Changing Perceptions of the Bus with Branded Services

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Abstract

Branded bus services have been implemented in many cities to make the bus network more legible, to improve the image of bus transit and to increase the awareness of bus services for greater patronage. Branded bus services have been classified into three broad categories for local or CBD shuttles, radial routes to the CBD from suburban areas and orbital or crosstown connector routes.

The key attributes of these types of branded bus services, such as the vehicle livery, route design, service frequency, infrastructure, signage, information and promotion, are examined with examples from cities in Australia, New Zealand and North America. The recent experience with branded bus services in various major cities was investigated and described, including examples from Perth, Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Vancouver and York Region in Canada, and Washington, DC and Los Angeles, California in the USA.

A basic assessment method with criteria under the headings of branding image and livery, route legibility, service frequency, infrastructure and information was used to rate the quality of these branded bus routes. Based on this evaluation, the factors that make a successful branded bus route are identified and discussed.

Guidelines for implementing high quality branded bus services are proposed. Branded bus routes must be planned carefully with the objective of creating a more simplified and legible network. A critical element for success is to keep the branding concept simple to make it easy for the public to recognise and understand.

1. Introduction

Branded bus services have been implemented in many cities to make the bus network more legible, to improve the image of bus transit and to increase the awareness of bus services for greater patronage. The general rationale for branded bus routes is to:

- Increase patronage on the bus network and to reduce traffic congestion in the CBD and along busy traffic corridors;

- Improve legibility for existing and new users to make bus services more attractive and easier to understand; and

- Change the perception and profile of bus transit without the high infrastructure costs of busways and transitways.

Branded bus services are also important to increase the profile of bus services when commuter rail and light rail transit are well identified by tracks, stations and rolling stock. Buses only have bus stops along streets and off-street bus interchanges that are not as obvious for the public to see. Bus routes can be changed more easily and are considered less permanent than rail systems. Branding can be used to give buses a stronger identity.

Bus service branding can be done with the vehicle livery, route design, service frequency, infrastructure, signage, information and promotion. The recent expereince with branded bus services in various major cities is described, including examples from Perth, Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Auckland and Christchurch in New Zealand, Vancouver and York Region in Canada, and Washington, DC and Los Angeles, California in the USA.

2. Attributes of Branded Bus Services

Branded bus services can be designed by using a special colour, logo and/or name to uniquely and simply identify the vehicle livery, bus stops and shelters, and the information and signage. The different attributes of branded bus services are described in the following section with examples from a range of bus systems.

2.1. The Branding Image

The branding image for bus transit systems is typically applied with a colour theme with a unique easily understood logo and name. The colour branding typically uses bright solid colours. In NSW the State Government has adopted a green colour for the free CBD shuttle services and red for the crosstown Metrobus network. Examples of the unique logos and colour schemes for branded services in a selection of cities in Australia and Canada are shown in Figure 1. These images and colours are used on the buses, stops and information.

Figure 1: Branded Logos and Colour Schemes

The CAT logo is used on the free shuttle bus services in Perth, Fremantle and Joondalup
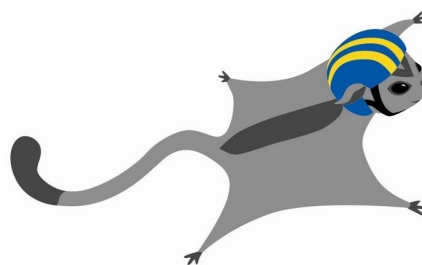
Sugar glider logo for the CityGlider in Brisbane

A bright red colour scheme for the Sydney Metrobus prepaid crosstown network

A bright green colour scheme is used for the free shuttle bus services in NSW

SmartBus logo with the orange branding for buses in Melbourne

VIVA is the brand name for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in York Region, Ontario, Canada

Simple primary colour schemes have been used in cities to rebrand the image of the bus. For example, in July 2004 the entire bus system in Seoul, Korea was redesigned with a simplified colour scheme and vehicle livery using blue, green, red or yellow to identify the trunk, feeder, circulator and intercity bus services respectively. This approach was used to successfully change the image of the bus in this major Asian city.

2.2. Branded Livery

Vehicle liveries with special branding schemes have been applied to different degrees. The best vehicle branding exists where it is applied to the entire vehicle with a unique logo. Symbols of a black cat and a sugar glider are used on the buses in Perth and Brisbane respectively, as shown in Figure 2. In Rockingham, Western Australia, a dolphin on a blue bus livery is used for the Route 555 Rockingham City Transit System.

Figure 2: Examples of Branded Bus Livery with Unique Logos

Perth CAT bus with the black cat logo and tri-colour route branding

Brisbane CityGlider bus with the sugar glider logo and blue colour scheme

Vehicle branding can be simply applied with a consistent colour scheme, as shown Figure 3 for the Metrobus routes in metropolitan Sydney and the free shuttle bus in Sydney CBD. The green colour scheme for the bus livery has been adopted for all of the free CBD shuttle services throughout NSW and this provides consistency for the free shuttle bus image.

Figure 3: Examples of Branded Bus Livery with a Consistent Colour Scheme

Metobus livery in Sydney on Route 10

Sydney Free CBD Shuttle Route 555

The bus liveries for two branded BRT services in Los Angeles, USA and in York Region, Ontario in Canada are shown in Figure 4. The vehicles allow for multi-door loading.

Figure 4: Vehicles for Branded BRT Services

Sliver and orange "streamlined" bus for the Orange Line in Los Angeles, California

VIVA three-door bus in York Region, Ontario, Canada

Some branded bus services have a less distinctive and a minimal vehicle livery with buses that may be used for other services. This confuses the strength and importance of the brand and image. Examples of bus liveries that do not present a strong and obvious image to the public are in Adelaide and Subiaco, Western Australia as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Examples of Bus Services with Less Distinctive Vehicle Branding

Adelaide CityFree buses have a colourful livery for the brand, but they are also used for other services in addition to the CityFree 99C loop

A red front section and small logo is used to designate the Subiaco Shuttle in Western Australia.

