27th Australasian Transport Research Forum, Adelaide, 29 September – 1 October 2004

Paper title: **The chain of information**

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Abstract (200 words):

Adelaide's public transport system was in decline for over 20 years until, four years ago in April 2000, a program of information and service adjustments to the system has reversed this trend, with patronage growing at an average of 2.5% per annum and a cumulative growth of nearly 10% over that same period of time.

This has been achieved by changing services at a relatively low cost and providing a Chain of Information Program operating under a comprehensive Information Marketing concept that delivered the joint message of "why" a customer should use public transport along with the invaluable "how to" information.

The Chain of Information Program was developed based on research that highlighted a lack of understanding and subsequent lack of consumer confidence in the public transport system. Budget restraints limited high tech system wide solutions or major investments in infrastructure.

The Chain of Information

A creative solution to building public transport patronage
A step toward a sustainable transport future

Introduction

This paper outlines how by applying the principles of product marketing to mass transit, in particular those applied to retail and fast moving consumables, real returns can be achieved.

The Adelaide Metro mass transit system services the city of Adelaide which has a population of 1.1 million and a foot print of 870 square kilometres. Adelaide is a sprawling city in which private car travel is extremely easy. It has a static population growing at less than 0.5% per annum, and a car population growing at 2.8% per annum.

Structure

This paper outlines what processes were used to develop and trial the Chain of Information concept. It also outlines the mix of products and concepts used in this process along with the method of implementation and a summary that details results and conclusions, along with background data and research.

Patronage Obectives

The overall objectives were:

- to increase patronage across the system
- to generate increased use by existing customers
- to generate use by new customers
- to improve customer satisfaction and
- to evaluate the perceived value and benefits of public transport across the broader community.

Adelaide's public transport system was in decline for over 20 years until April 2000 when a program of information, marketing and service adjustments to the system reversed this trend, with patronage growing at an average of 2.5% per annum and a cumulative growth of 9.9% over that same period of time. The system now has a real customer focus.

This has been achieved by changing services at a relatively low cost and providing a Chain of Information System operating under a comprehensive Information Marketing concept that delivered the joint message of why a customer should use public transport along with the invaluable "how to" information.
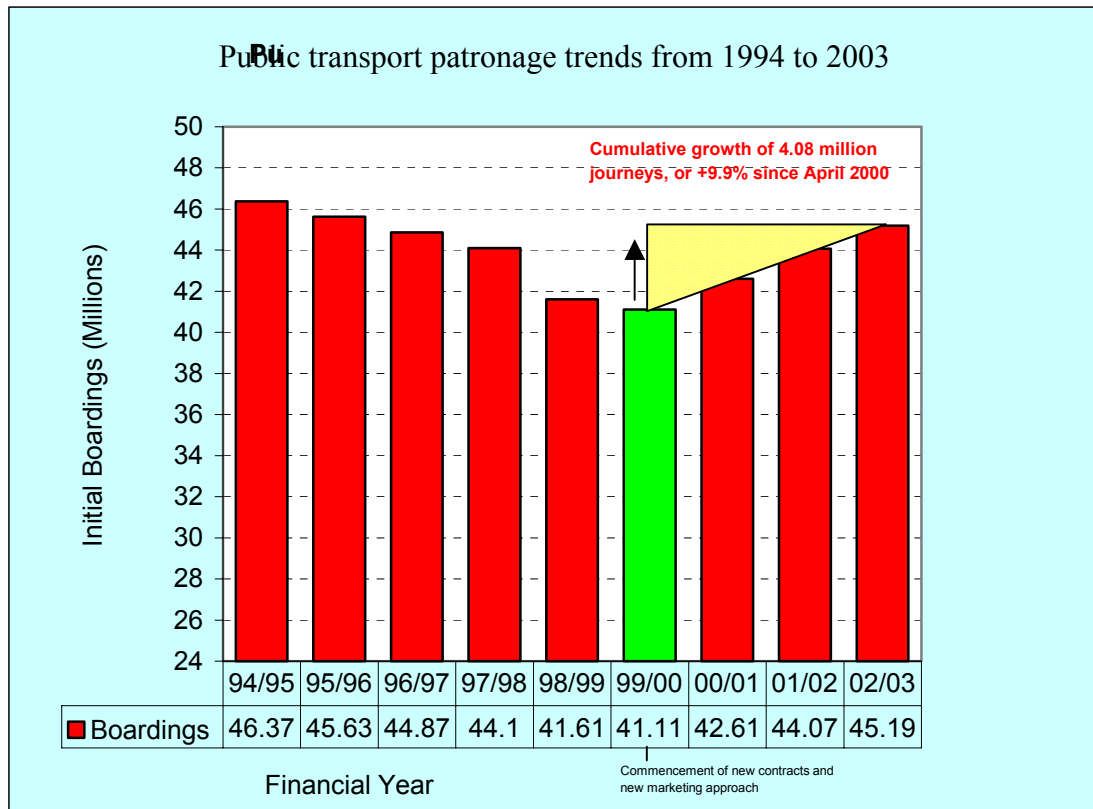
Public transport patronage trends from 1994 to 2003

