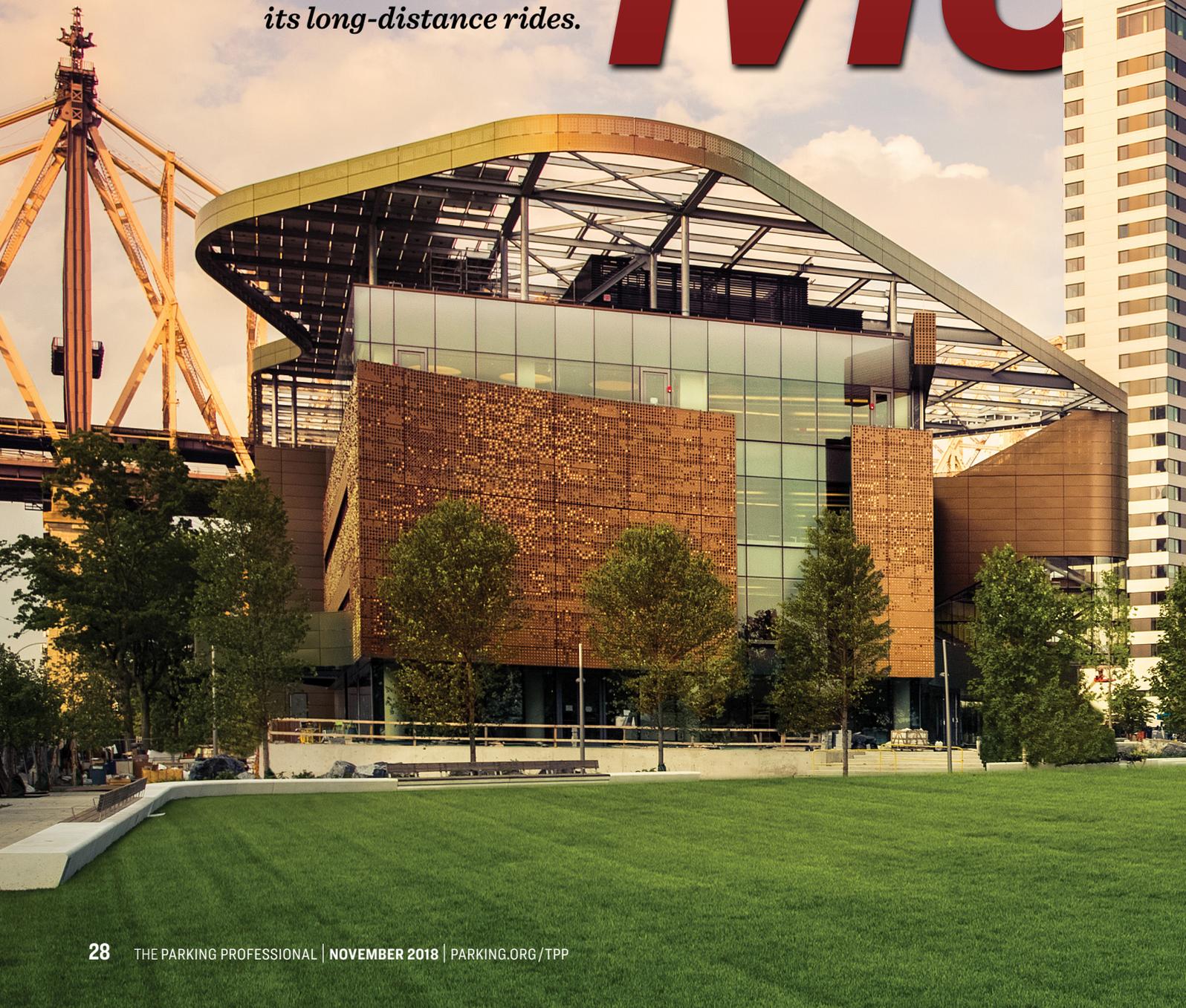


Keeping Cornell on the **Mo**

*A unique bus system offers
comfort and convenience, earning
loyalty from customers despite
its long-distance rides.*



