

search this site

CLEANER ENVIRONMENT  
CREATING JOBS ENERGY INDEPENDENCE  
BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE

# PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION TAKES US THERE

HOME TRANSIT NEWS TRANSIT FACTS TRANSIT SYSTEMS TRANSIT REPORTS OTHER RESOURCES INTERACT

site search site map

## TRANSIT REPORTS

[Transit Reports Main Page](#)

[Benefits For Individuals  
and Communities](#)

[Economic Impact](#)

[Energy Benefits](#)

[Environmental and Health  
Benefits](#)

[Seniors & Mobility](#)

[Transit Commuter Benefits](#)

## 10 WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR COMMUNITY: UNLEASH THE POWER OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

*Download in Adobe PDF format.*

America's communities are being revitalized. So how are the most successful ones boosting property values and stimulating local economies while solving traffic problems and providing citizens with the mobility to access opportunities? By enhancing and developing their public transportation systems.

From small towns to big cities, public transportation is helping to generate new vitality like never before. Beautiful, walkable town squares combine residential, retail, office, recreation and public transportation features to make community living easy. New bus services and light rail extensions improve mobility and ease congestion. Even the smallest adjustments, like widening sidewalks and adding bikeways, can provide dramatic impact and value.

Along with easing congestion and improving air quality, the benefits of enhancing public transit are enormous. Transit-oriented development increases property values, property tax revenues, sales tax revenues and more. In short, a healthy transportation system can anchor a community's revitalization effort.

Want to learn how your community can make the most of its public transportation system? Take a look at the next few pages. You'll discover 10 inspiring tips that can help public transportation help you and your neighborhood.

### 1. MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION A PLANNING PRIORITY

When your public transit system serves a mix of residential and commercial uses, you'll help reduce vehicle trips and make residents less dependent on their cars. Imagine the positive impact on local traffic, the economy and air quality when facilities like libraries, hospitals, houses of worship and civic buildings are located near public transit stations.

Make sure that public transportation services are part of the decision-making process when you are considering new public facilities and when developers are proposing new commercial projects. Remove barriers to traditional urban design, and consider changing zoning and building codes, including any parking requirements.

Take New Jersey's Transit Village Program, for instance. In 1999, the state named five communities public transit villages. To foster redevelopment and investment in areas near transportation centers-and to simultaneously promote the use of public transit-the communities agreed to create mixed-use developments within a quarter mile of a bus terminal or rail station. These mixed-use communities were to combine residential components with retail, office, parking and public uses within easy walking distance of each other.

One of the communities, South Orange, teamed private sector and local officials with NJ TRANSIT to rehabilitate closed-up storefronts around the public transit station. A transformed and revitalized downtown center emerged. There's an ice cream parlor, coffee shop, dry cleaner, bakery, clothing store and diner. Local officials also used federal funds to implement an ambitious streetscape project, and NJ TRANSIT added parking, landscaping and kiosks. What's more, over 200 high-density housing units are now within walking distance of the bustling center.

## **2. MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION THE CENTER OF YOUR COMMUNITY**

The best place to build public transit centers and bus stops is in the heart of your community. This helps create lively activity and a center of commerce that can become a community landmark, while also reducing the use of costly land for parking spaces.

Want to encourage public transit use? It's probably a lot easier than you think. In fact, many communities were developed as a result of a railroad or busline. Use this to your advantage. Renovate the historic railroad station into an intermodal facility that could include a library, revive it as a community activity center for adult education classes or use it as a farmers market on weekends.

Build shops, offices and residential dwellings close together, centered around attractive features such as planters, benches, fountains and public art. It's best to place parking facilities behind commercial developments rather than in the center of them. By doing so, you'll have developed an area that's walkable and inviting-villages where people want to spend time shopping, playing, living and working.

This attention to planning can pay off. On the banks of the Wabash River, the City of West Lafayette, Indiana, has created a new downtown in a city that's never had one. A public-private venture, Wabash Landing's master plan incorporates retail stores and restaurants, a multi-screen theater, residential dwellings, a park, a hotel, a child care center, a soon-to-be-built ice skating rink and much more.