	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/02	02/03
Boardings	46.37	45.63	44.87	44.1	41.61	41.11	42.61	44.07	45.19

Cumulative growth of 4.08 million journeys, or +9.9% since April 2000

Commencement of new contracts and new marketing approach

Initial Boardings (Millions) / Financial Year

Table 1 Public transport patronage trends from 1994 to 2003

Development through trial

The Chain of Information Program was developed based on research (ABS *Travel to Work and Place of Education*, Adelaide Statistical Division Commonwealth of Australia 1997) that highlighted a lack of understanding and subsequent lack of consumer confidence in the public transport system. It also identified that if information about public transport was readily available to new users they would consider using the system and existing customers would extend their use of the system. Budget restraints limited high tech system wide solutions or major investments in infrastructure.

The Chain of Information Program recognised that once an existing or new customer was prepared to trial the Adelaide Metro system, they had an immediate need for service information. This had to be addressed locally and reinforced at each decision point on the journey. It also recognised that the obvious presence of this information in the community would in its own right attract customers and reassure them about the public transport system.

It is also recognised that this program was required to shift perceptions as well as provide a system of delivering information.

This became apparent from a longitudinal study that the Passenger Transport Board (now the Office of Public Transport) conducted in the inner south eastern suburbs of Adelaide, an area with over 40,000 homes. (Dunstone, 1999).

This program combined information provision system with a customer awareness program promoting the benefits of using public transport. The combined 'why' and 'how to' message is at the core of its success.

The study involved 1,000 respondents within that area commencing with a benchmark study. It was then followed up with a further survey seven months later to measure change in opinions and public transport usage.
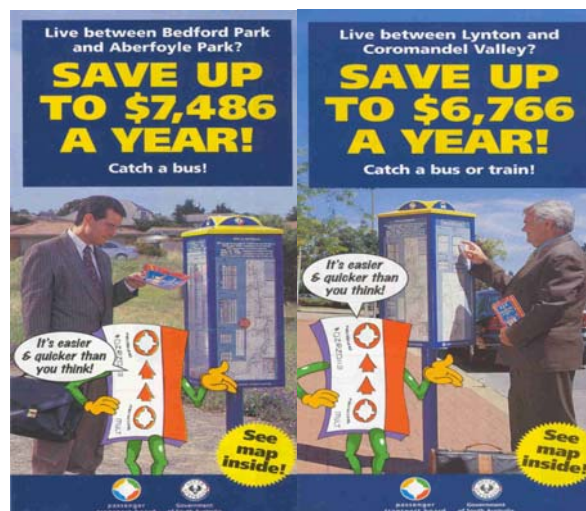

Figure 1 Early brochures for inner-south longitudinal study that promoted the benefits along with deleted service information

The results clearly indicated that a combination of reasons "why" supported by a "how to" program would be effective.

The likelihood of people in that area using public transport rose by 3% and actual patronage grew by one and a half percent, at a time when all other regions in metropolitan Adelaide had declining patronage.

The results from this trial and previous studies became the basis for the combined "why" and the "how to" components of the Chain of Information Program.

Key indicators from studies 1997-1999

Various studies were conducted over this period from 1997 to 1999, the most significant aspects that gave clear indications of what customer expectations were:

50% of people would extend their use of public transport if information was available (Eltridge-Smith, 1997).

Of those that didn't use public transport, 27% of people claimed services didn't go where they wanted to go, 16.7% of people said it took too long and 9.2% people indicated there were no services that suited them. This represents over 50% of respondents who might simply not understand what the public transport system offered them (ABS *Travel to Work and Place of Education*, Adelaide Statistical Division Commonwealth of Australia, 1997).