2.3. Branded Stops, Shelters and Stations

Bus stops and shelters can be branded to uniquely designate a branded bus service. It can be provided with unique signage, specially-designed shelters and real time information displays. Examples of branded stop signage and real time information are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Examples of Branded Bus Stop Signage and Information

Red bus stop for the Brisbane CBD Loop bus

SmartBus branded signage with a real time information display in Melbourne

Examples of branded bus shelters in Perth and Brisbane are shown in Figure 7. These shelters have a distinctive look and use the logo and colour scheme of the branded bus services to provide consistency in the image of these bus routes.

Figure 7: Examples of Branded Bus Shelters

CAT bus shelter in Hay Street at King Street, Perth

CityGlider bus shelter at the West End ferry terminal, Brisbane

Bus rapid transit (BRT) typically uses branding at the stations to promote a stronger identity for the bus similar to train stations on railway lines. In Australia, branding with a unique colour and logo has been applied at the busway stations in Brisbane and the T-way stations in Sydney. Examples of branded BRT stations in the USA and Canada that have been built to be consistent with the vehicle and route branding are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Examples of Branded BRT Stations

Orange Line BRT station in Los Angeles, USA

VIVA-branded station in York Region, north of Toronto, Canada

3. Classes of Branded Bus Services

Branded bus services have been classified into three broad categories for local Central Business District (CBD) shuttles, radial routes to the CBD from suburban areas and orbital or crosstown connector routes. Branded bus services can be broadly classified as:

- **CBD Shuttles** or Downtown Circulators which are free or low fare, high frequency bus services along short routes within a CBD or to a railway station;

- **Radial Routes** which operate high frequency services directly along major corridors from the outer suburban areas to the CBD, typically with longer stop spacing for faster services; and

- **Crosstown Connectors** which are bus routes that operate in an orbital or crosstown route that do not service the CBD and provide network connectivity linking across a radial or grid bus network.
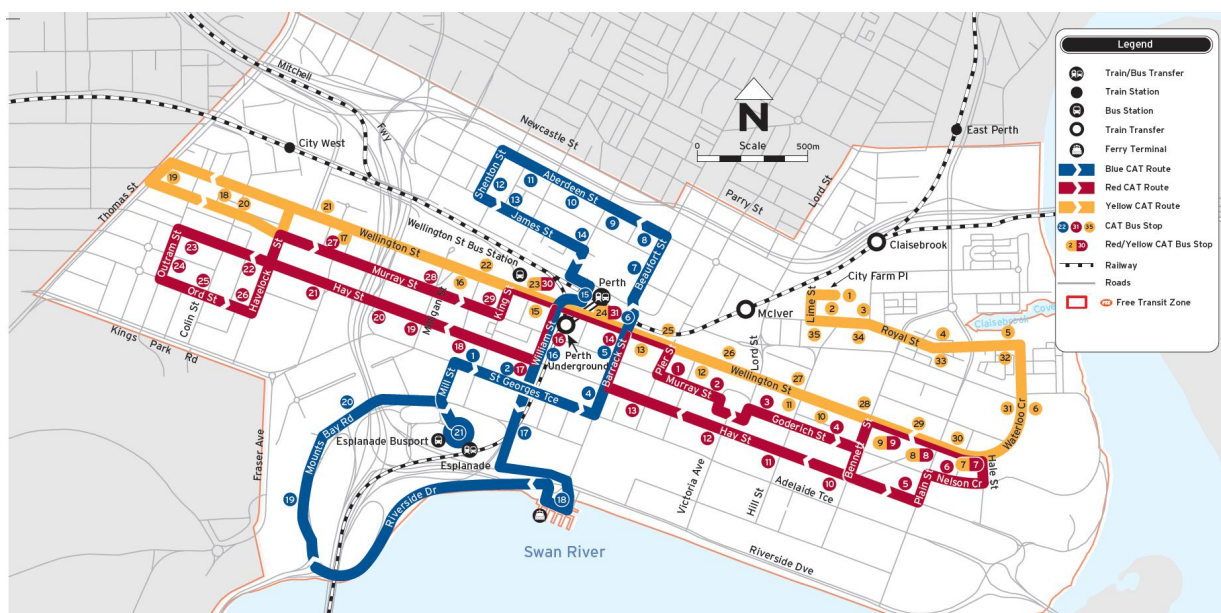
3.1. CBD Shuttles

Since the mid-1990s, CBD shuttles, or Downtown Circulators as they are known in the USA, have been introduced in most capital cities in Australia, in New Zealand and in several American cities. All of these bus services operate a circuit route in the central area connecting the main railway station or stations to the high density office area and major CBD retail precinct. CBD shuttle routes are typically free or have low fares to attract patronage on short trips between the city train and bus stations and the major employment areas in the CBD. (Boyle, 2011) These bus routes are dissimilar to community buses which are operated by local Councils as a local community service for the elderly and people who have mobility problems to travel to the local shops, libraries, medical offices and recreational centres. CBD shuttles are popular with commuters from the train stations, tourists and visitors who do not know the CBD well and CBD shoppers and business people who park in one location and use the shuttle bus to travel around the CBD. The vehicles used on CBD shuttles are typically low-floor accessible buses for people in wheelchairs or for parents or carers with prams.

In the DC Circulator Transit Development Plan for Washington, DC, it is recommended that a strong brand is very important for a CBD shuttle route. It must have distinctive, comfortable buses, high-frequency services operating all day with at least 10-minute headways, easy to understand routes and a simple, affordable fare structure. In the USA, many "downtown circulators" have a nominal fare, such as $1.00. In Australia, all of the CBD shuttles are free and subsidised through parking levies, CBD business fees or government subsidies.

One of the first branded bus services in Australia was the Perth Central Area Transit (CAT) system that was introduced in 1996. It replaced the free City Clipper bus route network with five inner city routes in central Perth. The vehicle livery for the Perth CAT services has always been silver grey with a black cat logo, but initially a fleet of Scania buses was used. These vehicles were eventually replaced with Mercedes buses with a common silver grey livery with a tri-colour marking on the front bumper and side of the bus to designate the Red, Yellow and Blue CAT routes as shown in Figure 2.

