WHY TRANSIT RIDERSHIP IS DECLINING, AND HOW TO WIN RIDERS BACK.

For the past several years, many cities have posted declines in transit ridership. Where do the riders go, and how can transit systems bring them back?

Nationwide, the economy has been improving and overall oil prices have been dropping, making it more feasible for more people to have and drive their own cars. Another important factor in declining ridership has been continued suburban growth. Cities spread out and people move away from denser urban centers. Suburban dwellers are usually not within a walkable or bike-able distance from transit. Suburban development also often lacks the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to connect potential riders to routes. As suburban growth is naturally auto dependent, most suburban dwellers do not usually register transit as an option. Transit systems also find it increasingly cost prohibitive, and lack the funding and ridership to be able to expand and accommodate suburban growth. In some areas where funding poses challenges for transit systems to cover all required maintenance, reliability issues can trigger decline.

The City of Chicago saw a 20% drop in bus ridership between 2008 and 2016, and New York transit has seen a steady decline across the board as well. In high growth areas congestion can affect time performance and reliability. Reductions in funding make it more challenging for transit providers to maintain a state of good repair, let alone increase fleet sizes or expand service.

Some blame for declining ridership has been placed on new technologies like ride hailing services (e.g. Uber, Lyft). Although, according to a press release by Mantill Williams at the American Public Transit Association (APTA), Uber and Lyft users are more likely to own fewer cars, spend less on transportation, and use public transit frequently. 1. And, according to transportation consultant Jarrett Walker, when Uber and Lyft left Austin, Capital Metro saw only a one percent increase in ridership. 2. More and more areas are trying to offer different kinds of transportation options to lure people away from single passenger cars, and while many of these options like bikeshare programs may prove useful for short trips, studies show that rather than affect transit negatively, these programs often support transit systems. Though many factors could be pointed to for declines in transit ridership, the real question for gaining back riders is, what are people looking for in any transportation solution?

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NOTES FROM THE TOP

BY MICHELLE HORNE

Hope everyone is enjoying your summer so far! We have been busy finalizing applications, Legislative Audit, FTA State Management Review, and preparing for the close-out FY 2018 as well as preparing for the new fiscal year.

As we close out FY 2018, I would like to remind all providers and MPOs, **final invoice must be submitted to our office no later than July 10** to ensure payment for FY 2017-2018 invoices.

As we start the new fiscal year, our annual Executive Directors’ meetings will be held in July. The one-day meetings will be held in Baton Rouge on July 19th and 20th and in Natchitoches on July 27th. Executive Directors and/or Transit Coordinators should plan to attend one of these **mandatory** meetings. We will cover a variety of topics during the meetings on program requirements, compliance issues, new reporting requirements with Transit Asset Management, Safety Management, and the list goes on and on. Also, Micah Bailey with Creative Bus Sales will be speaking to the group on warranty processes, vehicle specifications, and other common preventative maintenance issues. Keycha Green, RTAP Program Manager, emailed the registration forms the first of June to all providers. Seats are limited so be sure to sign up quickly.

We have been working to improve our processes internally as well as processes that affect the transit providers. First, all FY 2020 Transit applications will be due November 1, 2018. This change will assist DOTD with obtaining FTA’s approval on grant applications in Spring 2019 instead of at the end of fiscal year. The on-line application will be available on August 1, 2018. Second, the Annual Compliance Reviews will be due every three years when the agencies is due a site visit. With this change, we will not be collecting Annual Compliance Reviews this November. Instead, agencies who are due a site visit in FY 2020, will submit an Annual Compliance Review in June 2019. Third, we are in the process of restructuring the Public Transit Staff. With the reorganization, the state will be divided into four Regions. There will be a Program Manager assigned to each Region that will be the sole Program Manager for all FTA transit programs. These changes as well as other important information will be presented at the upcoming Director’s Meetings in July…you don’t want to miss it!

Please mark your calendars for the 2018 Annual Public Transportation Conference scheduled for October 31 – November 2, 2018, in New Orleans, Louisiana at the Intercontinental Hotel New Orleans. The Public Transportation staff and the LPTA will be working on the agenda and look forward to providing training opportunities that will support the future challenges facing transportation. The registration is **NOW open**. If you didn’t receive the email link, please contact Keycha Green, RTAP Program Manager.

