DETROIT REGIONAL TRANSIT – RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMPARISONS

REPORT FOUR OF A STUDY OF FACTORS THAT ENABLE AND INHIBIT EFFECTIVE REGIONAL TRANSIT

By
the University of Detroit Mercy
Transit Research Team
September 2013

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INTRODUCTION

THE DETROIT REGIONAL TRANSIT STUDY

In late June 2012 the University of Detroit Mercy (UDM) launched a project to study the factors that enable and inhibit the development and operation of effective regional transportation systems in Southeast Michigan (Detroit Metro area). This project was supported through grants from the US and Michigan Departments of Transportation and through matching support from the University of Detroit Mercy. The study team includes six UDM faculty members and eight students from three UDM schools/colleges, the School of Architecture, the College of Engineering and Science, and the School of Law. Each of the faculty members led a subgroup in the study of one or two aspects that influence, or are influenced by, transit.

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Over the past sixteen months, this team examined these focal areas in five phases, resulting in four major reports (including fourth report provided herein). Each report included chapters focusing each of the focal areas listed above.
Phase 1: Study of Other Regions:
The team visited and examined extensive documentation and media related to the experiences in four other urban regions, Atlanta, Cleveland, Denver and St. Louis. This led to the development of a major report on their lessons regarding the development and operation of effective regional transit systems. The Phase 1 Report was released in January 2013 and is available at http://eng-sci.udmercy.edu/udmtc/reports/index.htm

Phase 2: Detroit History:
This phase focused on the past successes and failures of metropolitan Detroit related to regional transit, focusing primarily on the period between 1956 and 2006. The study included examination of over 100 historic documents and interviews of past transit leaders from the region. The Phase 2 Report was also released in January 2013 and is available at http://eng-sci.udmercy.edu/udmtc/reports/index.htm

Phase 3: Detroit’s Current State and Opportunities Regarding Transit:
This phase examined events and the issues surrounding transit development between 2007 and mid-2013. The study method included interviews with transit, community, government, media and business leaders, as well as extensive examination of literature, media, legal and governance documents and transit providers’ website and print materials. The Phase 3 Report was released in July 2013 and is available at http://eng-sci.udmercy.edu/udmtc/reports/index.htm

Phase 4: Comparisons of Detroit and Other Urban Models:
This phase involved comparing the lessons learned from Phase 1 with Current Detroit (Phase 3), and extracting those lessons that were most relevant to the current state of transit development and service in Metro Detroit.

It also drew upon a separate but related activity, the Detroit Regional Transit Workshop, hosted by the University of Detroit Mercy on May 17-18, 2013. That workshop included presentations by local and national transit experts and leaders emphasizing how to plan and fund regional transit. Speakers came from national transportation organizations (i.e. the American Public Transportation Association and the Center for Transportation Excellence) and several urban regions (Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, Atlanta, St. Louis). Videos of their presentations and the deliberations of the workshop are available at http://eng-sci.udmercy.edu/udmtc/mdtw/. A comprehensive report on the workshop is available at http://eng-sci.udmercy.edu/udmtc/reports/index.htm
Phase 5: Recommendations for Detroit Regional Transit:
The last phase of the study involved distilling and translating the findings of all previous phases into over 100 recommendations regarding all of the focal areas: leadership and politics, governance and law, public opinion and media, finance and funding, transit oriented development, and equity and access. This process included reviews with the study advisory team comprised of leaders from MDOT, SEMCOG, SMART, M-1 Rail and TRU.

The results from the last two phases were combined into the report herein. Each of the chapters of this report reflects the judgments and opinions of the chapter's author(s).

The recommendations in this report are directed toward a wide array of stakeholders who can and will impact the future of regional transit in the Metro Detroit region thought their actions, or lack thereof. Substantive progress toward an exceptional, truly regional transit system will require sustained commitment and coordination by many such stakeholders, from transit providers and government leaders to leaders and advocates in all segments of our community: business, labor, community, health care, education and many special interest groups including those concerned with seniors, people with disabilities, the environment, tourism, ethnic groups, economic development and neighborhood livability . . . all of whom have specific interests related to transit. It is our sincere hope that our findings and recommendations will significantly increase the understanding of all of these stakeholders regarding the factors that enable and inhibit the creation and delivery of effective regional transit service . . . and move them to wise, proactive and concerted action.

