



TransitCenter |

TransitTools no.9

FAMILIES + TRANSIT

Having children is often associated with increases in car use. But this need not be the case. Studies of German and Canadian parents show that many maintain or increase their transit use after the birth of a child. In 2010, researchers found that parents of young children in Minneapolis were just as likely to use transit as other adults.

But there are legitimate barriers to families who hope to rely on transit. Long waits for the bus at stops with no amenities is challenging for the average rider, but worse for parents toting a toddler. Without youth fares or family passes, riding transit with children can be more expensive than driving. Anti-stroller policies give the impression that families aren't welcome on buses. And it's often difficult to simply find information about agencies' policies regarding children.

Fortunately, some agencies are starting to address these obstacles. LA Metro is considering shifting some of its bus and rail frequency from peak to off peak. Systems in Chicago, Washington DC, and Seattle are easing the burden of riding by allowing open strollers on board their buses. And Portland's TriMet has developed an ongoing program to make improvements to bus stops and the environment around them.

Car ownership is costly, and contributes to poor health outcomes - traffic crashes are the number one cause of death for children under 15. Transit is a safe and economical alternative that with some straightforward tweaks can work well for families. And here's the kicker - TransitCenter's Who's on Board rider surveys indicate that people who ride transit from an early age are more likely to keep riding decades later. Transit agencies should view accommodating families as investments that end up paying dividends.

Family-Friendly Transit



1. Expanded Service

There's nothing like travelling with a family to expose the cracks in transit service. Transit designed around 9-5 commutes simply does not accommodate the needs of parents who need to drop off kids at school and run errands during the day. And long transfer times make trip-chaining difficult.

- Run transit at 15 minute or less frequencies, where possible. At a minimum, hours of frequency should be extended to accommodate school pick up and drop off hours in the AM and PM peak.
- Decrease transfer times. Transit agencies in Houston and Austin have developed frequent intersecting bus networks, which decrease time riders need to spend transferring.
- Engage with families to identify challenges. Rather than assume what parents need, LA DOT worked with an immigrant mothers group to identify challenges to taking children to school.

2. Flexible Fares

Even the most affordable transit fares add up when there's multiple riders involved. Agencies should offer flexible fare structures that make taking transit a smart and economical choice for families, and present information about fares clearly to riders.

- Offer youth passes and bulk discounts for families travelling together. In Seattle, up to 4 children under 5 ride free with an adult on King County Metro. The agency also subsidizes passes for students during summer vacation.
- Partner with social service agencies to offer free or reduced fare passes. Detroit's DDOT donates tickets to maternal health advocacy organization Sister Friends in order to provide free rides for neo-natal visits.
- Eliminate transfer fees, which make travelling with families particularly expensive. SEPTA in Philadelphia plans to eliminate transfer fees; DC's WMATA is studying the feasibility.

3. Welcoming Infrastructure

Transit agencies should make waiting for and accessing transit as pleasant as the ride itself.

- Create space for strollers. Policies that require strollers on buses to be folded up send a hostile message to parents. Buses on Washington State's Pierce Transit have clearly-marked open stroller areas that don't take up wheelchair and senior spots.
- Give bus stops the attention they deserve. In too many cities, bus stops are nothing more than a pole in the ground. TriMet's bus stop improvement program systematically improves stops and the environment around them.
- Have a plan to make your system fully accessible. By 2040, Chicago's CTA will have elevators in 100% of its rail stations. Agencies should also institute level boarding at bus stops and rail platforms, which will ease stroller and wheelchair use.