In 2011, the Perth CAT bus network is comprised of three CBD routes as shown in Figure 9. The Blue CAT route operates as a one-way double loop between Northbridge and the Swan River that is not as legible for passengers as the Red or Yellow CAT routes that operate more simply between East Perth and West Perth.

**Figure 9: Perth CAT Network**

Source: www.transperth.wa.gov.au

The routes for CBD shuttles can be designed as a small one-way loop, larger two-way simple loops, a two-way linear line and a double loop or "figure 8" configuration. Double loops are not preferred for branded bus services where route legibility is very important. A double loop is more suitable for community bus services to maximise the number of stops at attractions providing a high level of accessibility throughout the CBD, and therefore it is not intended for fast or frequent shuttle services.

The NSW Government operates free shuttle buses with high frequency services for short trips in CBD locations. The bus stops maintain the branding with the green shuttle logo. These free shuttle services have been introduced in Bankstown, Blacktown, Cabramatta, Campbelltown, Gosford, Kogarah, Liverpool, Newcastle, Parramatta, Penrith, Sydney CBD and Wollongong. All shuttle services operate in either small one-way loops or larger two-way loops. The Parramatta Free CBD shuttle is shown in Figure 10 as an example of a simple one-way loop route.

An example of a linear shuttle route is the Subiaco Shuttle Route 97, as shown in Figure 10. This shuttle service connects Subiaco train station with the QEII Medical Centre and the University of Western Australia, and it is jointly funded by these organisations and Transperth. The shuttle route operates every 15 minutes from 7 am to 6:30 pm on weekdays and every half hour on Saturdays between 9 am and 6 pm and hourly on Sundays.

Figure 10: Types of Shuttle Services
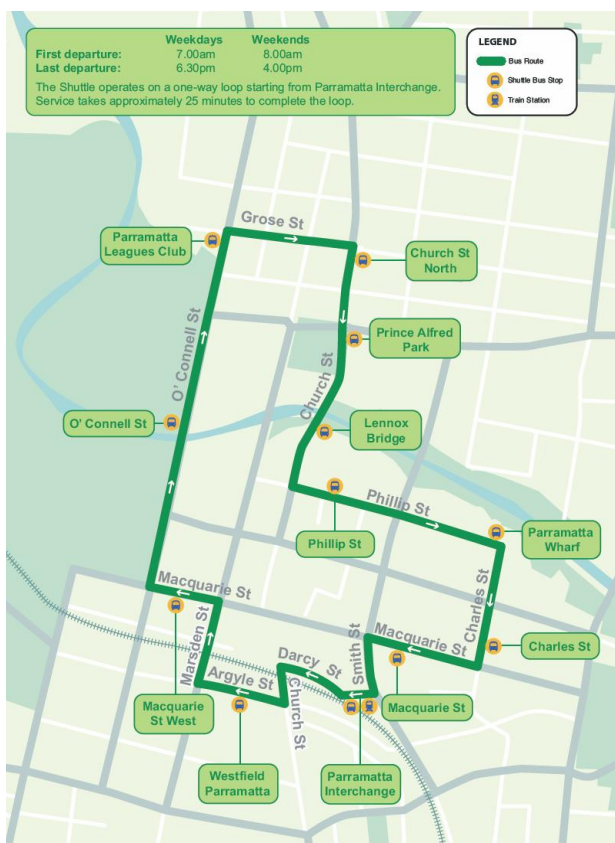
Source: www.131500.com.au

Source: www.transperth.wa.gov.au

In Parramatta, NSW, the Free Shuttle service operates in simple one-way loop route

In Perth, the Subiaco Shuttle operates north-south between the train station and the UWA campus with a terminus loop

Various branded CBD shuttle services with the branding attributes used in the assessment, such as the vehicle livery and signage, route design and the highest frequency during the peak demand period, are provided in Table 1. Most of the CBD shuttle routes operate with free services, except for ones highlighted with the red shaded rows.

Table 1: Branded CBD Shuttles

City	Shuttle Name (Route Number)	Vehicle Livery and Signage	Route Design	Peak Service Frequency
Perth	Perth CAT (Central Area Transit) (Blue 1, Red 2, Yellow 3)	Grey buses and shelters with cat logo (Blue, Red, Yellow stops)	Two linear routes, One one-way "figure 8" loop	Every 5 minutes on Red, every 15 minutes on Blue and Yellow
Fremantle	Fremantle CAT	Orange; changing to Red and Blue loop routes from June 2011	One-way "figure 8" loop changing to two one-way loop routes in June 2011	Every 15 minutes on Red, every 10 minutes on Blue as of June 2011
Joondalup, WA	Joondalup CAT (10, 11, 13)	Teal with CAT logo	Three loop routes	Every 15 minutes
Rockingham, WA	Rockingham City Transit System (555) (fares)	Blue with dolphin logo	Linear route with some turns	Every 15 minutes
Subiaco, WA	Subiaco Shuttle (97) (standard fares)	Red Subiaco Shuttle logo on a Transperth bus	Linear route with some turns	Every 15 minutes
Midland, WA	Midland Gate Shuttle (300)	Transperth livery; pink logo on timetable	One-way loop	Every 20 minutes
Brisbane	City Loop	Red	Clockwise / anticlockwise pair	Every 15 minutes
Brisbane	Spring Hill Loop	Yellow	One-way "figure 8" loop	Every 10 minutes
Melbourne	City Tourist Shuttle	Red and light brown	One-way loop with deviations	Every 30 minutes
Sydney	CBD Shuttle (555)	Green and white	Clockwise / anticlockwise pair	Every 10 minutes
Wollongong	Gong Shuttle (55)	Green and white	Two-way loop	Every 10 minutes
Parramatta	Parramatta Shuttle (900)	Green and white	One-way loop	Every 10 minutes
Bankstown	Bankstown Shuttle (950)	Green and white	One-way loop	Every 20 minutes
Blacktown	Blacktown Shuttle (720)	Green and white	One-way loop	Every 15 minutes
Liverpool	Liverpool Shuttle (999)	Green and white	One-way loop	Every 20 minutes
Newcastle	Newcastle Shuttle (555)	Green and white	One-way loop	Every 20 minutes
Adelaide	CityFree (99C)	CityFree gold with window card	Clockwise / anticlockwise pair	Every 15 minutes
Adelaide	City Connector (Red and Green routes funded by the Council)	Tindo green solar bus and white mini-buses	Two one-way "figure 8" loops	Hourly
Auckland, New Zealand	City Circuit	Red bus with City Circuit branding	One-way loop with deviation	Every 10 minutes
Christchurch, New Zealand	The Shuttle (ended with earthquake in Feb 2011)	Yellow hybrid electric buses	Linear route	Every 10 minutes
Washington, DC	DC Circulator (five coloured routes) (US$1 fare)	Red, silver and yellow on special buses and stops	Short linear routes	Every 10 minutes

3.2. Radial Routes

Branded radial bus services from the suburban areas to the CBD have been implemented in many cities to increase the awareness of the bus routes with high frequency, direct services that typically operate with wide stop spacing and bus priority measures, such as bus queue jump signals, "B" lights, bus lanes and sections of dedicated busway.

