

2015

Recommendations for Improving Bus Facilities



Memphis Bus Riders Union

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING BUS FACILITIES

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Prepared by the Memphis Bus Riders Union

Introduction

The Will Hudson Transit Center, commonly known and referred to in this document as the North End Terminal, is MATA's most used transit hub, and is in need of serious renovation. In the past year, we, the Memphis Bus Riders Union, have worked with riders to develop a vision of a more ideal terminal space and a series of recommendations for tangible improvements at the terminal. These recommendations are based on input gathered from bus riders, through outreach at the facility and through workshops at our membership meetings.

Our recommendations span many aspects of the terminal, inside and out. The North End Terminal should not be neglected in lieu of places like the Airways Transit Center and Central Station, which have received or are receiving large amounts of development funding since the North End Terminal was built in 1998. There is no excuse for a terminal as important as the North End Terminal to lag significantly behind the others in convenience, safety, and visual beauty. The images in this document provide a tangible view of how the recommended improvements could change the environment of the North End Terminal for the better.

The removal of Ambassador Worldwide as the terminal's security provider is its own issue. From a financial standpoint, Ambassador's contract is costing MATA an average of \$157,137.80 per year until 2019, money that could be better applied to the vastly-needed improvements in infrastructure and environment. At the same time, a high volume of complaints from riders demonstrates that Ambassador is not providing any better service than Pro-Tech, Inc. did: any realistic look at their day-to-day activity points not only to breaches of their contract, but also of Tennessee law, which allows for private citizens' use of "force reasonably necessary" to detain, arrest, and discipline (Op. Tenn. Att'y Gen. 03-018).

In its 2012 Market Analysis, MATA's Short Range Transit Plan identifies low-income, zero-vehicle, and minority households as "some of [their] strongest markets for service" (49). We assert that these markets continue to be consistently underserved, especially with regard to the North End Terminal. Moreover, other "transit dependent populations" that MATA identifies, including persons 65 years and older, persons with disabilities, and persons with limited English proficiency, are also being sold short by an inadequate system (22). The North End Terminal's condition should reflect its position as the terminal most riders come in contact with; and a higher-quality terminal with a more welcoming environment will lead to increased ridership by citizens and visitors alike. This becomes especially important when considering that the SRTP Market Analysis identifies the Downtown area as having sufficient population and employment

densities for “high-capacity transit” (48). If MATA truly shifts its priorities towards its greatest consumers, improvements will pay for themselves.

We recommend that the funding for these improvements be set aside in MATA’s budget for the *specific* purpose of renovating the North End Terminal. This is not an issue that should fall solely on the shoulders of riders: ultimately, MATA has the ability to effect change in this matter by reexamining which of its sectors have the greatest need and potential windfall. Renovation is not an issue that can be put off any longer, and we will continue to point out these inequities until meaningful effort is put toward their resolution.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are organized into the following categories:

- I. Safety
- II. Sanitary Conditions: Restroom Renovations
- III. Customer Service
- IV. Public Engagement
- V. Quality of Life
 - a. Amenities
 - b. Atmosphere

I. Safety

The first priority for improving MATA facilities is addressing safety concerns. Below are our recommendations for safer bus facilities:

- Drop security contract
- Regarding current security:
 - body cameras for all security guards
 - removal of the windowless holding cell
 - end discriminatory policing practices
- Purchase more “Wet Floor” Signs
- Mop closet to keep cleaning stuff away from children, people

Drop security contract with Ambassador: The Memphis Police Department will use the upstairs space of the MATA terminal as the location for one of their precincts. We recommend that MATA’s contract with the Ambassador security company be terminated, and in its place an agreement be made with the Memphis Police Department to provide security for the North End Terminal.

Regarding current security:

Body cameras for all security guards: We recommend that all security officers at the North End Terminal be equipped with body cameras for increased accountability and transparency. The estimated cost is around \$200 per camera. The cameras can also be integrated into the pre-existing security camera system.

Removal of the windowless holding cell: The current holding cell used for detainment by the security officers has no windows and cannot be seen inside by security cameras. This cell takes up space unnecessarily, and hinders citizens' right to non-commercial photography and film in public places; it should be removed from the terminal entirely. If privacy is needed, there are many other areas in the building where riders are not allowed, for example, the first floor entrance to the former Career Center.