The University of Detroit Mercy Regional Transit Study Team
September 18, 2013
CHAPTER 1

TRANSIT LEADERSHIP AND POLITICS

Leo E. Hanifin and Scott Douglas

September 2013
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The authors are grateful to the following leaders whose interviews and materials were critical resources for the findings and judgments of this study of Current Detroit Transit:

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- John Foster, Director of Finance, SMART
- Ron Freeland, CEO Detroit Department of Transportation
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- Beth Gibbons, Manager of Marketing and Communications - SMART
- Matt Helms, Reporter – Detroit News
- John Hertel, General Manager, SMART
- Paul Hillegonds, Chairman of the Board – Regional Transit Authority
- Richard Murphy, Board Member – Regional Transit Authority
- Carmine Palombo, Director Transportation, SEMCOG
- Bill Shea, Reporter – Crain’s Business
- John Swatosh, Chief Operation Officer – SMART
- Jim Townsend, State of Michigan Representative 26th district
- Ernie Zachary, Detroit Developer
A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the recommendations related to leadership and politics to advance toward reliable, efficient and affordable transit system and service in the Metro Detroit Region. These recommendations are based upon the study of these issues over the past fourteen months by the authors, including the review of extensive literature and media and many interviews on the history of Detroit Transit (Hanifin, Leadership and Politics - Detroit Transit History 2013) and similar research and visits to four comparable regions, Atlanta, Cleveland, Denver and St. Louis (Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Other Regions 2013). The study also examined transit related developments since 2007 through the study of literature and media and in depth interviews of 17 leaders from transit, business and government. (Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Current Detroit 2013). (The full reports on Detroit transit history, current developments and transit in peer regions can be found at http://eng-sci.udmercy.edu/udmtc/reports/index.htm.)

In most cases, the recommendation are followed by comparisons between Detroit transit and transit leadership and politics in other regions. This provides a context that shows that other regions have faced similar political challenges, yet have been able to overcome these barriers with effective strategies, actions and leadership. Of course, these other areas have also experienced setbacks. Their successes and failures both provide excellent lessons to our region as we seek to make dramatic improvements to our transit systems and service.

The recommendations and comparisons focus on four areas, advancing transit as a region, leadership of regional transit, overcoming political obstacles and transit system leadership and operation.

B. ADVANCING TRANSIT AS A REGION

The research conducted in this phase of this study reveals that Southeast Michigan has or can secure all of the technical tools needed to successfully implement public transit. However, these resources need to be organized and managed in ways that bring about substantive improvements to the operation of current transit assets and the development and funding of transit expansion.

A good deal of transit planning work has already been accomplished as part of the RTCC Public Transit Plan (Regional Transit Coordinating Council 2008)
completed in 2008 and AATA strategic plan (City of Ann Arbor 2008), and these plans have been accepted by the new RTA as the first step in moving transit ahead in our region. In addition, transit development has received far more attention and planned investment in the SEMCOG Regional Transportation Plan, “Direction 2035” (SEMCOG 2013), than it received in previous plans. While some believe that these plans can be improved further, they provide a sound planning foundation for moving ahead in regional transit development in Metro Detroit.

What is needed most is a unified will to move forward with a truly regional transit system, and an effective effort to employ that will to plan, fund, build and operate more effective regional transit systems. The significant element that is missing is the development of a unified working relationship between political, business and public leadership towards a common goal. That goal is the development of a public transit system for southeast Michigan that improves the lives of our citizens and helps to strengthen our economy. Our region does not have a good record of regionalism that brings citizens and leaders from across our region together to support broad, regional goals that would benefit the entire region. However, in recent years, a seed of regionalism has germinated and sprouts of regional thinking and action have emerged. These include decisions of government agencies and voting citizens to support and sustain regional assets such as COBO Hall, the Detroit Zoo and the Detroit Institute of Arts. While these are encouraging, they reflect a desire to retain and enhance existing assets that are valued and highly regarded by many.

Of course, the largest and most relevant movements toward regionalism have focused on transit: the approval of the RTCC’s regional transit plan and the creation of the Regional Transit Authority by the State of Michigan. The politics and leadership involved in the latter is recounted in the authors’ previous report on the Leadership and Politics of Current Detroit (refer to page no. for RTA development). Recent surveys (University of Detroit Mercy Transportation Center 2013) have indicated that the majority of respondents value transit in general, but do not have a high regard for the existing transit systems in SE MI, nor a high degree of confidence in the current transit provides in the region. Therefore, the advancement of transit will be especially susceptible to divisive forces whose priorities and politics are focused locally, not regionally.

Such forces are not unique to Metro Detroit and the barriers that they present have been overcome in other regions . . . and they can be overcome in our region. However, while a sense of regionalism is valuable to advancing regional
transit, transit leaders from all segments of the community must realize that it is not necessary to completely “solve” the barriers to regionalism to move forward with regional transit. In fact, regional transit can lead to a greater sense of and support of regionalism, if done well. Thirty-five (35) recommendations provide specific actions that will aid in the development of such regional transit by both creating greater regional support for transit and overcoming barriers to regionalism. Many of these recommendations are derived from examining the successful and unsuccessful effort in other regions. In many cases, relevant actions, leaders or political situations in these regions are briefly described and compared to those in Metro Detroit today.

