

Where Did Our Riders Go?

Rail~Volution 2017 -- Denver, Colorado

Brian T. Welch, AICP

Senior Manager, Planning Technical Services
Regional Transportation District



Presentation Summary

- What is happening with bus ridership trends?
- How much of this is attributable to transit agency decisions vs. external factors?
- What are potential responses?



Ouch!

Los Angeles Bus Service Declined as Rail Expanded

Given the tens of billions of dollars that L.A. will spend on transit over the next few decades, it's all the more important to invest it in ways that will be useful and attract riders. But since 2014, ridership has been dropping.

By Yonah Freemark | Aug 23, 2017 | 23



The loss of bus ridership as service has been cut and speeds have slowed swamps recent gains in rail ridership. Photo via David Guo/Flickr

Urban mobility at a tipping point

Sounding the Alarm about Uber's Impacts on Transit, and on Cities

DOWNTOWN DENVER MODE SPLIT YEARLY TRENDS



ECONOMY

America's Buses Lose Riders, Imperiling Their Future

Transit cornerstone is on the decline, stinging low-income workers whose commuting options are slim

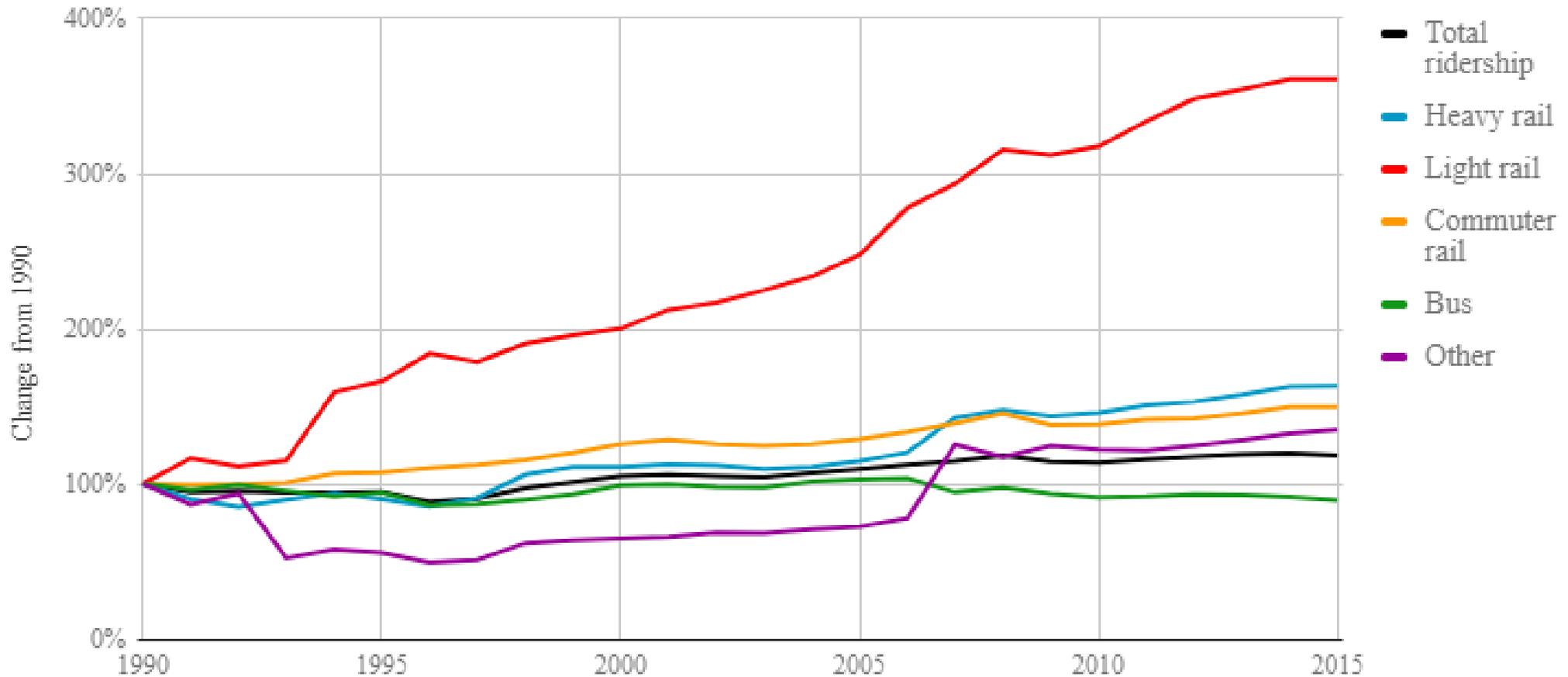
By David Harrison

Aug. 12, 2017 8:00 a.m. ET

A staple of American urban life—the city bus—is in a state of steady decline.