By Bridgette Brady, CAPP

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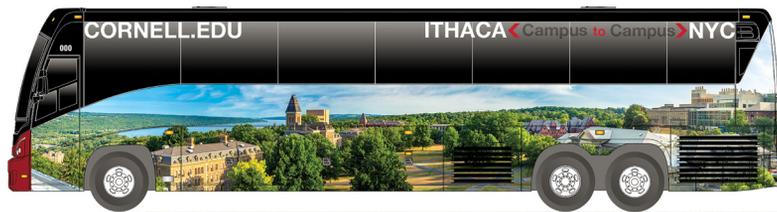
AS WE KNOW, mobility solutions take on many forms: trains, planes, boats, automobiles, human and animal-propelled modes, and of course the bus—one of the most used forms of transport in the world. Buses are among the most important forms of urban and rural passenger transport around the world. Increases in population, shifting mobility patterns, and a greater focus on environmental issues are changing the face of public transport. Whether through short or long distances, buses and motorcoaches are one of the safest, greenest, most user-friendly, affordable, and inclusive means of transport.

The diversity of services within the bus world creates more connections into the furthest reaches of society for the masses. This form of transport has a tremendous effect on the economy, both in access to employment centers and in employment within the system. There are more than 2 million jobs in the U.S. as a result of transit expenditures. Both with public and private services, buses arrive in all shapes, sizes, colors, and designs, taking us to adventures, work, competitions, shopping, medical facilities, and school. As mobility providers, buses are the cornerstones of our efforts to move people; they are the connection between the first and last miles of travel.





Each of the six MCI buses dons a specially designed wrap that turns heads wherever it goes, is the backdrop in many selfies, generates pride in being a Cornelian, and provides some of the most notable, bold, mobile marketing Cornell could imagine.



With all of that said, although they are seemingly the most impactful form of transport, these systems are not celebrated. I've been fortunate in my career to witness some impressive bus systems. One was named after the horse that pulled the first "shuttle," a passenger-designed and -named system—Hop, Skip and Jump—and another was a system connecting the entire Puget Sound region to a university on the hill, just to name a few. I've also had the distinct pleasure of working for one of the greatest bus systems imagined. True, I may be biased, but I believe the widely recognized Cornell University-owned and -operated Campus-to-Campus (C2C) executive motorcoach operation evokes more pride than any other, celebrating the vision of "an institution where anybody can find instruction in any study," block by block.

An Extensive System

Cornell University's world-class research and academic centers span globally, generating mobility challenges beyond the capacity of conventional solutions. Including two international locations in Qatar and Italy, one in Washington, D.C, and three in New York state, Cornell generates extensive knowledge corridors for learning, discovery, and engagement. One corridor in particular includes 200-plus miles of interstate, travels through

three states, experiences 1.5 miles of tunnel vision, and arrives in the middle of Manhattan. The essential need to connect academic, business, and research centers on the Ithaca campus (main) in Central New York to Weill Cornell Medicine on the Upper East Side, the brand-new Cornell Tech campus on Roosevelt Island, and eight more programs and locations throughout Manhattan requires a unique mobility solution.

In 2004, Cornell's president commissioned the express C2C executive motorcoach service between the Ithaca main campus and two locations in Manhattan, at Weill Cornell Medicine and the Cornell Club. At the time, the pilot motorcoach service was outsourced to a local operator. After a three-month pilot of 16 one-way trips per week, C2C became a permanent enterprise service for the university community and the general public.

By 2011, the number of one-way trips had increased to 40 per week. With a service so important to the campus community, uncompromised safety and quality control were the highest priorities. To ensure the highest level of service possible, in 2103, C2C was insourced by Cornell Transportation Services and Cornell affiliates and departments benefited from discounted fares. In 2018, a third stop was added to facilitate travel to the Cornell Tech campus on Roosevelt Island, with a stop near the subway station providing a train under the East River to the island or blocks away from a tram ride over the East River.

Logistics

A logistics-heavy operation like the C2C requires round-the-clock support. If all goes as scheduled, there are roughly five hours of rest between the last arrival and first departure from Ithaca the next morning. Operation of the C2C service is carried out by staff that consists of motorcoach operators, detailers, mechanics, administrative staff, outreach, and a calling service for after hours. The trips connecting Cornell campuses go smoothly as a result of a combined dedication to exceeding the expectations of our clientele. This hinges on a well-orchestrated effort by all involved, from maintaining and cleaning a fleet of six motorcoaches, professional driving with highest levels of customer service, ensuring compliance with Department of Transportation (DOT) regulations for driver hours of service, driver qualifications, and vehicle condition.