When asked what improvements would encourage use or more frequent use of public transport the following response was provided (J Dunstone, 1999):

- 23% increase frequency
- 13.2% more connecting routes
- 11.1% decrease waiting times
- 10.3% reduce price
- 5.2% increase security and
- 3.5% running on time

The issues of increasing, frequency, more connecting routes and waiting times can in many cases be perceptual, as was the case with the Go Zones that have grown by as much as 19% with barely any service changes, three of which had no service changes at all. However, what did change was how the service was presented to the public.
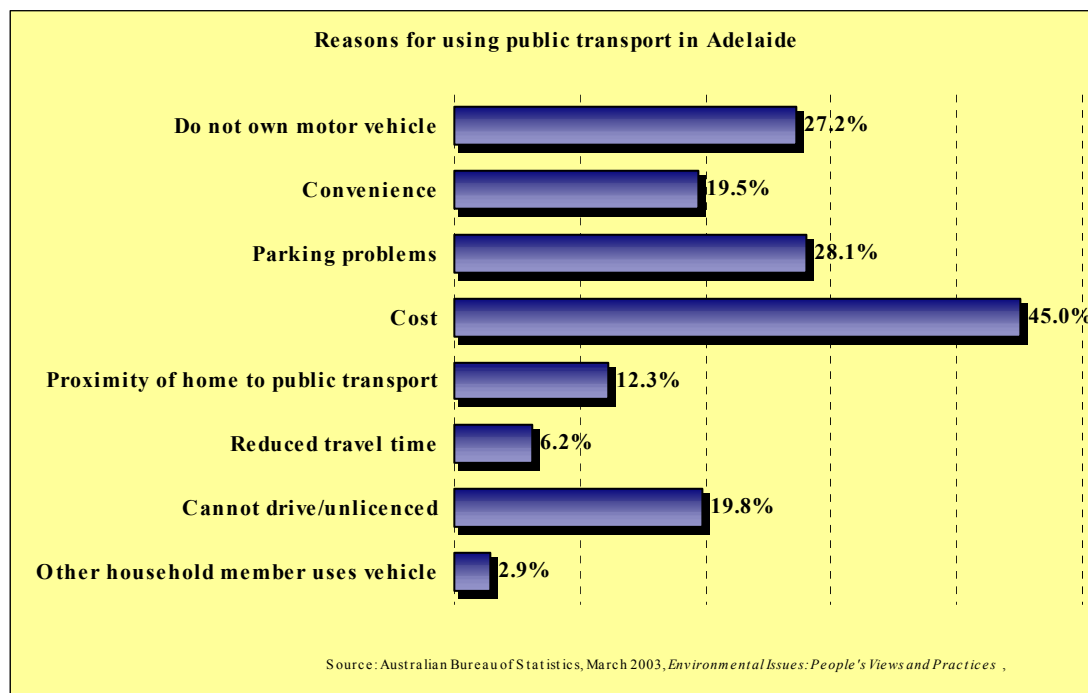

Table 2 – Reasons for using public transport

The "why" component

Following this study a detailed Marketing Plan was developed and since April 2000 has been refined, extended and rewritten every year.

These concurrent Marketing Plans that linked together to form the Chain of Information Program required the implementation of a series of strategic programs.

These were:

- To launch a new brand – the Adelaide Metro, reflecting a multimodal system with a fresh customer focus that would deliver on customer expectations.

- To launch new products – Go Zones, Roam Zones, etc. Primarily these were repackaged services that already existed, however, by emphasising what we now understood what the customer wanted we could launch these as fresh, new, credible products.

- To launch programs of enticement. This program delivered the "Why you should use public transport" message. The program had to deliver a message that was relevant are that immediately identified the benefits to the individual of frequency, convenience and relevance to their needs.

  Most importantly the image projected had to be fresh and modern and its focus always on people enjoying the product. Rolling stock no longer featured in promotional material unless it was of special relevance.

  Ultimately the aim was to show public transport as a product of choice that is convenient, relevant and a pleasurable experience - not a choice of last resort.

- To launch new livery and packaging. To maximise the impact on the market with minimal resources a new livery, signage and advertising design package was launched that was controlled through the Adelaide Metro StyleGuide.

Figure 2 Image, branding and benefits are crucial in delivering the "why" message

The "how to" component

To launch the Chain of Information Program. This program delivered the "How To use public transport" message by having in place a system wide service information program that provided information at key decision points prior, to and during a public transport journey.

This would guide and reassure, both new and existing customers, helping them to overcome a lack of understanding and confidence in the system. Critical to the entire program's success was the understanding that no program of enticement or promotion would work without the "Chain of Information" in place. This was designed to deliver service information to the customer or prospective customer using uniform branding and graphic design to ensure the delivery of easy to understand and use information.