1. ADVANCE REGIONALISM

While “solving” the lack of regionalism is not necessary to create regional transit it is still important that transit advocates act and speak to increase the public and political support for regionalism in general and transit regionalism in particular.

Recommendation 1: Transit advocates and leaders must raise the volume and bandwidth of communication and action for regional thinking in Southeast Detroit.

This is particularly important today as the financial crisis in Detroit plays out. Conservative voices from the suburbs are already sounding the voices of “we’re all on our own” (EcletaBlog 2013). However, even as the bankruptcy proceeds, investors from around the region and the world are betting on Detroit (Dolan 2013), and plans are being created that capitalize on the unique assets and character of Detroit. For example, the Detroit Future City framework takes advantage of the Detroit’s expansive untapped land assets to create business/employment corridors, vibrant, livable neighborhoods and large green spaces connected with efficient transit systems (Woods 2013).

Other urban regions have developed transit campaigns that emphasized the value of transit to all citizens, whether they use it or not. These include the values for economic development, retention of the “creative class”, and getting people to work for the benefit not only the employees, but to the businesses and customers, students, patients and even children who benefit from their work. This theme was part of a successful referendum campaign by Citizens for Modern Transit in St. Louis that used the slogan, “Some of us ride it, all of us need it.” This motto was born of the personal experiences of a suburban
Republican mayor, John Nations when he visited his mother who was in a nursing home. In 2008 when Metro placed a funding referendum on the ballot to maintain services and if this did not pass, Metro had said that they would cut services. As a Mayor at the time Nations knew about the referendum and thought that it had little to do with him or his community. When the referendum was voted down Nations received a call from his mother in her nursing home who was very upset. She elaborated that the nurses who were caring for her, and had become like part of her family, were resigning due to the cuts in transit. They would no longer be able to get to work and serve the nursing home Nation’s mother was in. This helped Nations see the interconnectedness of the system and the benefits to everyone even when not everyone is riding. By repeating this story, Nations gave a real context to the slogan. This lesson has been repeated by the City of Greensboro, NC which uses the same slogan and has captured the personal views of real people on a pro-transit video on their website, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEMLGInDOMg

This voice of transit regionalism in Metro Detroit is being heard more often in workshops (University of Detroit Mercy Transportation Center 2013), at regional meetings like the one held by MI Suburban Alliance on 8-2-13 (Thompson 2013), on television (Hertel 2013), and by advocacy groups like TRU (Transportation Riders United 2006). This voice needs to become even louder and more frequent through transit education programs and through op eds, the reports (like this one), and the web and spoken words of leaders from all segments of the Detroit Metro community.

2. REGIONAL PLANNING

Recommendation 2: (a) Hire experienced professional transit planners in the Regional Transit Authority and then (b) co-locate collaborative planning group with representation from the five transit providers (DDOT, SMART, People Mover, AATA and M-1) and SEMCOG. This group should first (c) review and update regional transit plans integrating the RTCC and AATA plans and then (d) develop a project list that is comprehensive, cohesive and financially feasible for (e) review by the public and area leaders prior to the first RTA funding referendum.

The study of the current Detroit transit organizations revealed that some of them did not have professional transit planners on their staffs. (This staffing deficiency and others are addressed below in the in Section E on transit leadership and operation.) While it is less critical that each agency have its own transit planning personnel, the RTA, as the developer of regional rapid transit and the coordinator of local services and regional transit services, must have at least one experi-
enced professional transit planner on staff. Once this has been accomplished, a truly regional transit plan cannot be accomplished without direct collaboration between all providers and the MPO (SEMCOG). This is best achieved by co-locating planning staff to encourage and enable consensus among all transit leaders on the priorities, strategies and system design to meet the shared objectives.

This concept of full time co-location of a planning team was used successfully in Atlanta as follows: In 2005/6 a Regional Transit Institutional Analysis completed by the Transit Planning Board (TPB). TPB was a “public sector joint venture” created for 2 years through an intergovernmental agreement between MARTA, ARC, and GRTA. Each agency provided staff and/or grant funding (matched by MARTA and the area’s community improvement districts) to create plan including governance and funding. They created Concept 3 (a transportation vision for the region). In 2008, Concept 3, Transportation Vision for Atlanta Region, was adopted by the boards of TPB, MARTA, GRTA and ARC, leading to the passage of the Transportation Improvement Act (TIA) in 2010. TIA authorized a referendum to fund both roads and transit in 2012. While this process of collaborative planning was successful and effective in developing a shared vision and an opportunity to secure funding, it stopped too soon. The referendum failed due to a number of reasons, including the use of a flawed process to move from a transit vision to a transit plan. That process allowed each separate jurisdiction to request transit projects that they saw as most important. Many of these projects were identified by people with little or no transit planning expertise. Further, because they were done independently, it yielded a plan that was not only incomplete, but it was a disjointed array of projects that did not fit together to an integrated transit system with the systemic improvements to regional transit service that might have occurred otherwise.

