

THRILLED WITH THE OPPORTUNITY

BY REGINALD BARON, DIRECTOR OF METROCARD
MOBILE SALES FOR NYC TRANSIT
AND NIVI NAGIEL, NCSA

When we think of transportation within New York City, whether from personal experience or as portrayed on television or movies, “hectic” and “impersonal” are probably two words that come to mind. With 2013 daily subway ridership at 5.5 million and an annual ridership of approximately, 1.7 billion, MTA New York City Transit is the largest public transportation agency in North America and among the largest in the world.

Operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, NYC Transit subways make 8,033 weekday trips across Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan and Queens. More than 6,300 subway cars travel some 345 million miles over 660 miles of track. The 100 percent accessible bus fleet, which serves all five boroughs, including Staten Island, consists of about 5,700 vehicles—making it the largest in North America.

Throughout the City, average bus ridership is 2.6 million a day, and 803 million annually.

NYC Transit’s mission is to provide a safe, reliable trip to all of its customers. Since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), NYC Transit, along with the MTA’s Metro-North and Long Island railroads, have worked diligently to make the MTA network accessible to customers with disabilities. Of NYC Transit’s 468 subway stations, 103 are accessible via elevators and ramps. In the City’s fifth borough, Staten Island, MTA Staten Island Railway operates a commuter rail with four ADA-accessible stations. And so, to that end, our story begins.

Within this massive transportation network, there exists a very small unit of 11 employees, who travel around the City and its neighboring counties each day, going above and beyond to reach out and assist customers. This unit is known as the MetroCard Mobile Sales (MMS) team.

Continued on following page

Continued from previous page

The MMS sales team was first conceived as a pilot program in 1996 to assist seniors and the disabled with enrolling in the MetroCard Reduced Fare Program. Customers applying for and receiving a Reduced Fare MetroCard, were transitioning from the older paper-based fare card system to the new electronic system, introduced in 1994. Not only were the card and technology different, but customers had to adjust to a system including new bus fareboxes that captured and returned their card, and subway turnstiles that required learning how to “swipe” the card for entry. Today, some 20 years later, the Mobile Sales team continues that effort and has become a presence at street fairs and community events, lending a sincere and caring hand to customers going through the reduced-fare MetroCard application process.

Reginald Baron, director of MetroCard Mobile Sales for NYC Transit, is proud to have been involved with MMS since the program’s inception. Baron started as

a field analyst in 1994. “I started as a planner. I had always wanted to be in the transportation industry because it is a vital part of everyday life. Our job is to help people, and the benefit is the immediate satisfaction we receive daily in our efforts,” says Baron.

The pilot program began in 1996 with one bus and eventually expanded to five vehicles in 2004. These vehicles travel to New York City’s five boroughs and its surrounding counties, educating the public about the transit network and the benefits of obtaining a reduced fare MetroCard. Using this service, customers fill out an application on the spot and receive a temporary card that allows them to immediately use the reduced fare benefit on New York City subways and buses immediately. Each vehicle is also equipped with fare terminals which allow customers to refill their reduced fare MetroCards.

Baron says that the unit provides any kind of assis-

Continued on following page



The MetroCard sales bus emphasizes its desire to serve with the friendly notice on the front of the vehicle—“Say hello to the MetroCard Bus! Step inside for MetroCard sales and assistance.”

Continued from previous page

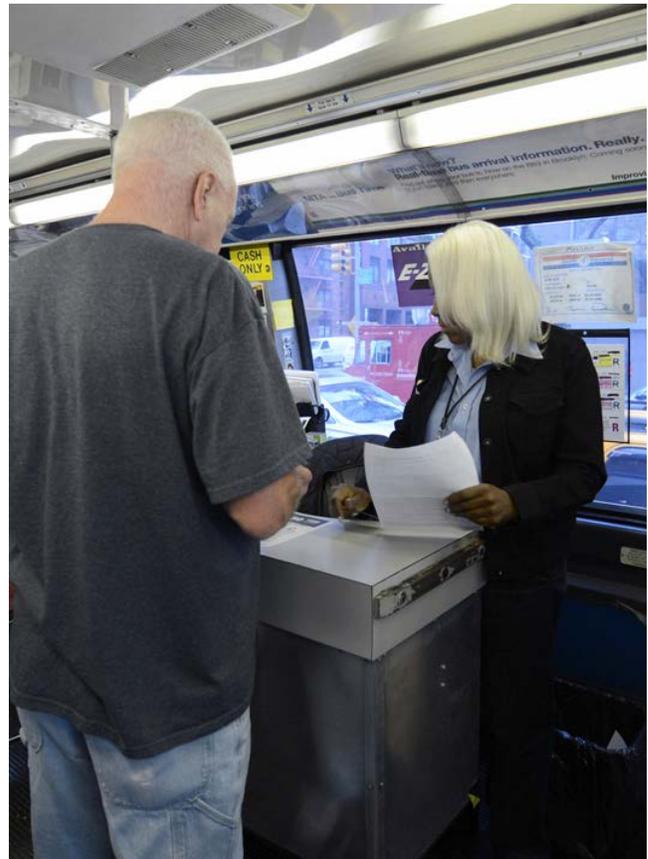
tance a person might need to obtain their MetroCard, including personally completing the application for the customer. "We're proud to provide quality customer service and serve as ambassadors for the NYC Transit system."