As always, we want the transit newsletter to be an informative publication that addresses issues of interest to you and others. If you would like to highlight your transit system or recognize one of your staff members, we will provide a forum to do so. We encourage you to share innovative ideas, techniques and uplifting stories about your transit system and/or a special client.

We wish each of you a safe and happy 4th of July and want to extend our deepest thanks to all who are working hard to provide transportation services to those in need throughout the state.

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We are excited to announce the Louisiana Public Transit Association Conference
Oct 31- Nov 2 in New Orleans.

To register, please visit:

Pictured above: Trisha Nolen, the Southern Regional Manager with Q’Straint/Sure-Lok, gives a presentation and hands-on training for wheelchair securement in Baton Rouge, LA, as Adrinne Woods with West Baton Rouge COA (far left), Brenda Hicks with St. Helena COA (Middle), and other transit agencies staff participates and get a better understanding of the liability inherent in transporting passengers in wheelchairs. Training also covered ways to mitigate risk, improve passenger safety and avoid common securement pitfalls, problems, and errors that lead to most wheelchair incidents.

DOTD EVENTS

OCT 31- NOV 2
Louisiana Public Transit Conference 2018 ..............New Orleans, LA

TRB EVENTS

JULY 9-12 Automated Vehicles Symposium 2018..........................San Fransisco, CA
JULY 14-17 12th National Conference on Transportation Asset Management..........................................................San Diego, CA
AUGUST 22-24 16th National Tools of the Trade Transportation Planning Conference.........................................................Kansas City, MO

APTA EVENTS

JULY 12 The Future of Mobility - Integrator ............................. Washington, DC
AUGUST 15-17 State Public Transportation Partnerships Conference..Minneapolis, MN
JUNE 7-13 Annual Meeting............................................................Nashville, TN
TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSIT (PART 8) - BREAKTHROUGHS THAT CAN IMPROVE RIDER EXPERIENCE

Other than the addition of air conditioning, the experience of riding public transit hasn’t really changed for decades. Several recent breakthroughs however in technology and design could have large impacts on how the public sees transit and could help buses reclaim their place at the top of the urban mobility food chain.

Accessibility
A company that specializes in solutions for wheelchair bound mass-transit riders, Q’Straint, recently debuted a technology they call Quantum. This technology is designed to help wheelchair users to automatically secure themselves via robotic arms. The idea being to ease boarding for wheelchair users. According to the Q’Straint company website, they offer the only wheelchair securement solution (thus far) that does not involve driver assistance and allows for much quicker on and offboarding experiences. Another breakthrough in accessibility is free rides. That is, transit suffers from the perception that it’s outdated technology and form of transportation as a last resort. Park City, Utah, and Vail, Colorado offer free buses system-wide. Residents of these cities pay a little more in taxes in exchange for reduced drunk driving, reduced traffic, and increased commercial activity.

Electric Buses
Although acquisition costs are still between $200,000 to $300,000 higher than for diesel coaches per bus, maintenance and energy costs are lower. This leads to lifetime investments that are comparable or cheaper in some cases. Equivalent reductions in miles per gallon energy usage reduce operating costs, and reductions in street-level air and noise pollution add to the benefits of electric buses. Improved charge time, charge distance, and battery life extend the range of electric buses, and make them more and more reliable. The overall “eco-friendliness” of this type of bus could also be a selling point in gaining new ecologically minded riders.

Seamless Payment
The ease of fare payment often can impact the choices of potential riders on fixed route systems, and whether the bus is able to complete its journey in a timely manner. Fumbling for cash, transit cards, tickets, or paper transfers can be a frustrating process. Difficulty in finding information about fares, route frequency, and arrival time are some of the biggest reasons potential riders tend to avoid city buses. One solution is to install payment kiosks at major stops, that way riders can hop on board a bus from all doors, which could speed boarding and would circumvent the time consumed by a slightly crumpled dollar bill being spit out of the farebox multiple times. Several companies are working to improve on board payment systems. Visa is working on a tap to pay system, which could allow riders to pay their fares with the tap of a debit or credit card, and multiple transit apps are working to enable multi-agency transit payments by smartphones.
One of the DOTD PT Section’s mandates is to provide information and technical assistance to transit providers in Louisiana in order to assist them in meeting their requirements for FTA funding. These activities come in many different formats and venues. DOTD PT provides numerous training courses, workshops, and training materials, as well as a website and an annual conference. To keep all of our constituents up to date on DOTD PT’s activities, DOTD On The Go features just a few selected items each quarter.