In 2010 ACTION in Canberra implemented the Rapid Bus concept of branded high frequency bus routes. (ACTION, 2010) Examples of branded radial routes with the level of branding and peak period frequency used in the assessment are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Branded Radial Routes

City	Route Name (Number of Routes)	Level of Branding	Peak Service Frequency
Canberra	Rapid Network (4 colour-coded corridors; Blue Rapid with 7 300 series routes; Red Rapid 200, Green Routes 4 and 5, Gold Routes 2 and 3)	Colour-coded routes; standard vehicle fleet	Blue Rapid every 5-8 minutes; Red Rapid at least every 15 minutes; Green and Gold lines at least every 20 minutes
Sydney	Metrobus Network (7 prepaid routes: M10, M20, M30, M40, M50, M52, M61)	Red low-floor buses and red bus stops	Every 10 minutes
Melbourne	Skybus (Melbourne Airport)	Red low-floor articulated buses and red signage	Every 10 minutes
Perth	Perth Airport Connector	Orange mini-buses	Less than hourly
Adelaide	Jetbus (J1 and J2)	Jetbus logo on timetables	Every 15 minutes
Brisbane	CityGlider (prepaid only route) (West End to Teneriffe)	Sugar glider logo and light blue colour on buses, stops and shelters	Every 5 minutes
Brisbane	BUZ Route Network (11 prepaid CBD-based routes: 111, 130, 140, 150, 199, 200, 333, 345, 385, 412, 444)	BUZ symbol on bus stops	At least every 10 minutes
Adelaide	Go Zone corridors (38 corridors with regular routes to Adelaide CBD)	Red on Go Zone bus stops, timetables and maps	At least every 15 minutes
Perth	High Frequency 900 series (2 routes: 920, 940)	No special branding	Every 15 minutes
Minneapolis, USA	Hi-Frequency Route Network (6 radial routes: 5, 6, 10, 16, 19, 64)	Hi-Frequency logo on stops and timetables	At least every 15 minutes

3.3. Crosstown Connectors

Branded bus services have been implemented as crosstown connectors in the form of high quality bus rapid transit (BRT) corridors, or with non-CBD cross-suburban or orbital routes to link major suburban attractors, such as university and TAFE campuses, regional shopping centres, major sporting venues, medical centres and hospitals.

Branded BRT services have been implemented in North America. In the York Region located immediately north of Toronto, Canada, the VIVA brand was launched in 2005 with high frequency direct bus services. The VIVA network comprises of two "line-haul" routes with the

Blue VIVA in the north-south corridor along Yonge Street and the Purple VIVA in the east-west direction along Highway 7. (Transport Canada, 2008, Gast and Turner, 2009) Additional peak period only VIVA routes are used to supplement the service frequency with connections to the train stations.

In Los Angeles, the Orange Line which is a BRT corridor is branded like the other Metro rail lines in order to highlight it as a premium service and visually distinguish it from other bus services. The buses known as Metro Liners are painted in the silver and grey of Metro trains. While the stations on the Orange Line have artwork to uniquely identify each one, the basic design and construction of the stations is identical to consistently reinforce a strong recognisable branding identity.

Branded orbital or crosstown bus services exist in Christchurch, New Zealand with the Orbiter and Metrostar services and the SmartBus series of bus routes in Melbourne. These bus routes are large loops or "arc" routes designed to connect multiple high intensity attractions, such as regional shopping centres, universities, hospitals and medical centres and major suburban business precincts. Examples of crosstown connectors or orbital routes with the vehicle livery, route type and peak service frequency used in the assessment are provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Branded Crosstown Connectors

City	Route Name (Route Number)	Vehicle Livery	Route Type	Peak Service Frequency
Melbourne	SmartBus (703, 900, 901, 902, 903)	Orange and silver with SmartBus logo	Four orbital routes, One crosstown route	At least every 15 minutes
Perth	CircleRoute (98/99)	Standard Transperth fleet	Clockwise / anticlockwise pair	At least every 15 minutes
Brisbane	Great Circle Line (598/599)	Standard TransLink fleet	Clockwise / anticlockwise pair	Every 30 minutes
Auckland, New Zealand	Link (Green)	Green low-floor low-emission buses	Clockwise / anticlockwise pair	Every 10 minutes
Christchurch, New Zealand	Orbiter (O)	Green special buses	Clockwise / anticlockwise pair	Every 10 minutes
Christchurch, New Zealand	Metrostar (M)	Orange and blue with star	East-west linear crosstown	Every 15 minutes
Adelaide	Suburban Connector (300)	standard Adelaide Metro buses	Clockwise / anticlockwise pair	Every 15 minutes
Sydney	Metrobus Network (6 prepaid routes: M41, M54, M60, M90, M91, M92)	Red low-floor articulated and standard buses	Six prepaid crosstown routes	Every 10 minutes
Vancouver, Canada	B-Line (97, 99)	Articulated low-floor three door buses	Two east-west crosstown routes to SkyTrain stations	At least every 5 minutes
York Region, Canada	VIVA BRT (Blue, Purple, Orange)	Blue low-floor articulated three door buses	Three all-day crosstown routes and three peak period crosstown routes	Every 5 minutes
Los Angeles, USA	Orange Line (901)	Silver low-floor articulated three door buses	Linear crosstown BRT as part of the Metro train network	At least every 5 minutes

4. Assessment of Branded Bus Services

A basic assessment method with criteria to score the various attributes was used to rate the quality and success of these branded bus routes. The branded bus services described in Table 1 for CBD shuttles, Table 2 for CBD radial routes and Table 3 for crosstown connectors were assessed based on various branding characteristics, service attributes, infrastructure and information provided. This information was used in a comparative assessment of CBD shuttles to determine which branding elements are the most useful in providing a highly legible bus service that will attract patronage. Based on this evaluation, the factors that make a successful branded bus route are identified and discussed.