"While our office is typically closed on holidays and weekends, our unit has the flexibility to work on occasional weekends or holidays at public events when we know there will be a lot of senior citizens or disabled persons in attendance. We're committed to providing education and assistance in getting them signed up."

Having developed a list of over 90 senior citizen centers throughout the city, MMS visits each center periodically to educate new residents about these facilities and allow cardholders to easily refill their MetroCards.

Baron is proud of the strategic partnerships the unit has formed with healthcare groups and other community-based organizations that can help spread the word about this transit benefit. "Since many of the 90 senior citizen organizations we work with are located on healthcare campuses, we've created a 'one-stop shopping' model that gives the residents the opportunity to explore and sign up for reduced-fare transit while also going to their doctor's appointment," says Baron.

Beyond the vans that travel throughout the boroughs, customers may also apply online at www.mta.info. "In addition to our mobile sales fleet, we continually seek out opportunities to talk about the Reduced Fare MetroCard program and our Mobile Sales services at community organizations. We've developed a 'train-the-trainer' program, where we educate other service providers who work with the senior or disabled communities and provide them with our application materials. In a way, we're increasing our 'sales staff' since these individuals now tell their clientele about our services." Baron is proud of the fact that approximately a half million New York City residents have signed up for the reduced-fare program, allowing them to go about their daily activities using the nation's largest transit network.



A MetroCard salesperson assists a customer in signing up for a reduced-fare option with the New York City Transit system.

Mobile Sales advertises its services on the internet, with brochures on NYC buses and subways, and by partnering with community groups. The strongest referral is, however, word-of-mouth from satisfied customers.

"We have an outstanding team at MMS," says Baron. "We're like a family. We acknowledge one another, share praise, motivate each other and do whatever it takes to get the job done. Because we're such a small group, we must be efficient—everyone is cross-trained for each function." The team includes two field managers whose job is to "keep a thumb on the pulse." The average tenure of the 11 employees is more than nine years.

"We find out what our customers need or want, and we always discuss how we can make that happen," says Baron. Typically those discussions are held at

Continued on following page

Continued from previous page



The smaller vans offer walk-up options for customers to inquire about and sign up for reduced fare options.

quarterly staff meetings that encourage open dialogue and feedback. The MMS effort is so successful because they are continuously striving to get better, and those efforts are driven by customer feedback. "We are committed to delivering excellent customer service," says Baron. "And we aren't satisfied with just serving the current group of customers—we are always trying to find ways to reach new customer groups."

What sets NYC Transit and its MetroCard Mobile Sales effort apart from other city transportation systems around the country? They seek customers through a team-based, personal touch philosophy. "We don't try to be a well-kept secret," says Baron. "Our goal is to get the word out by attending community meetings and conferences like those held by AARP." The unit is also more than happy to share their successes and challenges at transit conferences as well. "We want to promote this hands-on, quality customer service concept across the country."

A relatively recent outreach effort also has begun with senior citizen groups visiting New York City. "We are proud to provide support for these tourists as well," says Baron, noting that they are reaching out to tour

operators to promote their services. True to their word of expanding their service-provision network, MMS is always reaching out—the epitome of customer service excellence in action!

The MMS team has been recognized for its innovation, high standards and phenomenal customer enrollment numbers in the NYC Transit's internal newsletter publication, "At Your Service," and has been a feature on the agency's public affairs cable-access TV program. Baron reports, "We are the proud recipi-

ents of a 'Unit Citation' from the New York City Police Department, which recognized our service working at



Metro Mobile Sales is very proud of the award received from the New York City Police Department.

Continued on following page

Continued from previous page

community events as well as our dedication to the seniors and disabled groups in New York City. We're always happy to work with city agencies and community groups to ensure customers learn of the benefits of our Reduced Fare MetroCard program."

Mobile Sales' motto is we "C.A.R.E." about our customers, translating into CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE and RESOLUTIONS through EFFICIENCY. Our goal is to provide outstanding customer service with the personal touch.

"The success and longevity of the MetroCard Mobile Sales program speaks for itself." Baron feels privileged to work for a transit system that identifies and acts on

opportunities to serve all of its customers as fully as possible. "People can always take taxis or walk," says Baron. "Our goal is to have them use our transit system, which is the most convenient way to get around our great city." Per Baron, "Mobile Sales' motto is we 'C.A.R.E.' about our customers which translates into Customer Assistance and Resolutions through Efficiency. Our goal is to provide outstanding customer service with the personal touch."

Clearly the fact that MetroCard Mobile Sales continues to expand its services speaks to the level at which they achieve their outstanding customer service goal on a daily basis! ■

Reginald Baron is the director of MetroCard Mobile Sales for NYC Transit, New York, NY.

Nivi Nagiel is an NCSA Editor.

ARTICLE PHOTO ON PAGE 2: Metro Mobile Sales staff await the opportunity to serve customers in their traveling office.