

REALTORS® & Smart Growth

on common ground

WINTER 2013

transportation

Funding Roads
and Transit

Buses, Streetcars
and Bikes

Rethinking Parking



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION of
REALTORS®

The Future of Transportation

How we move around is undergoing a big shift. Travel by car has reached a saturation point, as evidenced by the leveling off of miles driven, and alternatives such as public transit and bicycles are attracting larger shares of the traveling public. One aspect of the gain in transit ridership is the greater patronage that buses are enjoying from “choice riders” — those who could drive their own cars if they wished. And transit, whether bus, rail or streetcar, is proving itself to be a catalyst for successful real estate development, as demand for living and working near transit is increasing.

There also is a new recognition that how we design our streets, which are our major transportation facilities, plays a huge role in determining the character of neighborhoods. Oversized streets in business districts can negatively affect commerce by increasing traffic speed and making the sidewalks less welcoming for pedestrians; our article on “Road Diets” shows a promising approach in right-sizing these facilities. And as shown in the article “Building a Better Community,” citizens are taking the lead in reimagining what a livelier street could look like, with the result often being new economic life for underused commercial properties.

Unfortunately, the transportation funding law that Congress passed this summer looks to the past rather than to these new futures. There was no stomach for increasing the motor



fuels tax, although the revenue from the current tax is not sufficient to meet the nation’s transportation needs. There were attempts to cut off transit funding. Dedicated funding for pedestrian and bicycle facilities was eliminated. Proposals for adopting a “Complete Streets” policy that would require the consideration of all corridor users (such as pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users) were defeated. As made clear in this issue of *On Common Ground*, it is at the local level that the picture of our transportation future is being drawn, as communities decide for themselves how to meet tomorrow’s growth and transportation challenges.

Editor

Joseph R. Molinaro
Managing Director, Community
and Political Affairs
jmolinaro@realtors.org

Assistant Editor

Hugh Morris
Smart Growth Outreach Representative
hmmorris@realtors.org

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®
500 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001

For more information on NAR and smart growth, visit www.realtor.org/smartgrowth.

On Common Ground is published twice a year by the Community and Political Affairs division of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® (NAR), and is distributed free of charge. The publication presents a wide range of views on smart growth issues, with the goal of encouraging a dialogue among REALTORS®, elected officials and other interested citizens. The opinions expressed in *On Common Ground* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policy of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, its members or affiliate organizations.

Distribution

For more copies of this issue or to be placed on our mailing list for future issues of *On Common Ground*, please contact Ted Wright, NAR, at (202) 383-1206 or twright@realtors.org.

On Common Ground is also available online at www.realtor.org/smartgrowth

©2013 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

On Common Ground

Winter 2013

Moving Ahead for Progress? 4
by David Goldberg

Public Transportation Is Picking Up 10
by Brad Broberg

Bike Sharing Is on the Move in America 14
by Martin Zimmerman

Find the Perfect Spot 18
... Rethinking Required Parking
by Brian Clark

From Freeways to Boulevards 22
As urban freeways age, cities move to take them down, before they fall down
by David Goldberg

Bus Rapid Transit 28
What's New?
by G.M. Filisko

Streetcars Still on Track 32
by G.M. Filisko

Creative Funding 36
With federal funding lacking, how will local and state municipalities pay for roads and transit?
by Tracey Velt

High Speed Rail 42
High Costs Derail Development
by Christine Jordan Sexton

TODs Are Top Choice in the Market 46
by John Van Gieson

New Routes for Rural Roots 52
Creative transportation options connect rural America
by Brad Broberg

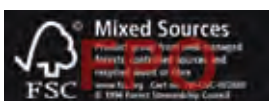
Building a Better Community 58
... One Block at a Time
by Brian E. Clark

Road Diets 64
by Christine Jordan Sexton

REALTORS® Take Action 66
Making Smart Growth Happen



On Common Ground thanks the following contributors and organizations for photographs, illustrations and artist renderings reprinted in this issue: Annette Ballou, BioEnterprise; Lynnda Bassham, Lower Savannah Council of Governments; Jeffrey Boothe, Holland & Knight; Gerald Carpenter, Utah Transit Authority; Dawn Mullally Chase, Roaring Fork Transportation Authority; Kimberly Cella, Citizens for Modern Transit; Danielle Decker, Seattle's Convention & Visitors Bureau; Mack Deibel, Greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce; Tim Frank, Port Authority of Allegheny County; Carlos Gallinar, City of El Paso; Connie Garber, York County Community Action Corporation; Caitlin Ghoshal, Congress for the New Urbanism; Rick Gustafson, Shiels Obletz Johnsen, Inc.; Kathy Karalekas, Hillsborough Area Regional Transit; Don Klein, Greater Nashville Association of REALTORS®; Bob Lasher, Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority; John Lisle, DDOT; Karen Massie, California High-Speed Rail Authority; Ken Miller, New Jersey Transit; Nicholas Monoyios, The Rapid; Gina M. Morris, Downtown Cleveland Alliance; Jessica Niemeyer, Citizens for Modern Transit; Stuart Proffitt, Proffitt Dixon Partners; Kaulani Robinson, Seattle's Convention and Visitors Bureau; Mary McCahon Shaffer, Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority; Amber Stidham, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada; Rebecca M. Sullivan, Reconnecting America; and Tina M. Votaw, Charlotte Area Transit System.



Moving Ahead for Progress?

Despite its name, new federal transportation law largely echoes the past.

By David Goldberg

Last summer, just before adjourning for campaign season, Congress finally adopted a new law setting funding levels and policy priorities for federal investment in highways, bridges and public transportation. It was nearly three years overdue; the last law, known as SAFETEA-LU, expired in September 2009. The new one, dubbed Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century — MAP-21 for short — lasts only two years, versus the usual six or so.

And for the first time, the bill was passed amid a swirl of partisan rancor and controversy. Since the Interstate Highway Act created the modern transportation program in 1956, the so-called “highway bill” has been one of the few measures that members of Congress term a no-brainer: Because it delivered billions of dollars to every state and Congressional district, it very rarely engendered much in the way of partisan wrangling.

The bill was passed amid a swirl of partisan rancor and controversy.



Courtesy of Reconnecting America



More efficient cars mean less revenue for the trust fund.

But this time was different, for a variety of reasons. At the root of it, perhaps not surprisingly, was money. Since the 1950s the transportation bill has been a matter of divvying up an ever-growing pie, a trust fund fed by the federal gas tax. But in the last few years that pie has stopped growing. Part of it is the long economic downturn: Fewer people working means fewer people commuting, lower paychecks lead people to cut corners, and higher gas prices have added even more incentive to conserve. In addition, said Darren Smith, NAR's policy point person on transportation, "The 18-cent federal gas tax has not changed in two decades, is not adjusted for inflation and is a per-gallon tax. So more efficient cars mean less fuel consumed, and less revenue for the trust fund."

In fact, the trust fund took in about \$30 billion less than expected over the five-year life of SAFETEA-LU, a shortfall that had to be made up from the general fund — the same pot of money that funds the rest of the federal government, runs a deficit and is the subject of intense partisan debate. When the last law expired in 2009, Congress had only recently passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in response to the 2008 financial meltdown. They were not eager to take up a multi-year transportation bill that needed billions more in revenue; neither raiding the general fund nor raising the gas tax seemed to be palatable options. Rather, they began a series of short-term extensions.

Then in 2010 a wave of freshmen arrived, eager to cut spending. One proposal was for a budget that would hack transportation by one-third, in line with what the current gas tax is expected to earn. But that idea proved deeply unpopular with state and local officials of both parties, who argued that the country needs to spend more, not less, to fix crumbling infrastructure and keep up with population growth. With neither party willing to propose a gas tax hike during the downturn, the Senate pressed successfully for a two-year bill, funded at the current \$53 billion a year plus inflation, which needed a relatively modest general-fund infusion of \$12 billion.





The result was a mixed blessing, Smith said. “We wanted a new authorization because the uncertainty around short-term extensions was not helpful to the communities trying to build projects and plan their growth. We wanted a bill that was mode neutral, that didn’t tilt the playing field toward highways or transit. We wanted to make sure communities could get what they need to do smart growth.”

So how did it come out? “A three-year extension of SAFETEA-LU would have been preferable to what we ended up getting, although it’s better than continued three-month extensions.”

NAR was part of a large, national coalition called Transportation for America (T4America), an unprecedented alliance of transportation user groups, including everyone from real estate developers and metro chambers of commerce to the American Public Health Association and a range of transportation and other organizations. T4America argued that, 20 years after completion of the Interstates, the federal program should shift from a primary emphasis on building large highways to maintaining existing roads and bridges, while filling out the network

The country needs to spend more, not less, to fix crumbling infrastructure.

The federal program should shift from emphasis on building large highways to maintaining existing roads and bridges.

with better rail and bus systems and more options for safe travel by foot or bicycle. The coalition also pushed for greater accountability in how money is spent, by requiring aid recipients to measure their performance in indicators such as getting more people to work on time, broader access to jobs, household transportation costs and energy savings.

Here are some key provisions of the bill:

Highways and Bridges

The authors of MAP-21 set out to reduce the overall number of programs and give states greater flexibility to move money among accounts. They reduced the total number of programs from 90 to about 30. Congress also ended the practice of member-specific earmarks and took away much of the discretionary funding that the U.S. DOT could use to award competitive grants aimed at spurring innovation. As a result nearly all the money is apportioned to states by formula.

Transit funding will remain at previous levels.

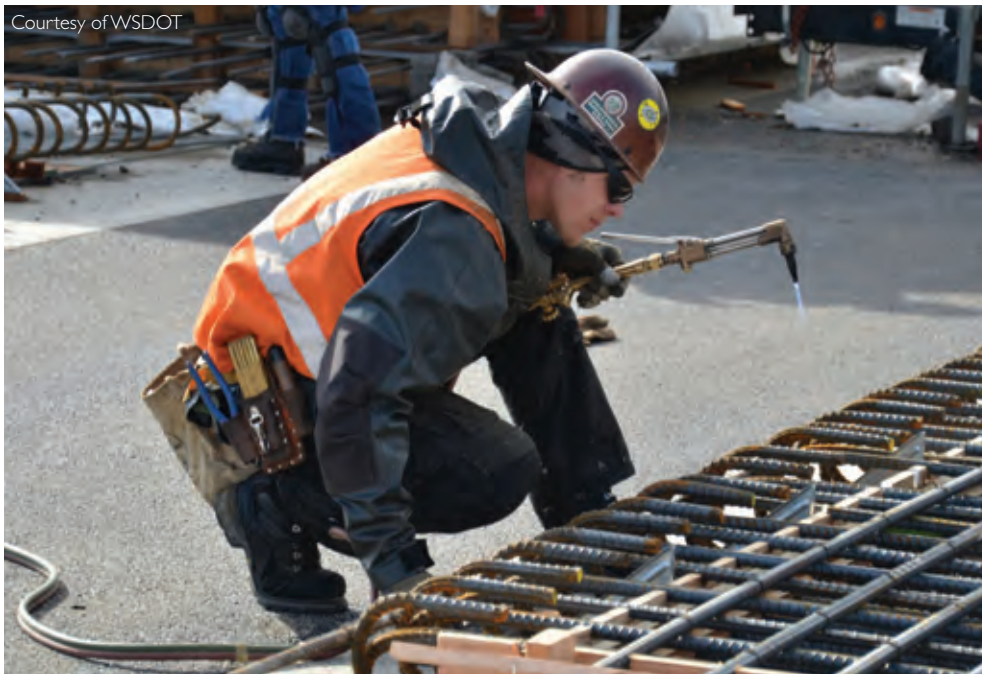
As has been the case for 30 years, 80 percent of the federal bill — about \$38 billion a year — will go to accounts devoted to highways and about 20 percent to transit. For highways, the law puts heavy emphasis on the National Highway System, which is the Interstates plus key state highways and other routes, representing about 5 percent of the total road miles in the United States. As a result, it reduces the funding available for other roads and bridges, at a time when state and local budgets are deeply stressed. In the name of flexibility, the law also eliminates dedicated pots of money for bridge repair and other maintenance. Under SAFETEA-LU about a third of highway dollars were devoted to maintaining roads and bridges. Advocates for better-maintained roads, noting that nearly 70,000 bridges are rated structurally deficient, have expressed alarm that spending money on repair is now discretionary. The bill's authors say that states will have some incentive to make responsible choices under a new system of

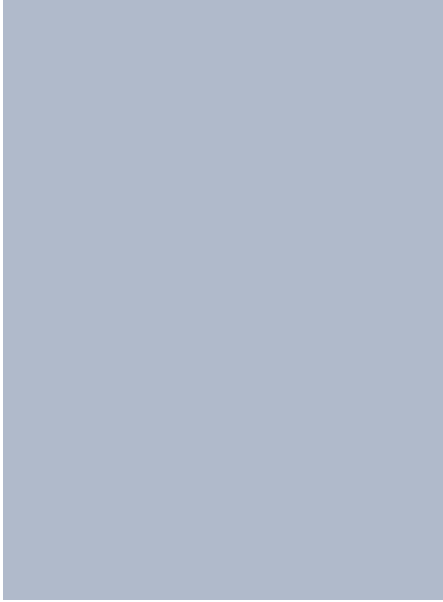
performance measures, mostly to do with maintenance and operations of highways and transit. In the near term, however, that system does not have the enforcement teeth advocates would like, because in most cases the states don't stand to lose money as a result of failure to improve performance.

Transit

In the biggest battle of the authorization debate, some House Republicans pushed to end the dedicated federal support for public transportation that began under President Reagan in 1982. That move provoked an enormous outcry from communities across the country. Transit ridership is at an all-time high in the face of rising gas prices and a growing urban population, and many communities are trying to preserve and grow transit options. The push to end federal support ultimately died when Republican members of Congress who represent parts of metro areas reliant on transit refused to vote for the measure.

In the end, transit funding will remain at previous levels. The New Starts program, which funds construction of new rail and rapid bus lines, will continue at \$1.9 billion a year.





A “complete streets” policy was stripped out in negotiations.

Local agencies still get funding for capital and operations according to the same formula. One provision that was cut during last-minute negotiations would have allowed large systems to use some of their capital funding to prevent service cuts in the event of severe economic hardship.

On the positive side for transit, MAP-21 sets new standards for the state of repair of transit systems and creates a pot of money to help with that. It also includes a small pilot program of grant assistance to help communities plan for development around their rail stations. Such “transit-oriented” developments help to increase ridership on the system while meeting the rising demand for more walkable neighborhoods.

“It shouldn’t be any easier for a highway project to get funded than a transit project,” Smith said. “The new authorization doesn’t change the equation very much — the status quo being that highway projects are easier because matching and other requirements aren’t as tough. And highway projects don’t compete against each other the way that transit projects compete for New Starts money.” MAP-21 does expand a federally subsidized loan program known as TIFIA, so that transit projects are eligible for what is now a larger financing pot.

“Active” Transportation

In a close second after transit for most bitterly contested provision, MAP-21 eliminates three popular programs used primarily to provide safer conditions for walking and biking: Transportation Enhancements, Safe Routes to School and Recreational Trails. It creates a new set-aside called Transportation Alternatives that funds some of the same projects, but lowers available funding by a third, from about \$1.2 billion to \$808 million. For the first time, half of that money is directly allocated to metro areas to program as they see fit, without the state being able to withhold or reprogram the money.

However, the other half is left to the state's sole discretion, meaning that some states can "opt out" of funding safe walking and biking.

"The Transportation Alternatives program, on net, is a loss," Smith said, "because while it does sub-allocate to metro regions, it reduces the overall amount," and expands the types of projects eligible for funding so that "there are more things competing for less money."

Smith also was disappointed that a "complete streets" policy included in the bipartisan Senate version of the bill was stripped out in negotiations with the House. That policy would have directed states to make sure the needs and safety of all users of a road — motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, transit riders — were provided for, in ways appropriate to the setting of the street in question. "A complete streets policy combined with greater flexibility for states, and greater accountability — that could have made it OK."