**SITE VISITS**

Part of the outreach and assistance that DOTD provides to the Rural Public Transportation (Section 5311) and Elderly and Disabled (Section 5310) providers are site visits from the program managers. In the last quarter, DOTD visited the following 5310 & 5311 providers: Webster Parish, Red River Parish, East Feliciana Parish with FTA Reviewers; Acadia COA, Options, LARC, Webster, Baton Rouge COA, STARC of LA, St. John ARC, West Carroll, Nellie Byers, Options with FTA Reviewers, Spark Life Services, Holy Angels, ARC of Caddo

**OUTREACH**

To further the goal of providing some form of public transportation in all 64 parishes, as listed in the Louisiana Vision 2020 Plan, DOTD has been conducting educational visits to all the parishes in Louisiana that do not currently have some form of public transit service. Last quarter DOTD completed outreach for the following parishes: West Carroll and Tensas Parish

**TRAINING**

DOTD staff provided the following trainings in the last quarter: Professional Dispatching and Safety Training.

For more information, please contact Keycha Alexander-Green, RTAP Program Manager.

If your agency or someone within your agency deserves recognition for a job well done, or has already received recognition or an award, please let us know. Email or send a brief description, photos, and contact information to Michelle.Horne@la.gov or to Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development/Public Transit Section, attn: Michelle Horne, P.O. Box 94245, Baton Rouge, LA 70804.
Safety, reliability, ease of use, and comfort.

How then, do large and small transit providers supply a safe, reliable, easy to use and comfortable service and lure back riders? According to 2016 National Transit Database (NTD) data, only three U.S. cities experienced a greater than 1% increase in transit ridership between 2015 and 2016: Seattle Washington, Houston Texas, and Milwaukee Wisconsin. Houston and Seattle have both invested in performing radical overhauls of their bus networks. These cities also invested in their walking and biking infrastructure. Though funding and prioritization is important in accomplishing these large overhauls, what holds relevant for smaller providers, is the attention to solving gaps in service and investing to fix them. Solving gaps in service, maintaining a state of good repair, and increasing inter-local coordination can go a long way in helping smaller transit systems provide safe, reliable, easy to use and comfortable service.


FROM CAPITOL HILL...

FTA Provides Guidance on Drug and Alcohol Regulation Updates
How to prepare for an audit.

FTA's drug and alcohol audit team routinely visit covered employers to assess their drug and alcohol testing programs. These visits provide FTA with an oversight mechanism to ensure covered employers maintain compliance with 49 CFR Part 655 and Part 40. The audits also exist as an outreach opportunity. This affords FTA a means to provide technical assistance to program stakeholders. Usually, employers are notified of an audit six weeks before the on-site visit. The notification process begins with a phone call from the audit team leader, and includes the issue of a formal notification letter, which provides pre-audit instructions as well as a detailed schedule for the grantee and for any contractors and vendors (e.g. collection sites) who will be visited. The following preparations will help ensure a successful audit:

1. Carefully read the notification letter in a timely manner.
2. Be sure to contact the audit team leader with any questions.
3. Ensure any applicable contractors and vendors are made aware of the audit and its requirements right away.
4. Send requested information for the grantee and all applicable contractors to the audit team leader by the deadline specified in the notification letter.
5. In the week preceding the on-site visit, the grantee’s DAPM will receive instruction (for both the grantee and any contractors) on which records must be available for review. If anyone, including a contractor, has any questions, contact the team leader immediately – do not wait until the team arrives.
6. Ensure all requested records are pulled, organized, and are readily available when the team arrives on site.
7. Prior to the visit, take a moment to think of any questions or concerns you might have related to the regulations or to best practices. This will help FTA provide effective technical assistance.