Designed to echo a 1950s-era town square, the mixed-use development links the Purdue University campus, the riverfront and, across the river, Lafayette's central business district. A new pedestrian bridge now connects West Lafayette with Lafayette and its multi-modal bus and rail transportation center. CityBus, the regional transit agency, provides bus service through the area, enabling students, residents and visitors to conveniently combine walking, biking and public transit to meet their mobility needs.

## **3. MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION LOOK FANTASTIC**

The more comfortable people are in your public transit facilities, the more often they'll use them. So ensure that they look great. Make your facilities easy to get to and easy to use. Keep them clean, safe and secure. Provide sidewalks and

eliminate barriers.

Don't hide your facilities-design them as part of the community. Plant shrubs, trees and flowers, and then make sure they're well-maintained. And think about attractive lighting. It's as important for safety as it is for enhancing the character of your community.

For example, in Tempe, Arizona, the community has made public transit fun by installing artist-designed bus shelters throughout the area. The shelters are colorful, creative, whimsical and interesting. Buses also have put art into motion with artist-designed wraps placed on the city's new neighborhood circulators. The buses are a source of pride and inspiration for the community.

Corpus Christi, Texas, worked with its regional transportation authority to make its bus stops and transfer stations safer, more attractive and more inviting to the public. With funding from the Federal Transit Administration, the city has turned key transfer centers- Staples Street and Port Ayers-into focal points of their surrounding communities. Landscaping, pedestrian walkways, lighting, vibrant paint and tilework have transformed the neighborhoods. The result? Increased ridership and significant re-investment in the community.

#### **4. MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION EASY STREET FOR PEDESTRIANS.**

Riders often walk to public transit stops and stations. So consider the sidewalks and routes around the stops. Narrow streets, for example, reduce vehicle speeds, resulting in streets that are safer for pedestrians.

When you configure your sidewalks to be wide and appealing, people feel safe and comfortable. And take the time to make sure they are well-lit.

Also remember that planning smaller, interconnected streets fosters easy access to neighborhood destinations. This provides pedestrians with optional routes and shorter walking distances.

Just a decade ago, Lake Worth, Florida's downtown was in disrepair, commercial vacancies were high and traffic flowed through core streets at high speeds. It was not an attractive or welcoming place to be. Faced with growing traffic problems, planners ultimately decided to implement a comprehensive streetscaping program designed to reduce the speed of traffic. The program included narrower streets, wider sidewalks, decorative lighting, benches, landscaping and more. To improve mobility, a trolley bus service was added along with new bike lanes. Lake Worth's downtown is now revitalized, with well-attended public events and increasing property values.

#### **5. MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION THE HOTTEST TICKET IN TOWN.**

Help public transit bring people to holiday events, fairs, festivals and sporting events in your community. Be sure to team with your local public transit system- not only will they often help advertise your community event, they may offer special promotions for people who get there by public transit. Also consider building public transit kiosks, where representatives can hand out schedules, brochures, coloring books, promotional passes and more.

How do you create synergy like this? Dallas, Texas, is a great example. When it's

time to plan its annual state fair-the largest in the country- they make sure the public transit system has special DART Flyer buses ready to go. The Dallas Area Rapid Transit District provides fairgoers with free parking at any of its eight transit centers, then whisks them to and from the fairgrounds in air-conditioned comfort. DART also provides a shuttle between its light rail station and the fairgrounds, encouraging residents to leave their cars at home.

Dallas isn't the only community that does this. Minneapolis- St. Paul offers similar public transit services to the state fair. And for fans of the San Diego Chargers and Padres, the Metropolitan Transit Development Board has made getting to the stadium simple and convenient-buses and trolleys take fans directly to the games. Sports fans in communities like Baltimore, Cleveland and Denver also enjoy the advantages of public transit, including not having to deal with traffic jams and parking.

#### **6. MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS.**

You know that the more people ride public transit, the more benefits your community will see. So help increase ridership by getting local businesses involved. They may not realize that, thanks to the federal Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, they can now offer their employees a tax-free monthly benefit of up to \$100 for commuting costs on public transit or in vanpools.