"Operating C2C has introduced me to facets of the transportation industry that I most likely would not have otherwise had the opportunity to experience," says Carl Hoaglin, assistant director for the East Campus Service

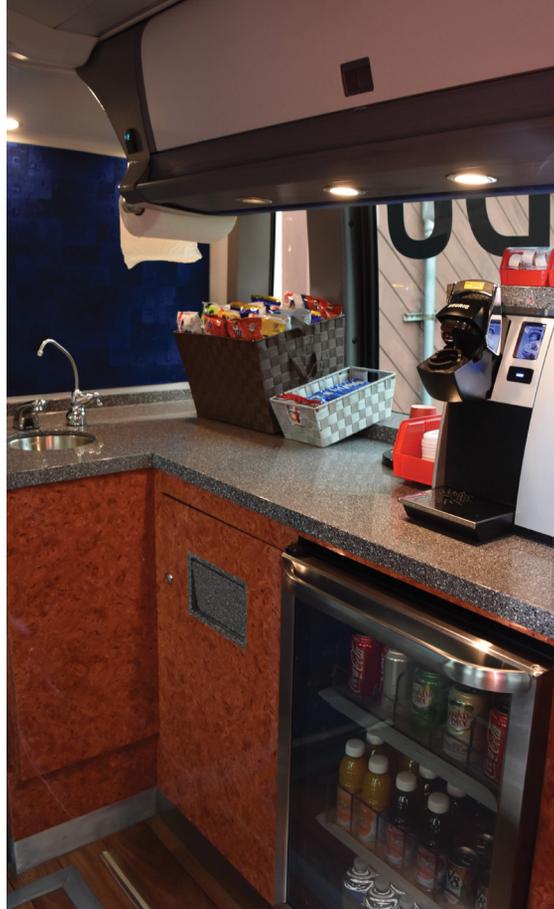
In a C2C motorcoach, 32 first-class reclining leather seats give way to a fully stocked galley in the rear of the bus, with a Keurig machine, complimentary snacks, and a refrigerator full of cold beverages.

Center. “From the inner workings of motorcoaches as an interstate transportation solution, to bus parking in New York City, to the options and amenities possible on a luxury motorcoach, the components that make a service of this caliber viable and successful are truly impressive.”

Considerations for external impacts are crucial in minimizing delays and planning efforts, including monitoring road construction in the highest traveled corridors, maneuvering city traffic, and evaluating evolving weather conditions, particularly when the route involves the Poconos Mountains. With curb space at a high premium in New York City, permits for pickup/drop-off locations must be maintained, requiring approval by neighborhood boards that can be fatigued and irritated by congestion and an ever-evolving New York City DOT bus loading permit system. Given the distance between destinations, having a driver run a roundtrip, down and back, places C2C in a position of possibly exceeding a mandated 10-hour driving time limit. As a result, a complex driving schedule is maintained to ensure the number of hours driven falls within regulations with three motorcoach operators and two motorcoaches spending layover time in a contracted hotel in Secaucus, N.J., to facilitate the three departures from New York City at 6:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 6:30 p.m. Motorcoach parking is found in a large lot of a neighboring big-box retailer.

An Eye for Comfort

There have been several changes to the service in the past 14 years. However, one thing has remained the same: Each bus provides one of the most comfortable travelling experiences you can imagine. Fostering an environment conducive to productivity for business and study requires offering as many comforts as possible on the four-hour ride. “I have ridden the C2C bus several times per year for Cornell business in the last five years and have always been impressed with the service: punctual, clean, and comfortable with handy Wi-Fi and coffee,” says Leslie Schill, Cornell’s director of planning.



A traditional motorcoach packs in 55 passengers. In a C2C motorcoach, 32 first-class reclining leather seats give way to a fully stocked galley in the rear of the bus, with a Keurig machine, complimentary snacks, and a refrigerator full of cold beverages. “I really appreciate that Cornell provides this excellent transportation option to New York City,” Schill says.