4.1. Assessment Criteria

Five key criteria were identified to assess the quality and effectiveness of branded bus services and they are provided in Table 4. These criteria have sub-criteria that were grouped under main criteria for the branding image, service design, infrastructure and information. These criteria were considered the most applicable for assessing the quality of branding bus services. The scoring was based on information from websites for each public transport operator or authority and personal knowledge of these services.

Table 4: Criteria for Assessing Branded Bus Services

Criterion	Sub-criteria	Description of Criterion
Branding Image	Colour Scheme	Use of a distinctive colour to easy identify the bus service that does not conflict with other colours used in the system.
	Logo and Name	A unique logo and name was designed to promote the brand.
	Vehicle Livery	A special vehicle fleet is used to identify the bus services
Route Legibility	Simplicity and Directness of Route	Simplicity of the bus route to closely connect many attractions, such as railway stations, university campuses, major shopping centres and retail precincts, significant public and cultural institutions and hospitals
Service Quality	Peak Frequency	The frequency of the bus services does not require a published timetable.
Infrastructure	Service Reliability Measures	Bus priority measures, such as bus lanes and bus queue jump signals, are used along the route to improve service reliability. The highest level of bus priority is provided with dedicated busway infrastructure.
	Shelter Design	The design of the shelters is unique and distinctive while being practical and safe to provide passengers sufficient cover.
	Stop Signage	The stop signage is distinctive and linked to the colour and logo of the branded bus service.
Information and Promotion	Stop and Timetable Information	The information at the stop is useful for waiting passengers in the form of real time information or easy to read maps with symbols.
	Promotion and Marketing	The branded bus service is promoted through easy to read materials that explain the simplicity of branded bus services.

The assessment of the branded bus services was based on scores from 5 to 1 for Very Good, Good, Average, Poor and Very Poor as described in Table 5. The scores were determined using the subjective opinion of the author based on knowledge of the various branded bus services. Initially an equal importance weighting was used for each criterion. The sensitivity of the scores was tested with less importance assigned to the criteria under the categories of branding image, service design, infrastructure and information. These sensitivity tests did not significantly change the results for the best branded bus services.

Table 5: Scoring for the Assessment of Branded Bus Services

Rating (Score)	Vehicle Livery	Route Legibility	Highest Peak Frequency	Infrastructure	Promotion
Very Good (5)	special fleet with branding and logo	Two-way straight linear	Every 5 minutes or more frequent	High quality BRT stations and bus priority	special website with on-line tracking or real time information
Good (4)	total distinctive branding colour	Two-way indirect linear	Every 6 to 10 minutes	Branded shelters; real time information	special brochure, map and website
Average (3)	partial branding colour	Two-way or multiple loops	Every 11 to 15 minutes	Branded stop signage	basic brochure with map with branding
Poor (2)	minimal route branding colour or logo	One-way loops	Every 16 to 30 minutes	Only branded route number or name on stop	map and timetables combined with regular services
Very Poor (1)	no special route branding	Double loops with deviations	Greater than every 30 minutes	No special branding information	timetable that is not different from regular routes

## 4.2. Comparison of Branded Bus Services

The branded bus services were grouped into 21 cities with CBD shuttles, ten cities with radial routes and 11 cities with crosstown connectors. A comparison of branded CBD shuttle services is shown in Figure 11. The CBD shuttle services with the highest scores are the Perth CAT and the DC Circulator in Washington, DC. Both of these high frequency services are very legible with uniquely-branded vehicles and signage and excellent on-line promotion.

**Figure 11: Comparison of Branded CBD Shuttles**

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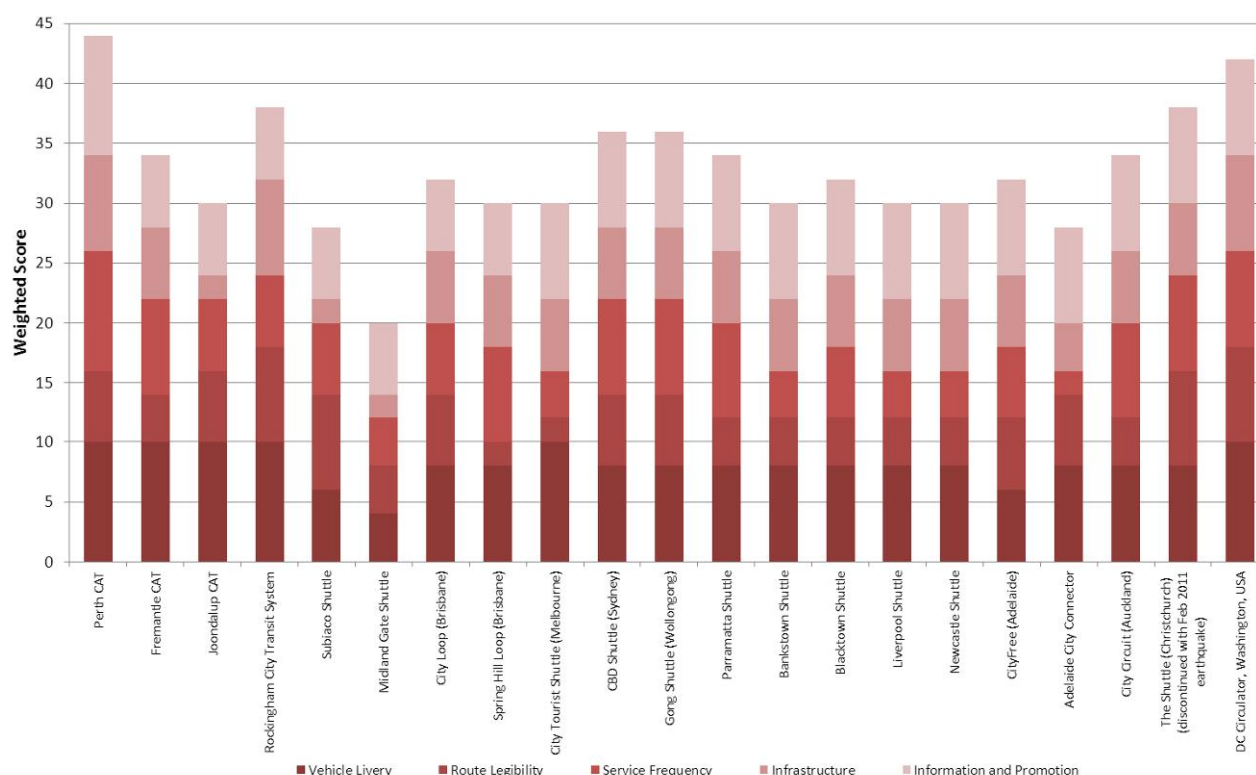
A comparison of branded radial routes is shown in Figure 12. The CBD radial routes with the highest scores are the CityGlider in Brisbane, Skybus in Melbourne and the Metrobus network in Sydney each with very legible brand for the buses, routes and information.