Our region should learn from this lesson and allow the transit professionals to first create an integrated plan for improvement that is put before leaders and the public for their input, suggestions and recommendations. Such a process will yield a much clearer system plan that can be promoted through an advocacy campaign. The Denver FastTracks program (Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Other Regions 2013) and its campaign advertisements exemplify such clarity in promoting support for specific system improvements and expansions that would be accomplished over the life of the funding provided by the referendum that was approved in November 2004 and took effect in January of 2005. As a result the Denver RTA (RTD) is now constructing 118 miles of transit that includes heavy rail, light rail and BRT components.

Finally, it is important that regional planners fully understand all regions are ag-
gregations of people of different political parties, different ethnicity, different lifestyles, different views on development and social equity . . . differences of all sorts. As a natural consequence of this diversity, everyone in a region will come to the table with diverse preexisting views on transit and many related issues, such as taxation, governance, land use and economic development. Because of this diversity of views across any significant region, any regional plan will be contrary to some of the values and goals of most constituents.

Recommendation 2.f: To be successful in developing a consensus plan that serves the priorities and values of the largest possible fraction of the population, everyone must come to the table realizing that they will not get everything in the plan that they would like. To everyone involved, the plan will not be perfect. In Denver, the leaders of the clearly recognized this with their oft-repeated admonishment, “Don’t let the perfect be the obstacle to progress.”

3. REGIONAL COALITIONS

No one segment of the Metro Detroit region can effectively advocate for regional transit funding. Most coalitions represent the views and perspectives of their constituent individuals or organizations, such as business leaders and corporations, environmental groups, educational institutions, transit rider advocacy groups, providers of health service, advocates of people with disabilities, fitness/biking groups, minority and ethnic organizations, political parties and unions. Each of these is naturally, and often legally, biased toward the unique needs and priorities of their members . . . and sometimes suspect by the members of other organizations. As such, it is essential that the advocacy campaign be defined and guided by a very broad coalition that represents many dimensions of the regional community.

Recommendation 3: Organize a broad coalition that effectively advocates for transit planning, support, ridership and development (TOD) in the Detroit Metro region.

While the creation of yet another transit organization in our region may seem unnecessary, there is no current coalition with the needed breadth, freedom of action and broad recognition to play this important role. There are several very valuable transit-related organizations that now exist, but each has limits in breadth or action. One is Transportation Riders United (TRU) which plays an effective role in providing a voice for riders and mobilizing them in support of important legislation or referenda. However, as its name indicates, TRU represents the small segment of the population that rides the current transit (primarily bus) sys-
tems, and does not involve the powerful business leaders who have proven to be critical partners in other regions. Trans4M has a somewhat broader perspective, but it is a state-wide organization. M-1 Rail has powerful business engagement, but is focused on a specific part of the regional system in Detroit, not the four-county RTA region. The RTA board is legally prohibited to advocate for funding. It is presumed that this barrier would also apply to the RTA Citizens Advisory Committee that will soon be created. All of these organizations must be heard and represent their constituent members, but no organization yet exists to bring all the necessary voices together and to work through compromise to consensus.

**Lessons from other regions:**

Los Angeles, St. Louis and Atlanta provide valuable lessons in the use (or absence) of such broad coalitions.

**MoveLA**

Los Angeles, a region with a history of car/freeway culture similar to Detroit, has, for the past couple of decades been building an extensive transit system. In November 2008, Measure R was approved by a two-thirds majority, providing a projected $40 billion to traffic relief and transportation upgrades over the next 30 years. Before the successful passage of the “Measure R” referendum in 2008, a broad coalition of community leaders was brought together by Denny Zane, an ex-mayor of Santa Monica. That coalition is now called MoveLA. MoveLA brought together over 175 organizations (“30-10 Campaign Partners”) to support and deliver that campaign including environmental and transportation groups (29 groups), cultural and community organizations, including foundations (30), labor (17), businesses (44) and business organizations (54). In addition to the 30-10 group, Move LA counts 37 partners in its Regional Planning and TOD group and 55 Financial Partners. Readers can view Move LA’s full partner lists at [http://movela.org/our-partners/](http://movela.org/our-partners/) (Zane 2013).

One obvious lesson is that a diverse coalition of powerful community organizations and leaders can play a central role in securing very large funding commitments from the general public, even in regions that are not traditional “transit towns.” The second lesson is that it takes the right leader, such as the ex-mayor of a large city in the region, to bring such a group together.