Money, Again

Regardless of the policies in MAP-21 today, the bill officially expires in September 2014 — less time than it took to reauthorize the program this time around. That affords the possibility that disappointing aspects can be fixed. More importantly, though, it sets a time clock for Congress to begin a much more serious discussion of the infrastructure needs of a rapidly changing America, and how to fund them, Smith said.

"The law doesn't do anything to bolster the highway trust going forward," Smith said. "It doesn't do anything to resolve the long-term challenge of matching revenues to actual infrastructure needs, thanks to declining purchasing power.

The existing funding level wasn't adequate to begin with, so maintaining it at that level is not much of a victory.

"We will be working to make the next authorization better and make sure it doesn't stand in the way of local communities being able to provide the types of neighborhoods that people tell REALTORS® that they want." ●

David A. Goldberg is the communications director for Transportation for America, a nationwide coalition based in Washington, D.C., that advocates for transportation policy reform. In 2002, Mr. Goldberg was awarded a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University, where he studied urban policy.

We will be working to make the next authorization better.





Public Transportation Is Picking Up

By Brad Broberg

Public transportation used to be the choice of people without a choice — a safety net for those without cars. Everybody else — with a few exceptions — drove. But those days are fading in the rear view mirror like a mini-van in the slow lane.

After stalling during the recession, transit ridership is on a roll again as more and more people opt to park their cars and board buses, light rail and commuter trains. The nation's transit ridership rose for the sixth straight quarter between April and June of this year, according to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).

The 1.6 percent increase over the same quarter last year came even as gas prices retreated — an encouraging sign for transit advocates that travel habits are changing for good. Another telling statistic: total annual ridership in 2011 was 10.4 billion — the second highest since 1957, topped only by 2008 when gas prices first kissed \$4 a gallon.

The surge in transit ridership comes despite budget cuts that forced most public transportation providers to cut service and/or raise fares in 2011, according to an APTA survey. Another APTA report suggests why service cuts

and fare hikes haven't fazed riders: people who take public transportation to work instead of driving can save an average of \$826 a month compared to the cost of owning a car, buying gas and paying for downtown parking based on September 2012 prices.

"The needle is swinging our way," says Art Guzzetti, vice president of policy and research with APTA. "It's not all about the car anymore."

No, it's not. The total number of vehicle miles traveled in the United States every year has steadily fallen from a peak of slightly more than 3 trillion miles in 2007 to a projected 2.95 trillion miles in 2012, according to the Federal Highway Administration. Although the projected 2012 figure is nearly identical to the 2011 number, even a flat figure is significant considering that vehicle miles traveled rose by a healthy amount each and every year between 1987 and 2007.

When Guzzetti connects the dots, he sees driving decline and transit growth as proof that continuing to expand the nation's public transportation systems makes all kinds of sense. "People are smart and they're going to make smart choices when they're available to them," he says. "We've given people better choices by investing in transit."

The total number of vehicle miles traveled in the United States every year has steadily fallen.

Giving people better transportation choices goes hand-in-hand with smart growth.

Giving people better transportation choices goes hand-in-hand with smart growth. “It’s hard to say one is the chicken and one is the egg,” says Geoffrey Anderson, president and CEO of Smart Growth America. “I think they’re stimulating and reinforcing each other.”

Anderson hesitates to say current ridership and driving trends represent a tipping point for transit and smart growth, which emphasizes walkable development and reduced dependence on the automobile. “Despite everything that’s happened over the last several years, we still have fairly poor transportation choices in a lot of areas,” he says. Under those conditions, smart growth is off the table. “There are places that offer walkable living without transit, but it’s much more difficult,” Anderson says.

The good news is that rising ridership signals a thirst for public transportation in those places that have invested in transit, providing a model for others to follow and a catalyst for smart growth.

While ridership on all major modes of public transportation climbed in the second quarter, light rail led the way with a 4.3 percent increase. Six light rail systems experienced double-digit percentage increases: Memphis (36.7), Salt Lake City (28.8), Pittsburgh (21.2), Los Angeles (13.8), Sacramento (13.4) and Seattle (10.3).

“The investments in transit that have occurred in (these places) have really shown that when there are good options out there, people will use them,” Anderson says. “It’s certainly telling that a lot of these systems have been

built because people were willing to tax themselves. It’s another expression of market demand.”

Fares pay less than half of the cost of most public transportation systems, so transit agencies rely heavily on local taxes and state and federal funds to operate and expand. Sustaining today’s ridership growth will require continued taxpayer subsidies. That’s no different than any other important public service, Guzzetti says. “Some (transit systems) are coming close to covering operating costs at the firebox, but you can’t put that test on every one,” he says. “We have police, fire, courthouses. We should have mobility systems.”

Salt Lake City is a surprising poster child for the appeal of public transportation. “Utah is a very conservative



Courtesy of DART



Photo courtesy of Ride UTA



Photo courtesy of Ride UTA



Photo courtesy of Ride UTA

state. We like our cars. We like our highways. We like our quarter-acre lots in the suburbs,” says Gerald Carpenter, spokesman for the Utah Transit Authority (UTA). “A lot of people said it wouldn’t work here.”

That was before the UTA — originally a bus-only agency — added light rail service in 1999. “It did very well. The trains were full. People loved it,” Carpenter says. “The conversation quickly changed to when do I get service?”

The first line was built without voter approval after the UTA secured a federal grant covering 80 percent of the cost. The public was initially angry the line was built because voters previously rejected a light rail ballot measure. However, when UTA sought a sales tax increase in 2006 to accelerate expansion plans, voters said yes.

UTA opened two new light rail lines in 2011 and will open two more in 2013. They add a combined 25 miles of track to the existing 20-mile system. UTA also added 44 miles of track to an existing 45-mile commuter rail line that opened in 2008. The extension, which will begin service in December, links Salt Lake City with Provo.

In a separate project, UTA is working with Salt Lake City and the city of South Salt Lake to build a two-mile streetcar line that will connect the thriving Sugar House Business District to the light rail system.

Ridership across the UTA system was up 7 percent during the first half of 2012 versus the first half of 2011. That projects to 42.7 million trips in 2012 — a new record that breaks a record set the year before.

Three out of every four UTA passengers are choice riders who have cars but prefer transit, Carpenter says. “People have felt the pinch at the gas pump ... and they enjoy the convenience of not driving,” he says. “The

west side of Salt Lake City has heavy congestion during commute hours.”

Congestion is a growing problem nationwide. By 2015, the average commuter will waste 37 hours a year stuck in traffic. That’s up three hours from 2010, according to the 2011 Urban Mobility Report published by Texas A&M University. The cost of gridlock will rise from \$101 billion to \$133 billion and the amount of wasted fuel will jump from 1.9 billion gallons to 2.5 billion gallons.

The UTA’s aggressive expansion supports the Salt Lake City region’s vision of concentrating growth around activity centers served by public transportation. Transit-oriented development is blossoming. The developer of Daybreak, a large master-planned community southwest of Salt Lake City, contributed \$13 million to hasten extension of the light rail system to that development.

The Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) in St. Petersburg, Fla., added no new service, yet ridership on the bus-only system grew by 7 percent to a record-breaking 14.1 million trips during the most recent fiscal year ending Sept. 30. “Some of our top routes are standing-room-only all day long,” says Bob Lasher, PSTA spokesman.

A record-setting tourist season and higher gas prices during much of the year helped drive the increase,

Transit-oriented development
is blossoming.

Some of our top routes are standing-room-only all day long.

Lasher says. However, even after gas prices dipped, many people who previously resisted, discovered they liked riding the bus and never stopped, he says.

The PSTA's main funding source is property taxes, but that revenue stream has shriveled with the housing market and left the agency unable to boost service. One possible answer is to switch to a sales tax, Lasher says. The agency is currently seeking public input on a plan to improve transit services — including possibly building a light rail line.

“We’re definitely seeing the demand for more service, but it’s a matter of finding a way to meet it in these tough economic times,” he says.

Over the last 12 years, voters in Grand Rapids, Mich., have approved five property tax increases to expand a transit service known as The Rapid. Ridership on the bus-only system has grown 162 percent since the agency assumed responsibility for the system in 2000, says Jennifer Kalczuk, agency spokesperson.

At the time, there was no service after 6 p.m., no Sunday service at all and either 30 or 60 minutes between buses. “There weren’t really any choice riders to speak of,” Kalczuk says. “It wasn’t a viable option for anybody who had an option.”

During fiscal year 2011, the system set a record with 10.8 million passenger trips and topped it in 2012 when ridership approached 12 million. Some, but not all, of the increase resulted from a contract with Grand Valley State University that allows students, faculty and staff to ride free.

The Rapid owes its success — both in attracting riders and winning elections — to learning what services people want and then delivering them. “We have been very deliberate about what we tell voters so they know exactly what they’ll be getting in exchange for their money,” Kalczuk says.

The latest addition is a nine-mile bus rapid transit (BRT) line along the busiest commuter corridor in the region. It targets the so-called Medical Mile in downtown Grand Rapids where a cluster of hospitals and research facilities are located. Like light rail on wheels, the BRT will run often — every 10 minutes at peak hours — and at times travel in a lane of its own. ●

Brad Broberg is a Seattle-based freelance writer specializing in business and development issues. His work appears regularly in the Puget Sound Business Journal and the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.



Courtesy of District Department of Transportation

BIKE SHARING

Is on the Move in America



By Martin Zimmerman

Sometimes even the most common sense solutions to community transportation needs take decades to gain traction. Bike sharing is no exception. After almost 50 years of trial and error, this form of two-wheeled public transit has finally grown from its western European roots to blossom as a global enterprise. According to a 2011 study by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, 236,000 bike share vehicles were traversing the thoroughfares and lanes of at least 300 cities worldwide. Europe still claims almost 90 percent of city fleets, but its share of total bikes in use has dropped below the 50 percent level. Paris' Vélib' system continues to garner the greatest acclaim. With 20,000 bikes and 1,800 docking stations and daily rentals as high as 120,000 trips, Vélib' racked up an astounding 100 million trips

in its first four years. Its industrial design, engineering and software are patented under the name Cyclocity, and it is available in 67 other cities in France and other countries. In sheer size, however, Hangzhou, China, takes first place honors with a fleet of 50,000 bikes and 2,050 docking stations.

Bike sharing actually began in the mid 60s when Witte Fietsen ("White Bikes"), a modest-size, free offering program of bikes on an honor basis, was launched in one of the world's most bike-friendly cities — Amsterdam. But this effort was quickly abandoned due to high levels of theft. Several later attempts in succeeding years, including a few in the U.S., also failed for much of the same reasons.

A major breakthrough finally occurred in 2005 with the Vélo'v program in Lyon, France. At last bicycles

Smart bikes offer user-friendly docking stations.

were made available with vandal-proof assembly components and tamper-resistant docking mechanisms. This advancement has since fused with other “smart bike” advances in wireless IT technologies according to Paul Demaio, a leading bike share expert based in the United States and whose blog (<http://bike-sharing.blogspot.com/>) is considered the most authoritative guide on the bike share movement here and abroad. Smart bikes offer another crucial user-friendly breakthrough: instead of relying on an attendant behind a service desk to rent a bike, customers can go directly to any bike docking station and insert their subscription card in the automated kiosk slot — just like using an ATM.

The United States is a relative latecomer and smart bike attributes are highly credited for contributing to the national surge in bike sharing programs. According to a September 2012 report by the Toole Design Group in conjunction with the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center and the U.S. DOT Federal Highway Administration, nearly 20 U.S. communities now operate smart bike facilities and an additional 20 or more are in the formal planning stages. Fleets range in size from Capital Bikeshare in Washington, D.C., and the Arlington and Alexandria, Va., areas (1,670 bikes and 175 stations), to Spartanburg, S.C., (14 bikes and 2 stations).

Launch days in cities have blossomed into civic celebrations. Social marketing, special discounts and community rides are some of the many promotional tools being deployed by bike share management and civic boosters to launch and grow the systems. Deftly using such tools, Capital Bikeshare has surpassed all expectations by hitting the 1 million ride mark in its first year.

It appears that the skeptics had it wrong. Granted the car has been king of the road since the inception of the Interstate Highway system, but it is beginning to look like bike sharing may be here to stay. Charlotte, N.C., launched a smaller system in advance of the September 2012 Democratic National Convention, proudly staking its claim as a convention “legacy” project. With a startup fleet of 200 bikes at 20 stations in or near the downtown core and at Blue Line light rail stops, “Charlotte B-Cycle” has secured major corporate sponsorship funding for the first four years from

Nearly 20 U.S. communities now operate smart bike facilities.



Courtesy of Planetgordon.com



Photo by afagen



Photo by Mary Newsom/UNC Charlotte Urban Institute

“Charlotte B-Cycle” has secured major corporate sponsorship.

Bike sharing is fun, fashionable, convenient and cheap.

Blue Cross/Blue Shield as part of GO NC! (Get Outside North Carolina), a public-health campaign.

B-cycle is a joint venture between Trek Bicycle Corporation, Humana Inc. and Crispin Porter + Bogusky and has installations in nine other U.S. cities. Bikes are designed to be as attractive looking and user-friendly as possible with heavy-duty tires, 3-speed gears, kick stands, fenders front and rear, cushy seat pads, automatic front lights, and sturdy built-in metal baskets for briefcases, purses or groceries. Seats can adjust easily up or down. Granted that 3-speeds do not adapt well to hills, but San Francisco is considering an electric bike option in its plans to implement a vast, region-wide system.

Why would someone choose this mode of transport? As a healthy form of individualized transportation, it is virtually carbon free. It is fun, fashionable, convenient and cheap. The typical base rate daily pass costs \$8, and annual rates rarely exceed \$75. Membership cards entitle customers to as many free trips as they like in a given day as long

as no trip exceeds 30 minutes. Longer trips are assessed in addition to the base rate.

Bike sharing is especially favored by commuters. Surveys in Washington, D.C., show that most riders live no more than a 15-minute drive by auto to the workplace parking stall in downtown. But “casual” rides are also in demand for lunch breaks, evenings on the town and weekend riding along parkways and greenways by residents and tourists alike. Yes, bike sharing can be “cool.”

Convenience is a top priority. Docking stations must be close together and highly visible. In Europe, the rule of thumb is 300-400 meters apart, but in the United States, where densities are much lower and the mix of land use is far less diverse, separations of as much as 1/2 mile are considered by some planners as tolerable. Ideal docking locations should be on public sidewalks at major destinations, such as shopping or employment nodes, or adjacent to transit stops.

What factors contribute to successful launching of a bike share program? Here are some key considerations:

Define the market – Not all communities have sufficient numbers of seasoned cyclists or wanna-be cyclists, even in the center city, to justify the investment. Who is expected



As a healthy form of individualized transportation, it is virtually carbon free.

A decent system of safe, infrastructure components should be in place prior to considering a bike share program.



to use the system? Will this be a year-round operation? Will customers need inducements such as bargain day discounts to join?

Identify and promote the brand – Bike share does not necessarily sell itself. Be prepared to spend ample funds to promote the enterprise. What brand name will best convey the image? Create a social media package that works. Be mindful that despite an upward trend, daily urban bike trips nationwide are still below 1 percent of all trips.

Choose the appropriate business model – Although all programs function essentially as a public transportation system, funds never derive entirely from the public sector, and a few, such as Deco Bikes in Miami Beach, are totally private efforts. User fees, foundation grants and advertising rights are common funding sources. Boston and Washington initially relied on the government grants, but both are attempting to shift to other parties.

Secure a supplier and hire a management/operations team – Besides B-cycle the other major fleet and software supplier for the U.S. market is Bixi, headquartered in Montreal. The staff that operates, repairs and promotes a local system is typically a combination of public agency staff, direct hires or consultants, but not the supplier.

In the long term, just what constitutes “success” is still open for debate because bike sharing in the United States

is still a relatively new development. Does a bike share system need to make a profit? Can it contribute to reducing the local collective carbon footprint? Are there ways to better measure its health benefits? Is it adding or taking away trips from other forms of public transportation? If it is IT based, then how should it serve the underprivileged customer who may not have a credit card or I-phone? Is it realistic to expect bike sharing to have an impact in reversing the prevailing culture of auto-dependency?

