

What's MTA? Agency is Working to Strengthen its Identity

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Sept. 11, 2003) Do you know FedEx? 7-Eleven? Starbucks? Most people do. But, a significant percentage of Angelenos don't know what MTA means.

Even though it's been 10 years since a merger created MTA, the name still draws blank looks. Many citizens, including the taxpayers who fund the agency, can't describe what it does.

Developing a clear identity is a challenge facing management as MTA moves forward with a far-reaching program for planning, building and operating transportation services in LA County.

"Nobody sees our services as 'Metro.' They see them, individually, as the Red Line, the Blue Line, as Metro Rapid," says Chief Communications Officer Matt Raymond. "We want to bring MTA under one identity umbrella."

Recently, the agency has accelerated efforts to reach the public with its messages and to clarify its identity. Brochures and timetables have been given a distinctive appearance, as have MTA posters and bus ads.

The efforts include two new publications – *Metro Quarterly Magazine* and the monthly *Metro News* patron newsletter – along with a quarterly cable TV show, "Metro Motion," and Metro Briefs ads published in nine languages in more than 100 newspapers.

'Discover Gold' campaign

To date, the most successful effort to promote a new identity and image was the "Discover Gold" campaign leading up to the opening of the Metro Gold Line in July. The unprecedented campaign included a full-court press of new-look print and broadcast ads, posters, brochures, billboards and other elements.

The result: a highly favorable reception by the media and the public, word-of-mouth "buzz" throughout the region and a high level of recognition for the new rail line.

"We're in the process of giving all our materials – signage, customer information, ads – a uniform appearance so our customers will recognize one unified brand," says Raymond. "They'll realize that Metro Buses are linked with Metro Rail, with Metro carpool lanes, with Metro bikeways."

One of the next steps toward updating the agency's identity will be an effort to de-emphasize use of the acronym "MTA" and to promote, instead, the more commonly used word "Metro" to identify bus, rail and other transportation services

In effect, "Metro" and the new logo will become the "brand" for agency products and services. The "corporate" name – Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority – and the acronym "MTA" will usually be reserved for more formal use on such things as public documents.

Introducing new 'M' logo

Symbolizing this change will be the replacement of the current "M" logo with an original new logo that reflects the strength, clarity and precision MTA seeks for its image. The major element of the new logo will be a more prominent use of the word "metro," which will be displayed with the redesigned "M".

Although the new logo will begin appearing on MTA materials later this year, it will come into its own beginning in January 2004 when all new materials will feature the updated "brand." Stocks of materials bearing the old logo will remain in use until depleted.

The transition to the new logo, which also will be placed on buses and trains, non-revenue vehicles and division facilities, will be accomplished within annual budgets and is expected to take three years.

And, perhaps one day, "Metro" will gain the same recognition that is enjoyed by FedEx, 7-Eleven and Starbucks – at least in Los Angeles County.

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