The Living Bus Shelter

Summer 2016

Prepared for: Minneapolis DID and Metro Transit

ThreeSeven www.threeseven.mn
Troy Gallas and Patrick McKennan
troy.gallas@gmail.com
patrick.mckennan@gmail.com
OVERVIEW
The Bus Stop Pilot Project is a collaboration between the Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District and Metro Transit that aims to explore new ways of thinking about bus shelters while making improvements to bus stops at high ridership, high priority locations in downtown Minneapolis that lack permanent waiting area fixtures. The Living Bus Shelter is ThreeSeven's response to DID and Metro Transit's interest in testing temporary, experimental prototypes for addressing needs of transit waiting areas in the downtown public realm. This project is aimed at generating design solutions that Metro Transit can apply to multiple sites.

The transit stop site we selected for the implementation of this installation was on the North side of 7th Street between 3rd and 4th Avenues South, adjacent to Hennepin County Government Center Plaza South. The stop serves the 5, 14, 19, 22, 34, and the 94 express busses and has the third highest ridership of any bus stop in downtown Minneapolis without a shelter.

PROBLEM
Prior to the installation of “The Living Bus Shelter” the site contained very few amenities for transit riders. The space dedicated for transit riders to wait was largely a barren open space with two small benches for waiting. Additional seating and quasi-public green space could be found in the adjacent Government Center Plaza (owned by Hennepin County), but visibility to incoming buses is limited and no shelter is provided from the elements.
CONCEPT
It talking with transit riders at this bus stop in the early stages of the project, it was clear they desired a sheltered space with both standing and seating space and a clear view of incoming buses. The Living Bus Shelter aimed to meet these base needs of the ridership while also creating an environment and experience more interesting than a typical bus shelter.

Responding to a research study conducted by the University of Minnesota Center for Transportation Studies in 2015 which found that greenery in bus stop environments reduces perceived waiting times for transit riders, The Living Bus Shelter explored how we might bring green space into our cities' bus shelters to create a more inviting and enjoyable experience for transit riders.

The Living Bus Shelter was comprised of 5 bays that provided adequate seating and standing areas for transit riders. The bays were covered by a semi-transparent canopy that protected users from rainfall, diffused direct sunlight, and allowed natural lighting to permeate the sheltered space. The bays were comprised of vertical pallet gardens containing a variety of plants. In addition to providing vibrant greenery to the bus shelter, all the plants at The Living Bus Shelter were edible; transit riders and passersby were encouraged to explore them, taste them, and bring some home to enjoy with dinner. Primarily aromatic herbs, the plants gave off a pleasant scent throughout the day. Additionally, the height of the pallet garden walls provided a bit of protection from the wind while still allowing a clear view of incoming buses.
PROJECT PHOTOS
SURVEY
While the Living Bus Shelter was up, ThreeSeven conducted a brief user survey. The survey aimed to gather information from transit riders about how successful they thought the project was on a variety of levels. The survey was available online as well as conducted on site a few times. Below are the survey questions, average user response, and (when appropriate) our own comments and recommendations..

**On a scale of 1-10 (ten being best) how do you think The Living Bus Shelter performs as a seasonal bus shelter?**

*Average User Response: 8.0*

Given that the shelter was intended to be functional during a two week stretch of generally warm and calm summer weather, we thought it performed well as a seasonal summer shelter. Because the installation ended up being on site for nearly three months, we got to see how it
functioned in more inclement weather. While it still provided adequate shelter, there were times when protection from the rain and wind could have been improved for a better user experience.

On a scale of 1-10 (ten being best) please rate The Living Bus Shelter on the seating it provides
Average User Response: 8.5
In observing the shelter in use and talking with it’s users, it became clear that many people arrived early for their bus, their bus was late arriving, or they just came there to sit while not waiting for a bus. This often resulted in sitting times longer than a few minutes. While there were an adequate amount of benches, our main criticism of the seating was its minimal level of comfort for a long wait. This is something we would seek to improve for a better user experience. Given the shelter could not be anchored to the ground, it was built on platforms raising the majority of seating a step up from sidewalk level. While there was still one bench providing seating for those who could not take the step up, it would have been better to offer more accessible seating. There was one single bay that provided a protected space for one wheelchair.

On a scale of 1-10 (ten being best) please rate The Living Bus Shelter on the protection from summer weather it provides
Average User Response: 8.5
Overall, we thought it provided a decent amount of protection from the summer weather. Were the installation to be up during the more wet Spring or windy Fall months, improvements would need to be made to create a more enclosed shelter.