A word of caution: A decent system of safe, on-ground connectivity via bike lanes, signage and other infrastructure components should be in place prior to considering a bike share program. Hopefully, the right solutions will evolve as bike sharing continues to expand to communities large and small and the tracking of real-time data becomes increasingly responsive to locally based visions for sustainable, multi-use transportation solutions. ●

Martin Zimmerman is an urban planning journalist residing in Charlotte, N.C., and a former executive director of the Charlotte Area Bicycle Alliance. He does not own a car.

Find the Perfect Spot

... Rethinking Required Parking



By Brian E. Clark

Americans have had a long love/hate relationship with their automobiles. They give us the freedom to roam at will, something our independent spirits crave. But they've also led to regular traffic jams, urban sprawl, monstrous parking lots around shopping centers and ugly suburban architecture. The list goes on and on ...

They've even helped put the kibosh on the revitalization of older downtown neighborhoods — thanks to zoning ordinances that require what critics say are a too-high number of off-street parking spaces for restaurants, stores, apartments and condos.

But a growing number of municipalities — and even small towns — are rethinking those parking restrictions, according to University of California at Los Angeles urban

planning professor Donald Shoup. He says they are following on the tracks of cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, Seattle and San Francisco, which have low or even no minimum off-street parking requirements.

“In fact, they've had maximums,” said Shoup, author of “The High Cost of Free Parking.” His research focuses on the links between transportation and land use, and his book has led a growing number of cities to charge fair market prices for curb parking, dedicate the resulting revenue to finance public services in the metered districts, and reduce or remove off-street parking regulations.

And the movement is picking up steam. In the past four years, he said, 100 cities and towns around the country have trimmed or even removed their minimum off-street parking requirements. Shoup, who served on the design review board in Los Angeles for eight years, said the push

Developers know that required parking can prevent infill redevelopment.

is coming from everyone from developers to environmentalists to city planners to free-market economists.

Developers know that required parking can prevent infill redevelopment on small lots and add thousands of dollars to the final cost of a condominium or apartment, depending on the where it's built, he said. Moreover, surveys show that building owners consider minimum parking rules the second most onerous regulation they face. (The top one was having to pay property taxes, he noted.)

"And it's not just rehabbing older buildings," he said. "Parking requirements will limit what can be built more than what the rest of the zoning does. Usually builders can't provide all the units required by the zoning because they stumble over the parking requirement barrier.

"It's quite common for developers to say that parking requirements limit density more than any other part of zoning. And, having parking lots in downtowns creates ugly 'dead spots' along streets."

Shoup said what occurred in Los Angeles — a city truly in love with its cars — back in 1999 was "almost a miracle."

"It happened in downtown LA, which most people don't think of as the greatest place to live," he said. "But this city has the nation's largest collection of intact office buildings from the first part of the 20th century, and all were vacant above the ground floor because urban renewal had shifted business uses to a new high rise area."

Unfortunately, developers could not use these structures for residential use because of the minimum off-street parking requirement. But nearly 14 years ago, the city adopted the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance (ARO) which said the owners could convert these empty office buildings into apartments with no new parking.

"The opponents cried 'this will never work, bankers will never lend for redevelopment and people will never buy them without ample parking.

"Well, they were proved wrong. There were 57 buildings that were beautifully restored and turned into 7,300 housing units between 1999 and 2008 — with much less parking than the zoning otherwise required. It was a great success story."

Shoup also lauds towns and cities around the country that have changed their zoning rules to allow for the development on the perimeters of large parking lots that often surround malls.

"Ministers are told 'don't build your parking lots for Easter Sunday,'" he said. "But we build shopping centers for the week before Christmas, which I think is a huge mistake.

"Fortunately, some cities are allowing mall owners to build housing around the perimeter of the lots, which can make them money and greatly improve the look of the malls. It activates the street life and really doesn't reduce the parking for 99 percent of the year.

"If you allow development around the periphery, it creates the impression that you are in a city neighborhood and helps create a feeling of community. Besides, those aren't the spaces where people want to park anyway."

Shoup said he is convinced more people are coming to view mall parking lots as expensive, unattractive,



producing huge amounts of runoff, and not producing taxes for the cities where they are located.

“There is a lot to be said against empty asphalt, and I think that minimum parking requirements are a lot of empty asphalt,” Shoup explained, adding that one of the good things about these parking lots is that they are potential land banks just waiting for development — at least on the periphery.

Up in Seattle, Shoup is singing to the choir. Mike Podowski, an urban planning supervisor with the city, said Seattle adopted a “progressive” land use, transportation (and parking) plan around 1985 for downtown neighborhoods. To promote residential development and 24-hour neighborhoods, the city eliminated off-street parking requirements for residential use in downtown.

“We’re letting the developers and property owners provide the parking that suits the needs of the tenants and taking the city out of the equation,” he said. “We’ve found that residential developers still provide parking for 60 to 70 percent of the units. Occasionally, there will be a building with no parking, but that’s rarer.”

Other significant steps, since then, include the 2007 adoption of new commercial zoning for business districts, that eliminated off-street parking for commercial and residential users. And in all other areas outside these districts, the city reset the requirements at one off-street parking space per unit.

He said environmentalists and developers have supported these ideas, while local residents sometimes express opposition.

“But they realize that we’re not prohibiting off-street parking, just not dictating it,” he said. “And it’s also important to work with the city’s transportation department to manage on-street parking at the same time.”

Then, in 2009 and 2011, Seattle removed off-street parking requirements in multi-family zones. This year, the city began promoting transit community policies to make it easier for people to live and work and ride transit.

Only further-outlying city neighborhoods that don’t have adequate transit service have required off-street parking now of one space per unit for residential units and other rules for commercial uses, based on square footage.

“But in the city center, which is served by light rail and frequent bus service, we don’t have those requirements,” he said.



Photo by Travis Conklin

Seattle made a substantial investment as a region in public transit, and new parking policies leverage that investment.

“We’ve made a substantial investment as a region in public transit and these kinds of policies leverage that investment.”

In Greenfield, Mass., Mayor William Martin said his small city, founded nearly 260 years ago, has many buildings between 80 and 120 years old on its Main Street.

Many of them were vacant above the first floor because of a bevy of government regulations, including minimum off-street parking rules, he said. But in 2007, the city eliminated those parking requirements for downtown residential units as part of an urban renewal plan.

“With change to the zoning ordinance, we reduced the need for off-street parking for downtown residential units, which helped property owners decide to invest in their buildings,” he said.

Changing the rules on off-street parking for apartments was a key to downtown redevelopment.

Photo by John Paul "Boomer" Iacoangelo



Photo by Stephen Berkman

That private funding, combined with a number of local, state, federal and other tax credits meant millions of dollars were pumped into the city's downtown. A \$13-million rail and bus transportation center opened in early 2012, a \$60-million courthouse renovation will break ground this spring and other projects, worth more than \$6 million, are on the way, he said.

"It took a couple of years to put a lot of the plans into effect, but after the Greenfield Redevelopment Authority, by eminent domain, took over three abandoned buildings, every property changed hands within a year."

Martin said his city's downtown was never blighted, but it was on its way.

"We never hit bottom, and it's because we wanted to make

the U-turn before that," he said. "Changing the rules on off-street parking for apartments was a key."

In Muskegon, Mich., zoning administrator Mike Franzak said several years ago the city did away with the off-street parking requirements for businesses, for existing buildings that need less than 15 spaces.

"We're revisiting that ordinance now and looking to do further, major modifications which will be more of the same because we have a lot of parking now where a mall used to be and we're working to revitalize the downtown," he said. Apartments now are required to have 1.5 spaces per unit and that rate will most likely be lowered.

"So far, the changes are working well. We tore up the covered mall that used to be downtown and put in streetscape. It's now being developed with two- and three-story buildings, with some condos and townhomes going in, too.

"Unfortunately, the recession slowed everything down. But now it's starting to pick up again."

Further west, in Sand Point, Idaho, senior planner Joan Bramblee said her downtown was struggling several years ago when the city council did away with confusing, off-street parking rules for businesses in the core area.

"Our parking code did not allow for available street parking," she said. "We have a lot of historic buildings built lot line to lot line right on the street, so this created problems for our businesses. There was not a lot of room for putting in new parking."

Now, she said, the town has less difficulty attracting businesses downtown. In addition, Sand Point has changed its commercial code to encourage more apartment development by increasing the allowed height of buildings from 45 feet up to 65 feet, as long as residential units are provided on the upper floors.

"These have been good changes for us, and it's given businesses and building owners more flexibility to help create a vibrant downtown," she said. ●

Brian E. Clark is a Wisconsin-based journalist and a former staff writer on the business desk of The San Diego Union-Tribune. He is a contributor to the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Sun-Times, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Dallas Morning News and other publications.

From Freeways to

AS URBAN FREEWAYS AGE, CITIES
MOVE TO TAKE THEM DOWN,
BEFORE THEY FALL DOWN

By David Goldberg

You could call John Norquist the Moses of freeway tear-downs, a prophet of doom for elevated urban highways shouting, “Set my city free!” The former mayor of Milwaukee not only took out a freeway stub in his home city, he has since gone on a national campaign to help other cities remove the aging hulks that blight their waterfronts or in-town neighborhoods. In so doing, he has become the antithesis of another Moses — Robert Moses, the mid-century public works czar of New York City, who was himself an evangelist for bringing freeways through cities in the first place.

Writer Peter Harnik in his 2010 book, “Urban Green,” recounts the result of urban freeway construction a half-century ago: “Waterfronts were blockaded in Portland, Ore.; Cincinnati; Hartford; Cleveland; Philadelphia; and San Francisco. Nooses of concrete were wound tightly around the downtowns of Dallas and Charlotte. Trenches of noise and smog cut through Boston, Detroit, Seattle and Atlanta. Stupendous elevated structures threw shadows over Miami and New Orleans. And wide strips of land were taken from large, iconic parks in Los Angeles (Griffith Park), St. Louis (Forest Park), Baltimore (Druid Hill Park) and San Diego (Balboa Park).”

Today, a few of those cities — Portland, San Francisco and Boston — already have reversed some of that damage by replacing freeway structures with ground-level boulevards

The 2010s may be the
decade of the Great
Urban Freeway Undoing.

BOULEVARDS



Photo by Nan Palmero



Photo by Chas Redmond

City advocates have protested the intrusion of massive freeway structures from the beginning.

(and in Boston's case, a massive tunnel network, as well). Increasingly, though, it looks like the 2010s may be the decade of the Great Urban Freeway Undoing. At least a dozen cities are in the process of replacing freeway structures with new boulevards and redeveloped neighborhoods or are seriously studying the prospect of doing so. And the trend appears to be picking up steam, Norquist says.

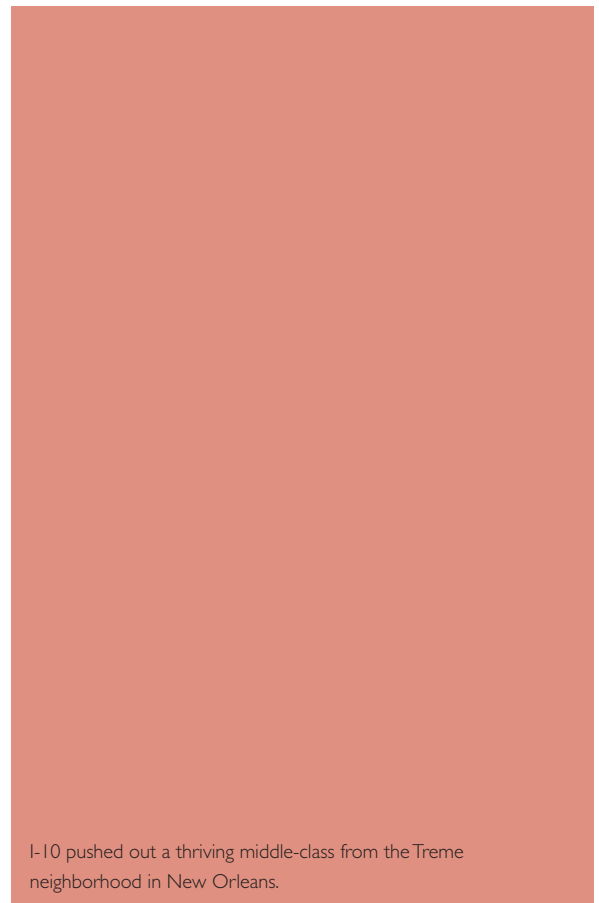
“Once more of these come down and people see that the world doesn't come to an end, you will see more freeways removed from cities,” predicts Norquist, who after leaving office became head of the Congress for the New Urbanism, where he launched a freeway tear-down initiative.

Most of the urban freeways were built as an adjunct to the Interstate system, constructed with 90 percent federal money. More recently, the federal government has given grants to help remove those that have proved less than essential. Since the federal economic stimulus bill created the TIGER grant program in 2009 — aimed at spurring innovative approaches to transportation — three cities have received funds toward freeway

Many of the elevated structures are outliving their design life.



Photo by dsb nola



I-10 pushed out a thriving middle-class from the Treme neighborhood in New Orleans.

removal. New York got a grant to study taking down the Sheridan Expressway in the Bronx. New Haven, Conn., received a contribution toward “replacing the Route 34 highway connector, reclaim land and knit neighborhoods back together, reversing damage done a half-century ago,” as the New Haven Register put it. And New Orleans is actively studying the tear-down of the I-10 Claiborne Expressway as part of its post-Katrina recovery.

City advocates have protested the intrusion of massive freeway structures into the urban fabric from the beginning, arguing that they bring noise, smog and visual blight while bisecting neighborhoods and disrupting traffic flow. All true, urban observers say, but the winning argument for replacing them increasingly is an economic one. Many of the elevated structures are outliving their design life and are in need of major repair or replacement; some, as in Seattle and San Francisco, have proved to be seismically unsound. The sheer cost of a major overhaul has given many regions pause, especially given that many of these

roads have been supplanted by bypasses and are essentially serving only local traffic. More compelling still: The freeways are occupying critical land in many cities that are seeing growth like they have not seen since the freeway construction era of the 1960s. They are finding that freeways are blocking economic resurgence, as city land is once again highly sought-after.

“Throughout the country, we have failing infrastructure and budget challenges to maintain what we have now,” says Peter Park, a Harvard Loeb fellow who has made a study of freeway tear-downs. His interest grew out of his own experience as the planning director under Norquist who managed the replacement of Milwaukee’s Park East Freeway. “We were sold these freeways in our cities as solutions to congestion and [motorist] safety — and they delivered neither. These days we have to get the most economic bang out of every buck. It seems odd we would use our taxpayer money in a way that devalues private property in cities, where we have our most valuable property.”

We have failing infrastructure and budget challenges to maintain what we have now.



Photo by Bernt Rostad

The redeveloped Embarcadero Boulevard in San Francisco after the freeway tear-down.



Photo by compujeramey

It was cheaper to tear down the freeway than to keep it up.

(Left) Redevelopment of the Park East Freeway corridor in Milwaukee



Courtesy of WSDOT

Providence, R.I., for example is contemplating the redevelopment of 40 acres of downtown land made available by freeway removal. New Haven, Conn., is making ready for a major downtown renaissance, and in New Orleans, 11 acres in a prime location would be available in a part of the city primed for renewal. In Seattle, the pending removal of the Highway 99 viaduct along Alaskan Way — after a protracted debate — has given rise to a sweeping vision for remaking the waterfront that is expected to be a boon for the tourism industry as well as area residents and businesses.

These and other cities hope to replicate something like the success of San Francisco's Embarcadero Boulevard. That urban gem emerged after the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989 made it clear that the elevated Embarcadero and Central freeways were seismically unfit. Rather than hundreds of millions to rebuild a double-decked freeway, the region invested \$50 million to take it down and convert the land into a 1.6-mile grand boulevard, complete with palm trees and a waterfront promenade. The portion south of Market Street boomed with housing, offices and retail, and property values rose an estimated 300 percent.

In Milwaukee, the Park East Freeway's days began to be numbered when the business community came to see the .8-mile spur as an impediment rather than a boon,

Norquist said. The replacement movement was given impetus when Harley Davidson began eyeing the land for a major development, lending credence to the city's vision for a revived downtown that did not include the Park East.