The program is low tech and is designed to have the maximum coverage across the system. It comprised various components targeted to give maximum delivery of relevant information at strategic points prior, to and during the journey, both guiding and reassuring.

The size and spread of the system also required careful consideration to ensure the program remained manageable, reliable and effective, as it would have to service thousands of locations with detailed service information.

This was an important element of the project's success as previous attempts by government agencies to introduce service information had failed due to poor design and little consideration to recurrent costs which had ballooned due to vandalism and uncoordinated service changes.

Information at kerbside/stop, platform and interchange

The information display survey (Eltridge-Smith, 1991) identified that over 50% of respondents would consider extended use of the system or trial the system if information was available at kerbside. This was subsequently found in the inner south eastern survey (Dunstone 1999) and more recently with the Benchmark survey for Real Time passenger information (McGregor Tan 2003) that identified 49 % of respondents wanted information at the bus stop. Hence the need to apply substantial effort and resources at kerbside and ensure the information has wide coverage across the system and is reliable and serviceable.

With over 6,800 stops and 81 stations the Adelaide Metro designed a graphics system that best explained its sprawling network and then designed a display case to meet these specifications that was vandal resistant and serviceable.

It developed a hierarchy of route and timetable display units designed to service single and multi service stops. Coverage of service information has gone from virtually nil at the stop/platform to nearly 50 % of the system offering comprehensive service information at the stop/platform. Boarding and high use stops were a priority.

Information at the point of ticket purchase

Adelaide Metro sells over 50% of its tickets through a retailer network of convenience stores at nearly 600 different locations. At nearly 300 of these outlets, Adelaide Metro installed self-service InfoBars that provide timetables and guides relevant to the region the InfoBar is located in. These units are restocked by Adelaide Metro and have proven extremely popular with customers. Information was previously only available at a few locations across the metropolitan area.

Figure 3 – Kerbside information is delivered by a hierarchy of units for different applications

Figure 4 – InfoBar fully stocked and managed by Adelaide Metro at nearly 300 ticket outlets

One on one delivery of information

The delivery of information in a manner that is easy to understand, that guides and reassures is best delivered person to person, in particular with new users.

InfoTeams

When new products or service changes are introduced, the Adelaide Metro engages an InfoTeam of up to 30 specially trained staff that have a vast knowledge of the system. The InfoTeam travel the system with timetables and literature to guide and reassure customers and to put a friendly helpful face to the public transport system.

Roadshow

Adelaide has six regional shopping centres with a combined weekly visitation in excess of 1 million people. The Adelaide Metro's Roadshow rotates from one shopping centre to another. It has a vibrant eye catching appeal and is staffed by helpful, friendly InfoTeam members ready to offer timetables, literature and advice about using the Adelaide Metro. The display

also includes a trial ticket validator, enabling staff to demonstrate how to validate a ticket when using the live system. Since its inception the staff have served over 310,000 customers.

Adelaide Metro InfoCentre – Ourshopfront

The Adelaide Metro operates a retail information and service shop in the CBD of Adelaide offering a comprehensive range of information and services. This outlet has been described as the best in Australia and services over 900,000 people per annum.

Figure 5 Adelaide Metro Roadshow

Figure 6 Workplace Deal

Figure 7 InfoLine

Figure 8 InfoCentre

Figure 9 InfoTeam

One on one delivery of information is a critical factor in guiding and reassuring

Adelaide Metro InfoLine – help via telephone

The InfoLine provides a complete information service seven days a week. Customer feedback indicates that customers appreciate talking to a real person who understands their need for accurate and reassuring information, rather than an automated service. The InfoLine receives over 600,000 calls per annum.

Workplace program

Workers are targeted in their workplace with this special program that offers information and incentives to use public transport. Offering information sessions and one on one trip planning as well as information displays and brochure dispensers located permanently in the workplace. This program also uses special ticket incentives to encourage new or continued use of the public transport system.

Drivers and staff

The most important link is the driver – the first point of contact when a customer uses or trials the system. Through incentive and education the level of customer service and customer satisfaction has risen dramatically in the last two years - 87% of customers were satisfied with their experience using public transport.

Information on board

A trial of on board information dispensers has commenced at a Southern suburbs depot operating 93 buses. It has proven popular and will be extended over the system as budget allows.

Information in the workplace, home & via mobile phone

Adelaidemetro.com.au offers customers information at the click of a mouse at thir in the workplace or home or via their mobile phones. The website offers a complete range of information including a journey planner, email mailing list, SMS messaging service and consumer competitions. The site is one of the busiest government websites in South Australia and able to be used by vision and hearing impaired people. With over 10 million hits per annum and over 450,000 individual sessions it provides a vital link to our customers.