Bus ridership trending down nationally

Change in ridership from 1990 by mode



Created by Yonah Freemark @ The Transport Politic | Source: APTA

Per capita bus ridership down in RTD service area

HOW ARE WE DOING?

Transit ridership increased between 2010 and 2015; per capita boardings decreased.



5% increase
in annual boardings
(4.8 million more boardings)



4% decrease
in annual boardings per capita
(1.6 fewer boardings per person)

- Light rail ridership has **increased 30%**, bus ridership has been steady.
- Regional transit mode share was **consistent at 4%**.
- Ridership on the E/F/H Lines has **increased 18%**.

What do RTD riders tell us is *really important*? Have these actually changed over the past few years?

- Customer care
- On-time performance
- Reliability of connections
- Waiting time at stops
- Driver skills and courtesy
- Evening and weekend service
- Service frequency
- Safety
- Fare impacts (at varying income levels)

Do we really understand our markets?

- TransitCenter divides riders into “Occasional,” “Commuter”, and “All-Purpose.” Much more illuminating than “Choice” and “Captive.”
- “The idea that people without cars are ‘captive’ and will use transit regardless of quality is severely overstated.”

What are the Seven Demands of Transit Riders?³

1. It takes me where I want to go.
2. It takes me when I want to go.
3. It is a good use of my time.
4. It is a good use of my money.
5. It respects me in the level of safety, comfort, and amenity it provides.
6. I can trust it.
7. It gives me freedom to change my plans.

Part of the problem: declines in bus revenue service hours

- “After the 2007-2009 recession, financially strapped city bus agencies pared back service nationwide, slashing routes and frequency to save money. That drove away riders and starved bus agencies of cash needed to recover lost services.” (*Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 2017)
- “I call it the transit death spiral,” said Darrell Johnson, chief executive officer at California’s Orange County Transportation Authority. “It’s a never ending pattern, and pretty soon you’re at a bare-bones service.” (*WSJ*).



How do we stack up against the competition for short(er) trips?

40% of transit trips in the US require one or more transfers



TIME SPENT waiting and transferring influences perception 3x more than time spent inside buses or trains traveling



PRIORITIES

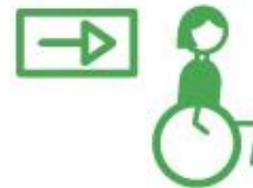
1 Safety



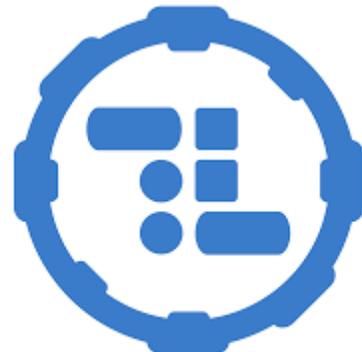
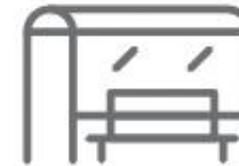
2 Reliability



3 Access



4 Amenities/Comfort



TransLōc®

Source: UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies

Are we providing what our customers really want?

Passengers want safe, frequent, reliable service—plain and simple.



Source: UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies and NACTO

Cheap(er) gas prices, driver's license availability, mobility-as-a-service, etc. give all-purpose riders more choices *and* less tolerance to poor transit customer experiences

**Walkability is Critical,
Particularly For
All-Purpose Ridership**

How transit affects job seekers—the first and last mile to the station make all the difference



Source: Streetsblog Denver

Can transit agencies reverse the downward bus ridership trend?



Here are some suggestions

- Understand your customers, and don't assume that "captive" riders have no other options. They increasingly do, and seem to be taking advantage of them.
- Recognize that competition for some traditional transit services is here to stay, and plan to adjust accordingly. Build on strengths, not weaknesses.
- Embrace the role that technology can play in enhancing transit service to riders from *all* socioeconomic backgrounds.

“The future of public transit hinges on shifting from a supply model to a demand model and embracing emerging modes to better serve, satisfy and grow ridership.” Rahul Kumar, TransLoc

Thank You!

brian.welch@rtd-denver.com



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