As impressive as the interior of the bus is, one of the most amazing things about the C2C bus is the exterior, with each bus having a unique identity. Each of the six MCI buses dons a specially designed wrap that turns heads wherever it goes, is the backdrop in many selfies, generates pride in being a Cornelian, and provides some of the most notable, bold, mobile marketing Cornell could imagine. Although different in design, the theme remains consistent: Each wrap includes scenes of both New York City and the Ithaca campus, and metropolitan scenes blend into rural campus settings. The designs have been so popular over the years that highly sought-out, limited edition miniature buses were also wrapped.

Partnerships

The success of any transport system program requires strong partnerships and institutional resolve. C2C continues to grow and foster strong working relationships with many stakeholders, including university administration, the Cornell board of trustees, academic units, student organizations, and local charities. A free trip is one of the most anticipated prizes in so many

raffles for a good cause. One particular relationship that has grown through the years has become incredibly important to all involved.

“I’ve been with C2C since the beginning. One of the greatest sources of pride for me is the relationship with the Cancer Resource Center of the Finger Lakes, providing free rides to cancer patients (and a companion) seeking treatment at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center located next to Weill Cornell Medicine,” says Tammy Lopez, manager of C2C customer relations. “This service removes one worry during this difficult time in a cancer patient’s life.”

There is so much to celebrate in the C2C service, but the absolute best part of the service is the clientele. The ridership is a global representation of students, staff, faculty, university partners, and casual travelers. The buses transport students arriving to Cornell for the first time, dignitaries traveling abroad, researchers seeking cures, an executive with great responsibilities, the traveler just needing a weekend away, and many more. Oftentimes, repeat customers form friendships with their favorite drivers and they have their favorite seats and know exactly which beverage and snack to grab when they board. All of the drivers, are my favorites, and I’m partial to 7A on the single row of seats, ginger ale, and cheese doodles.

Measuring Success

Even when you know something is great, it can always be better. Success of the service can be measured using several performance indicators. However, there is a strong focus in measuring performance surrounding the customer experience. C2C customer service satisfaction surveys always return with glowing reviews, high ratings, and productive feedback. Even during competitive market conditions, ridership has grown each year for several years, many times experiencing unmet demand.

Along with providing a superior product, the ridership growth can be attributed to a comprehensive marketing plan. While many forms of outreach are used in the plan, two of the more popular and effective programs are the loyalty program and an award-winning social media campaign.

The loyalty program, instituted in 2016, celebrates customers’ patronage by providing a cozy C2C-branded travel blanket after five one-way trips and thereafter offers a complimentary one-way trip for every 10 trips taken. There were two overwhelming discoveries in the months following the start of the program: C2C has a very loyal customer base, and they love their travel

blankets almost as much, if not more, than a free trip.

Being Social

The furthest reaching marketing program is a social media platform to help establish relationships with our customers, alumni, and potential customers around the world. C2C’s social media platform has provided a tremendous amount of positive exposure for our entire department. “Cornell University’s mission is learning, discovery, and engagement. Learning and continually trying to understand how to use social media as a communication channel has changed my career,” says Gary Cremeens, manager of outreach and transportation demand management (TDM).

Building meaningful social media relationships involves taking time to share content that recognizes customers and organizations rather than yourselves. “It is very rewarding seeing others be successful when engaging with their audience,” Cremeens says. Roughly 90 percent of C2C social media efforts are dedicated to building relationships and providing useful information, such as upcoming weather conditions and local events, and sharing fun facts about various topics related to Cornell or New York City. We only spend 10 percent of our time with content for self-promotion, but by creating relationships with the 90 percent effort, people and organizations tend to like, share, comment, or click a link. The posted content typically reaches more than 100,000 people, resulting in over 5,000 doing something actionable with our posts weekly—a 5.4 percent engagement rate. Given the industry standard for action after a post is 1 percent, C2C is miles ahead of the competition.

The C2C team is relentless in its pursuit for excellence and is dreaming up plans for enhancements as I type. With a new bus on the way to design and up-fit, a new reservation system in the works, and thoughts of different food offerings, the possibilities for improvements are endless. The C2C team is extremely proud to have the opportunity to facilitate these connections. If after reading this, you’re not convinced C2C is one of the most unique, celebration-worthy mobility programs offered, I invite you to visit Ithaca and check it out for yourself. #KeepingCornellOnTheMove. 



BRIDGETTE BRADY, CAPP, is senior director of transportation and mail services at Cornell University. She can be reached at bb635@cornell.edu.