End discriminatory and aggressive policing practices: We call for the end of all discriminatory and aggressive policing practices, including the harassment of riders wearing sagging pants, and use of the "n" word by officers addressing passengers. Sagging pants are neither illegal in the city of Memphis nor forbidden in MATA policy at the last time of inquiry; and as the ACLU of Mississippi points out in a 2012 statement, "Government policy-makers have no right to dictate or influence style, nor do they have the right to protect themselves and the greater public from seeing clothing they dislike...There is no evidence linking saggy pants to crime or public safety." In August 2014, a rider and her child were both injured with mace by a security guard who was not disciplined. These are not solitary instances: MBRU has received multiple complaints from riders about the practices of Ambassador Worldwide since they began working for MATA.

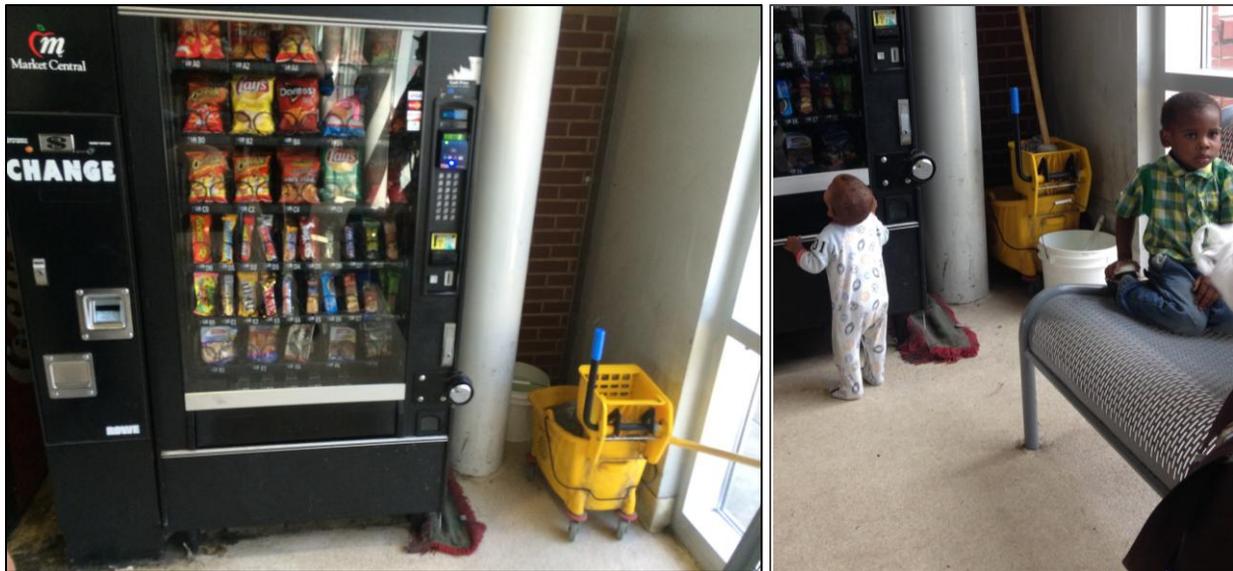


Windowless holding cell and security desk located inside the North End Terminal

Purchase more wet floor signs: Currently there is only one wet floor sign, so when there are multiple areas with wet floors (two separate bathrooms, a bathroom and a spill in the main terminal floor), there is no way to mark all areas that are wet, posing a safety hazard. We recommend that two additional wet floor signs be purchased for use in the North End Terminal.

Cleaning supplies should be kept in a closet or separate room, not out in the open or in the waiting room: Currently the mop used for cleaning the North End Terminal is frequently left out and stored in the main waiting room. This is unsanitary, unsafe, and unprofessional. We

recommend that all cleaning supplies be stored in a closet or a room separate from the main waiting room.



A mop bucket with used mop water and bucket with bleach water, frequently stored next to the vending machine at the North End Terminal. Leaving it out in the open leads to the possibility of people coming in contact with it, like the children in the second image.

