Transit ridership: Why it’s down and what cities are doing to bring it back

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National Transit Ridership, 2002-2017

Unlinked Trips, All Modes

Source: TransitCenter analysis of National Transit Database data
National Transit Ridership, 2002-2017

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Source: TransitCenter analysis of National Transit Database data
Ridership by Mode, 2002-2017

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Ridership by Mode, 2002-2017

Bus:

- 2002: 3.0
- 2003: 3.2
- 2004: 3.4
- 2005: 3.6
- 2006: 3.8
- 2007: 4.0
- 2008: 4.2
- 2009: 4.4
- 2010: 4.6
- 2011: 4.8
- 2012: 5.0
- 2013: 5.2
- 2014: 5.4
- 2015: 5.6
- 2016: 5.8
- 2017: 6.0

Rail:

- 2002: 2.4
- 2003: 2.6
- 2004: 2.8
- 2005: 3.0
- 2006: 3.2
- 2007: 3.4
- 2008: 3.6
- 2009: 3.8
- 2010: 4.0
- 2011: 4.2
- 2012: 4.4
- 2013: 4.6
- 2014: 4.8
- 2015: 5.0
- 2016: 5.2
- 2017: 5.4

Source: TransitCenter analysis of National Transit Database data
The following graphs show trends in various elements of mobility compared to transit ridership.

These trends are not shown to scale, and I have not run regression analyses to see if, and to what extent, they are correlated with ridership declines.
Unlinked Trips, All Modes

The economy

Economic Growth

Recession

Recovery

Source: TransitCenter analysis of National Transit Database data
Gas prices

Source: TransitCenter analysis of National Transit Database data, Energy Information Administration
Note: gas price trend lines is illustrative, not to scale
Unlinked Trips, All Modes

2013: 224,000
2016: 700,565

Self-employed taxi & limo drivers

2013: 224,000
2016: 700,565

**Teleworking**

Unlinked Trips, All Modes

Workers Usually Working from Home

2006: a little under 4%

2017: a little over 5%

Service cuts

Unlinked Trips, All Modes

Vehicle Revenue Hours per capita

Source: TransitCenter analysis of National Transit Database data; SK Solutions analysis of NTD data (illustrative, not to scale)
Service cuts, by mode

Unlinked Rail Trips

Rail Vehicle Revenue Hours per capita

Source: TransitCenter analysis of National Transit Database data, SK Solutions analysis of NTD data (illustrative, not to scale)
Service cuts, by mode

Source: TransitCenter analysis of National Transit Database data, SK Solutions analysis of NTD data (illustrative, not to scale)
Will ridership go back up?

Better service could turn these groups into future riders.

Current riders would also benefit from better service.

- Current riders
- Former riders
- Non-riders
Former riders switched to other options because they are (or are perceived to be):

- Faster
- More convenient
- More reliable
- Cheaper
Why aren’t they on transit today?

**Former riders** switched to other options because they are (or are perceived to be):
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**Non-riders** use other options because they are (or are perceived to be):
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or because transit is not readily available to them
To attract riders, transit needs to be:

1. Fast
2. Convenient
3. Reliable
4. Affordable
5. Available to more people
To-Do List

To attract riders, transit needs to be:

1. Fast
2. Convenient
3. Reliable
4. Affordable
5. Available to more people

All of these are possible - with leadership from both transit agencies and local & state officials.
Example: Seattle

City DOT and King County Metro

- **Faster, more reliable:**
  - bus lanes, queue jumps, boarding islands
- **More convenient:**
  - ORCA farecard
- **More accessible:**
  - light rail and commuter rail expansions
  - focused growth in areas served by transit

Credit: Oran Viriyincy

Credit: Adam Coppola
Photography
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Ridership up 10% (2014-2017)
Example: Houston

Houston Metro

• **Faster:**
  - redesigned entire bus network to create more frequent service in high-demand corridors

• **More accessible:**
  - expanded all-day service
  - many more people live or work close to frequent bus service

Frequent bus network, before and after

Example: Houston

Houston Metro

• **Faster:**
  o redesigned entire bus network to create more frequent service in high-demand corridors
  Houston bus ridership was down 0.1% from 2016-17

• **More accessible:**
  o expanded all-day service
  But other Texas cities lost far more.
  o many more people live or work close to frequent bus service

Frequent bus network, before and after

Example: Washington, DC

WMATA and Maryland, Virginia, District of Columbia

• More reliable:
  o focused on Metrorail maintenance

• April 2018: MD, VA, DC provide additional $500 million annually in dedicated capital funds

• Marketing campaign: Back2Good

• Rush hour promise: fare refunded if rush hour trains more than 15 minutes late

Greater Washington Partnership:
Example: Washington, DC

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Greater Washington Partnership:
Example: Maryland Purple Line

MTA, Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties

• Faster, more reliable:
  o new rail service will provide faster, more reliable trips

• More accessible:
  o 91,000 more people will live near rail transit

• P3 procurement uses private financing and shifts construction risk to private consortium, which allows state to proceed with complex project

Other examples

- **Faster:** Transit signal priority at 200 intersections in San Francisco sped up buses using those intersections by 5-10%.

- **Faster:** New York’s Select Bus Service (SBS) routes, which feature limited stops, bus-only lanes, and off-board fare collection, have seen travel time improvements up to 23% and ridership increases between 10%-31%.

- **More convenient:** Pittsburgh’s ConnectCard is linked with the HealthyRide bikeshare system to offer consumers unlimited 15-minute bike rides.

- **More affordable:** Richmond is providing free transit passes for all public high school students in the city.

- **More accessible:** Los Angeles Metro is providing low-interest loans to developers to build affordable housing within ½ mile of transit.

Sources:
- https://www.metro.net/projects/joint_dev_pgm/affordable-housing/
Thank you!

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