In Portland, Oregon, Intel and Nike already know about this great program, and they both offer annual public transit passes to all employees. And in California, Sun Microsystems has been actively involved in getting its 13,000 Bay Area and southern California workers to use commuting alternatives to get to and from work. This company sells public transit tickets at work sites, offers a \$20 monthly subsidy for each employee toward the purchase of a public transit ticket, operates shuttle services between work sites and public transit stations, and provides guaranteed rides home for those using public transit, carpools and vanpools. And it's working. In a 1998 survey, Sun Microsystems found that approximately one-quarter of its Bay Area workers were using a commute alternative.

It's also happening in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where companies of all sizes can help their employees pay for public transit fares by providing Bonus Bucks public transit vouchers. Employers pay half the cost of an employee's monthly bus fare and then deduct it as a business expense. Employers offer the vouchers to interested employees, who then send the vouchers to Tulsa Transit along with their share of the fares. Monthly passes are sent to the employees and an invoice is sent to the employer for the vouchers redeemed. It's an easy process with extraordinary benefits.

#### **7. MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION A NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR.**

Why encourage residential homes near public transit facilities? It's convenient, reduces traffic and adds vitality to a downtown. It also pays off for the homeowner. A study by the University of North Texas reports that housing along the Dallas Area Rapid Transit light rail line is valued 25 percent higher than similar homes located elsewhere in the city.

A team of non-profit organizations recently partnered with Fannie Mae to create a new kind of mortgage: the Location-Efficient Mortgage. Since people buying homes

in convenient, public-transit-rich neighborhoods tend to own fewer cars and drive less, why not enable them to apply those savings to finance mortgages? The Location-Efficient Mortgage allows these prospective homebuyers to apply for mortgages that are \$15,000 to \$50,000 higher than ones they could apply for otherwise-making homeownership possible for more families. Already, lenders in Seattle, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco are offering this program, and Fannie Mae has committed to purchasing \$100 million in such mortgages over the next few years.

Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission of Oakland, California, has established a new Housing Incentive Program that provides funds to jurisdictions that locate compact housing near public transit. The jurisdictions may spend the monies on any neighborhoodbased transportation projects that are consistent with the public transit agency's Transportation for Livable Communities Program, which helps fund improvements on streetscapes and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

What's more, Maryland's Live Near Your Work program combines funds from employers, the state, the local municipality and employees to create a total pool of at least \$3,000 toward the purchase of a home near an employee's place of work. Because the employee must live in the home for at least three years, the program helps to stabilize the neighborhood and reduce turnover in the workplace. Once again, the program supports clean air initiatives and lessens local dependence on the automobile.

## **8. MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION A CANVAS FOR NEW IDEAS.**

The ways you can make better use of public transportation in your community are limitless. Engage your citizens and get their ideas. Try different things. Your own community members can be inspirational resources for new and exciting projects.

For example, an innovative group of Boulder, Colorado citizens changed the face of their transportation system. Tired of circuitous routes and empty buses, they made it clear to the city council that something had to change if they were to use the system. Working in partnership with the city, this cross-section of citizens-from students to seniors to business leaders-developed a new service called the HOP. Their intentions were for the HOP to serve three main areas of the city, run every 10 minutes and operate small buses that would mesh with the character of the ecologically minded community.

The service launched in 1994 with a daily ridership goal of 2,000 passenger trips. It was surpassed within four weeks. Today that number has grown to 5,000. And by working with the Regional Transportation District, the city's GO Boulder office has developed four new citizen-driven services: the SKIP, JUMP, LEAP and BOUND.

But they haven't stopped there. GO Boulder is working equally hard on developing public transit pass programs to generate even more interest and increase ridership further. For instance, all Colorado university student IDs double as unlimited-use bus passes and cost students only \$21 per semester. The city is also working with local businesses to create a similar business pass program, and is developing an annual neighborhood public transit pass program for \$50 to \$100 per household, per year.

## **9. MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION A COMMUNITY PARTNER.**

Get ready to create a beautiful friendship. Partnering with your local public transportation system is one sure way to serve your community better. From municipal to regional to state levels, officials are not only finding new ways to factor public transportation into their planning equations-they're making them happen.