**Citizens for Modern Transit**

The energy and will to continually advance the “ground game” for governance, projects and funding are critical to their success. One good example of such leadership was the efforts of John Nations to develop and lead a coalition of supporters in St. Louis leading to a successful funding referendum in 2010 (after a
similar referendum failed two years earlier). In fact, this occurred while he was the Mayor of Chesterfield, just before his selection as CEO and President of St. Louis Metro. In this campaign he partnered with a transit advocacy group that focuses on TOD, Citizens for Modern Transit and, for the educational elements, with the Metro Transit staff. With input from many partners, the community was “sliced” into its different stakeholder groups that defined one dimension of the community. These included business, church, education, union, community organizations, health care, environmental, fitness/bicycling and elected officials. In each dimension individual organizations were identified and, for that organization, the key leaders or spokesperson identified and, wherever possible, their position on the transit referendum gaged. Then a specific member of the coalition was identified to engage that person to provide the case for the referendum and, if possible, secure either a statement of support or their active participation in the campaign. In the end, this “ground game” was a key element in securing approval of the referendum that raised the sales tax in the midst of a downturned economy in 2010.

In addition to the need for a ground game with extensive volunteer engagement and attention to detail, CMT provides a good example of collaboration between the regional transit authority in St. Louis (Metro) and the advocacy group in delivering a synergistic education program by the RTA and advocacy campaign by the advocacy group. It Metro Detroit, it is essential that such coordination occur between the new organization recommended here and the RTA and its Citizens’ Advisory Committee.

The Absence of a Broad Coalition in Atlanta

On July 31, 2012 a funding referendum for a combination of highways and transit investments in the Atlanta region failed by a two to one ratio. While there are many strongly held opinions around Atlanta as to why that failure occurred, it is clear that the lack of a well-developed and organized coalition to support the referendum was a significant contributing factor. In fact, some organizations that typically are pro transit, including the Sierra Club and some chapters of the NAACP, became aligned with some typically anti transit organizations, including the TEA Party. This unlikely opposing team even held joint press conferences to promote votes against the referendum. If a more effective effort, with more listening to community needs and reflecting them in the ultimate mix of projects to be supported by the new funds, organizations like the Sierra Club and the NAACP may well have been effective members of a supporting coalition.

The obvious lesson here is that an effective funding campaign should not be initiated or driven by one narrow element of the community, such as the Chamber
of Commerce, but by a coalition that should be developed early in the process. However, it is important to understand that such a coalition probably does not have the experience or expertise to run a funding campaign by itself (see recommendation 4a below). If there is to be a successful funding vote in the RTA four-county region in November 2014, the building of that coalition should begin immediately.

4. REGIONAL FUNDING CAMPAIGNS

Recommendation 4a: The transit funding campaign should involve the active participation and even leadership of a political consultant who has successful experience in running public funding campaigns. The 501(c)4 would be funded from private sources, possibly including individuals, business development organizations (chambers of commerce, economic development corporations, . . . ) and corporations.

In the past 12 years in 72% of transit funding referenda across the country were passed, and in the past year that success rate rose to 79%. (Jordon 2013) Of course this means that over one of every five transit funding referenda is defeated. So, it is important that our region learn from those experienced in running such campaigns.

At the recent Detroit Regional Transit Workshop (DRTW) at the University of Detroit Mercy (UDM), Jason Jordon, Executive Director of the Center for Transportation Excellence, distilled these successful campaign strategies into a set of common practices or “Hallmarks of Success” that have commonly led to success:

1. Pre-campaign outreach and education
2. Early Polling and Fundraising
3. Identification of the Specific Benefits of the Funding
4. Agency (RTA) – Campaign – Advocate Coordination
5. Strong Champions
6. Robust Coalition Support and Engagement
7. Business Community Support
8. Specific Engagement Strategies for Key Communities
9. Identify the Values (specific benefits and implications)
10. Link to Comprehensive Messaging Effort
11. Deploy Social Media Outlets (Jordon 2013)

Many of these are addressed in other recommendations, but it is important to observe recent developments related to these strategies. In Detroit, the DRWT and the website that makes the DRWT presentations available is, in itself, a form of such outreach and education. Also, through support of the US DOT (in the form of a grant from the Mineta National Transit Research Coalition to UDM), UDM and Transportation Riders United are collaborating on a sequence of surveys and educational programs aimed at improved understanding and influence of public opinion regarding transit, serving both the first and second strategies. The third strategy is one element of the collaborative planning described in the discussion of Recommendation 2 above, and the coordination of the RTA and advocates groups is the job of the RTA and the advocate coalition described in Recommendation 3.

Recommendation 4b: Segment the definition and delivery of the Case for Transit: Match the elements of the value proposition to the priorities and values of different community segments, and employ the representatives of each segment to convey the case in terms that resonate with them.