Information where the people gather

Adelaide Metro's Chain of Information extends to places where large numbers of people gather that need public transport information or who might be inclined to use public transport. If they had the required information. At large regional shopping centres and campus's large static displays have been installed that include self-service brochure and timetable displays and in selected locations, free telephone links to the InfoLine.

Colour coding

Our graphics package was developed with input from market research and testing and from advocates for the vision impaired. It uses a colour-coded design delineating different functions and regions, supported by various symbols that explain functions and service differences.

It is a uniform package used in all publications, including the MetroGuide, an overall guide to the public transport system, similar in design to a street directory. This tool is ideal to explain public transport services in a car culture which is familiar with and regularly uses a street directory. Now in its seventh year of publication it is continually refined and upgraded and has been replicated in most capital cities here in Australia.
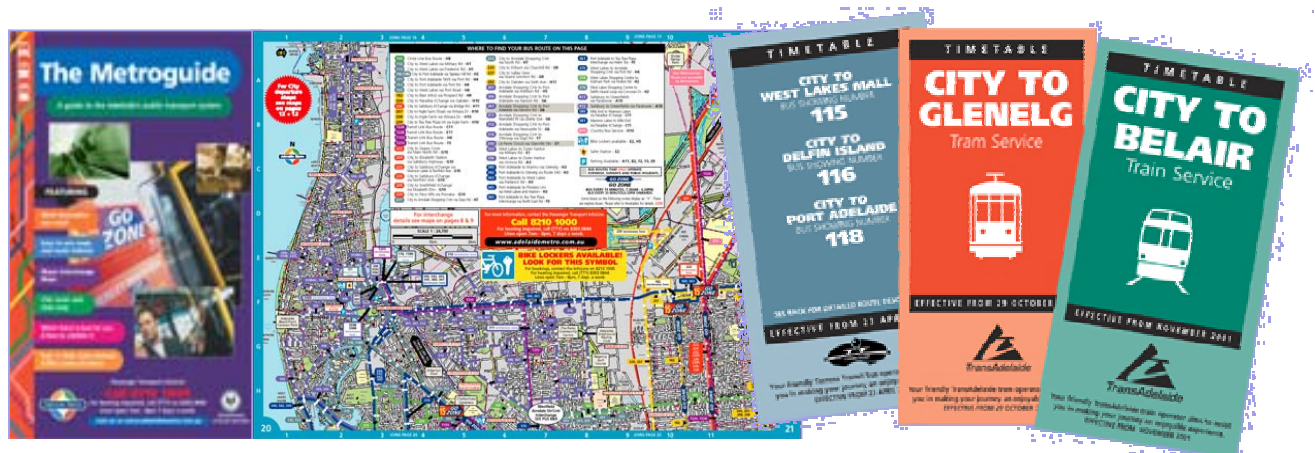
Figure 10 – MetroGuide and colour coded graphics package

The program introduced by Adelaide Metro clearly establishes that public transport patronage increased following careful targeting and promotion. Like most other fast moving consumer items, Adelaide Metro is a base need item that requires repeat purchases and to be perceived as a low cost purchase by the customer. The consumer's choice is discretionary and loyalty is built on perceived benefits as much as real benefits.

Therefore to maintain patronage growth, brand awareness, product benefits and quality control must be delivered. That perception of quality, value for money and product of preferred choice must be maintained so that a real brand is established that enjoys a relationship with the customer.

Unique to public transport

What is unique to public transport is its complexity relative to its actual cost to the customer and the need to clearly explain the product to the customer. This needs to be explained in a manner that instils confidence, guides and reassures.

What is unique about the Chain of Information is that it recognises the need to simultaneously provide reasons "why" via promotion and marketing and "how to" with detailed service information at critical points, prior, to and during the public transport journey.

Summary

High or low-tech information delivery mechanisms are mediums to communicate with the customer; the decision to use them was based on their effectiveness, cost and relevance to the market. A combination, or mix of, information delivery mechanisms was developed enabling us to tailor the information program to the market and cover all segments of the community regardless of their socio economic background.

The overall objectives were:
- to increase patronage across the system
- to generate increased use by existing customers
- to generate use by new customers
- to improve customer satisfaction and

- to evaluate the perceived value and benefits of public transport across the broader community.

The Chain of Information Program has been an outstanding success that has achieved all of these objectives on a system wide basis without major investment in infrastructure.