In the end, Milwaukee ended up using \$25 million of the state's federal allocation to remove the spur, reconnect city streets and build a boulevard. "It was a little weird to use federal money to take a freeway out," said Park. "That wasn't what they were used to doing."

"It was cheaper to tear down the freeway than to keep it up," said Norquist. "Often the argument you hear is that, well, there's no money to tear it down. But that assumes that repairing the elevated structure is free. Once the repair cost is considered, the potential economic payoff in redevelopment and improved tax base should tip the scale."

Making these arguments against freeways in the city "is why I got into politics in the first place," said Norquist, who was mayor from 1988 to 2004. "You can find a freeway tear-down project almost anywhere in America if you look hard enough."

At least one skeptic thinks there are fewer opportunities for urban freeway removal than Norquist contends.



Photo by Bernt Rostad

Embarcadero Boulevard in San Francisco

Seattle shoreline before demolition of the viaduct



Courtesy of WSDOT

A multi-lane boulevard often can carry a substantial share of any through traffic.

In an op-ed for Bloomberg news, architecture historian and author Robert Bruegmann wrote, “Although conspicuous, the pieces of freeway that are now being replaced or removed are quite small. The vast majority of the urban freeway network still stands because these roads have done what they were supposed to do, carrying heavy traffic that otherwise would need to thread its way through city streets.”

Indeed, the question of where the existing traffic — however heavy or light — will go is often the major stumbling block. The spurs and offshoots that are prime candidates often carry relatively low volumes of traffic, as freeways go. Advocates for removal note that most cities have street grids with more capacity than people appreciate. A multi-lane boulevard often can carry a substantial share of any through traffic, albeit at slower speeds, contends Lucinda Gibson, a principal at Smart Mobility, a transportation planning firm that has analyzed several proposed freeway replacements. “Speed does not equal capacity,” she told a “webinar” audience earlier this year. In fact, she said, 30 mph can provide the maximum capacity because it allows cars to be spaced closer together and move continuously.

In New Orleans, Gibson’s firm found that most traffic moving through the region uses I-610, which runs on the fringe of the central area, rather than I-10/Claiborne Expressway, which runs through downtown. Most I-10 travelers are commuting downtown, and they would see their trips grow by four to six minutes, on average. At the same time, other city trips that today are blocked by the freeway could be shortened, yielding a time and energy savings for other residents, the analysis found.

More importantly, transforming the Claiborne Expressway into a re-born Claiborne Avenue would repair damage done to the historic Treme neighborhood when the overpass was built in the 1960s, said Lolis Elie, a Treme resident and writer on HBO’s series based on the neighborhood, also called “Treme.”

“Removing this overpass will be a major step toward healing this wound,” he added. I-10 was routed over Claiborne Avenue after preservationists rebuffed highway forces

— including Robert Moses himself — who had pushed for the Interstate to follow the Mississippi River through the French Quarter. At the time, Treme was mostly African-American but not uniformly poor. In fact, thanks to the businesses along Claiborne Avenue, there was a substantial middle class presence.

“It wasn’t that the highway came through here because it was poor,” said Vaughn Fauria, a resident and co-chair of the Claiborne Corridor Improvement Coalition. “The highway chased the black middle class to New Orleans East,” and disinvestment was left behind. Fauria is a member of the advisory group overseeing the study of the revival of Claiborne Avenue under a \$2-million federal grant.

The bridge is likely to need a \$50-million overhaul before the end of its original design life in 2016, Fauria said. The question to her is whether that money could be better used to make a transformation that would restore value, and end the noise and pollution associated with the overpass.

“Ironically, much of the opposition is from people commuting from eastern New Orleans to downtown, who will lose the convenience of getting on the overpass and staying there until they reach their destination,” Elie said. “Many of them are in eastern New Orleans because their families moved when the freeway came, but now they use it to commute, and in that way made their peace with the overpass.”

“There are so few people now that experienced the oppression that created that bridge they don’t realize what was lost,” Fauria said. Some in the neighborhood are so accustomed to its presence that they can’t imagine life without it, she said. Some have suggested removing the traffic but keeping the overpass as a multi-use promenade. “It has been there so long it has become entrenched to some. The Mardi Gras Indians didn’t like it when they put it up, but now they use it if it’s raining during a celebration. You can hear (musician) Kermit Ruffins under the bridge almost any time. It’s what we do, we acclimate.”

But before the overpass, “It was a thriving — thriving — cosmopolitan commercial area,” she added. “I think we can get some of that back, and if we’re careful we can do it without displacing the people there now. I’m old enough to remember Claiborne Avenue, and so I’d like to blow that bridge up tomorrow.” ●

David A. Goldberg is the communications director for Transportation for America, a nationwide coalition based in Washington, D.C., that advocates for transportation policy reform. In 2002, Mr. Goldberg was awarded a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University, where he studied urban policy.



Redevelopment of the Park East Freeway corridor in Milwaukee



Beyond Bus Rapid Transit: What's New?

Bus rapid transit has grown to encompass nearly every upgrade transit agencies announce. The real question isn't what qualifies as BRT, but what constitutes high-quality bus service today.

By G.M. Filisko

When it was introduced in Curitiba, Brazil, nearly 30 years ago, bus rapid transit (BRT) was transformational. With features like lanes exclusively for buses, bus signal priority, and rail-station-like bus stops where riders paid fares instead of using on-board fare boxes while buses idled, the system became a world-wide model.

Fast forward to today, and cities throughout the United States have implemented some features of BRT. However, few outside of Cleveland and Boston have adopted the whole BRT kit and caboodle.

“Most BRT systems would have dedicated or semi-dedicated lanes, but that’s not happening here,” explains Mariia Zimmerman, a principal at MZ Strategies, an Arlington, Va., transit consultancy. “In some ways, BRT in the United States is similar to how we talk about high speed rail. We’re not really doing high speed rail; rail is just faster than it was before. We’re not really doing BRT, either. But quick service with an easy-on payment system and some lane changes are going to allow transit authorities to treat BRT like light rail.”

Does it really matter what qualifies as BRT? And whatever BRT is, what are the standards for good bus service in the United States today?



Quick service with an easy-on payment system and lane changes are going to allow transit authorities to treat BRT like light rail.



BRT Definition: Anyone? Anyone?

Ask those immersed in the transit world what they consider BRT, and you'll age dramatically before reaching consensus.

"There are multiple definitions," admits Dennis Hinebaugh, director of the National Bus Rapid Transit Institute and transit program director at the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida in Tampa. "In its simplest forms, BRT is a rail-type application, but using buses. There are less-frequent stops; there's improved frequency of service and travel speeds and enhanced vehicles and bus stations — we call them stations instead of stops. There's also improved technology, maybe giving next-stop information at stations. Or systems might use traffic-signal priority, meaning if a bus is running late, it might get an extended green light or be a queue jumper, which would allow it to jump ahead of the queue of vehicles."

Jeffrey Boothe agrees the definition of BRT is fluid. "The spectrum of BRT is much wider than the spectrum for streetcar and light rail systems," says the partner at Holland & Knight in Washington, D.C., who specializes in transportation policy and transit-oriented development. "What bus system in the United States has the most features that come the closest to a light rail system? It's Cleveland. At the other end of the spectrum, we have cities increasing their frequency and adding next-vehicle information, but their stations are just enhanced bus shelters. Yet they call that BRT."

This fuzzy framework is a more serious problem than it might seem. "I was at an event in March sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, and the biggest issue was the failure to define BRT," says Boothe. "While some

segments are reluctant to define it — they want everything to fall within the rubric of BRT — that's undermined the industry's ability to document BRT's effectiveness to show it's anything more than glorified bus service. And how we define the project and its features affects its ability to qualify for capital funding."

The Bus Gold Standard

Whatever transit agencies want to call their offerings, Cleveland's HealthLine system is widely regarded as driving standards for good bus service in the United States today.

Initially called the Euclid Corridor, the system was renamed because of a partnership with the Cleveland Clinic and University Hospitals, two major locations along Euclid Avenue, the key thoroughfare served by the 40-stop BRT system. Specially designed hybrid buses arrive every five minutes during morning and afternoon weekday rush hours and on less-frequent increments throughout the rest of its 24/7 schedule.

"We basically changed the entire traffic pattern in Cleveland," says Mary Shaffer, media relations manager at the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA). "It's 9.2 miles, but the Euclid Avenue part is 7 miles of what I call 'heavy BRT.' We went from two lanes both ways to a much larger, expanded area with a dedicated transit line that's sometimes one, sometimes two lanes. We also installed things like elevated platforms and fare machines at stations. The other 2.2 miles is 'light BRT.' There's some BRT that may include a specialized longer, larger-capacity vehicle, but it's running on regular roads, and we don't do elevated platforms or fare boxes at stations."

Estimates of the economic development benefits from the \$200-million system have ranged from the GCRTA's \$2 billion to the Cleveland Plain Dealer's \$4.4 billion. "Newer numbers suggest it's more than \$5 billion," says Shaffer. "It's kind of the spark that lit the fire behind developing Euclid Avenue again."

Montgomery County, Md., is hoping to get a similarly strong economic return with a BRT system still in the planning stages. There are already bus routes in the county, though they primarily lead into and out of the nation's capital. What the area lacks is transit to carry people to locations within the county. Current plans call for branded buses that will run on as many as 23 routes, mostly along state highways, some of which will have lanes that have been repurposed into bus lanes, and stations will have off-board fare collection and platforms that will be level to the buses.

"Our BRT system will be about 161 miles of mass transit through the county that will run on roads as we now know them," says Bonnie Casper, an agent at Coldwell Banker Residential in Bethesda. "That way, we'll be able to get this going faster and less expensively than by doing rapid rail. It's much more feasible to finance \$2 billion to get 161 miles than the same amount for a couple of miles of a rapid-rail system."

Casper is also 2012 president of the Greater Capital Area Association of REALTORS®, which is backing the plan. "We don't even see it directly as a matter of land

values, though it clearly is," she explains. "We've done this because we recognize that implementation of the proposed network is really important to economic development in our area. Without it, we stand to lose an opportunity to bring thousands of jobs into the county. We don't just sell real estate but a quality of life, and if we're going to be able to grow our economy, we need to compete in the region."

Express Busing Gains Traction

Fresno, Calif., and Chicago, Ill., are striving for quality bus service with new express-bus plans. Fresno considered light rail, but ruled it out. "It's a very auto-centric suburban environment," says John Downs, planning division manager at the Fresno Department of Transportation. "There simply wasn't the demand or money enough to justify light rail."

Fresno plans to upgrade the two busiest routes on its system, launching in 2015. "We're getting much nicer stations, each with level boarding platforms so people don't have to climb into buses," says Downs. "We'll have next-bus-arrival signs and off-board ticketing. We won't have exclusive bus lanes, but they're designed so other vehicles aren't supposed to use them to get from point A to point B. We're getting nice curb extensions so buses will stay in the third lane and not pull to the curb, along with transit-signal priority. We're also going to have a special place for buses to go into to get a head start on traffic instead of waiting for traffic to clear. All are techniques to speed up service and give passengers a more comfortable ride."

We recognize that implementation of the proposed network is really important to economic development in our area.



The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) will be testing similar elements of BRT with its November 2012 launch of the “Jeffrey Jump” pilot program, according to Joe Iacobucci, manager of strategic planning. The express-bus service will operate from 103rd Street on the south side to Metra’s Ogilvie and Union light rail stations downtown, shaving five to seven minutes off rush-hour commutes.

Buses will operate in dedicated lanes from 7-9 a.m. northbound and 4-6 p.m. southbound, says Iacobucci. They’ll also have traffic signal priority during some stretches and will stop at less-frequent, half-mile intervals. The CTA is also upgrading about 20 stops with lighted shelters that will feature bus-tracker LED displays, kiosks with route and local neighborhood maps, disabled-accessible sidewalk ramps, bike racks and benches.

The CTA is studying two similar projects — a downtown corridor and the Western/Ashland corridor. “Each will have elements of BRT, with the goal to provide a fast, high-capacity service that will encourage cross-town trips,” says Iacobucci. “Customers have told us speed and reliability are the two things they’re looking to get out of these processes.”

Urban Circulators Are Hot Tickets

“Circulator” bus systems like the one that opened in 2005 in Washington, D.C., don’t typically fall within the definition of BRT. But they’re also on the forefront of good bus service.

“We look at circulators as a premium transit service that connects areas not currently served by the Washington Area Mass Transit Authority,” says Carl Jackson, associate director for progressive transportation services at the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) in Washington, D.C. “They connect customers to the business communities in locations like Union Station, the Washington Convention Center and Georgetown.”

Vehicles are clean, safe and identifiable, says Jackson, with their branded red, gray and yellow color scheme. “Circulator buses operate on 10-minute headways,” he says. “And, we’ve been able to maintain the price — it’s still only \$1.”

Jackson says the first month the system launched, it drew almost 50,000 customers. It now covers five routes and serves 6 million customers annually, the busiest being the Georgetown-to-Union Station route. It started with an average of 14.5 riders per hour and in July 2012, averaged almost 33 riders each hour. DDOT is currently in

Today’s broad scope of upgrades add up to quality bus service for commuters.



talks with the National Park Service to become the bus operator for the National Mall.

Whatever planners call them, Hinebaugh says today’s broad scope of upgrades add up to quality bus service for commuters. “To me, BRT is something that simply improves bus service,” he says. “It’s faster, more efficient and cleaner. In the United States, where we have many concerns, whether they’re monetary or car-centric, I think we’re much better off having the wide range of alternatives and being able to do what each community needs.” ●

Streetcars Still on Track

Cities throughout the country are eager to add streetcar systems. But do they deserve all the economic development credit showered on them?

By G.M. Filisko

It's an exaggeration — but only a minor one — to state that there's not a sizeable city in the country that isn't considering, planning to, or hasn't already added a streetcar to its transportation system.

"There are many, many cities that have initiated planning for streetcars," says Martin Schroeder, chief engineer for the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) in Washington, D.C. "Every major city has looked at streetcars and decided to build for obvious reasons."

What are those "obvious reasons," given that streetcars are a slower form of transportation, a seeming drawback when people increasingly demand information and services immediately? "People like streetcars," Schroeder simply says. "They're different, often historic, and interesting, and people come downtown to ride them. It's still a very popular mode of transit."

Developers are often among the fan base. "In places like Portland, Ore., and even places like Spokane and Tacoma, Wash., and Tucson, Ariz., streetcars are very much supported by the development community," says Mariia Zimmerman, a principal at MZ Strategies, an Arlington, Va., consultancy Zimmerman launched after working in the Obama administration to help communities better link transportation and economic development goals.



There are many, many cities that have initiated planning for streetcars.

“Having them there shows there’s an interest from developers in investing in infrastructure and transportation to regrow an area. What’s interesting about streetcar proposals is that it’s the development community, with the public sector, that promotes these, which isn’t always the case [with transportation projects].”

Can streetcars live up to all the expectations planners and developers have for them? There’s evidence to support high expectations, but experts caution that streetcars alone may not be responsible for all the positives attributed to them.

The Streetcar Is Reborn

Streetcars aren’t new by any stretch of the imagination. In the last half of the 1800s and first decades of the 1900s, the “street railway” was a major catalyst of urban development, according to APTA. However, the Great Depression forced the closure of some lines, while the decline of others was triggered by growth of automobiles after World War II.

What exactly is a streetcar? “Streetcars are a form of urban circulator,” says Schroeder. “They’re typically defined by vehicles operating on rails and powered by electricity, and they’re usually smaller than light rail vehicles.”

They generally fall into one of three categories:

- **Traditional systems** – “This is the San Francisco and New Orleans trolley or streetcar, whatever you want to call it,” explains Jeffrey Boothe, executive director of the Community Streetcar Coalition in Washington, D.C., which advocates for streetcar projects. “They’re legacy systems in the few cities that didn’t destroy them or that have been able to acquire the streetcars from private operators. Right now, Kenosha, Wis., runs an old car. Memphis, Tenn., runs streetcars that were built in the 1950s or 1960s. Dallas runs old streetcars as part of the McKinley Avenue project. They’re authentic — the real deal.”
- **Heritage systems** – “There are also new heritage systems whose cars look like old streetcars but are newer, modern cars,” explains Boothe. “Cities like Little Rock, Ark., and Tampa, Fla., run heritage cars. They tend to be more a tourist operation as opposed to a city-building tool to shape economic development and land use. In Tampa, the system operates only eight hours a day, doesn’t run with great frequency, and connects tourist locations. Little Rock, for example, connects to the William J. Clinton Presidential Library.”



