Today’s public bus agencies want to help their communities grow. Flexible routing and innovative deployment techniques further enable transit agencies to bring employees and employers together. In Silicon Valley, where America’s high-tech industry depends on a commuter workforce, public shuttle buses bring employees directly from rail transit stations to more than 100 companies. Through inexpensive, reliable access to job training, jobs and childcare, the public transit bus has helped open up the world of work to low-income employees, disabled workers and welfare recipients. All across the country, the bus is creating a win-win situation: realizing economic growth for individual workers, whole businesses and entire communities.

Partnering for Mobility

One of the greatest success stories of ridership growth is the partnerships public transportation companies have formed within their communities. Atlanta’s Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), which operates more than 1,500 miles of bus routes in addition to rapid rail service, has a Partnership Program with over 100 employers, including major corporations, hospitals, hotels, governmental agencies and not-for-profit organizations. Honolulu’s BONUS! (Bus ON US) program, which involves some 60 employers and serves more than 6,000 employees, has initiated a hassle-free, transit-pass-by-mail program using the Internet to cut down on administrative tasks.

Some transportation agencies are even partnering to build bus ridership into future real estate developments. Pennsylvania’s Centre Area Transportation Authority (CATA), for example, is working hard with Penn State University and the municipalities it serves to assure that bus pullouts and bus stops are designed and built into new shopping centers, residential complexes and commercial centers—from the beginning.
In the second year of the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County’s (METRO) U. Pass Program, ridership jumped more than 50 percent. The popular program enables university, college and technical school students to ride METRO buses for free. The U. Pass Program was expanded in 2001, with 134,500 free passes distributed to 42 campuses. The program has gotten rave reviews from students, teachers and community leaders for reducing students’ out-of-pocket costs in gas and parking, and helping to improve Houston’s air quality.

3:00 p.m.

U. PASS scores high marks with university students on their way to class.
Since the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) was passed a decade ago, new technologies have enabled buses to become safer, lighter, more efficient, more durable, and easier to service—offering dramatically improved driver and passenger satisfaction. Bus manufacturers have been responsive to their clients, bringing new generations of buses to cities throughout North America. Many of the new features, like light-emitting diode (LED) lights, multiplexing and adaptive shift, are on the cutting edge. Extra sound insulation, vibration dampening, and electronic adaptive transmissions have made for a smoother ride.

**Lower Emission Technologies**
Liquid and compressed natural gas, ultra low-sulfur diesel and hybrid electric technologies are enabling buses to run cleaner and more efficiently. Over the past 10 years, bus emissions have been reduced by 95 percent, contributing greatly to cleaner air, and fuel consumption has been improved by 30 percent. SunLine Transit in Thousand Palms, California, was the first system in America to convert totally to an alternative fuel fleet. Systems are also shifting to hybrid electric vehicles—New York City Transit has recently purchased over 300.

Buses are more environmentally friendly in others ways, as well. They use more recyclable materials and materials that are better for our world, such as synthetic oils and Freon-free refrigerants.

**Driver ergonomics**
Ergonomically designed drivers’ compartments, adjustable air-ride seats and tilt-and-telescoping steering columns all enhance the comfort and performance of the driver while reducing driver fatigue. Wraparound front windshields reduce interior glare and improve drivers’ fields of view.

**Smart Buses**
Today’s buses incorporate many Intelligent Transportation Systems to assure free-flowing traffic and an informed public. From Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and digital communications, to automatic stop announcements and smart-card fare collection systems, buses make the most of high-tech developments. Thanks to GPS and Automatic Vehicle Locators, public bus agencies can track, contact and effectively manage their fleets, while bringing real-time information on arrival times to passengers at bus stops, over the Internet and on their wireless communication devices.

**Added Passenger Comfort**
Passengers on today’s new commuter buses appreciate the increased use of padded and reclining seats, slip-resistant floors and overhead lights and overhead package racks, along with air conditioning and other amenities. Plus, spacious interiors, low-floor designs, wide doors, roomy aisles, flip-out ramps and kneeling features assure that buses can easily accommodate all riders.

**Better Lighting and Heating**
Electronically controlled interior lighting improves both safety and visibility and lets riders read and work. As bus doors open and close at stops along the route, computer-controlled zoned heating adjusts temperatures to comfortable levels. Light-emitting diode (LED) exterior traffic signal lights have reduced accidents by improving visibility for other drivers.