II. Sanitary Conditions: Bathroom Renovations

One of the most important and urgent recommendations are for improving the bathrooms. We urge MATA to allocate an adequate portion of their CIP funds for facility improvements to renovate the restroom facilities at the North End Terminal. Below are a list of recommendations for improvements to the North End Terminal restrooms.

- “Shield-Crete” floors with seamless epoxy protective coating (see Airways Transit Center floors)
- Tile walls
- Hooks on stall doors
- Spotter checklist
- New stainless steel waste bins
- Tampon/pad vending machines and sanitary trash cans (in bathroom stalls)
- Stainless steel soap dispensers
- Stainless steel toilet paper holders/paper towel holders
- Air hand dryers (including one that is placed lower for handicap access)
- New mirrors
- New sinks
- New durable laminate countertops
- Stainless steel baby station
- New water fountains

- Hire professional cleaning staff

The urgent need for renovations are clearly shown in the images below:



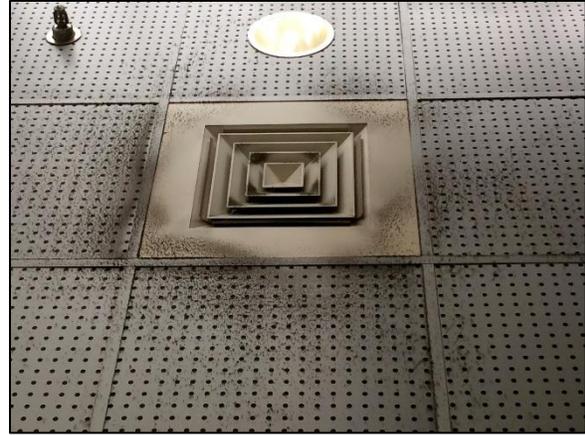
Dilapidated bathroom fixtures in need of replacement and worn out concrete floors at the North End Terminal

The restrooms in the Airways Terminal are an example of the quality of restrooms that should be available for the North End Terminal.



Bathroom facilities at the Airways Transit Center, including several recommended amenities for the North End Terminal

Central Air vents are also in need of maintenance. We observed that every visible vent within the facility had a thick layer of dust.



Dirty air vents at the North End Terminal

New, sanitary waste bins: We recommend that all trash cans be replaced. Many have no lid, and are in disrepair.



On the left: one of several trash cans without a lid at the North End Terminal. Not sure what the steel drum next to it is for. On the right: a trash can outside at the Airways Transit Center, which has a more visually appealing design and is more durable.

III. Customer Service

Below are some recommendations for improving customer service at MATA bus terminals:

- Free phone that connects directly to customer service, transit information, or administration
- More customer service representatives on staff
- Announce on the intercom when MATA PLUS comes

Free phone connecting directly to customer service: We recommend that a phone be available for use inside the terminal that can directly connect to MATA's customer service number, and/or have information recordings about service changes and other important route information.

More customer service representatives: At the last time of inquiry, MATA only had one staff member handling all customer service calls and emails. More staff is urgently needed in order to adequately respond to all customer service inquiries.

Announce on the intercom when MATA Plus is at the North End Terminal: Currently, it is difficult for MATA Plus customers waiting inside the terminal to see when their bus has arrived. We recommend that the inside intercom be used to announce the arrival of a MATA Plus vehicle at the terminal.

IV. Public Engagement

In order to improve MATA's engagement and communication with the public, we recommend the implementation of the following:

- Comment box
- Informational posters (MATA related, public hearing/input announcements)
- Intercom announcements
- More screens with MATA information
- Post administration's contact information
- Braille and Spanish translations for all signs posted at terminals and on buses



An example of a comment box that could be placed at the North End Terminal

Comment box: We recommend that a comment box be placed in the North End Terminal along with comment slips so that riders can more easily submit written comments to MATA. This could be used as a more convenient means through which the public can provide input about proposed changes in service, or transit plans.

Informational posters: We recommend that all important announcements, including route changes and upcoming public meetings and board meetings be posted clearly, with adequate notice in a prominent place in the North End Terminal, in both English and Spanish.

Intercom announcements: We recommend that an intercom system be purchased for the North End Terminal. Periodic informational announcements could be played throughout the day, containing information about route changes and cuts, as well as upcoming public meetings.

More information screens to announce bus arrival times: More screens should be added to post arrival times of buses. They should be installed in places that are clearly visible from the seating area inside the North End Terminal.