On a scale of 1-10 (ten being best) please rate The Living Bus Shelter on the visibility of incoming buses it provides
Average User Response: 9.0
Visibility of incoming buses was good. For people 5’ and above, visibility was generally unimpeded while sitting on the benches, with minimal plant obstruction. For those shorter than that there was more plant obstruction. Visibility while standing was generally good. The only time visibility really became an issue was when a food truck shared the open space adjacent to the shelter. If a permanent installation is to be put in place, it would be smart to place open space to the South West.

On a scale of 1-10 (ten being best) please rate The Living Bus Shelter on its aesthetic character
Average User Response: 9.0
We thought it was pleasant looking, but would have liked to see even more plantings to provide a more green visual aesthetic from all sides.
Do you like the incorporation of greenery into the shelter? Yes, No, Indifferent
*User Response: 100% Yes*

Did the Living Bus Shelter make your wait time seem: Shorter, Longer, About the Same?
*User Response: 60% Shorter, 40% About the Same*

Compared to a typical bus stop, was your wait at The Living Bus Shelter: More Enjoyable, Less Enjoyable, About the Same?
*User Response: 80% More Enjoyable, 20% About the Same*

Based on comments heard on site from transit riders, we were extremely happy with how much they enjoyed the experience of The Living Bus Shelter. For many people it wasn’t just that it was more enjoyable, it was WAY more enjoyable. Generally, those who gave positive remarks absolutely loved the experience and concept of having greenery at a bus stop. Here’s one great user comment:

“...when I was eating my lunch and daydreaming trying to forget I was at work the other day I got to explore it and although it took me a second to figure out what it was, when I realized that it had planters and mint and herbs it brightened my day. And the “brightening of a day” is something that MetroTransit isn’t exactly known for. People have a hard time associating buses and trains with that kind of creative freedom that marketing agencies attribute to cars.”

What elements made it more or less enjoyable, if any?
*Most Common User Responses: Plants/Greenery, More textures, Enjoyable Aesthetic, pleasant smells.*

Plants and greenery were by far the most popular feature of the shelter people attributed to their enjoyment of it and was something they would love to see in future bus shelters.

Has The Living Bus Shelter made you feel: Safer, Less Safe, About the Same?
*User Response: 65% Safer, 20% About the Same, 15% Less Safe*

We feel the main reason people answered they felt “less safe” than in a traditional bus shelter is the fact that when seated here you did not have a solid wall behind you. The wall still went up to shoulder height and was fairly thick, but there was still a feeling of exposure that was unsettling to some. This is something that would be a real concern for future installations and should be addressed.
Has the addition of The Living Bus Shelter made you want to catch the bus at Government Plaza South? Yes, No, Indifferent.
User Response: 60% Yes, 25% Indifferent, 15% No

How did you engage with the plants at the shelter? Check all that apply:
Most Common User Responses in order: Look, Smell, Touch, Pick, Eat
There was signage to inform users the plants were edible and they could take a pinch home, but based on what we witnessed, we would do more to make this even clearer as few users actually picked or ate the plants. We would have liked to incorporate more educational information that encouraged users to explore the plants.

What elements of The Living Bus Shelter would you like to see incorporated into future bus shelters, if any?
Most Common User Responses: Greenery, Wood, Private Seating Spaces

How do you feel about the Downtown Improvement District and Metro Transit commissioning artists to publicly explore how we might reimagine bus shelters through installations such as this? Love it!, Like it, Indifferent, Dislike it, Hate it!
User Responses: 65% Love it!, 15% Like it, 15% Indifferent, 5% Dislike it, 0% Hate it!
Similar to how people felt about their enjoyment of the shelter, if people loved this idea, they really loved it. Most thought it was a smart, fun, and interesting way to explore new ideas and get public input through direct experience. Those who disliked it seemed to attribute their dislike to the allocation of funding to the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Some of our more specific recommendations can be found in the Survey section above. Overall, transit riders responded extremely positively to a shelter being placed at this location. With such high ridership, multiple bus lines, and positive user feedback, the addition of a permanent shelter to this location is highly recommended. Based on user feedback and our own on site observations, transit riders were thrilled with the inclusion of greenery and softer materials such as wood. Finding a way to incorporate plants and wood into a permanent shelter is also highly recommended. Additionally, people enjoyed the experience of a larger shelter that was broken up into a few smaller spaces within. This provided more personal waiting areas and a more unique experience than a traditional bus shelter.