This success has been seen in many ways, however, the following highlights Adelaide Metro's success in achieving the set objectives.

- Patronage system wide has grown at an average of 2.5% per year since the introduction of the program, cumulative growth over the same period is 9.9 % or 4.08 million journeys.
- Patronage for Regular Full Fare paying discretionary customers has grown at 8% per annum.

- When the first nine Go Zones were launched, three had no service changes. All, however, had the branded stops and information units supported by a marketing campaign. All showed significant increases in patronage of up to 16%.

- Eighteen months after the introduction of Go Zones and their supporting information package, market research showed that 40% of users had increased their use of the system since their introduction and 8% were new users to the system.

- Roam Zones which utilized an extensive information program at bus stops, ticket retailers and on board showed a 21% increase in patronage in its first two years of trial.

- Customer confidence and satisfaction with the public transport system has risen dramatically with 87% of customers expressing satisfaction with their public transport journey (McGregor Tan 2003).

The relevance of petrol costs

Without doubt, escalating fuel costs do have a positive impact on patronage. It is argued that this has been the reason for the success of the Chain of Information Program.

This is not the case, historically fuel prices have risen and for a short time patronage has increased, then as fuel costs have reduced or the consumer has acclimatised to higher prices, subsequently patronage has dropped on the public transport system.

In the past, the public transport system servicing metropolitan Adelaide has failed to capitalise and keep this influx of new and returning customers, this was the case in the 1970's fuel crisis and in the early 1990's with the Gulf War spike in fuel costs.

This program was launched in April 2000 and in June of that year fuel prices suddenly increased to levels not seen in years, however, by October they had subsided, conversely patronage on the Adelaide Metro continued to increase for the next four years.

The graph below clearly illustrates this.