This message segmentation is made possible through detailed segmentation of public opinion from surveys, such as the comprehensive survey to be conducted by UDM this coming fall. The delivery of these tailored messages to various community segments will be possible if each segment is represented on the coalition recommended above.

Like any political campaign, advanced polling to test messages is a valuable step to be taken, often employing political consulting organizations. The Denver Regional Transit District involved consultants to assist in the testing of messages and/or development of materials prior to the campaign to pass the tax to fund FasTracks, an extremely large expansion of the transit system in the Denver region. This company, CLR Associates, is experienced at advising organizations that are seeking support through public referendums. Their advice led to several decisions that contributed to the success of that referendum:

Friends of the Denver RTD formed a “C4” corporation that was funded through contributions from business and hired CLR to run the advocacy campaign.

The campaign “messages and media” were developed by experts in determining what will resonate with the various stakeholder groups and the various “publics”, and those RTD staff members and leadership who were not as expert in these areas were not allowed to alter the message or media. These messages emphasized the specific new lines and extensions that would be built, their impact
on such areas as congestions, and the value of these improvements to both transit dependent riders and riders of choice.

The additional revenue from the .4 of a cent sales tax was approved in this vote (to design, build, operate and maintain the elements that were in the FasTracks plan), providing “about $160 million per year, and, depending on the economy, we should be around $410 million total in sales tax revenue for RTD this year and next” (ref: Howerter interview, 2:28)

(The pilot survey conducted in early in 2013 indicated that while there is a recognition of the value of and need for improved transit among likely voters in SE Michigan, there is also a low level of confidence in transit providers and a low level of satisfaction with current transit service in the region.)

Other consulting services, such as R&R Partners (Salt Lake City) and Avantt Partners (St. Louis), have also had great success conducting campaigns for transit referenda across the nation. Stories of their strategies and success are also presented in the videos of the DRTW at http://eng-sci.udmercy.edu/udmtc/mdtw/video/index.htm.

While the traditional mechanism for supporting transit in Michigan has been through property taxes, this is in part due to the constitutional prohibition against levying a local sales tax in our state. Sales tax is a common vehicle for securing the local funding for transit systems in large cities across the nation. One reason for this is that many transit riders (those without autos, students from other regions or nations, business travelers and tourists to the region, . . .) are not property owners. So, taxing the purchases of these groups fairly assesses them for their use of the transit system.

Recommendation 4c: Begin the political processes to amend the state constitution to allow for local sales taxes to support transit.

While this would require the solution of significant political barriers, it would put a valuable tool in the hands of the RTA and the people within its transit region, to assess those who live in or visit through the sales tax mechanism.
C. LEADERSHIP FOR REGIONAL TRANSIT

Previous reports on leadership

*Other Regions:* The findings of this study team from the examination of leaders in other regions (Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Other Regions 2013) focused on seven leaders from different sectors of the region that had pivotal impacts on the advancement of transit there. These leaders were

1. Transit Authority Chief Executive Officer
2. Transit Authority Chief Operations Officer
3. Transit Authority Chairman of the Board
4. Business Leaders
5. Metropolitan Planning Organization Leaders
6. Advocacy Group Leaders
7. Elected Executives (Mayor, Governor)

While only these seven sources of transit leadership were discussed in depth, it is important to note that any citizen of a region can play important roles in advancing the effectiveness of transit in a region. Leaders from other sectors, such as media, education and research, also played important roles in advancing transit in these regions.

*Current Detroit:* The study team also examined the roles of many leaders in who played important roles in the recent transit developments in Southeastern Michigan (Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Current Detroit 2013). The region is fortunate to have effective leaders from government, business, transit systems, community organizations and education who have proven to be up to the task of navigating the political barriers and staying the long course to make substantive progress toward an effective regional transit system.

The readers are referred to these two earlier reports that capture the findings of previous study phases. They present the findings in the form of stories and vignettes that illuminate the methods and impact of leaders from many segments of Detroit and other regions.

Recommendations Moving Forward: As developments have evolved in SE Michigan, recommendations regarding some issues have become less relevant. For example, since the RTA has been created by acts of the Michigan legislature, the time for recommendations of such action by political leaders has passed. Similarly, since the Chairman of the Board and CEO of the RTA have been selected, recommendations regarding their selection are also of little consequence. The progress made by these actions and the specific decisions made in creating the RTA and selecting its two key leaders have advanced the region significantly and established a position from which substantive progress can now occur in the
planning, funding, construction and operation of effective regional transit in Metro Detroit. The following section focuses on recommended actions and activities of leaders in government, business, community organizations and educational institutions that are needed to move further towards affecting the actual transit service that citizens from across our region deserve.