Post administrative contact information: MATA should clearly post contact information for MATA administrators in a highly visible location in the North End Terminal.

Braille and Spanish translation for all signs posted at terminals and on buses: Currently signs and announcements are posted only in English. Spanish and Braille translations should be included with these announcements to make the information accessible for more riders.

V. Quality of Life:

Improvements pertaining to quality of life were grouped into two categories: Amenities and Atmosphere. We make the following recommendations.

Amenities

- Free WIFI
- Food Trucks, Vendors
- Mobile Health Facilities
- Green Machine
- Kids Center, Anatex Play Cube (Transportation-related)
- Tables for eating

Atmosphere

- Music played through the intercom
- Artwork related to Memphis Civil Rights History and Transportation
- Plants inside and outside, high oxygen generating, colorful
- New colorful paint job inside & out, walls and benches
- Remove “No Loitering” signs
- Televisions showing news and sports



Examples of play cubes that could be installed for children at the North End Terminal

Amenities

Free WiFi: Free WiFi should be available for all riders to use at the North End Terminal.

Food Trucks and Vendors: Currently there are few food options available for bus riders who must commute long hours and/or wait a long time for bus transfers. We recommend that MATA allow food trucks or carts to park in the parking lot adjacent to the main terminal on a trial basis, to see if this might better service the needs of riders, with the added benefit of promoting small local businesses.

Mobile Health Facilities: We recommend that a relationship be formed between MATA and the Christ Community Clinic's Operation Outreach, and that the Mobile Healthcare Clinic park at set times throughout the week in the North End Terminal parking lot.

Green Machine: We recommend that MATA partner with the University of Memphis Planning Department to allow the Green Machine mobile produce market to park in the North End Terminal parking lot at a set time or times throughout the week.

Kid's center with play cubes: We recommend that an area of the terminal be furnished as a children's play center. This area will include stationary play cubes that are safe for toddlers and young children, and adjacent seating where mothers can supervise their children. This project could be funded by crowd sourcing or through other community sponsors such as local churches.

Table seating: Some seating with tables should be available so that passengers may have a place to eat food or snacks while they are waiting for their bus.

Atmosphere

Music played through the intercom: Music could be played quietly through the North End Terminal intercom to create a more pleasant atmosphere. We recommend a variety of Old School and contemporary Soul, Jazz, R&B, Blues, Hip-Hop, and Gospel music.

Artwork related to Memphis civil rights history and transportation: We recommend that art be displayed on the terminal walls to beautify the space. The art could pertain to civil rights history and transportation.

Plants inside and outside: Plants should also be placed inside and outside the terminal, to beautify the space and create a calm and pleasant environment.



Potted plants at the Airways Transit Center. This is a good example of how plants could improve the atmosphere at the North End Terminal.

New colorful paint job inside and outside: Currently, much of the terminal is made up of grey, white, or exposed concrete, which is covered in soot and dirt, and creates a dreary atmosphere. We recommend that walls and benches be repainted to be more colorful, to further beautify the space, and to make the terminal easier to clean.

Remove “No Loitering” signs: Currently there are at least 19 no loitering, soliciting, or panhandling signs posted in the terminal, none of which are on the side of the building that faces the trolley. Riders have expressed that this is discriminatory. Moreover, the number of signs is excessive: in many cases there are two signs, an old one and a new one placed next to it. These signs create an unwelcoming atmosphere for all riders. We understand that MATA’s Customer Conduct policy prohibits panhandling, soliciting and loitering, and that the contracted security company enforces this policy. However, because security guards are already authorized to enforce customer conduct policy, the signs are ultimately unnecessary. If they remain, there will also be less room for artwork and informational posters. Therefore, we recommend that all “No Loitering,” “No Panhandling,” and “No Soliciting” signs be removed.



Redundant “No Loitering” signage inside the North End Terminal.



Three no loitering signs posted by the stairwell outside the North End Terminal.

Televisions showing news and sports: As a way to make riders' waits more comfortable, we recommend installing televisions in the terminal that can show news or sports programming throughout the day.