Figure 12: Comparison of Branded Radial Routes
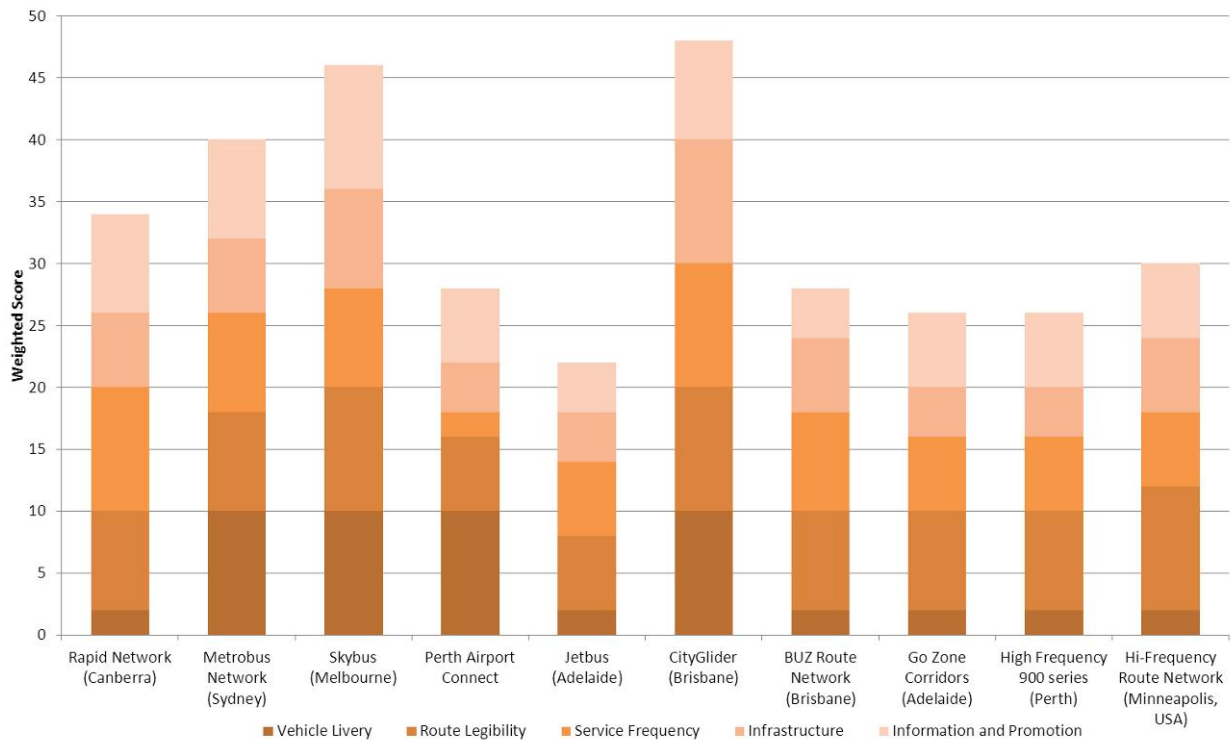
A comparison of branded crosstown and orbital routes is shown in Figure 13. The cities with the highest scores are the SmartBus in Melbourne and the BRT systems in North America.

Figure 13: Comparison of Branded Crosstown and Orbital Routes
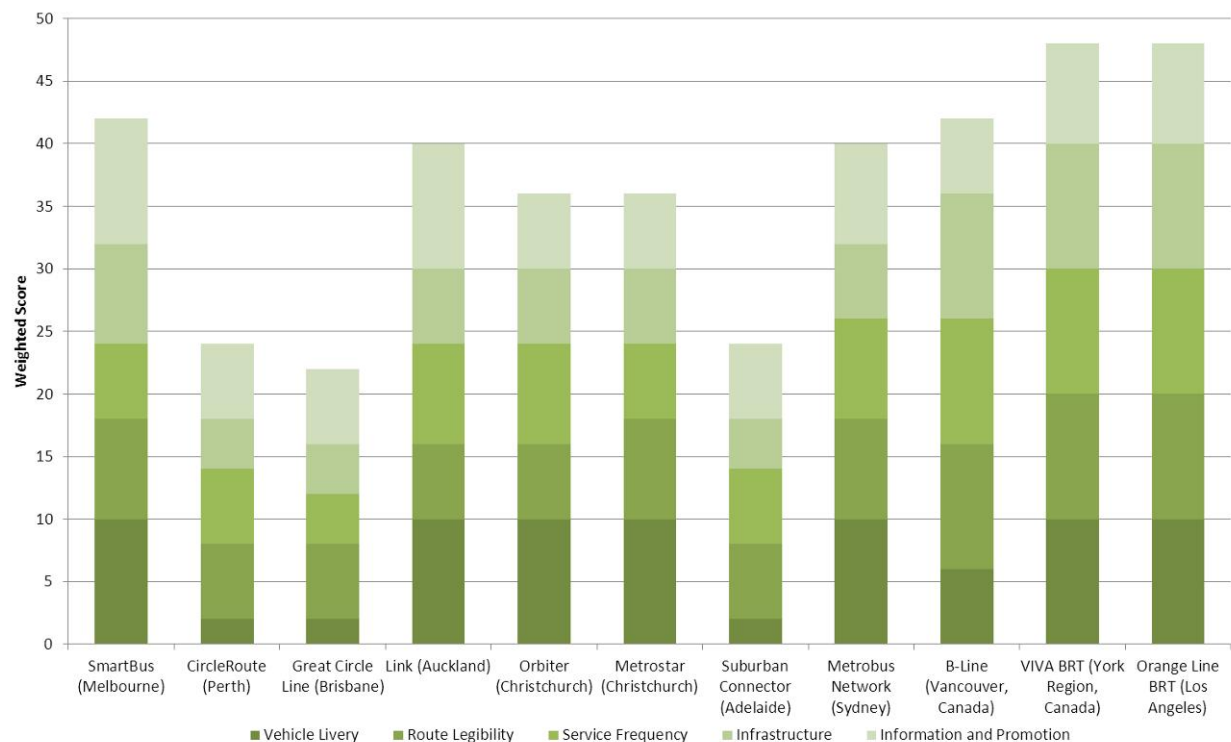
4.3. Evidence of the Success of Branded Bus Services