In Maplewood, New Jersey, the local Chamber of Commerce partnered with NJ TRANSIT to establish a concierge service at their local train station. Just like at a hotel, the concierge can take care of commuters' needs with a simple phone call. In fact, one desk represents more than 30 community businesses. Commuters can drop off dry cleaning, order gourmet take-out for the night's dinner and have their car tires replaced-all through one quick stop at the concierge desk on the way to work. Local businesses aren't the only ones that benefit. The concierge establishes a vibrant presence at the train station, and encourages people to ride more often because they can get more done.

In the 1990s, residents and business owners in the South Park neighborhood of Tucson, Arizona, joined forces with the Tucson Urban League, the University of Arizona, the Tucson Department of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Federal Transit Administration to improve the South Park community. A newly built boulevard was directing traffic away from their area, resulting in problems for their local economy.

So with funding from the FTA and the City of Tucson, they planned and implemented a series of streetscaping improvements to beautify the neighborhood. Soon, pedestrian, bicycle and public transit users were enjoying sidewalk and curb access ramps, six new artistic bus shelters, pedestrian-friendly walls doubling as a public art canvas, new traffic signals and landscaping.

How did all this happen? Community residents rose to the challenge, held monthly town hall meetings and gave plenty of input on the design and implementation of the project. Then the South Park Community Art Center opened, and under the tutelage of a local artist, the community went to work to create mosaics, totems and sculptures-all now displayed in their own neighborhood. The partnership and investment in South Park have helped instill new pride and volunteerism in the community, while establishing the conditions needed to help rebuild the local economy.

## **10. MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION A WISE INVESTMENT.**

Want the best return on public transit? Invest in it. When federal, state and local entities partner with the private sector, and when you participate in the regional transportation planning and programming process, you can ensure that your money is being used most effectively.

For example, most states are working to include transportation components in their welfare reform projects. Grants have been awarded to states to develop strategies to help welfare recipients gain access to employment through better transportation opportunities.

Take Michigan, for instance. The Department of Transportation has distributed nearly \$20 million to the state's network of public transportation providers. Part of the state's transportation-to-work effort, the funding is helping welfare recipients

and other low-income workers get to and from work, training and child care sites.

In Portland, Oregon, the city's growth strategy has long been tied directly to public transit. Since the 1970s, Portland has recognized the importance of improving its public transportation system to achieve a variety of goals. The city created a Fareless Square to give people free rides on public transit within the central business district. The city also put a lid on downtown parking and created exclusive bus lanes to improve travel times.

Tri-Met, which serves three counties in the Portland metro area, continues to expand its bus and light rail system. A new 5.5-mile light rail extension serving the airport was built through an innovative public-private venture, requiring no new property tax dollars, state general funds or federal appropriations.

Or look at Tempe, Arizona, where residents approved a transit improvement plan that is being funded with one-half of one percent of local sales tax revenue. The improvements include expanded bus service, the implementation of free neighborhood circulator buses linking residents to bus routes and major activity centers, improved bikeways and new and improved bus shelters.

To learn more about these examples-and to discover how public transportation is an investment that really gives back-log on to [www.publictransportation.org](http://www.publictransportation.org).

### PROJECT PARTNERS

The Transportaton and Livable Communities Consortium

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials

American Institute of Architects

American Planning Association

American Public Transportation Association\*

American Public Works Association

Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Environmental Protection Agency

Federal Highway Administration

Federal Transit Administration

Institute of Transportation Engineers

International City Managers Association's Smart Growth Network

International Downtown Association

Local Initiatives Support Group

National Association of Home Builders

National Association of Realtors

National Governors Association

National Trust for Historic Preservation

Project for Public Spaces

Surface Transportation Policy Project

Urban Land Institute

US Department of Transportation

*\*This report was underwritten by APTA's private sector business partners and its Public Transportation Partnership for Tomorrow initiative, 1666 K Street, NW Washington, DC 20006-1215 Phone: 202.496.4800 [www.publictransportation.org](http://www.publictransportation.org)*

American Public Transportation Association / 1666 K Street NW • Suite 1100 • Washington, DC 20006 • 202.496.4800 •