PARTIAL BUDGET ESTIMATE

We believe that many of the preceding recommendations are relatively inexpensive, especially given the tremendous impact they will have. He have prepared a list of expenses below to illustrate how relatively inexpensive these improvements would be.

- I. Safety
 - a. Body cameras (2 guards) = \$200 each
 - b. Wet floor signs (4) = \$15 each
- II. Sanitary Conditions
 - a. Bathroom faucets (2 per bathroom) = \$100-200 each
 - b. Stall hooks (3 per bathroom) = \$5 each
 - c. Soap dispensers (2 per bathroom) = \$40-50 each
 - d. Baby changing stations (1 per bathroom) = \$1,000 each
 - e. Toilet paper dispensers (3 per bathroom) = \$100 each
 - f. Paper towel dispensers (1 per bathroom) = \$50 each
 - g. Large stainless steel trash cans (10) = \$300 each

- h. Air hand dryers (2 per bathroom) = \$500 each
 - i. Laminate countertops (1 per bathroom) = \$100 each
 - j. Water fountains (2) = \$500 each
 - k. Tampon & pad vending machine (1) = \$300 each
 - l. Bathroom mirrors (1 per bathroom) = \$150 each
 - m. Wall mount trash receptacle (1 per bathroom) = \$200 each
- III. Customer Service
- a. Commercial wall phone (1) = \$30 each
- IV. Public Engagement
- a. Wall-mounted or hung computer monitors (4) = \$200 each
- V. Quality of Life
- a. Anatex Six-Sided Play Cubes (2) = \$250 each
 - b. Plants in stone pots (10) = \$60 each
 - c. 40-inch Television (2) = \$300 each
 - d. Outdoor square picnic tables (2) = \$900 each
- VI. Total Estimate: \$19,660
- a. **NOTE:** This estimate is partial and does not include the costs of contracted work or the hiring of additional staff. However, with existing funding, plus the removal of private security and increased ridership that a more adequate terminal would provide, these costs would not be beyond MATA and the city of Memphis's capabilities.

BEFORE AND AFTER IMAGES



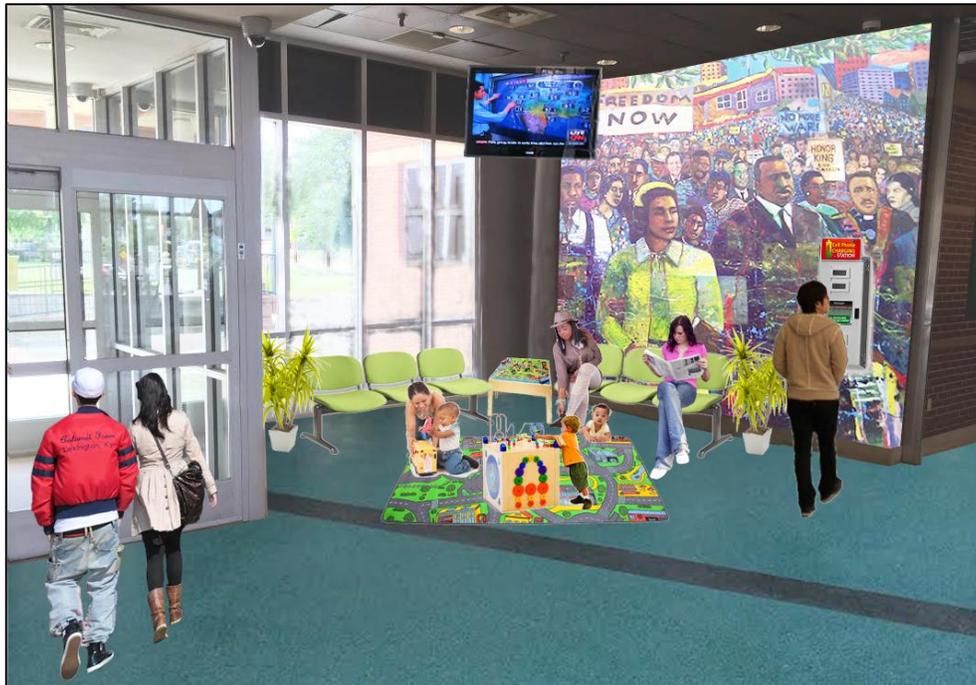
Current conditions outside the North End Terminal.