Most importantly the program not only capitalised on the new customers generated by high fuel costs it also continued to grow patronage as fuel prices subsided - something that had not been achieved in the past.
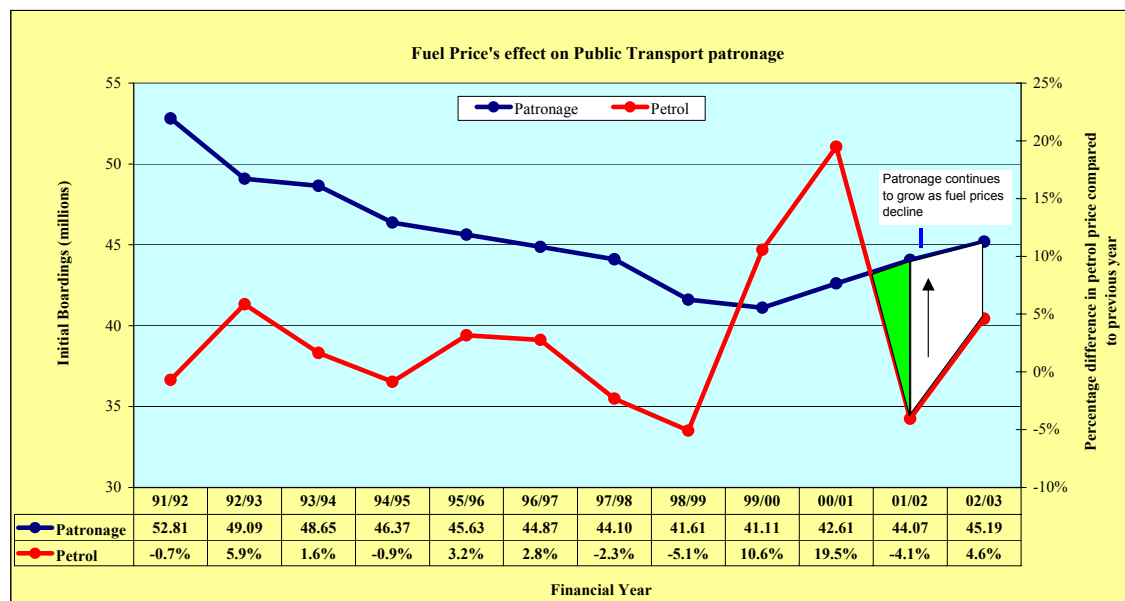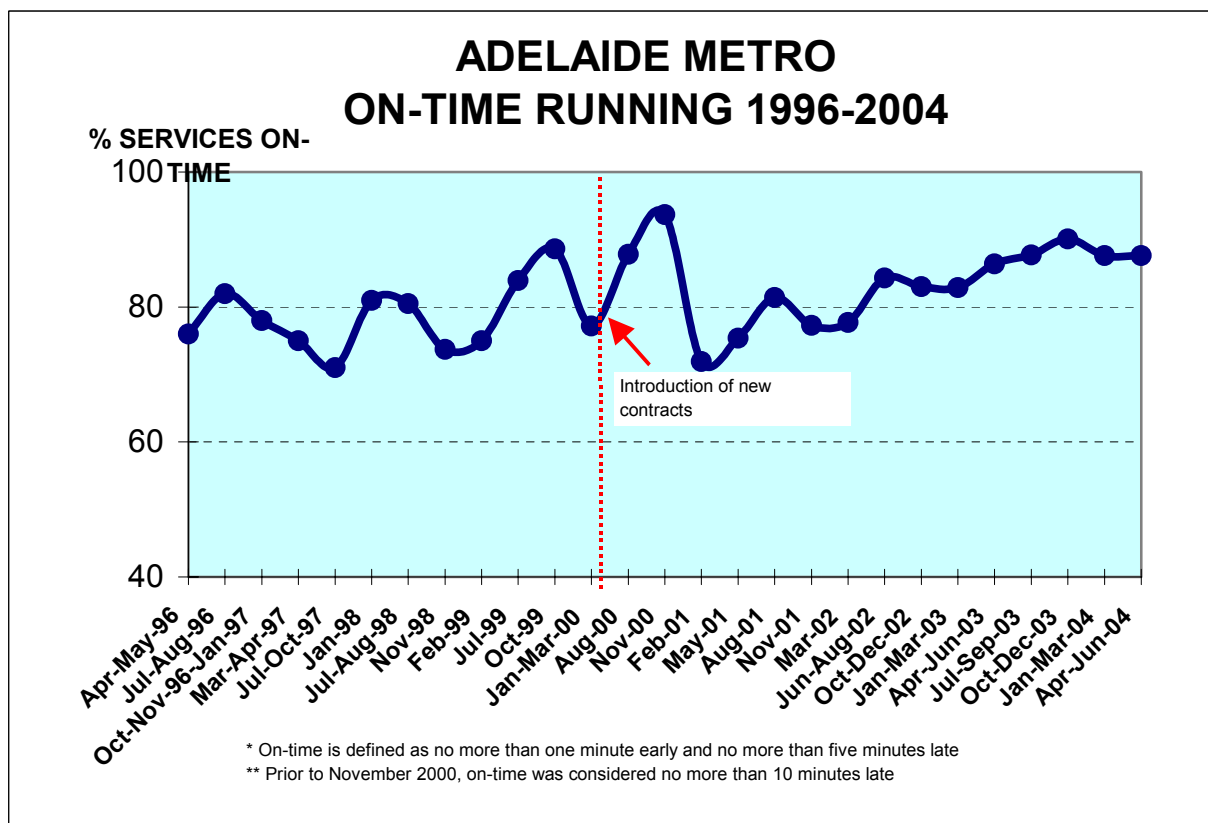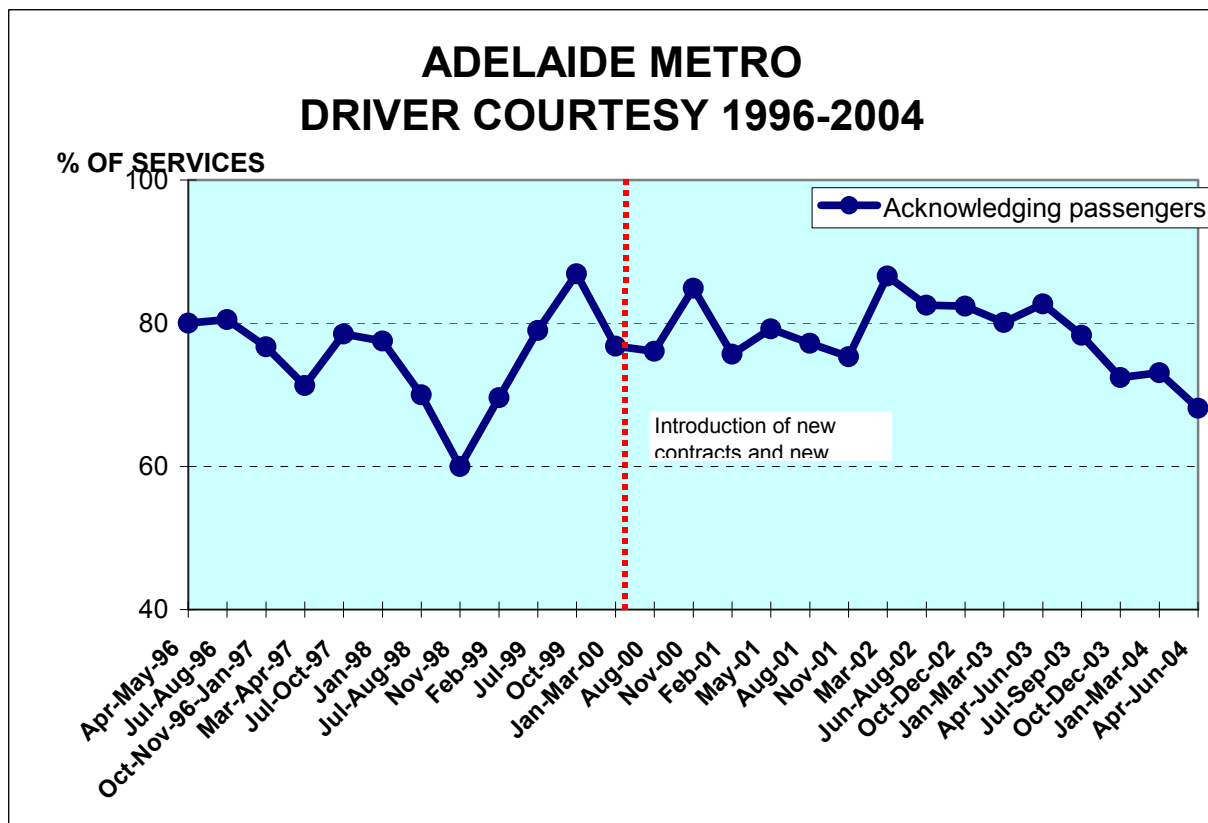