- **Modern systems** – “Modern cars are those first introduced by Portland in the early 2000s,” says Booth. “These systems envision streetcars to be something very different. It’s still about circulation, but we also see streetcars as an economic development tool.”

Whatever category they fall under, most streetcars differ from light rail in important ways. “They’re less schedule driven than other transit, like light rail,” says Boothe. “They make a circulation by running down a corridor with great frequency, like every five or seven minutes. They also tend to be on a shorter system, say from one to five miles maximum. There are more frequent stops, the stations are closer together, and people use them to get on and off at their leisure. Light rail has been more commuter focused, so stations tend to be further apart, and trains tend to operate in a dedicated right of way, where streetcars tend to be in the streets. Light rail also tends to board in stations, while streetcars tend to have side boarding, meaning, boarding along the sidewalks.”

Portland Sparks Resurgence

Portland’s streetcar system opened in 2001, but planning began eons earlier. “We opened a light rail line — which tends to have half-mile stops and is used to get to suburbs quickly — in 1986,” says Rick Gustafson, executive

Portland's streetcar success triggered interest throughout the country.

director of the Portland Streetcar. "Our efforts were underway to plan a second line, and subsequently we added other lines. But in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the city decided that having that same quality of transit for inner-city neighborhoods was equally important. We started exploring the feasibility of streetcars in denser, urban neighborhoods."

Funding wasn't easy to come by. "I was there in the relatively early days when Portland was trying to get federal funding to make the streetcar a reality," recalls Zimmerman. "We were struggling because it wasn't seen by transportation folks in Washington, D.C., as legitimate transportation or by the people at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as a legitimate type of urban development project. It was kind of this orphan that was hard to get off the ground."

That forced Portland to fund its system locally. "We built the first four miles on our own, with the property owners being the first contributors," says Gustafson. "The cost was about \$103 million for the whole four-mile line."



Photo by Contemplative Imaging

In 1996, Earl Blumenauer, who was a Portland city commissioner during the streetcar planning, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where in 2002 he introduced the Community Streetcar Development Act. That legislation became part of the 2005 SAFETEA-LU Act, which authorized federal funding for smaller transportation projects like streetcars.

With about 50 percent of that newly available federal funding, Portland has expanded its system, opening a new \$148-million, 3.35-mile line in September 2012. "Portland Streetcar operates on 12-14-minute frequencies and averages nearly 12,000 riders a day, with about 4 million riders a year," says Gustafson. "Up until September, two-thirds of our line was in Portland's free-rail zone, which allowed you to get on and off at no cost. The new fare for a streetcar-only trip is \$1."

Where Do Streetcars Work?

Portland's streetcar success triggered interest throughout the country. "One thing that broke the logjam for streetcars really was the success of the Portland streetcar project, where people could touch it, feel it, and see that the development community was really coming in there," says Zimmerman. "But it wasn't until the Obama administration that the Federal Transit Administration started to fund streetcars. We went from very few communities having streetcars to now having about 40 communities that have funds in place or are working to get a streetcar funded."

The economic impacts are stark. "In the first 10 years of our four-mile line, we generated \$3.5 billion in private and public investments in developments within 750 feet of the line, including 10,000 new residential units," says Gustafson. "Our goal was 5,000 residential units. We basically blew away any goals we had for attracting residents and new development. Our \$3.5 billion took 10 years. Seattle's \$3.2 billion in economic development after it launched its streetcar took two years."

Washington, D.C., is among the cities planning a streetcar system with an expected summer 2013 launch. "A streetcar is a green technology," according to Carl Jackson, associate director for progressive transportation services for the District Department of Transportation. "Rather than putting more fuel-powered vehicles on the streets, streetcars can carry 130-140 people.



The streetcar is becoming a tool to make areas attractive places to live.

And it's a mode that helps increase economic development because it's permanent, fixed and integrated into the community. We're already starting to see an increase in real estate, small-business and commercial activity on what will be our streetcar line."

Zimmerman says that's happening along many planned streetcar lines. "In places like Tucson, Ariz., which in 2011 got a \$60-million federal grant for a streetcar, they're already seeing redevelopment along the corridor on which they're building," she says. "Kenosha has

a small, \$6-million line, and it's generated an estimated \$150 million in economic development."

However, transit experts, including Gustafson, are quick to qualify economic development figures. "I'd be careful never to use the words 'caused by the streetcar,'" he explains. "The streetcar serves as a catalyst and can pull together thinking about the total investment you need for development to occur, and it's a good marketing tool. But I'd stop short of saying streetcars caused the growth in economic development. There are a lot of reasons development occurs."

Are there places where streetcars don't make sense? "While the costs of streetcars are lower than light rail, they're still more costly than improved bus service in most instances," says Zimmerman. "Also, because it's not as fast as light rail, there's a certain point where streetcars don't make sense. If you're looking to connect multiple communities, it may not be a streetcar that's the best investment. It may be light rail or bus rapid transit because you can get higher speeds."

Will Streetcars Still Generate Desire?

What's the future of the streetcar? "More and more people are deciding to live in the urban environment, so the demand for streetcars can only go up," predicts Schroeder. "And we may see more streetcars running without overhead wire contact. They'll be running on a battery and may charge while in a station. A number of those systems are being tested today, and I suspect we'll see more of that."

Boothe says the continued success of streetcars depends on planners' goals. "That gets to the more important issue of what we want these projects to do for us," he says. "We're finding that people are moving back downtown and to close-in suburbs, and the streetcar is becoming a tool to make those areas attractive places to live. Ridership numbers are typically pretty high for the cost of a streetcar project, but they're also city-shaping. We don't care where you're going, just that you're using the system." ●

G.M. Filisko is an attorney and freelance writer who writes frequently on real estate, business and legal issues. Ms. Filisko served as an editor at NAR's REALTOR® Magazine for 10 years.

CREATIVE FUNDING

With federal funding lacking, how will local and state municipalities pay for roads and transit?



By Tracey C. Velt

After extending the old federal transportation bill repeatedly for three months at a time, legislators finally passed a new federal transportation-funding bill — one that falls short and does not resolve how we'll pay for transportation infrastructure in the long term, according to the NATIONAL

ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® (NAR). “The majority of the federal transportation program is funded by federal gas tax dollars and that funding source is drying up,” says Darren Smith, the NAR policy representative on smart growth and state/local affairs. According to a recent article in USA Today, “that’s because the federal tax on gasoline, the primary method since 1956, has

Vibrant transit with different options will make regions more competitive to attract employers — and homebuyers.

lost one-third of its buying power since it was last raised in 1993. States add their own tax on top of that, but the federal tax accounts for about 45 to 50 percent of capital spending for transportation.” Says Smith, “With more fuel-efficient cars, this revenue has decreased.”

Supporting transit and transportation projects is an easy “yes” for real estate associations and professionals. Not only does it enhance the local areas, but it also makes those areas more appealing places to work and live. Vibrant transit with different options will make regions more competitive to attract employers — and homebuyers.

So, how will we fund the necessary infrastructure upkeep and transportation systems? State and local governments have had to get creative with financing transit and road projects.

Local Tax Financing

From public/private partnerships to increased sales taxes, funding has to come from a broad variety of sources — each with its set of hoops to jump. For example, in Georgia, on July 31, 2012, a measure to add one percent to the sales tax to pay for transportation improvements passed in only three of the 12 regions in the state. More importantly, the measure failed in Atlanta. “At the end of the day, people believed the inaccuracies that were being spread about this measure, such as that the money wouldn’t actually go to transportation projects,” says Beth McGinn, director of public affairs for the American Road and Transportation Builders Association.

Another group hoping to get a local income tax approved is a coalition of business leaders and organizations that includes the Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of REALTORS®. The group is currently seeking authorization from state legislators to hold a referendum by county to adopt a local income tax that will go toward transportation systems. The group was unsuccessful previously.

“We need a 0.3 percent increase in local option income tax in at least two of our counties, with long-term plans to touch six to eight other counties,”



Photo by Lee Cannon

State and local governments have had to get creative with financing transit and road projects.

We're looking at a combination of federal, state and local dollars, as well as transit fares, to operate and maintain a plan that includes bus rapid transit, light rail, sidewalks and trails.



says Chris Pryor, government affairs director for the Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of REALTORS®. The initial phase focuses on Marion County, the urban core, and Hamilton County, the area's most populous suburban area. "We're looking at a combination of federal, state and local dollars, as well as transit fares, to operate and maintain a plan that includes bus rapid transit, light rail, sidewalks and trails," he says.

In addition to the additional income tax, the group hopes to take advantage of existing ad valorem taxes allocated from property taxes that go towards their current bus systems. "We're anticipating those dollars will be directed toward this project," says Pryor.

For the Indianapolis coalition, they'll also be raising money for a special election. "We'll be presenting another bill asking for authorization to hold that referendum during our 2013 session, which runs from

January to April," says Pryor. "If it gets passed, we'll hold a special election in November 2013, so we're asking our coalition partners to contribute a significant chunk of money, and we will be asking NAR (who contributed to the previous lobbying effort) for additional funds," says Pryor.

Vehicle Miles Tax

With the loss of revenues from the federal gas tax, states like California and Oregon tested a Vehicle Miles Tax pilot project, which proposed a tax based on how many miles you drive, not how much gas you buy. This idea was met with a host of concerns: What if you drive out of state? Which state gets that money? One possible method of collecting the tax is an electronic odometer and a Global Positioning System (GPS) to record miles. When the car pulls into a

With the loss of revenues from the federal gas tax, states like California and Oregon tested a Vehicle Miles Tax pilot project.

gas station, its mileage is uploaded to a wireless reader, which sends the information to the gas station's computer. It's then compared to the car's last reported mileage. Taxable miles are computed, and the tax is assessed. However, there are privacy concerns about this tracking, McGinn indicated.

Business Improvement Districts

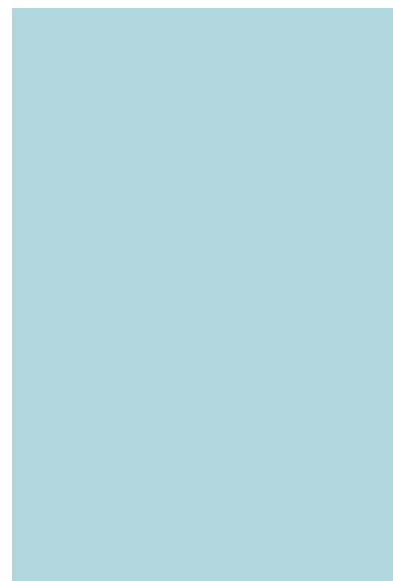
Leaders in Nashville, Tenn., are looking at even more creative ways to fund transit and transportation projects. "We received a \$10,000 grant from NAR to launch and fund the Transit Citizens Leadership Academy in cooperation with the Middle Tennessee Transit Alliance," says Don Klein, association executive of the Greater Nashville Association of REALTORS®. The group is engaged in helping community members make educated decisions about the types of transit needed in the area. "Two sessions ago, the state legislature passed some empowering legislation that would allow for multi-county funding authority so that if we created a significant mass transit plan for the region, it gives us a way to create a mechanism to pay for it," says Klein.

One such project is the East-West Connector bus rapid transit system. "After a federal study, the recommendation was that we build a bus rapid transit system through an eight-mile corridor through the heart of Nashville," says Ed Cole, executive director of The Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee in Nashville. "We're looking at a combination of urban street car and bus rapid transit, which is much less expensive than light rail, but can emulate the same performance."

But, funding that project is proving tricky. Early construction estimates show that it's a \$174-million project. Some funding ideas include "some form of business improvement district," says Cole. "Basically, you create a district and under state law, property owners (residential is typically exempt) in that district would vote to impose a fee on themselves. The proceeds would pay for the transit."

In addition to the business improvement district, the Transit Alliance is looking at value capture funding. "In tax increment finance, if investment in transit is made and business and property values increase because of it, a portion of the increase in tax revenue will be put back into the service to pay for the initial cost."

If investment in transit is made and business and property values increase because of it, a portion of the increase in tax revenue will be put back into the service to pay for the initial cost.



Tolls

Of course, the most talked about and perhaps most misunderstood type of transportation and transit funding is the toll road.

One form of toll road is through the Value Pricing Pilot (VPP) program, part of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). The Act encourages implementation of value pricing pilot projects to manage congestion on highways through variable tolls and other pricing mechanisms. However, it's clear from many studies that tolls only pay for a small portion of transportation costs.

According to a report from the U.S. Public Interest Research Group: "Do Roads Pay For Themselves?", the answer is "no."

In a study by Policy Matters Ohio, an Ohio-based non-profit research organization, more than \$5 billion is spent every year to operate and maintain Ohio roads. Tolls provide only 4 percent of that total. Ohio is not

alone in this conclusion. Thus, the gap in funding has to be closed elsewhere.

Public/Private Partnerships

That's where public/private partnerships (PPP) may come into play. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, "A successful toll road project can be built with virtually any mix of public and private financial sponsorship."

Both the Nashville project and the Indianapolis project are considering PPPs as part of the funding for their transit projects. As with any type of partnership, there are several ways to go about PPPs. According to the study, "Moving Forward on Public/Private Partnerships," by the Brookings Institution, a public entity in transportation (a state government, local government or transit agency) decides, plans and finances construction of a new piece of infrastructure and ultimately

Tolls only pay for a small portion of transportation costs.



Photo courtesy of Reconnecting America



On March 30, 2011, John Robert Smith, president and CEO of Reconnecting America, testified before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, representing the Transportation for America coalition.

Most localities and states will have to take control of financing transportation projects going forward.

maintains and operates it. Different private entities (e.g., an engineering firm and a private contractor) bid for the individual tasks of first designing, then later, constructing it. In a design-build arrangement, these operations are bundled into one fixed-fee contract with a private entity that assumes the delivery of these services. The Bay Area Rapid Transit extension to the San Francisco International Airport is an early case of design-build.

A design-build-operate-maintain contract adds private entity responsibilities after construction, in terms of the operation and maintenance. In these cases, the public entity is in charge of financing and assumes all the risks related to operating costs and revenues. The Hudson-Bergen light rail system in New Jersey is one example.

Some PPPs include a private finance component. The Denver Eagle Commuter Rail project has a design-build-finance-operate-maintain arrangement. In such projects the private party is also responsible for all or a major part of the project's financing and is generally paid through revenues directly related to the project itself (e.g., tolls or fares) while the public sector retains ownership.

Flushing Out Funding

The truth is, most localities and states will have to take control of financing transportation projects going forward. Which, according to Smith and NAR, isn't ideal. "There is a federal responsibility for transportation. If we do away with federal funding and let the states and localities handle it themselves, it would lead to no consistent uniformity as far as highway design and funding." ●

Tracey C. Velt is an Orlando-based business writer.





Courtesy the California High-Speed Rail Authority

High Speed Rail ...

HIGH COSTS DERAIL DEVELOPMENT

By Christine Jordan Sexton

America's quest to build high speed rail may have gotten derailed in the last few years, but there are signs that it may be getting back on track.

That's because California — a trend-setting state because of its size and population — is moving ahead with its own ambitious plans to make high speed rail a reality in that state.

The Golden State recently passed legislation authorizing the sale of \$2.7 billion in bonds that will be used to fund the fastest train in the nation as well as the largest public infrastructure project. Gov. Jerry Brown signed the measure into law this summer.

When completed, California's high speed rail will run from San Francisco to Los Angeles and will attain speeds of 220 miles per hour for a trip that will last 2 hours and 40 minutes. Ultimately, the aim is for the train to run from the state capital of Sacramento to San Diego near the U.S.-Mexico border or about 800 miles. The train will travel at speeds of up to 220 miles per hour with approximately 15 stops.

