recently implemented mobile applications that address major barriers to reporting should be pursued.

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