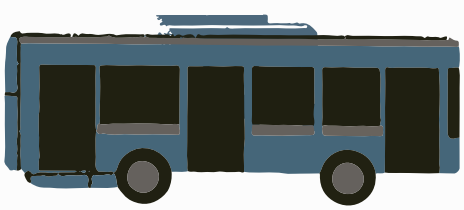
TransitCenter | TransitTools no. 2

TRANSIT RIDERSHIP RECIPE

Ingredients

More cities than ever are interested in bigger and better transit systems and in most cases want to see more people use transit. But attracting a strong user base is not simply a matter of "build transit and they will come." Buses and trains are generally more attractive to riders when they are fast, frequent, reliable and walkable. Some regions of the U.S. are spending billions on new rail lines but not getting the most out of their investments.



It can be difficult for transit lines to low density areas to meet the standard of fast, frequent and walkable. The same could be said for commuter trains running once an hour, or streetcars operating in city traffic.

In some cases, the utility of transit can be significantly enhanced by reallocating resources in advance of making huge long-term capital investments. A growing number of American cities are reorganizing obsolete bus networks, better integrating bus and rail, and learning how to move buses faster on city streets. Houston, Seattle, San Francisco and Columbus are making major efforts to ensure transit is useful.

While factors affecting ridership can be complex, this sheet provides a starting point for evaluating transit ideas that may be proposed in your city or region, as well as for assessing existing service.

See Jarrett Walker's HumanTransit.org blog for in depth discussion of factors affecting ridership as well as TransitCenter's new Ridership Initiative at http://transitcenter.org/initiatives/ridership/

Key ingredients to transit ridership

(Hint: It's not about the mode!)

1. Speed

Transit vehicles with dozens of passengers should be prioritized to move quickly on otherwise crowded city streets, and there are a variety of treatments that can help to speed them up.

Ingredients Needed:

- Reduce boarding delay through advanced fare collections methods.
- Dedicate unobstructed rights of way to transit lines and minimize twists and turns.
- Improve bus travel times through transit signal priority and street treatments like bulb-outs, queue jumps and dedicated lanes. Quick-build techniques can allow bus lanes to be implemented virtually overnight, as in Everett, MA.

2. Frequency & Reliability

Frequent transit enables "walk up and go" conditions for riders, making a system easy to use. Similarly, people must be able to depend on transit to arrive close to schedule or they they may make other travel choices.

Ingredients Needed:

- Integrate bus and rail service into a network of intersecting routes with 15-minute headways or better.
- Provide accurate transit arrival information through public APIs.
- Use this real-time information to actively manage intervals between transit vehicles.

3. Walkability & Accessibility

People who can walk to transit use it far more often than those who cannot. Building transit in dense, walkable places will likely garner higher ridership.

Ingredients Needed:

- Concentrate transit in dense places. In Los Angeles, extending the Expo Line to connect the urban centers of Santa Monica and Downtown L.A. resulted in a large increase in usage. Extending the Gold Line to suburbs east of Pasadena - where some stations are in freeway medians - saw a much smaller increase.
- Subject existing transit stations and stops to walking audits and remove barriers to walking. Paint and other cheap street engineering tools can quickly simplify complex intersections and create a safer environment for pedestrians. In the longer term, remove zoning constraints on development near transit. These strategies are opportunities for city governments to contribute to the success of transit.
- Dedicate resources towards constructing new bus shelters and improving existing ones, which can determine whether a rider feels valued and is particularly important for older citizens.

To learn more about useful transit, please visit www.transitcenter.org or follow us on Twitter @transitcenter