

What's sexier than a hybrid city bus?

Only the rapidly modernizing LRT, says Charles Stolte, Edmonton Transit's gung-ho new manager

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If sex can sell beer and body wash, how about a bus pass?

Edmonton's new transit manager certainly thinks the strategy can work, and he's out to convince the public he's right.

Of course, Charles Stolte isn't talking about sex exactly. He's got no plans for on-board strip shows or naked drivers.

He simply wants Edmontonians to think of their buses and LRT as sexy — sleek, modern and sophisticated.

The style Edmonton Transit chooses will be developed over the next few years as the service pushes ahead with a major overhaul of its system, he says.

Among the biggest changes will be 26 new, state-of-the-art LRT cars, the construction of several bus rapid transit routes and a move away from diesel buses in favour of hybrids.

From what he's seen of the designs, Stolte believes the next generation of vehicles and stations will impress people with their aerodynamic shapes, new passenger-information systems and several high-tech security features.

"I think what you're going to see is a real modern transit system in Edmonton," Stolte says. "When you think about it, it's exciting. Imagine what it could look like 20 years from now."

Stolte thinks it should be fun to take transit; it should be what all the cool people are doing.

"We want to make it sexy for people," he says from his small, fifth-floor office that overlooks Jasper Avenue. "We want people to be proud of their transit service. We want them to be excited by it."



JOHN LUCAS, THE JOURNAL

"Imagine what it could look like 20 years from now," enthuses Charles Stolte on the subject of Edmonton's brave new world of transit.

He knows it will be no small challenge to persuade commuters that it's hip to leave their cars at home, especially in a cold-weather city like Edmonton.

His strategy to win them over is still a work in progress. But what he currently lacks in detailed plans, he makes up for with a dynamic general philosophy.

The way to get residents tickled about transit, he says, is part esthetics and part

attitude. For the esthetics, Stolte believes the entire transit network — from the vehicles to the stations to the drivers' uniforms — has to look good and give riders a sense of comfort.

There are many ways to accomplish this. However, while attention to style is important, it will get you only so far, Stolte says.

To keep people riding, the service has

to project the right attitude.

"It starts with the frontline people, the drivers and security staff. If they are excited about transit, then they are going to pass it onto the ridership."

That attitude has to be matched with top-notch customer service, Stolte says, adding that he wants Edmonton Transit to be seen as a choice employer so that it can attract quality staff.

Ideas to improve convenience are also in the works, including the introduction of electronic "smart" cards for pass holders, and giving bus riders the ability to board through the back doors as well as the front.

"Little things mean a lot to people, even something like a driver calling ahead to make sure a rider can make his transfer."

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