**Improved Maintenance**
While the bus makes its rounds, computer-controlled diagnostics are working to identify any problems before service is affected. Thanks to modular systems design and easily accessible maintenance items, along with innovative ideas such as quick-change skirt panels and engine cradles, problematic components can be quickly removed and replaced, increasing bus uptime.

**Safety and Security**
Today’s buses are more secure than ever. Around the country, many buses are equipped with video surveillance cameras and high-tech two-way radios to reach police and emergency medical services. Public bus agencies are also stepping up their police patrols and creating partnerships with community and local law enforcement organizations to assure a safe operating environment.
Gamers and tourists often choose the bus to get to casinos and other area attractions. The Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) of Washoe County serves more than 25,000 riders a day with a fleet of 65 buses. During peak hours the RTC operates 52 Citifare buses and four PRIDE coaches, which provide service between Reno and Carson City. Special RTC promotions, like that created with the Reno Hilton for guests participating in a major international bowling tournament in downtown Reno, offer added convenience for visitors.
Outreach
In Touch with America’s Communities

Bus operators are continually seeking new and better ways of serving the community. First and foremost, customer satisfaction is a top priority. Automated communications may be the wave of the future, but agencies know that well-trained, courteous bus drivers and customer service staffs are on the front lines. And today’s bus agencies speak the community’s language—whether it’s English, Russian, Japanese or Spanish.

They’re also constantly improving their image, appeal and effectiveness. Teens in Tempe, Arizona, now have their own website to keep up to date with bus routes and local events. In Clearwater, Florida, Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) passengers are impressed with a brand new easy-to-read route map with points for local landmarks. School-age Knoxville Area Transit (KAT) riders in Knoxville, Tennessee, are eligible for the very affordable Super Summer Pass, good for unlimited rides around town.

Listening…and Reacting

Transportation agencies now consider themselves part of the community and value the community’s input. Special meetings, newsletters or websites get the word out—and get feedback—on service improvements and capital projects. Today’s agencies are listening…and giving riders what they ask for…and more.

Do bus riders want special destination service? LAKETRAN buses bring Cleveland-area sports fans to the stadium to cheer on their home teams in baseball and football. Do riders want to bring their bikes aboard? In 1995, Honolulu’s TheBus began a pilot program to place bike racks on certain buses. The response was so enthusiastic that bike racks were installed on all buses, and the program now represents its fastest growing ridership segment. How about childcare? Aided by a federal grant, CityBus in Lafayette, Indiana, opened a childcare center for its riders and employees in 1998—that success inspired a second childcare center, which is scheduled to open in 2002.
2:00 a.m.

Mechanics work into the wee hours, readying Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) buses for another busy day.

The OCTA maintenance facilities in Garden Grove, Anaheim and Irvine—a fourth center is in development in Santa Ana—fuel, maintain and clean OCTA’s fleet of buses. While Orange County is known for its freeways, more than 60,000 residents a day ride OCTA buses. During peak hours OCTA puts more than 460 buses on 80 routes. And because ridership is growing, OCTA has approved a 49 percent increase in bus service by 2015.
What will tomorrow’s buses offer? If progress to date is any indication, America can look forward to buses that are even more efficient, attractive, quiet, reliable and environmentally friendly. With continuing improvements in engine designs and emission reductions, as well as new technologies such as hybrid electric buses and fuel-cell-powered buses, emissions will keep diminishing—and in some cases reduce to zero. Through real-time security information and accident-avoidance systems, buses will be even safer. Programmable drive features, precision steering, docking and electric brakes will make for even smoother rides.

Bus passengers will enjoy numerous other advances—from on-call residential service and flash-card fare collection to real-time information systems and flexible interiors featuring light-sensitive glass windows. Thanks to a round of improvements, from new, lighter-weight, vandal-resistant materials to self-diagnostic systems with wireless links to bus maintenance centers, buses will be more reliable and economical to operate.

As buses and bus services get better and traffic gets worse, ridership will continue to increase. Now and in the future, America can count on the bus.
Photo Contributions:

**Bus Manufacturers**
Advanced Vehicle Systems, Inc.
Blue Bird Corporation
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NEOPLAN USA Corporation
New Flyer
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**Transit Agencies**
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Capital Area Transportation Authority, Lansing, MI
City and County of Honolulu Department of Transportation Services, Honolulu, HI
Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA), Chattanooga, TN
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Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, San Jose, CA
Santa Monica’s Big Blue Bus, Santa Monica, CA
Transit Authority of River City (TARC), Louisville, KY

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