"All eyes are on California," said Angie Schmitt, editor of Streetsblog, an online advocacy journalism site that, according to its website, promotes sustainable transportation and more livable cities and towns. "California really is going to be the first place in the country to have truly high speed rail."

California High Speed Rail Authority spokesperson Lisa Marie Alley said the authority is following the principles laid out in its revised April 2012 business plan when it comes to building the rail and making improvements to existing regional transit. That plan called for the new rail to be built in the Central Valley and for improvements to the initial bookend cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles.

It also called for a blended approach which would allow existing metropolitan rail infrastructure to be used as much as possible to provide connection into urban areas. Those existing rail systems would tie into the high speed rail backbone through the Central Valley.

The Central Valley rail work will be contracted to a number of different vendors through a series of competitive bids.

California really is going to be the first place in the country to have truly high speed rail.



Photo by reallyboring



Courtesy the California High-Speed Rail Authority

The first bid, a contract between \$25 and \$50 million, was completed in October and disseminated to interested vendors. Alley said the association should have the vendor picked by the end of the year and construction should begin in the first quarter of 2013.

“We are going to do what’s right for the state, and hopefully, other states can learn from us” said Alley, who predicted that when the high speed rail is complete, tourists who visit the state will “go home and talk about it” just as they do other California attractions.

For high speed rail advocates, the California experience could not have come at a better time. President Barack Obama has been a big believer in high speed rail and he asked people to “imagine whisking through towns at speeds of over 100 miles an hour, walking only a few steps to public transportation and ending up just blocks from your destination.” He declared it would be a great project “to rebuild America.”

But the main source of funding for high speed rail drew the ire of some Republicans. The money was included in the federal stimulus bill or the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Decisions were made to turn down dollars for both high speed rail — defined by the federal government as trains that move at 110 miles per hour or far slower than the California project and European trains — as well as money for higher speed rail, where trains move slower, but are still quicker than cars.

Those who rejected the high speed rail money were primarily GOP governors who were elected in 2010. Perhaps the most high profile refusal came from Florida Gov. Rick Scott, who, shortly after being elected governor of the third largest state in the nation, returned \$2.4 billion to the federal government.

Florida has had an on-again, off-again relationship with rail.



Scott used studies conducted by the Reason Foundation, a Libertarian think tank, and the Heritage Foundation citing concerns about high operating costs, low ridership, delays in construction and cost overruns. Scott said Florida taxpayers could potentially be on the hook for \$3 billion.

Weeks after rejecting the money, Scott’s own agency, the Florida Department of Transportation, released a study showing that the line which would have connected Tampa to Orlando, would have had a \$10.2 million operating surplus in its first year of operation and a \$28.6 million surplus by 2025 when the rail was completed down to Miami.

Scott’s decision to reject the federal money put to an end nearly 30 years of planning by Florida leaders that started with former Gov. Bob Graham in 1986.

Florida has had an on-again, off-again relationship with rail. Florida businessman Doc Dockery — a longtime rail advocate — said that Democratic Gov. Lawton Chiles opposed rail in the early ‘90s though he subsequently changed his mind.

Frustrated at the lack of action on a bullet train in Florida despite recommendations from a blue ribbon gubernatorial panel to have a train from Miami to Orlando to Tampa, Dockery in 1999 mounted an effort to amend Florida’s Constitution to require that it be built.

The constitutional amendment was passed with 53 percent approval. With the help of his lawmaker wife, State Sen. Paula Dockery, an “implementing law” was passed which placed the content of the amendment into state statutes.

But Gov. Jeb Bush refused to fund the train and went further by launching a successful effort in 2004 to remove the constitutional mandate for high speed rail that had been previously approved by voters. Bush, however, fell short in his subsequent efforts to kill the bullet train outright by having the “implementing law” regarding the train repealed from statutes. Two years after Bush left office the High Speed Rail Commission, which included Dockery, began meeting again and worked on the plan that eventually was recommended for federal funding.

“I think eventually the people who are for high speed rail will win because they must win. We had to have an interstate highway system,” Dockery said, adding that President Dwight D. Eisenhower faced a heavy lift in selling the idea to Congress and the American people. “And we have to have passenger rail.”

While federally funded high speed rail may be dead in Florida, the first privately funded (though not high speed) service is underway. Florida East Coast Industries —

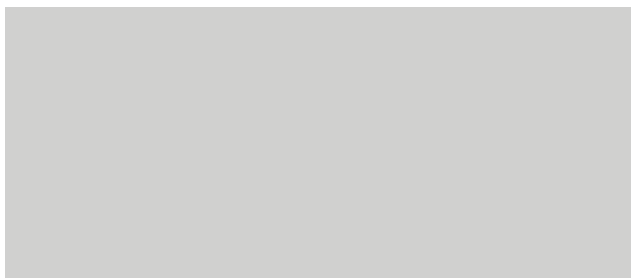
a company established more than a century ago by rail baron Henry Flagler — announced plans for intercity passenger rail service by 2014 that will run from Miami to Orlando with service in Ft. Lauderdale and West Palm Beach.

The line will be owned by All Aboard Florida, a subsidiary of Florida East Coast Industries, and could create 1,000 permanent jobs, according to the company. In September, All Aboard Florida hired the AMEC Environment & Infrastructure engineering firm to handle the design, planning and environmental compliance and permitting associated with project.

Dockery called the effort a good first step. “It doesn’t do enough, but it’s a start and I applaud the start,” he said.

The other states that rejected federal funding included Ohio and Wisconsin. Ohio Gov. John Kasich turned back \$385 million for a train to connect Cincinnati, Columbus and Cleveland. Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker rejected \$810 million in federal funding for a plan that would have connected Milwaukee to Madison. There has been no talk of high speed rail in Wisconsin — which has \$6.5 billion transportation budget for fiscal years 2011-2013, since Walker’s decision.

The line could create 1,000 permanent jobs.



That doesn't mean, though, they haven't been talking about transportation in Wisconsin. An 11-member Transportation Finance and Policy Study Commission was created in 2011 and directed to make legislative recommendations regarding the future of transportation finance. Craig Thompson, executive director of the Transportation Development Association of Wisconsin and a commission member, said the group is expected to finalize its recommendations early, by December 2012. Nowhere will there be mention of high speed rail, though, said Thompson, whose 400 association members range from road builders to mass transit advocates.

"The statutory language that created the commission was quite clear about the areas the commission should study and provide recommendations about. High speed rail was not on the list," Thompson said.

While there is no talk of high speed rail in the Capitol in Madison, the talk on the street remains. High speed rail advocate Gary Goyke said returning \$810 million in federal dollars was a "generational mistake" that will have repercussions for decades to come.

Goyke and pro-rail citizens like him have formed All Aboard Wisconsin. The group, Goyke says, has filed its preliminary paperwork and hopes to have a 501 c 4 in place to promote candidates who support high speed rail and rail options.

The Federal Railroad Association downplays the Florida snub noting that in 2012 there are 44 projects in 18 states totaling nearly \$3 billion under construction or set to break ground. The majority of those projects — about 85 percent — are concentrated in five key regional networks which account for 65 percent of the United States population, said FRA spokesperson Kevin Thompson.

Some examples of those projects include the 457 miles of track between Washington, D.C.'s Union Station and Boston's South Station that has gotten more than \$3 billion from the federal government for improvements. The system accommodates more than 2,000 passenger trains daily and 70 freight trains. The Northeast Corridor is responsible for 20 percent of the nation's gross domestic product.

Washington and Oregon in the Pacific Northwest received a combined \$780 million to make improvements and in the Midwest construction on a line from Chicago to St. Louis is underway as is work on a line to connect Chicago with Detroit and Pontiac, Mich.

High speed rail is alive and well and moving forward in a huge way.



Like Thompson at the Federal Railroad Association, United States High Speed Rail Association President and Chief Executive Officer Andy Kunz maintains Obama's rail initiative is intact and doing well. Three governors returned the money, he said, but 44 others did not.

"I would say it's alive and well and moving forward in a huge way in California," Kunz said. "It will set the model for the rest of the country." ●

Christine Jordan Sexton is a Tallahassee-based freelance reporter who has done correspondent work for the Associated Press, the New York Times, Florida Medical Business and a variety of trade magazines, including Florida Lawyer and National Underwriter.

TODS are Top Choice in the Market



Courtesy of Charlotte Area Transit System

By John Van Gieson

Transit-oriented development, loosely defined as mixed-use projects near mass transit stations, has been a relatively bright spot in a dismal real estate market over the last four years.

TOD projects have been built or are under construction in communities around the country that are still reeling from the collapse of the housing market. Those developments are generally holding their value better than other housing options, according to TOD experts. They agree that even though the TOD market is not as strong as it was previously, it's still holding its own.

Jeffrey Wood, New Media Director/Chief Cartographer at Reconnecting America in Oakland, Calif., said property values “that have dropped precipitously in exurban and suburban areas are staying close to the same in areas that have access to mass transit.”

TOD, a concept that's been a key element of smart growth planning for about 20 years, has traditionally revolved

TOD developments are generally holding their value better than other housing options.

around light rail stations, but that is changing. More and more communities are building Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) systems because they are considerably cheaper than light rail and produce similar results in terms of ridership and development. The HealthLine in Cleveland, Ohio, is cited by TOD advocates as the outstanding example of a BRT that is playing a key role in an American city's renewal.

TOD advocates say communities developing light rail and BRT systems should focus on linking downtown with other major employment centers, which typically includes hospitals and major universities. Cleveland's BRT links downtown with major medical centers and universities.

“The highest riderships have come on transit systems that connect employment centers,” Wood said.

Communities should focus on linking downtowns with other major employment centers.

“I think there are a lot of systems that need to connect their employment centers.”

That was a primary goal when officials in Cleveland, which has had an extensive rail system since the 1960s, opened a BRT line on Euclid Avenue in 2008. The 9.6-mile bus route links Public Square in downtown Cleveland with University Circle, home of the world famous Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals and Case Western Reserve University, and continues on to East Cleveland, an inner suburb.

Euclid Avenue, the main street running east from downtown, was known as “Millionaires Row” in the early 1900s because the founders of Standard Oil and General Electric lived there. However by the time Cleveland officials got serious about building a BRT line, part of Euclid Avenue, frequented by hookers and drug dealers, was known as a place to avoid.

“It used to be a place where you didn’t even want to stop your car at the red lights,” said Annette Ballou, spokeswoman for the Downtown Cleveland Alliance. “It’s all different now. You can get out and walk around. You can eat at a really good restaurant. It’s a complete turnaround; it really is.”

Known as the HealthLine — the Cleveland Clinic and University Hospitals paid \$6.25 million for naming rights — the Cleveland line was rated the No. 1 BRT in the country by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy.

Urban Land, the Urban Land Institute magazine, reported that \$5.8 billion has been invested in development along the HealthLine, \$3.3 billion in new construction and \$2.5 billion in rehabilitated buildings. HealthLine development includes:

- \$1.3 billion invested in more than 150 high-tech companies;
- \$500-million Cleveland Clinic Heart Center;
- \$500-million University Hospitals expansion;
- \$180-million Cleveland State University expansion;

The highest riderships have come on transit systems that connect employment centers.



- \$27-million Museum of Contemporary Art;
- Health Tech Corridor, featuring a \$28-million building, housing startup bio-tech companies and seven business incubators;
- 5,100 housing units in mixed-use buildings featuring retail, bars and restaurants; and
- 13,000 new jobs.

HealthLine features sleek, hybrid buses; stylish stations where riders purchase tickets before boarding; dedicated lanes in the middle of Euclid Avenue to avoid traffic congestion; distinctive lighting in each district along the route; and 104 planters where the flora is changed three times a year.

“We wanted to make the physical environment as comfortable as possible,” said Joseph Marinucci, president and CEO of the Downtown Cleveland Alliance.

HealthLine has become a magnet for communities around the world considering BRT systems. Mary Shaffer, spokeswoman for the Greater Cleveland Rapid Transit Authority,

said visitors in 2012 included an Australian delegation and Disney World planners.

TOD with Light Rail

The Charlotte, N.C., LYNX Blue Line is frequently cited by TOD advocates as a good example of a light rail project that focused on TOD and got it right.

“I agree completely,” said Stuart Proffitt, a partner in Proffitt Dixon Partners, which is developing a 208-unit luxury apartment complex at the Blue Line’s New Bern station. “The Planning Department in Charlotte is very smart and thoughtful.”

The Blue Line is not consistent with Reconnecting America’s goal of linking major employment centers: the 9.7-mile line runs south from Charlotte’s downtown, which the locals call Uptown, to the suburbs, but it is a model for TOD growth. Proffitt said Blue Line planners did an excellent job of implementing zoning and density policies that made it considerably easier for developers to succeed.



HealthLine has become a magnet for communities around the world considering BRT systems.





Courtesy of Charlotte Area Transit System



Courtesy of Charlotte Area Transit System

The value of property rezoned for TOD has shown an annualized increase of 36 to 143 percent.

Tina Votaw, TOD manager at the Charlotte Area Transit System, said the projected TOD impact from the Blue Line's opening in 2007 through 2013 is nearly \$1.5 billion. Those projections include 6,887 housing units, nearly 600,000 square feet of retail and more than 638,000 square feet of office. Votaw said the value of property rezoned for TOD has shown an annualized increase of 36 to 143 percent.

A lot of the earlier TOD took place in Uptown, but the trend is moving south, turning the South End neighborhood across the interstate, once dominated by light industrial buildings and warehouses, into a trendy mecca for young professionals who work in the city's banks. Charlotte is an international banking center, home of two of the country's largest banks.

Proffitt said his project, Fountains at South End, offers all the amenities a young banker could want, is located next to the New Bern station and will become a centerpiece of a popular neighborhood that features retail, restaurants and a new brew pub. Set to open in 2013, the Fountains

will feature a transit lobby with a Starbucks machine, plush seating, news channels on big-screen TVs and a monitor that tells residents when the train is approaching the station.

"It's a site that was good for apartments before the downturn, and was bought by an apartment developer that went out of business," Proffitt said. "We bought the property at auction and that made the economics of the deal good enough that we could get over the hurdles of the economy."

St. Louis, Mo., is a shrinking city, although its metro area is growing at a modest rate. The Gateway to the West has lost population in every U.S. census since the 1930s. Population growth in the downtown area is a bright spot, however. NextStL.com has reported that 83 percent of St. Louis neighborhoods with access to light rail gained population in the last decade.

"St. Louis has had a resurgence of downtown residents in recent years," said Kimberly Cella, executive director of

New residents are drawn downtown by new housing options and other amenities near transit stations.

Citizens for Modern Transit. She said the new residents are mainly young professionals and empty nesters drawn downtown by new housing options and other amenities near transit stations.

St. Louis is served by two MetroLink light rail lines, Red and Blue, that link downtown with the Central West End, an affluent neighborhood featuring an employment center at the Washington University Medical Center. MetroLink extends to the Illinois and Missouri suburbs, and there has been some development near some of those stations.

John Langa, vice president for economic development of the Bi-State Development Agency in St. Louis, said more than \$1 billion worth of development, including infrastructure improvements, has been completed, started or announced near MetroLink stations since the start of 2011.

MetroLink has published a TOD primer that discusses the benefits of walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods near light rail stations and offers advice and assistance to developers. Amos Harris, whose company is building a major development at the downtown Convention Center station, said he is talking to transit officials about adding some amenities that will enhance the value of his project, called Mercantile Exchange.

Mercantile Exchange is a \$250-million redevelopment of three older buildings near the center of downtown. When all three are up and running in 2013, the development will include a 212-room Embassy Suites Hotel, 205 market rate apartments, 375,000 square feet of office space, 145,000 square feet of retail and 750 parking places.

Harris, principal of Spinnaker St. Louis, said Mercantile Exchange is designed to be a magnet attracting tourists and suburban residents. He said he has set rigorous standards for measuring the success of the project, and one of the most important is a substantial increase in riders getting on and off the trains at the downtown stations.

“What I want is for people to come downtown and feel like they want to spend the day,” Harris said. “You need to have a whole slew of options for them.”