Small improvements outside the north end terminal such as colorful new paint, new trash cans, and plants would create a brighter and more welcoming atmosphere.



Currently, a large area inside the North End Terminal is taken up by a security desk and a windowless holding cell.

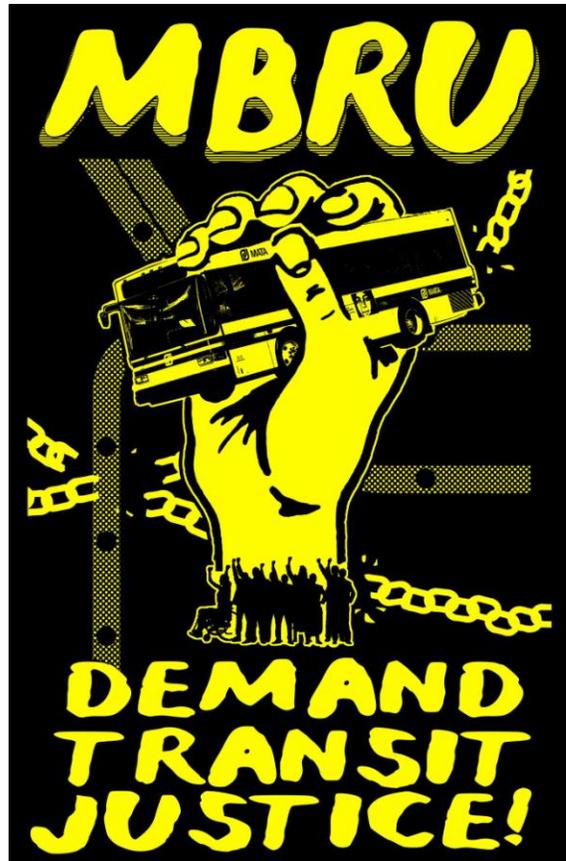


The removal of the holding cell and security cell would make room for a child's play corner where mothers could wait with their children. The colorful murals, potted plants, and more durable floors also create a more welcoming and comfortable atmosphere in the terminal.

ABOUT THE MEMPHIS BUS RIDERS UNION

Founded in February of 2012, the Memphis Bus Riders Union (MRBU) is a grassroots organization that fights for better bus service in our city, providing input about MATA practices and policies with key decision-makers, including the MATA board and administration as well as city government. Bus riders and supporters come together for monthly meetings where decisions are made democratically by the membership.

The work of the MBRU is essential in highlighting and fighting the racism and the oppression based on socioeconomic status as reflected in our city's grossly inadequate public transportation system: 90% of bus riders are Black, a majority of whom are Women, and 60% have incomes of \$18,000 or less. Cuts to bus service combined with inequitable economic development and residential segregation disproportionately affect low-income residents and communities of color.



"Buses stop running in some neighborhoods at 6PM, which puts a curfew on us like we're locked up in some kind of modern-day slavery."

—Georgia "Mother" King, Founder, Organizer, MBRU

Those who depend on bus service also include People with disabilities, Students, Workers and Seniors. All these facts inform our understanding that the funding, planning and function of mass transit is a civil rights issue. The intersection of race, class and transportation reveals massive walls that divide our city. But don't just take it from us; here's what Dr. Martin Luther King had to say:

"When you go beyond the relatively simple though serious problems such as police racism, however, you begin to get into all the complexities of the modern American economy. Urban transit systems in most American cities, for example, have become a genuine civil rights issue—and a valid one—because the layout of rapid-transit systems determines the accessibility of jobs to the Black community. If transportation systems in American cities could be laid out so as to provide an opportunity for poor people to get to meaningful employment, then they could begin to move into the mainstream of American life. A good example of this problem is my home city of Atlanta, where the rapid-transit system has been laid out for the convenience of the white upper-middle-class suburbanites who commute to their jobs downtown. The system has virtually

no consideration for connecting the poor people with their jobs. There is only one possible explanation for this situation, and that is the racist blindness of city planners."

Sadly the reality Dr. King addressed is still the reality today. MBRU organizers have demonstrated an acute preoccupation with the complex barriers bus riders face in their everyday lives. It is through your continued support of our work that we may gain the tools to understand these barriers and to begin to remove them.

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