Further investigation into the success of branded bus services was conducted by obtaining more detailed information from patronage reports, market research surveys and comments from the agencies responsible for their planning, implementation and operation. One example from the top ranked branded bus services in each category of CBD shuttles, radial routes and crosstown connectors was selected, namely the Perth CAT system, the CityGlider in Brisbane and the Smartbus services in Melbourne. Only Australian examples were selected because access to the information was more readily available.

4.3.1. Central Area Transit in Perth, Western Australia

Patronage on the Perth CAT buses has grown steadily since the implementation in 1996 as shown in Figure 14. The red trend line indicates continued strong growth in recent years. The three CAT routes in Perth CBD operate at frequencies from every 5 to 15 minutes during daylight hours and these free services are very popular with commuters, shoppers to the CBD and visitors to Perth.

Figure 14: Annual Boardings on the Perth CAT Bus Services
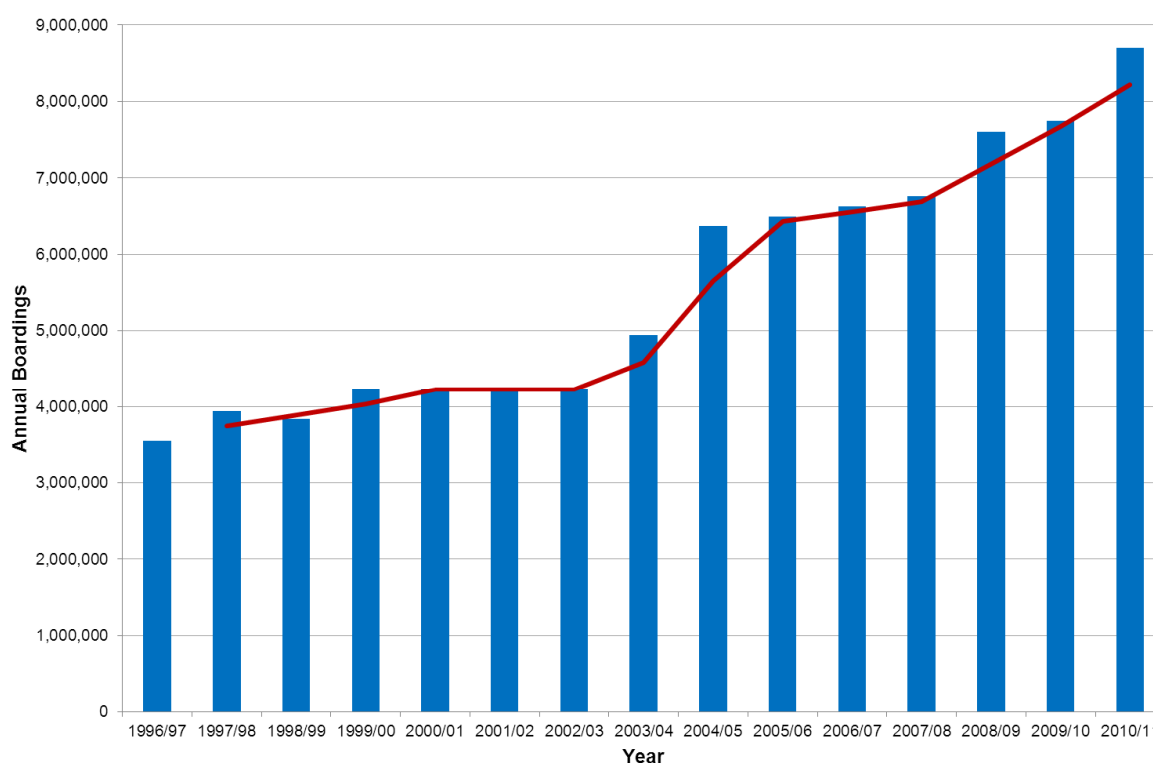
Source: Public Transport Authority, Western Australia, 2011.

The Perth CAT buses have a 92 percent satisfaction rating from customer satisfaction surveys conducted in March 2010. (PTA, Western Australia, 2010) Of the survey respondents for all CAT bus services in Perth, 30 percent of them mentioned that the CAT services had influenced their work-related driving behaviour with 70 percent of these passengers driving less often as a result of the high frequency CAT bus services.

The CAT bus services are considered to be an icon in Perth and this high recognition along with the high frequency services continues to attract new patronage and the demand for more frequent services is documented in a media statement in April 2011. In order to promote a consistent brand and image for the CAT services, the same CAT logo and vehicle livery has been implemented for Perth, Fremantle and Joondalup CBD services.