1. GOVERNMENT LEADERS

Leadership from both executive and legislative leaders is critical to the advancement of transit in our region, requiring many actions by many such leaders. The authors have chosen to focus on a few that have already had a great positive impact on advancing regional transit, and/or have the potential for doing so in the next few years.

Top Republicans State and County Executives:

It is a commonly held view that Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support investments in transit. However, in many regions across the country, it was a bipartisan leadership that led to substantive transit advances in their region . . . providing benefits that resonate with core values of both parties. (The conservative case for public transit is presented very clearly in the collection of essays.) (Lind 2009)

In recent years, the two most powerful Republicans in the State of Michigan have played important roles in advancing regional transit. Governor Rick Snyder played a proactive role in supporting the development of the Regional Transit Authority and assigned one of his top staff members, Dennis Schornack, to assist in developing the legislation and support and launching the RTA. L. Brooks Patterson, County Executive for Oakland County, was helpful in his approval (along with Democratic leaders of Wayne and Macomb Counties (Bob Ficano and Mark Hackel) and Democratic Mayors of Detroit (Kuame Kilpatrick and Dave Bing) of the regional transit plan created by the Regional Transit Coordinating Committee director, John Hertel (now CEO of the RTA). Patterson also did not oppose the RTA legislation.

As the RTA moves forward to plan and seek funding to build regional rapid transit, these Republican leaders will come under especially severe pressure from conservative anti-tax and anti-transit elements in their party. Such pressures will come from within Michigan and elsewhere. Last year in Atlanta, the Tea Party played a significant role in opposing the TSPLOST transportation funding referendum, even though the campaign for the referendum was run by the Chamber of Commerce . . . even partnering with unlikely allies, the Sierra Club and the NAACP. (Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Other Regions 2013). Anti-
transit forces, referred to as “libertarians” and “anti-transit troubadours” in “Moving Minds,” will likely come to SE Michigan to lend their voices.

**Recommendation 5a:** Governor Snyder, L. Brooks Patterson and other Republican and Democratic elected officials must “stay the course” in their support for effective regional transit, even when the conservatives strongly oppose any increased taxes or fees to provide local funding for transit.

In fact, regardless of the myths perpetrated by some organizations, good transit serves conservatives and liberal values equally well. In the essay, “Twelve Anti-Transit Myths: a conservative critique,” Weyrich and Lind effectively debunk anti-transit arguments aimed at appealing to conservative values, doing so with documented facts and data. Some of the myths that are critiqued and dismissed are:

- Myth 1: Rail transit does not spur economic development
- Myth 2: Most jobs are in the suburbs, and transit can only serve urban cores
- Myth 3: Light rail has been a failure everywhere
- Myth 4: Transit brings crime to a community (P. M. Weyrich 2009)

By becoming familiar with the counter arguments and supportive data from such sources and from national organizations such as APTA and the Center for Transportation Excellence, these elected officials can make informed decisions that best serve their constituents. The authors believe that such information will allow both conservative and liberal leaders to support the regional transit investments while remaining fully faithful to their political values.

**Legislators:**

Regional sales taxes are a very common method to provide local support of transit across the nation, especially in larger urban regions (Jordan 2013). In 2012 there were twelve ballots for approval of a new or extension of a sales tax for transit support across the country, and eight of them received over 50% approval, and another received 49.82% approval . . . leaving only three with approval ratings of 33, 37 and 44%. However, Michigan is one of only fourteen states in the country without any regional or local sales tax. The authors believe that this funding option should be available to the residents of the four-county RTA region if they deem it the most effective and fair way to provide local funding to for regional transit.

**Recommendation 5b:** Leading legislators should introduce, support and actively
work for the passage of a proposed constitutional amendment that allows for local sales taxes in the state, leading to a state wide vote for its approval.

There are other reasons, including political viability and taxing of visitors to consider sales tax as an option for the generation of transit support, compared to other options such as property tax or vehicle fees. First, with the two alternative taxes, the most affluent property owners and vehicle owners would pay the most for transit, but are less likely to be dependent on public forms of transportation. On the contrary, non-property owners are often more likely to be transit riders and would pay no tax. These include such people as business travelers, tourists and students from outside of the area or even outside of the country. A sales tax would provide a vehicle for such riders to contribute to the provision of a service that is valuable to them.

Of the four peer regions studied, all four of them have successfully employed local sales taxes to support the construction and operation of their transit systems. St. Louis and Denver have recently had successful votes to continue or increase the sales tax for transit.

**Leaders of Cities and Towns in the RTA Region:**

Mayors and other elected leaders of cities and towns are factors in both conveying and influencing public opinion regarding the development and funding of transit. In St. Louis, John Nations, the mayor of Chesterfield, an important suburban city, was the primary spokesperson for a successful local funding referendum in 2010, in the midst of an economic recession (Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Other Regions 2013).