Figure 11 – Fuel price's effect on public transport patronage (Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Average Retail Prices of Selected Items (Cat. No. 6403.0),* **[© Commonwealth of Australia 2004])**

Conclusions

Without doubt the Adelaide Metro public transport system has reversed a 20-year trend of declining patronage. It was introduced as part strategic approach along with new contractors and minor route and service changes in April 2000. The significant difference was the combined information and marketing package that took existing services, repackaged them, explained them and made them either appear or be relevant.

This process reflected what customer research told us about customers' demands, also, as this was introduced customer satisfaction and patronage rose, clearly indicating that we had met customer needs and that combined with increased awareness, understanding and confidence we had achieved our objectives.

The impact of petrol prices in June of that year assisted, however, this program retained that growth in patronage and continued to increase patronage – this had not been achieved in Adelaide before. The impact of the new contractors that offered improved customer service and some minor time and route alterations were part of the strategic approach of this plan, however, far greater service changes infrastructure development had been implemented in the past. This included the O-Bahn, and the introduction of Transit Link services, which on their own were successful, however, they failed to reverse the continual decline in patronage system wide.

ADELAIDE METRO
DRIVER COURTESY 1996-2004

% OF SERVICES

Legend: ● Acknowledging passengers

Introduction of new contracts and new

X-axis labels: Apr-May-96, Jul-Aug-96, Oct-Nov-96-Jan-97, Mar-Apr-97, Jul-Oct-97, Jan-98, Jul-Aug-98, Nov-98, Feb-99, Jul-99, Oct-99, Jan-Mar-00, Aug-00, Nov-00, Feb-01, May-01, Aug-01, Nov-01, Mar-02, Jun-Aug-02, Oct-Dec-02, Jan-Mar-03, Apr-Jun-03, Jul-Sep-03, Oct-Dec-03, Jan-Mar-04, Apr-Jun-04

ADELAIDE METRO
ON-TIME RUNNING 1996-2004

% SERVICES ON-TIME

Introduction of new contracts

X-axis labels: Apr-May-96, Jul-Aug-96, Oct-Nov-96-Jan-97, Mar-Apr-97, Jul-Oct-97, Jan-98, Jul-Aug-98, Nov-98, Feb-99, Jul-99, Oct-99, Jan-Mar-00, Aug-00, Nov-00, Feb-01, May-01, Aug-01, Nov-01, Mar-02, Jun-Aug-02, Oct-Dec-02, Jan-Mar-03, Apr-Jun-03, Jul-Sep-03, Oct-Dec-03, Jan-Mar-04, Apr-Jun-04

* On-time is defined as no more than one minute early and no more than five minutes late
** Prior to November 2000, on-time was considered no more than 10 minutes late

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