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The Bus Stop

Forrest Gump is probably the only feature film ever made that takes place almost entirely at a bus stop. Notwithstanding flashbacks to other times and places, the center of the action is a simple wooden bus bench on a concrete platform along the edge of one of Savannah's beautiful squares. Gump sits there recounting his extraordinary life story to the passengers who arrive and depart throughout the day.

This particular and positive focus on a bus stop is refreshing. Outside the world of the movies, when money is actually spent to improve a transit system, the overwhelming balance goes to expensive subway and light rail stations. In the transit family, bus stops are neglected stepchildren; needing so little, they get even less. These sidewalk Cinderellas are even less likely prospects for enhancing public space. The phrase "bus stop" rarely connotes urbanity, character or charm.

Why should it matter? Because in most places, the only transit is bus transit. And bus stops are highly visible: they pepper major streets every few blocks, stand right on the curb and are highly visible to both drivers and pedestrians.

Bus stops advertise the transit system to the public. A stop that looks dirty or neglected, or whose waiting passengers look hot, cold, wet, confused or vulnerable sends a devastating message: you're lucky you don't have to ride the bus. A stop that looks clean, comfortable, safe and informative suggests that riding the bus is a practical, attractive alternative to driving.

Bus stops also send a message about a city's public space. They are the place where bus transit and municipal identity overlap. Each stop can be thought of as having a two-way identity; it is a gateway to the transit system for pedestrians getting on, and a gateway to the adjacent neighborhood for passengers getting off. Each stop should be assessed as part of a pedestrian network that permits someone to get to and from the stop.

Modest physical improvements — shelters that protect transit users from bad weather; comfortable seating; good lighting for reading and security; good information about fares, schedules, routes, transfers and nearby destinations; a drinking fountain, telephone and newspaper box — can go a long way toward making a bus stop a sidewalk amenity.

What follows is a trip along a hypothetical bus route with a collection of bus stops, at many of which *Forrest Gump* might feel at home.

1



Denver

This bus stop on Denver's transit mall has movable chairs. People make their own casual seating arrangements, which makes waiting for the bus seem almost leisurely.

2



Morelia

In Morelia, Mexico waiting passengers can pick up a snack of fresh mango or pineapple. These well-maintained vending cars, which are regulated by the city, are painted bright yellow and topped with white canvas awnings.

3



Portland

Good information about the transit system is important, but often missing. Stops along Portland's main downtown bus thoroughfare are exceptionally well equipped. The graphic information system, with special color-coded logos for each direction, help people navigate the bus network; monitors show bus schedules.

4



Los Angeles

At bus stops in Los Angeles, passengers must wait on advertising benches. There is no sense of protection from the fast and close traffic, and certainly no amenities to speak of. Information is limited to a sign with a route number and general direction, not much help even to regular riders.

5



Philadelphia

Bus shelters along Philadelphia's Market Street have beautiful posters that tell the history of nearby buildings, people and events. In most cities this space is reserved for advertising.

All photos except Portland courtesy Doug Suisman. Portland photo courtesy Todd W. Bressi.

6



Paris

The quirky, fan-shaped profile of the Paris bus stop marker is so distinctive that you can spot it from a block away. The RATP, Paris's bus and rail agency, manages to compress an extraordinary amount of information on these kiosks, from diagrams of the immediate area to maps of the regional transit network. A new, electronic version can be programmed from a central office to tell passengers when the next bus will arrive.

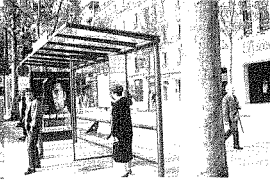
7



U.C.L.A.

Most off-the-shelf bus shelters are humble affairs, extruded aluminum pieces bolted together for minimum cost and ease of maintenance. But on the UCLA campus, these shelters, which pick up the banded masonry of the university's historic buildings, show that reasonably priced shelters can be both durable and quirkily monumental.

8



Champs d'Elysees

At the other end of the spectrum, these Champs d'Elysees shelters, designed by Norman Foster, achieve an elegant transparency. They are part of an overall streetscape program managed by JCDecaux. In exchange for advertising rights, Decaux works with leading designers to develop, build, install and maintain customer-designed shelters.

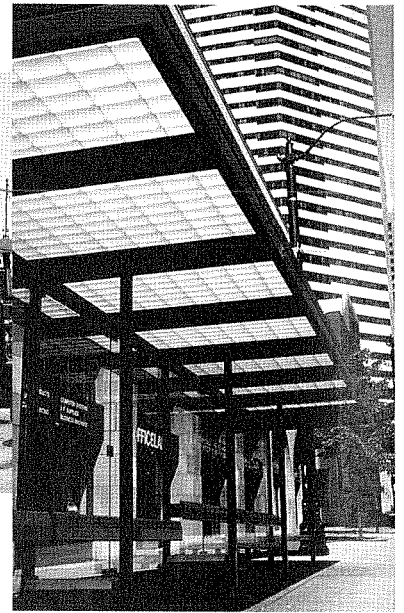
9



L.A. Civic Center

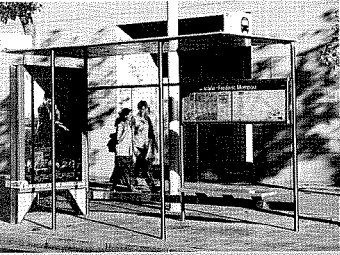
Neither monumental nor transparent, the standard Los Angeles shelter is clunky and dark. While they do offer protection from sun and rain, they also separate out from the visual environment of the street. The prototype was designed by the Gannet Co. in response to city requirements, which were mainly developed by engineers intent on having the shelters withstand the impact of a car moving 55 m.p.h.

10



Seattle

The translucent roofs of Seattle's downtown shelters allows filtered light into the waiting area and helps the shelter blend into the surrounding area.



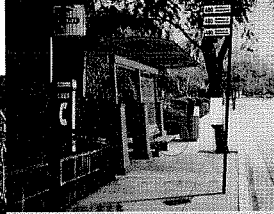
Barcelona

Barcelona's obsession with thinness and transparency in design is well represented by this beautiful shelter. With its wafer-like roof, its bright and hard yellow enamel finish, its bright red information band and its crisp stainless steel joints, the shelter brings color and sparkled to the street while allowing you to look right through it to the building and the sidewalks behind.



Santa Monica

Santa Monica asked my firm to develop a bus stop marker that wasn't a shelter. We picked up on a landmark Craftsman-style pergola along the oceanfront and developed a vertical column that carries vines and an illuminated sign.



Claremont

Bus stops often occupy the overlapping jurisdictions of a regional transit agency and a local municipality. Foothill Transit asked us to develop stops that would unify stops throughout the system yet recognize the widely varying identities of 20 towns and cities in its service area.

We developed a program of bus stop improvements that keep certain elements consistent throughout—for example, the curved profile and standing-seam metal of the shelter roof and the shelter's structural module—but allow the cities to select and customize other elements. These include the color of the roof and the cladding of the vertical supports.

In this example, the town of Claremont picked a terra cotta color for the roof and river rock for the supports, which harmonized with the architecture of its downtown village.