

# ***Metro Transit Rolls Out Vastly Improved Bus Stop Signs***

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Not too long after finding the “on” switch to the Nextrip signs at light rail stations, Metro Transit has begun a pilot program rolling out much improved bus stop signage in the Twin Cities. The pilot, funded by grant money left over from the expansion of a Brooklyn Park park-and-ride, involves stops in North Minneapolis and Brooklyn Park. After the pilot, a wider rollout in the northwest metro is planned later this year, and the rest of the system should be updated in the next couple years using a mix of federal, state, and local funding.

Studies have shown that improved amenities at bus stops can affect riders' perception of wait times. Metro Transit currently ranks behind Portland, Maine on measures of basic bus stop signage—we're about on par with Wausau, Wisconsin.

Today, you can find the new signage along a stretch of the Route 22 on Lyndale Avenue North in Minneapolis. Here is one of the signs in all its glory at Farview Park.

You've got:

- Distinctive branding (the “T”)
- Phone number
- Website
- Route listing
- Stop number
- An easy to read illustration of frequency
- A route map



This is an enormous improvement!

The map is a little complicated, but very clearly indicates which branches are traveling to which destinations. The chance of hopping on the wrong bus, getting lost in Angry Birds on your phone for ten minutes, and then looking up and realizing you're in the wrong county—a horrible worst nightmare for all transit users—is lower with this signage. A new or infrequent rider standing at this stop can easily tell that, if they're going to the Brooklyn Center Panda Express, they need to take the 22 A, B, or C—not the D.

The highest-used third of the system's stops will receive the map and the note about frequency, others will have a QR code—which feels a bit retro already. In general, a move towards thinking about frequency rather than 3:06, 3:17, 3:25, 3:34, etc., is maybe a good one for more frequent routes—are riders waiting for the northbound Route 18 bus arriving at Nicollet and 28th at 4:09 PM, or are they just waiting for the next 18? That logic doesn't work in all situations, but it may trick some people into being less frustrated when a bus arrives four minutes late on a route with eight minute headways.

You'd also have to think that the new signage could encourage transit use out on the edges of the core cities and in the suburbs—here, for instance. People in this neighborhood know that there are buses, and that there are bus stops. But people who might never otherwise think about transit may be out walking the dog and see very clearly that, hey, this bus goes some place I'd like to go, and it goes there all the time.

## ***OmniRide – From Generic to a Recognized Brand; Our Evolution of Growth***

In a country where bus stop modernizations projects are taking center stage within transit agencies from coast to coast, we at OmniRide have also stepped on board, through our Strategic Plan, to evolve from serving a mere bedroom community to providing expansive transportation options to our growing population.

While researching other transit agencies and their current transportation modernization projects, Metro Transit of Minneapolis began a pilot program to change their bus stop signage. Their reasoning was shaped by a study that showed improved amenities at bus stops can greatly influence the overall perception of the transit agency, the perceived wait times of passengers, which in turn influences the overall ridership. The bus stop signs of their pilot program are quite informative and detailed, including route maps and schedules.

Taking a page from the lessons learned at other transit agencies, a pilot program is underway here at OmniRide that overhauls and incorporates new bus stops. While our newly designed bus stop signs are not as elaborate as those in Minneapolis, they are an improvement to our existing bus stop signage. These improvements are a great indicator of the direction OmniRide is heading.



As a lifelong employee in the transportation industry, in my travels, it is natural for me to observe and note bus stops and signage in other places. When I moved to Woodbridge eight years ago, I came upon a bus stop sign that was reminiscent of the black and white generic food labels on generic groceries. Most foods were packaged in white boxes and containers, with black lettering. The names were generic and the target customer were those with lower expectations. The reputation of generic to most consumers simply meant lower quality groceries.

When I came upon that bus stop, I wondered if the bus service was generic and low quality as well. Having worked for other transit agencies and having traveled to other cities worldwide, I was amazed to see in a place just 25 miles from the capitol of the United States, bus stop signage was not informative and appeared to be an after-thought. Generic, as defined by Webster's is *"not being or having a particular brand name; having no particularly distinctive quality or application."* What is this place I had moved to and what could I do to get my wife to stop giggling every time we passed a BUS STOP sign? I became involved in an unconventional, but direct manner, as an employee and now the Transit Amenities Coordinator.

As OmniRide moves forward with the restructuring of the western service pilot program, our bus stops have taken on a completely



new look. No longer a label from the generic grocery stores of years gone by, the progressive and informative new signs are indicative of the direction OmniRide is headed, as an organization and integral part of the overall Washington DC Metropolitan transportation scene. The signs will



feature a “lollipop” style bus stop sign, with individual route signs below it. Prominently displayed on the sign is the Omniride logo, a phone number and website address. Symbols will indicate whether a route is wheelchair accessible, whether a bicycle can be transported, or whether a stop will be served during inclement weather. All while sporting an eye catching appearance that is much more visually appealing. The signs will initially be installed in the western service area of Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park.

OmniRide provides Express commuter service into the Washington DC area, Local and Metro Express service in Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park, ride-matching and employer outreach services, Wheels-to-Wellness voucher program, and administers a regional Vanpool Alliance program. Soon, paratransit service and Express commuter service to and from Stafford County will be added.

OmniRide, through our Strategic Plan, is poised to not only provide improved transportation services within Prince William County, but our services will be seen as top-notch and comparable to transit agencies covering much larger areas and populations. We are no longer the transit agency of 1994 simply running feeder routes to VRE stations. We are positioned, capable, and ready to give our ridership what they deserve and things they haven’t thought possible. The first phase in stepping to the forefront is having signage reflecting who we are.