Eliminating alcohol advertising from NYC Public Transit: A public health victory

Alcohol Policy 18
Arlington, VA
April 12, 2018

Robert Pezzolesi, MPH
NY Alcohol Policy Alliance
U.S. Alcohol Policy Alliance
As required by the Alcohol Policy 18 Conference, I/we have signed a disclosure statement and note the following conflict(s) of interest:

None to report.
Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)
the largest transit system in North America

2.73 billion trips per year
8,764,983 daily riders
357 lines & routes
8,889 rail and subway cars
5,725 Buses
2,080 Track miles
736 Rail and subway stations
68,824 Employees
More exposure to alcohol ads = Greater underage drinking risk

- Longitudinal studies: Greater exposure = greater likelihood to initiate alcohol use and engage in binge/hazardous drinking [Jernigan, Noel, et al., 2016]

- Current brand-specific research on underage drinking shows parallels to tobacco advertising, with underage drinking “concentrated among a relatively small number of [heavily advertised] alcohol brands” [Siegel, DeJong, et al. 2013]
NYC Public Transit is the Yellow School Bus for NYC

- **Over 670,000** NYC schoolchildren use Student MetroCards for subways/buses as government-funded school transportation. [NYC Independent Budget Office, 2015]

- **Thousands more** youth receive free subway passes from the NYC DYCD to attend educational & recreational events. [NYC DYCD, n.d.]

- **Many thousands more** children & youth use public transit for other travel. 55.7% of NYC households have no vehicle. [Governing, n.d.]
"Motivate usage and create awareness by saturating the environment and captivating the bus audience."

"Capture the attention of a completely captive audience with vibrant, attention-grabbing messages."

"... give advertisers a chance to reach a diverse demographic from upscale to ‘hip and trendy’ to ethnic."

"Subway ads also influence a completely captive audience of students, household decision makers and tourists as they complete daily activities, run errands and go out on the town ..."
Methods:

- I assembled a team of researchers who rode all seven subway lines in the Bronx, assessing all advertising (>1,500 ads) in all 68 stations.
- My team linked observations about ads to ridership data from the MTA, demographic data from the U.S. Census, and health data from the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

Key Study Findings:

- Alcohol ads were present in more stations than ads for any other foods or beverages.
- Some stations had as many as 9 alcohol ads on view.
- Placement of alcohol ads correlated with demographics of the neighborhoods in which stations were located, *NOT* with the number of riders entering each station (in other words, not ads for widest audiences but targeted marketing!)
- Alcohol ads were located excessively in neighborhoods with greater poverty, lower educational attainment, higher percentages of black and Hispanic residents, and more children (especially ads in Spanish or featuring minorities).
- Placement of alcohol ads in the Bronx was also tied to low fruit-and-vegetable consumption, higher sugary drink consumption, and higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol in neighborhoods. [emphasis added]
Issue Background

- Tobacco ads removed from MTA system in 1992 [NY Times]
- Alcohol ads NOT allowed on transit systems in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Seattle, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco/Oakland, Detroit, Indianapolis, Phoenix, Houston, El Paso, many others.*
- Proposed NYC Council Resolution to ban alcohol ads in 1999 collected 10 co-sponsors, but never made it out of committee [NYC Council]
- Some other public health, legislative and media attention to the issue, but no organized campaign to change policy, until ...
Phase 1: Coalition building
LGBTQ Health and Advocacy
Phase 2: NYC Council Resolution
(Dec 2015 – Apr 2017)
Several riders have stepped forward to ask the MTA board to remove alcohol ads from subways and buses.

Public speakers at MTA board certified booze ads. @vwanterpool wants report on different types of ads that are posted, how they’re placed.

Lots of calls for @MTA ban on subway booze ads. No “Hey hey, ho ho, alcohol ads have got to go!” chants this time.

Coalition Demands Transit System Ban Ads That Pro... Controversy over advertisements in the subway isn't new to the MTA, but now, there's a push to do away with ads that promote alcohol.

ny1.com
Thanks to members of the public - particularly BAAFT for their well-reasoned and well-documented research

“Advocacy for the right thing works ...”
B. **Prohibited Advertising**

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the MTA will not accept any advertisement for display in or on the Property if it falls within one or more of the following categories:

11. Promotes tobacco or any tobacco-related product or any alcohol product.
Seven key learnings

1. Tightly focused goal
2. Grassroots mobilization & organizing
3. Engaging faith community from the start
4. Flexible & (relatively) flat campaign structure
5. Flexible & nimble strategy – “kaleidoscope”
6. Balanced messaging (heart & head)
7. Passion & persistence
The Community Organizer
The Trusted Neighbor
The Engaged Researcher
The Wise Sherpa
The National Expert(s)
The Savvy Lobbyist
The Inside Champions
Bryant Park MTA Station
Tunnel between 7 & B/D/F lines

Photo: Giovanna Pezzolesi
Thank you!

Questions or comments:

rsp@alcoholpolicy.org
Twitter: @Upstreaming