Courtesy of Charlotte Area Transit System



Courtesy of Citizens for Modern Transit



Courtesy of Reconnecting America



Bus rapid transit, the new kid on the TOD block, is rapidly growing in cities across the country.

TOD with Buses

Bus rapid transit, the new kid on the TOD block, is rapidly growing in cities across the country. San Francisco, Chicago and Boston, all served by extensive rail systems, are developing BRT routes to provide new transportation options.

Two Western cities, Las Vegas and El Paso, Texas, have rejected light rail as too expensive and are developing BRT systems that will eventually move people along major corridors throughout the city.

Las Vegas has two BRT lines in operation, including one that serves the famous Strip where many of city's casinos are located, and two more in the works. Being Vegas, the BRT lines are called ACEXpress.

El Paso is an especially interesting model as its BRT lines are part of an effort to revamp the city by embracing smart growth principles. City officials have approved a comprehensive plan called Plan El Paso and adopted a Smart Code to guide growth.

Carlos Gallinar, El Paso planning director, said the city is developing a 55-mile system of four BRT lines to provide better transit options than the existing bus system. Now under construction, the Oregon-Mesa line will connect a Mexican border crossing, downtown El Paso, the University of Texas at El Paso and other civic landmarks.

Gallinar said the mixed-use projects built near transit stations will be the first of their kind in the West Texas city. Montecillo, a massive \$777-million urban village along the Oregon-Mesa line near downtown, is under construction. The plan calls for more than 2,500 apartments, almost 500 homes and town homes, senior community, schools, retail, offices and 80 acres of open space.

"Basically what we are trying to do is have multiple types of construction, multiple types of product, that people will enjoy," developer Richard Aguilar of EPT Land Communities told the El Paso Inc. newspaper. "We're doing the best we can to get as many good projects on the ground that we can." ●

John Van Gieson is a freelance writer based in Tallahassee, Fla. He owns and runs Van Gieson Media Relations, Inc.

New Routes FOR Rural Roots

Creative transportation options connect rural America

By Brad Broberg

ight rail. Commuter trains. Buses running on fixed routes. That's how most people picture public transportation.

But they're focused on big city transit. Lost in that picture are the creative ways many small cities and towns are meeting the mobility needs of rural America.

"Most people don't know there is such a thing as transit in small towns and rural places," says Sara Kline, policy director of Reconnecting America.

Reconnecting America is a nonprofit organization that focuses on the link between transportation and community development. In a report published earlier this year, Reconnecting America describes the need for rural transit, the challenges involved in delivering it and various places where it's thriving.

"These aren't metro systems, but they're systems that are meeting the needs ... of their populations," says John Robert Smith, president and CEO of Reconnecting America.

The needs are greater than meets the eye. Although rural areas of 50,000 people or less comprise only about 20 percent of the nation's total population,

Today's rural residents are faced with driving farther to find work than previous generations.





they are home to nearly 40 percent of the country's transit-dependent population — primarily senior citizens, persons with disabilities and low-income individuals.

Changing rural economies are another factor. Traditional sources of local employment — often based on agriculture and natural resources — have shed many jobs. Today's rural residents are faced with driving farther — and spending more on gas — to find work than previous generations. That's if they even have a car. More than 1.6 million rural households don't, according to the Reconnecting America report.

Finding Innovative Solutions

The strong need for more rural transportation options isn't easily met. Rural roads aren't usually designed for safe walking or cycling. The buses and trains that once ran between cities and stitched rural America together make fewer stops in fewer places.

Even under the most favorable conditions, public transportation requires subsidies. Rural populations are spread out and destinations are far apart, driving per capita costs

Many rural residents are more isolated than ever from jobs, health care and education.

higher. With local resources scarce, rural communities are at the mercy of uncertain federal support.

The bottom line: many rural residents are more isolated than ever from jobs, health care, education and other essential needs. The lack of mobility also hurts rural economies as potential customers and employees find it difficult to make the trek to town.

Reconnecting America's report, "Putting Transit to Work in Mainstream America," aims to shine a light on the public transportation issues facing rural communities — and some of the innovative strategies and partnerships they're using to improve mobility. "The good news is we're finding some very creative best practices in very small cities and towns," Smith says.

The goal of these communities is to provide more transportation choices — a cornerstone of smart growth — in places where building more highways has often been the one and only answer. “Highways are not always the best solution,” Smith says. “One choice is no choice.”

The 11,000 residents of tiny Allendale County, S.C., are scattered. Most live far from jobs and service and many are too poor to afford cars or too elderly to drive. “The rural Health Center told us that one-third of their appointments were cancelled because people had no way to get there,” says Lynnda Bassham, human services director for the Lower Savannah Council of Governments (LSCOG).

The LSCOG is a regional planning agency that coordinates community development efforts in six counties. Faced with a pressing need for public transportation, Allendale County turned to the LSCOG for help. The result was a trailblazing transit service called the Allendale County Scooter.

“The scooter is the poster child for what you can do with nothing,” Bassham says. “I talk about it all over the country.”

The Allendale County Scooter is a demand-response service. Instead of running according to fixed routes and schedules, vehicles pick up and drop off passengers at requested locations. Demand response is the transit system du jour for rural areas because people are so spread out. According to the Reconnecting America report, 86 percent of all rural transit systems offer this type of service.

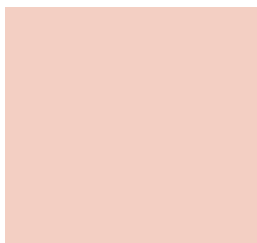
What sets the Allendale County Scooter apart is the source of the system’s vehicles. After setting out to start a transit system from scratch, county leaders and the LSCOG changed course when they realized a de facto transit system already existed right under their noses.

Every day, health clinics, senior centers and other human services providers were independently transporting clients in vans and shuttles with plenty of empty seats. Why not coordinate their pickups and dropoffs with ride requests from the general public?

Demand response is the transit system du jour for rural areas.



Photo by Dan Burden



We made the connection between a high percentage of unemployed people and a job market with vacancies that weren't being filled.

The Allendale County Scooter debuted in 2004 after a mobility manager was hired to match ride requests from the general public with available seats on vehicles operated by participating agencies. “We saw the opportunity to take advantage of what we already had and it worked very well,” Bassham says.

Ridership has doubled since 2004 as the 14-vehicle system now serves more than 1,000 riders a month. A blend of local, state and federal money plus modest fares, fund the Allendale County Scooter. The scooter's success led neighboring Bamberg County to establish a similar system and set in motion plans to build a regional network of coordinated transportation providers.

Last year, LSCOG opened a new mobility center to support various transit programs — including the Allendale County Scooter — in all six counties it serves. Upgrades include new communications/scheduling software and onboard computers with GPS tracking systems.

“We've built a virtual transit network ... and we keep making progress,” Bassham says.

Connecting Workers to Jobs

In York County, Maine, public transportation services are provided by the York County Community Action Corporation (YCCAC), a nonprofit human services agency. Home to 197,000 people, York County is dotted with isolated towns — many hugging the scenic coastline where tourism is a driving force in the local economy.

The challenge for coastal hotels, restaurants and other tourist-dependent businesses is to attract the number of workers needed to handle the summer crowds. The challenge for workers is to get to work — or at least it was before the YCCAC responded to a plea for help from business leaders and launched the Shoreline Explorer trolley service in 2006.

The Shoreline Explorer links the county's inland to the coast with year-round service and connects the coastal communities to each other with seasonal service during the summer. The result? An employment pipeline from the inland city of Sanford — hard hit by manufacturing layoffs — to all the tourist towns begging for workers up and down the coast.



“We made the connection between a high percentage of unemployed people, many of whom don't have personal vehicles, and a job market with vacancies that weren't being filled,” says Connie Graber, YCCAC transportation director. Tourists seeing the sights and residents running errands also ride the Shoreline Explorer, relieving congestion on the busy highway connecting the county's coastal towns.

York County isn't the first Maine county to connect tourist towns with trollies — think cute buses not streetcars — but it's the only one that built a system incorporating existing private transit service. "We have three private, for-profit trolley operators, but (their routes) weren't connected," Graber says. "We filled the gaps with our trollies and added a route connecting Sanford with the coast."

Riders must get on and off and pay separate fares to travel the entire route, but the Shoreline Explorer's unique formula is a winner. "Ridership is growing by leaps and bounds — 2012 was the highest we ever had," Graber says. Ridership rose to 72,000 from 62,000 in 2011.

State and federal sources account for the bulk of the system's budget, but the towns and local businesses served by the Shoreline Explorer also chip in — and are happy to do so. One downtown association recently asked what it would cost to add weekend service during the shoulder season, Graber says.



High-Level Rural Service

The Roaring Fork Valley in Colorado faces the same mobility challenge as York County — but on steroids. The valley is home to Aspen, a world-class tourist destination with lots of hospitality jobs, but a workforce that lives in other towns. With the average home costing several million dollars, the Aspen housing market is one of the most unaffordable in the country.

The Roaring Fork Transit Authority (RFTA) has provided service connecting the valley's small towns to Aspen and each other since 1983. Today, the RFTA operates a fleet of more than 80 vehicles serving 10 communities in three counties and carrying 4.5 million passengers — locals as well as tourists — a year.

"We have a lot of folks living here who are transit-dependent because they don't own cars or don't like to drive in the snow," Chase says.

The RFTA will make rural transportation history when it launches the nation's first bus rapid transit system serving a rural area.



Photo by Dan Burden

RTFA secured federal funding and won voter approval for a tax increase to build a “light rail on wheels.”



Photo by lumierefl

Courtesy of Roaring Fork Transportation Authority

Rendering of a VelociRAFTA bus, which will be part of the first rural bus rapid transit system in the United States.



Next fall, the RFTA will make rural transportation history when it launches the nation’s first bus rapid transit system serving a rural area. Dubbed the VelociRAFTA, the service will operate along a 40-mile corridor between Aspen in the north and Glenwood Springs in the south.

The 2008 spike in gas prices planted the seed for VelociRAFTA, says Dawn Chase, the agency’s marketing and communications manager. Ridership on the RFTA’s conventional bus service from Glenwood Springs to Aspen swelled to standing room only during the gas spike. Many so-called choice riders — people with cars who could drive if they wanted — never returned to their cars when gas prices dipped.

Deciding it was time to upgrade service, the RFTA secured federal funding and won voter approval for a tax increase to build a bus rapid transit system — a.k.a “light rail on wheels,” Chase says. VelociRAFTA will run every 15 minutes instead of every 30 minutes and make the Glenwood

Springs to Aspen run in 60 minutes instead of 90 minutes plus. The system’s 18 buses will make fewer stops, travel in priority lanes that speed their progress through traffic lights and offer on-board Wi-Fi service. “We’re trying to make it as convenient as possible for the choice driver,” Chase said.

Convenience isn’t the only carrot. Colorado is one of the greenest states in the union. VelociRAFTA gives riders a chance to help reduce air pollution by leaving their cars in the garage. The buses will run on clean-burning compressed natural gas produced in Colorado. ●

Brad Broberg is a Seattle-based freelance writer specializing in business and development issues. His work appears regularly in the Puget Sound Business Journal and the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.



Photo by Rebecca Farewell-Prisaznik

BUILDING A *Better Community*

... **One Block
at a Time.**

By Brian E. Clark

Jason Roberts thinks like an artist, not like a city bureaucrat or urban planner.

Which is a big part of the reason why, he says, the “Build a Better Block” project that he and several co-conspirators dreamed up has rapidly taken off around the country, and even gone global.

Roberts, who was raised in suburban Dallas, plays guitar and keyboards in a band. He also was an IT consultant for 15 years. More important, though, he’s passionate about bringing blighted areas of communities back to life.



Courtesy of Sustainable Flatbush

He and other volunteers are doing this — for a weekend at a time — by reducing traffic, adding bike lanes and sprucing up streetscapes with flower-filled planters, temporary trees, public artwork, outdoor cafes and opening pop-up temporary businesses in older buildings. In the meantime, they’re also encouraging cities to implement changes in traffic patterns to make streets more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly.

Roberts has lived in the Oak Cliff neighborhood — which some consider a “bad part of town” — for about a dozen years. On a trip to Europe five-plus years ago, he saw neighborhoods with vibrant street scenes from Italy to Scandinavia.

When he returned to Texas, Roberts headed a successful effort to revive a boarded up theater that’s now showing films again and is used for art shows and other events. Next, he launched a drive to promote bike lanes. (And he didn’t even own a bicycle at the time.)

But what he really wanted to do was reinvigorate once busy streets. His partner in the effort was Amy Cowan.

“We started by looking at a couple of blocks in Oak Cliff on the southwest side of Dallas near downtown that had a lot of empty buildings that had been boarded up,”

We want to bring back neighborhoods rapidly.

The Build a Better Block idea was created on the premise of people coming together to create a community destination quickly.

he said. They ended up choosing the 400 block of N. Tyler Street because it had had a streetcar stop back in the 1920s and 30s.

A rebel at heart, Roberts didn't want to go through a lengthy process or jump through numerous bureaucratic hoops.

"We want to bring back neighborhoods rapidly rather than getting some multi-million-dollar bond package that would take 10 years to accomplish," he said, exaggerating only slightly.

"We wanted to do something within days," he explained. "So this Build a Better Block idea was created on the premise of people coming together to create a community destination quickly."

Roberts said as he began "peeling back the layers," he found numerous ordinances that had been put in place over the years — some of them enacted back in the 40s — that restricted outdoor seating, awnings and other things that he believes make streets come alive.

"Then we identified with the community what makes a great block: And all around the world they seem to have the same things, like small stores, bakeries, restaurants, flower shops, cafes ... things like that."

"We said to ourselves, 'if we know this is what makes a great block, how do we start working toward that goal immediately, as opposed to a long, public process?'"

The answer was to treat the event like an art project.

"We knew if we wanted to get building permits, it would take months," he said. "So instead of saying this is going to be a coffee shop here, we said it was an art installation of what a coffee shop would be. But it would also sell coffee. We knew if we approached this as an art project, we'd have more leniency and flexibility."

Roberts called the effort "part guerilla, part legit."

"We worked with the building owners, of course, but we pushed the envelope with the public space improvements," he said.

"With the landlords, we said 'look, these buildings have been vacant for months or years. Can you let us use them

for a few days because they aren't doing anything now? We can just treat this like an open house.'"

Roberts said most were "surprisingly amenable." Some were worried about liability, so they arranged for event insurance for the weekend to allay owners' fears.

The Better Block weekend was held in Oak Cliff a little more than two years ago, back in April of 2010. Roberts said it has been a catalyst for reviving the block.

"You see all kinds of businesses moving in now," he said, noting that the city has changed some of the ordinances that were holding back commercial development of the street.



Photo by Rebecca Farewell-Prisaznuk

Better Blocks project in Las Vegas, Nevada

You see all kinds of
businesses moving in now.



We did it by putting in pop-up businesses and planters, changed the traffic and parking for the weekend and made the blocks more people- and bike-friendly.

In addition, the Better Block concept has caught on around the country. Since the first one, some 32 other events have been held. And Roberts is working with activists in Australia, South Africa and Colombia.

“It’s taken off because there is an obvious need to help blighted neighborhoods,” he said. “Every city has commercial neighborhoods that are doing nothing now, but could be turned into great gathering places. And the biggest hurdle to get over is the perception. So if you can go in and start changing the perception of an area, that’s a great way to begin.

“We did it by putting in pop-up businesses and planters, changed the traffic and parking for the weekend and made the blocks more people- and bike-friendly, vs. the street being designed just to move cars. We found that perception can be reality and that’s 90 percent of our battle. We changed the psychology of the place.”

Scott Griggs, who represents Oak Cliff on the Dallas City Council, lauded the Better Block effort as part of an ongoing effort to improve the area and make the infrastructure more pedestrian-friendly.

“I think it’s a great project and certainly an alternative to the traditional ‘charette’ or model used in urban

planning,” he said. “It gives people a vehicle to experience what the block could be like. And that’s very positive.”

Still in the works, he said, is an effort to change the street from a one-way couplet into something that is more conducive to walking and cycling.

“We’re working on it,” he said. “But like a lot of things, what it comes down to is money.”