4.3.2. CityGlider in Brisbane, Queensland

The CityGlider in Brisbane has been very successful with sustained growth in patronage since the implementation on 11 April 2010. It has operates with pre-paid ticketing and dual-door boarding for faster boarding and alighting, a frequency of every five minutes during the peak period and every 10 to 15 minutes during the off-peak periods and has a 24-hour service on Friday and Saturday and 18-hour service from Sunday to Thursday.

The CityGlider carries about 40,000 passengers per week and during the first 14 months of operation 2 million passengers have boarded the services. Research into the impact of the unique branding on patronage has not been conducted. The high patronage results because it operates to inner city areas that previously had poor bus service, the high frequency services along a direct route, the higher speed operations with fewer stops spaced further apart and the high legibility of the bus stops well positioned along the route.

4.3.3. Smartbus in Melbourne, Victoria

The Smartbus routes in Melbourne have proven to be very popular and the patronage has grown since the first implementation in 2002 with crosstown Routes 703 and 888/889. (Department of Transport, Victoria, 2010) The key features of the SmartBus concept is the direct route along arterial roads between train stations and significant activity centres, such as major shopping centres and the high service frequency operating at least every 15 minutes between 6.30 am and 9.00 pm on weekdays and every 30 minutes at other times, and the longer hours of service into the late evening.

Market research for the Route 903 in July 2009 provides evidence that the SmartBus livery was highly successful in generating awareness of new route with about half (51 percent) of those interviewed reporting that they became aware via totems and the branded buses along the route. (Department of Transport, Victoria, 2009) The livery and advertising campaign worked together with a total of 72 percent of the respondents becoming aware of the new SmartBus route via one of these two methods.

From the market research conducted on the Route 902 in April 2011, passengers were using the SmartBus or were using it more often because the SmartBus route was more direct or more convenient than alternative routes. (Department of Transport, Victoria, 2011a) The SmartBus service brand was specifically reported as a reason for usage by 4 percent of respondents. Passengers surveyed also mentioned they used the SmartBus routes because of the high service frequency, the direct route along main roads and the longer operating hours.

On 4 October 2010, SmartBus Routes 905, 906, 907 and 908 were launched. (Department of Transport, Victoria, 2011b) These four Doncaster Area Rapid Transit (DART) project SmartBus routes cover a wide area of Manningham with higher frequency bus services. They also complemented the three existing crosstown SmartBus Routes 901, 902 and 903 that also operate in Manningham. The market research conducted on the DART SmartBus routes in June 2011 suggested that the vehicle livery as a form of promotion had almost twice the impact as other forms of advertising and should be seen as the primary focus for promoting future new SmartBus services.

The SmartBus livery was highly successful in generating awareness of new routes with 40 percent of those interviewed reporting that they became aware of the services by seeing buses along the routes or bus stops or totems being installed. Comparatively, advertising on outdoor signs and in the local newspaper had almost half the impact as the livery in generating awareness of the new routes (25 percent). The livery and advertising campaign worked together to give an additive effect with a total of 62 percent becoming aware of the new SmartBus DART routes.

5. Guidelines for Branded Bus Services

Of the five criteria used in the assessment, the branding of the vehicle livery is most often used to designate a branded bus service and secondly the branding of information. The use of special infrastructure to brand a bus service is least used most likely because it is the most expensive element to implement with the cost of special bus shelters and BRT infrastructure.

Based on the research and assessment of branded bus services in the previous sections, the following guidelines for implementing high quality branded bus services are provided.

- The branding image must be distinctive from other public transport services and easily recognisable and understood by the general public. The use of unique special logos and bright colour schemes for the bus livery, signage and information is encouraged.

- The colour scheme must be kept simple, clean and consistent. If multiple branding colours are used, they must be designed to work as part of the network and not conflict with the vehicle livery, signage and information used elsewhere in the system.

- The routes should be simple with no deviations. Direct linear two-way routes are preferable to loop routes. Any one-way shuttle routes should be kept small for a short circuit time and to maintain a high service frequency.

- A high level of service will make the bus service more obvious and attractive to use. Successful branded bus routes typically operate at least every 10 minutes and do not require detailed timetables in brochures and at stops.

- Branded bus services are most successful when they can use BRT infrastructure and bus priority measures to provide services with improved reliability and reduced travel times in order to reinforce the message from the branded vehicle livery, signage and information.

- Special innovative websites and easy-to-read information brochures should be designed to promote the branded bus services apart from the other regular suburban bus services.

6. Conclusions

The main objective of branded bus services is to change the perception of the bus by implementing services with a new look in order to attract more patronage. A unique branding image can be applied to the vehicle livery, route and service design, stops, shelters and other bus priority infrastructure, and for quality information to promote the services.

Branded bus services are applicable for local internal CBD shuttles, radial suburban routes to the CBD and crosstown or orbital routes that do not service the CBD. A selection of branded bus services from each of these categories was assessed based on criteria for vehicle livery, route legibility, peak period service frequency, infrastructure and information.

From the assessment of the selection of branded bus services in this research, the branded BRT routes in York Region, Canada and in Los Angeles, USA have the highest scores. In Australia, SmartBus in Melbourne has the best branded crosstown routes. For the CBD shuttles, the Perth CAT and DC Circulator in Washington, DC have the highest scores. The CityGlider in Brisbane has the best branding concept for radial routes. The lowest scores are for the Midland Gate shuttle in Perth and for the orbital routes in Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane where no special vehicle branding and a low level of promotion has been used.

Evidence that the branding of the vehicle livery and bus stops with a unique colour scheme and logo encourages higher patronage is inconclusive because the popularity of branded bus services may result from the higher service frequencies along direct legible routes or because most of the CBD shuttles are free services. However, from discussions with the planners of the branded bus services, the bus routes that have a distinctive brand have a much higher awareness by the general public and are more legible for new users to understand than the rest of the bus network.

High quality branded bus routes have a distinctive colour scheme for the vehicle livery, signage and information, a very legible route with services operating at least every 10 minutes and bus priority measures wherever possible to improve the quality of the services.

In summary, branded bus routes must be planned carefully with the objective of creating a more simplified and legible network that is easily recognised by the general public. Keeping the branding concept simple, consistent and unique is a critical element for success.

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