

MEDIA ADVISORY FOR:

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“All Transportation is Local: A Field Guide for City Leaders”

A guide-book for mayors and others seeking to deliver better urban transportation

Many mayors do not control mass transit, but they can set the table for transit's success

New York, NY: Despite an onslaught of stories about pending technological revolution and trillion-dollar infrastructure policies, American cities whose transportation systems are performing well are doing so thanks to strong local leadership. On the other hand, a leadership vacuum or institutional disarray frequently mark transportation systems that struggle.

“Mayors whose cities are meeting transportation challenges are putting themselves in the driver’s seat, whether or not they control every facet of transportation” said Steven Higashide, senior program analyst for TransitCenter. “Cities already have a huge array of unheralded tools to shape transportation choices: more and more cities are allocating road space for buses and plazas, rethinking development standards to create more walkable places, and slicing red tape to get projects done fast.”

TransitCenter’s new handbook, “All Transportation is Local” provides a strong menu of steps -- both institutional changes and remakes for city streets -- that mayors and other leaders can use to improve urban transportation.

“When we hear ‘transportation,’ we often think of big infrastructure funded by states or the feds, but a huge amount of innovation is happening inside municipal governments,” said TransitCenter executive director David Bragdon. “With All Transportation is Local we’ve systematically packaged these stories so new mayors don’t have to reinvent the wheel.”

All Transportation is Local: A Field Guide for City Leaders, draws on examples from over thirty cities and outlines nearly two dozen policies and strategies that mayors and transportation agency leaders can use to make their cities better places to love, work, and visit. Mayors should:

- Rewrite regulations that force buildings to overcater to the automobile. Many cities have kept obsolete requirements on the books that require that developers overbuild parking and attempt to maintain free-flowing traffic. Dozens of places are doing away with such requirements, making it easier to build walkable, attractive neighborhoods. For example, in 2010 Nashville eliminated rigid standards forcing developers to build parking in downtown, allowing for more pedestrian-friendly construction.
- Get more out of their street infrastructure. As cities grow, they can move many more people by redesigning streets to prioritize transit, walking, and cycling; incentivizing transportation options, and managing curb space to make loading and parking easier. The City of Everett, MA recently made national news with a pilot project that transformed underutilized parking into a bus-only lane, using nothing more than traffic cones and signage. The project was such a hit with both drivers and bus riders that it has been made permanent.
- Hire transportation leaders who are action-oriented and strategic communicators. The most effective city transportation leaders win support for change by connecting transportation to critical city goals like safety, access to opportunity, and economic productivity. They move quickly by embracing new project delivery methods, adopting an experimental mindset, and holding their department accountable to 1-year and 2-year benchmarks. Seattle has set a goal of having over 70% of city residents within walking distance of frequent transit—and is making it happen by adding signal priority, bus lanes, and other improvements on key routes.

- Form alliances with civic leaders, transit agencies, and employers so that transit improvements happen in tandem with street improvements and that policy changes happen with community backing. Business groups and transportation advocates in Denver were instrumental in supporting a regional transit vision in the early 2000s, and remain highly engaged as the city writes its own transit plan.

“Denver is the fastest-growing city in America, and part of our success in handling the growth has been major investment in transit. But transit succeeds only when you build high-quality, walkable neighborhoods around it,” said Crissy Fanganello, Transportation and Mobility Director for Denver Public Works. “As the city government, we don’t run train and bus service—but we have to play a leadership role if we want to reap the benefits of transit. All Transportation is Local is a must-read for cities who want to understand how transportation policy can accommodate growth.”

“I worked for two strong mayors that wanted innovation at almost all cost. The most important thing they did was to have my back,” said Gabe Klein, the former transportation commissioner of Chicago and Washington, DC. “That enabled lots of controlled experimentation, where we set the expectation with the public that we were going to try new things and move quickly. All Transportation is Local not only provides a menu of policies cities should enact—it outlines the philosophy mayors need to understand if they’re going to get things done quickly.”

“All Transportation is Local” includes multiple examples of mayors who have achieved remarkable successes within a single term in office rather than deflecting through long-term planning processes. Cities like Memphis and Boston are currently using quick-build techniques to reconfigure dangerous intersections. Richmond, Seattle and Everett, MA are successfully working to get more out of their bus system. These sorts of quick wins establish public confidence and encourage constituents to see urban space as something subject to change.

“All Transportation is Local” can be found on TransitCenter’s website at

<http://transitcenter.org/publications/atil/>

About TransitCenter

TransitCenter (www.transitcenter.org) is a foundation committed to improving urban mobility through research, advocacy, and grantmaking that empowers communities, policymakers, and riders.