Kayli Cusick runs an art shop on the block called Oil and Cotton with her business partner, Shannon Driscoll. Cusick was a piano teacher and art curricula writer when she heard about Better Block. Driscoll was an art conservator who did workshops on the side.

“There was an email going around town about this experimental project and they wanted someone to do a kids art studio. I was totally into that, so I volunteered, in part to meet people and get involved.”

She expected perhaps 150 people to visit the pop-up art shop. Instead, more than 500 flowed through the studio, and many stopped in both days. “We had 3-year-old kids and professionals, everyone working side-by-side to create art,” she said. “And the whole Better Block was really a big art installation of outdoor seating and beautiful stores and a big party on a colorful, reinvented street.”

Cusick said her store opened four months after the Better Block event in April of 2010. “We quit our jobs, got a lawyer, negotiated a lease and did an art camp in the store,” she said. “Once we had some money, we bought furniture.”

“We started with \$5,000 and did it all organically, without a business plan,” she chuckled. “And we still don’t have one, but we’re going strong.”

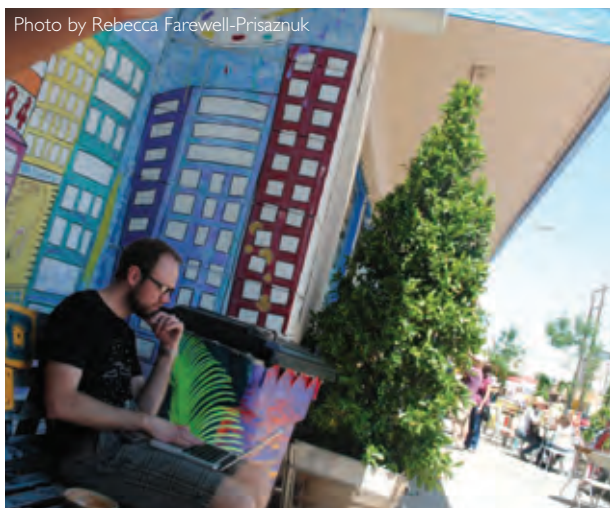
She called her block a “work in progress. Businesses have come and gone, but it’s improving. Now if we can just get the traffic changed and get crosswalks added. It’s still a fast street, but Jason is hounding the city about that.”

Out in Las Vegas, Ciara Byrne, David Wiegand and Shavannah Tiera were inspired by Roberts’ Better Block program. But they put a sustainable twist on the effort — which was held last April on Main Street between Charles and Coolidge streets — dubbing it “Build a Greener Block.”

She said they chose the Main Street block because it had thrived in the 50s and 60s.

“We want to help rejuvenate downtown,” she said. “This street was where everyone went to shop and have coffee once. All the locals came here on the weekends to hang out before the flight to suburbia began and the street died.”

To brighten up the block, the trio and a multitude of volunteers painted store fronts with eco-friendly paint.



Better Blocks project in Las Vegas, Nevada

This was the opportunity to prove that Vegas has a sense of community and culture.



Better Blocks project in Las Vegas, Nevada

They also solicited donated trees, and solar panels to provide lighting at night. Keeping with the sustainable theme, the cafes used biodegradable utensils and many of the pop-up stores offered green products.

“We had classes on gardening, hydroponics and making your own cleaning agent classes. All in all, it was a great weekend that attracted more than 1,500 people,” said Byrne, a native of Dublin, Ireland and a documentary film maker who has lived in Las Vegas less than three years.

She said her group worked closely with city officials. The only downside was that they had to pay fees of around \$5,000. However, she noted, money raised on indiegogo.com — an Internet cloud funding platform — covered the permits.

For Wiegand, a native Las Vegas, this was a chance to show that Sin City has a sense of community and people who are interested in improving the environment.

“We’re all interested in giving downtown a lift,” he said. “This was a way to plant the flag, say this is what we want this area to look like, let people try it out and then — hopefully — see it grow. We’re such a transient city, so this was also the opportunity to prove that Vegas has a sense of community and culture. That was one of the big ones for me because I was born here.”

Wiegand said he hopes to do another green block event on Main Street next spring. “There’s definitely been a lot of interest since April. We just have to find the right empty buildings.”

Some 2,600 miles east in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Rebecca Bradley said she, too, was impressed with what Roberts had done in Dallas and other cities. Bradley runs the Cadence landscape architecture firm with partner Gage Couch.

In 2011, she and Couch worked on a PARKing Day project in which people take over metered parking spaces and turn them into mini-parks for the day — sometimes complete with Astroturf or real sod. Started by a San Francisco group in 2005, PARKing Day and the Better Block are both part of the “tactical urbanism” movement.

After that, Bradley and a group of friends were drawn to the Better Block concept. They chose an area of downtown

Fort Lauderdale in the Flagler Art and Technology Village, a warehouse district that has art walks once a month.

“The rest of the time, though, it’s not anything that great,” she said. “But there are cool, creative people in that area and we thought it would be a neighborhood that would be well suited for something like this.”

The event took place in June on Northwest First Avenue, and Bradley called it a huge success. “Things were definitely starting to happen there, but it really needed some more ‘ummmph’ to give it some juice,” she said.

In the process of planning for the event, Bradley and Couch became so enamored with the area that they ended up renting space on the block and moving their business there. “We saw the potential,” she said.

Bradley said her group worked closely with city officials they’d met through PARKing Day. In addition, an urban planning professor — Eric Dumbaugh — and some of his



We only needed one little permit and the city’s Community Redevelopment Agency covered the cost for us.



Photo by Gelatobaby
PARKing Day in Los Angeles



Photo by Jennifer Conley



Photo by Mondo Tiki Man

This has fostered other ideas and helped build a great community.

students at Florida Atlantic University campus in downtown Fort Lauderdale helped out.

“We only needed one little permit and the city’s Community Redevelopment Agency covered the cost for us,” she said. “After a few meetings, we were on our way.”

Nor did it hurt that the landlord who owned nearly all the buildings on the block was “in complete concert” with the proposal, Bradley said.

Because the block they chose is two football fields (600 feet) long, they first planned to re-invent just half of it. “But as the amount of people involved grew, we decided to do the entire thing,” she said. “We painted seven buildings, cleaned the street, re-planted planters that were full of weeds and built tons of street furniture from pallets and reclaimed lumber.

“We also worked with 20 different small businesses to create pop-up shops, some in vacant warehouses so not everything was outside on the street.”

Since the event, an ad agency has moved into one of the buildings on the street. Two of the pop-up businesses are in the process of negotiating leases, too. However, a café or restaurant is needed so there are places for people to gather.

“But, we’re not traditional developers,” Bradley indicated. “Though, we’re trying to make the connections to improve the neighborhood.” Bradley has two more areas in Fort Lauderdale where she is thinking of holding Better Block gatherings. In addition, students from Miami who took part in the weekend are planning one of their own for the Magic City.

“We’ve also been approached by Baton Rouge, where I went to Louisiana State University,” she said. “This has fostered other ideas and helped build a great community here in Fort Lauderdale.

“Someone asked if we could do this once a month,” she quipped. “We’re not up to that, but we’re certainly not going to disappear.” ●

Brian E. Clark is a Wisconsin-based journalist and a former staff writer on the business desk of The San Diego Union-Tribune. He is a contributor to the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Sun-Times, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Dallas Morning News and other publications.

Road Diets

By Christine Jordan Sexton

Diets aren't restricted to people, or even pets, anymore. Roads across the United States have been going on diets, losing lanes and girth, but gaining multi-modal use, increasing safety and promoting businesses along the way.

While the idea is not new — San Francisco boasts it has been trimming back roads for more than 40 years — it is gaining popularity as the move to walkable communities, complete streets and smart growth takes hold.

“When done right, road diets create a place, not just a space, to pass through,” said Dan Burden, executive director of the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute who is credited with coining the term “road diets” in 1999 in an article with Peter Lagerwey entitled “Road Diets Fixing the Big Roads.”

Diet refers to transforming from wide, multi-lane undivided roads geared toward fast moving cars into highways with one lane in each direction. The reclaimed space taken from the former lane is reallocated for other purposes such as additional parking, a bike lane and pedestrian crossing islands.

The most common type of road diet, said Burden, is when a four-lane highway is reduced to three, with one lane in each direction and a shared left hand turn lane and a bike lane added.

Road diets have been tried successfully across the nation from Orlando, Fla., where Edgewater Drive in the trendy College Park Avenue was trimmed back more than a decade ago, to San Francisco, Calif., which boasts having placed more than 40 streets on a diet.

Diets are recommended for roads with average daily traffic (ADT) of 20,000 or less. Roads with 15,000 ADT



or less “had very good results in the area of safety, operations and livability,” according to the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration.

A road diet is one “countermeasure” being touted by the Federal Highway Administration as a way to make streets safer and to reduce the number of highway fatalities and injuries. According to the agency reconfiguring and restriping undivided four lane roadways to three lane roads reduces by 29 percent the number of roadway crashes.

Nine countermeasures were unveiled January 2012 by the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration Acting Administrator of Safety Tony Furst. Other countermeasures the federal government is promoting include considering roundabouts — not traffic signals — at intersections; placing longitudinal rumble stripes on two-lane roads that alert sleepy drivers who drive over them; and incorporating raised medians in curbed sections of multi-lane roadways to provide pedestrians a safe place to stand and wait for traffic gaps.

When done well a road diet keeps traffic moving smoothly, despite cars going a little bit slower.

When signals are used, the federal government is asking transportation officials to make traffic lights more visible by adding backplates with reflective borders.

City planner and architectural designer Jeff Speck touches on road diets in his new book, *Walkable Cities*.

“There is hardly a downtown in the United States that does not have a 4-laner that would benefit from a road diet tomorrow,” said Speck. “A happy by-product of the road diet is the additional 10 to 12 feet of roadway freed up by the eliminated lane. This space can be used to expand sidewalks, plant trees, create a missing parking lane, or to replace parallel parking with angled parking in a business district.”

While Speck said that road diets are gaining in popularity, trimming back roads hasn’t always been a popular option, not even in the city that boasts having the title of Biggest Road Loser.

Putting Valencia Street — a north-south corridor in San Francisco — on a diet initially wasn’t supported by the local transportation department, but 1.8 miles of the street were thinned out in 1999 by order of the city board of supervisors. The four lane highway was reconfigured to two travel lanes, a center median with left hand turn bays and bike lanes.

A subsequent study conducted by San Francisco State University showed a 144 percent increase in bicycle use on the road and a decrease in collisions involving bicycles



Photo by Ely Blue

and pedestrians. Just six percent of merchants surveyed after the road was thinned and bike lanes installed had negative feedback.

Residents in Lewistown, Pa., overwhelmingly opposed efforts by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation to convert a one mile section of Electric Avenue from four lanes to three. The change was made despite 95 percent opposition from residents who feared increased travel times. Subsequent analysis showed overall trip times were unaffected. Burden in his 1999 paper, “Road Diets Fixing the Big Roads,” concluded that nearly 95 percent of those who feared the change “are openly thankful” for the change.

“When done well a road diet keeps traffic moving smoothly, despite cars going a little bit slower and they don’t jockey for space ... and here’s something really cool, with a road diet, people often get home sooner at slower, safer speeds because we take out delays at intersections,” Burden said. ●

Christine Jordan Sexton is a Tallahassee-based freelance reporter who has done correspondent work for the Associated Press, the New York Times, Florida Medical Business and a variety of trade magazines, including Florida Lawyer and National Underwriter.



Photo by Dan Burden

REALTORS® Take Action

Making Smart Growth Happen

REALTOR® Associations Leading in Bringing Public Transportation to Their Communities

“Public transportation is a benefit to cities and developers looking for ways they can enhance smart growth and sustainable development,” says Taylor Oldroyd, chief executive officer of the Utah County Association of REALTORS®.

REALTOR® associations have long known that people frequently make housing choices based on proximity to transportation. That’s why REALTOR® associations across the country are educating about, and advocating for, public transportation. In Utah, Colorado, and Florida, REALTOR® associations have sponsored events that showcased local public transit projects and reached hundreds of officials from government, business, organizations and educational institutions. In Indiana and Virginia, REALTOR® associations are engaged in ongoing advocacy of public transit plans and expansions. The results everywhere are increased public awareness, and collaborative efforts to develop and expand public transportation options.

The Utah County Association of REALTORS® has been hard at work promoting FrontRunner South, a commuter

rail line utilizing a 45-mile stretch of an existing Union Pacific Railroad corridor to connect downtown Salt Lake City with Provo. It opens to the public on December 10, 2012.

With the help of a NAR Smart Growth Grant, the Utah County Association of REALTORS® sponsored an event that provided an opportunity for elected officials and the public to learn more about FrontRunner South. The August 17 event brought together more than 100 stakeholders, including the governor, and gave many the first chance to step aboard a FrontRunner South passenger car. The Association also helped build awareness and educate the public through a series of print ads that explained the Utah Transit Authority project.

The Denver Metro Area REALTORS® (DMAR) have been engaged throughout all aspects of an expansion plan for Colorado’s West Rail Line — the latest step in an eight-county, comprehensive transit expansion plan called FasTracks that will expand the Regional Transportation District’s light rail corridor an additional 12 miles from downtown Denver to Jefferson County and the city of Golden. DMAR partnered with the Denver Regional Council of Governments and sponsored a tour and seminar for nearly 100 REALTORS® and elected officials, which included a close-up look at the West Rail Line construction and the chance to learn more about land use along the corridor. DMAR hopes to hold another event showcasing the light rail cars shortly before the line opens to the public in April 2013.

Florida’s SunRail will connect Orlando and Central Florida by commuter rail when it begins operation in May of 2014. Recently, the **Orlando Regional REALTOR®**



Association organized and hosted an opportunity for fellow REALTORS®, chamber of commerce members and elected officials to experience the benefits of commuter rail first hand. Approximately 170 people hopped aboard the train and travelled the construction route to check out SunRail's progress. During the trip and a presentation that followed, attendees learned more about the economic and land-use impact of the project and the benefits of transit-oriented development. Completion of the 61-mile SunRail project will boost economic development all along its route, including current plans for more than \$1 billion in projects ranging from apartment buildings to commercial and retail space.

“As Central Florida continues to grow, so will the demand for higher density development. Public transportation, while being a key catalyst for this type of development, will also relieve existing over-burdened roadways. Our new commuter train — SunRail — makes use of existing tracks that parallel main traffic arteries and pass many of our key employment and entertainment centers. Central Florida, like all other regional economies, needs a reliable public transportation rail system as part of a smart-growth strategy,” says Stephen Baker, chairman of the board of the Orlando Regional REALTOR® Association.

While many associations are educating and promoting projects currently under construction, other associations are active in advocating for development and expansion of public transportation options. **The Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of REALTORS®** (MIBOR) is actively supporting and advocating for a multi-modal transportation system that would include higher quality bus service, light rail and commuter rail. MIBOR, in collaboration with the Central Indiana Transit Task Force, is working to place a referendum on the Indianapolis-region ballot in 2013 that would seek taxpayer support for revenue for public transportation development. (See Creative Funding article on page 36.)



In Virginia, the **Hampton Roads REALTORS® Association** has long been a supporter of light rail in the region. Currently the area benefits from The Tide, a light rail line that serves Norfolk and began operation in 2011. The Association hopes to spread those benefits to neighboring Virginia Beach and is working with planners and officials to educate the public on the benefits of light rail and advocate for expanding The Tide. The Hampton Roads REALTORS® Association, along with NAR, have been promoting and supporting a fall advisory referendum question on the proposed expansion. The referendum question asks voters in Virginia Beach if the city council should use “all reasonable efforts to support the financing and development of The Tide light rail into Virginia Beach.” Members of the Hampton Roads REALTORS® Association say ‘Yes’ to the referendum question and have been working hard to persuade voters to say ‘Yes’ as well.

Through education, promotion and advocacy, REALTOR® associations across the country are working to ensure that homeowners, developers and communities benefit from a variety of public transportation choices. When it comes to public transportation, REALTORS® are on the right track in helping connect communities and promote regional growth and prosperity. ●



REALTORS® & Smart Growth

on common ground



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION of
REALTORS®