In Denver, the advocates of a regional transit plan and referendum, Fastracks, convinced all 31 regional mayors in the Metro Mayors’ Caucus to support the plan. In fact, they issued a strong endorsement of it and urged member communities to make “development of, education on, and passage of such a measure the highest priority for their municipalities.” (Metro Mayor’s Caucus 2003) Leaders of the Denver RTA (RTD) feel that this was a significant factor in the passage of Fastraks in 2004 with 57% voter approval, allowing the construction of $4.7B of new transit systems (heavy rail, light rail and BRT). (Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Other Regions 2013)

**Recommendation 5c:** The mayor and directors from all jurisdictions with the RTA’s four county region should become and remain well informed regarding transit and its benefits to their communities and the region, and actively engage in the review of transit plans and the advocacy of its support.

In fact, there are good signs that the leaders of local communities are becoming
more informed and actively engaged in a dialog concerning transportation in
general and transit in particular through the activities of SEMCOG and the Michi-
gan Suburbs Alliance. SEMCOG has recently developed and approved a 2040
Regional Transportation Plan that calls for an increase in spending for transit
capital and operations from 24% of total transportation expenditures to 42% in
the next 25 years. Also, on August 2, 2013, the Michigan Suburbs Alliance host-
ed a meeting of mayors and directors that featured presentations on transporta-
tion needs and funding by the MDOT Director Kirk Steudle, SEMCOG Director
Paul Tait and RTA board member Roy Rose. Their slide presentations are avail-
able at the Michigan Suburbs Alliance website. (Alliance 2013)

2. BUSINESS LEADERS

Business leaders and leaders of business organizations such as chambers of
commerce and economic development organizations have played important roles
in advancing regional transit systems in virtually every transit development stud-
ied by the authors. That influence and support ranges from involvement in
Transit Oriented Development to involvement in planning and the support of and
active participation in the advocacy of plans and funding initiatives.

Our region is fortunate to have many business leaders who have taken on such
roles in recent years. A few of these people and their roles were described in the
Chapter on Leadership and Politics in the Report “Current Detroit Transit”.
(Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Current Detroit 2013) The business
leaders described there, Roger Penske, Dan Gilbert, Matt Cullen and Tom
Dekar, were not intended to be an inclusive list of all business leaders engaged
in transit advocacy, but rather illustrations of the types of leadership that had
occurred in the advancement of two transit developments, the M-1 Rail Project
and the creation of the RTA.

In fact, the creation of M-1 and its broader impact on Detroit has drawn national
attention as a model for the “metropolitan revolution.” A book by that title asserts
“... the launch of the M-1 Rail exemplifies the collaborative spirit and integrated
nature of economy shaping and place making at the heart of the metropolitan
revolution. Detroit’s revival is being inspired, accelerated, and supported by an
intreicate web of philantropic and business leaders ...” (Katz 2013)

Our region now needs many more business leaders from across the four-county
RTA region to become more actively engaged in transit planning and advocacy.
Four specific recommendations related to this need are provided below.

Business leadership in local transformation:

Recommendation 6a: Local business leaders and transit providers should partner
to promote transit and secure developer and community input on outcomes in order to create a transformation where new transit systems are introduced.

Such transformations should employ the principles of “complete streets” (Smart Growth America 2010) and lessons from other regions such as Cleveland, Denver, Portland and Atlanta (Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Other Regions 2013) (Dittmar 2004).

According to the National Complete Streets Coalition, “complete streets” involves strategy, policy and design that “enables safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. This means that every transportation project will make the street network better and safer for drivers, transit users, pedestrians, and bicyclists – making your town a better place to live.” Support for complete streets planning has emerged in Michigan in the form of the Michigan Complete Streets Coalition, supported by organizations of bicyclers, environmentalists and senior citizens (Michigan Complete Streets Coalition n.d.). Some communities such as Royal Oak have begun to develop complete street plans as part of a federally funded project to create the Woodward Complete Street Plan for the entire 27-mile length of Woodward Avenue (City of Royal Oak 2013).

One excellent example of transformative impact of transit is the Healthline that led to a complete metamorphosis of Euclid Avenue in Cleveland.

Once the Healthline plan started to become reality, transit oriented development began to occur along its eight mile length. Business leaders, like Richard (Dick) Pace, again played critical roles in this the transformation of Euclid Avenue. Pace, President – Cumberland Development in Cleveland, took an active role in promoting the funding and creation of Cleveland’s Health Line, a BRT system that is widely credited with stimulating over $4 billion along its 6.8 mile alignment (Cleveland Plain Dealer, 2008). In fact, the Health Line (aka Euclid Line) changed Pace’s mind about investing in this area of Cleveland, ““Before Euclid Corridor, I didn't feel it was a good investment,” he said. After his first project was successful, he said, he's “looking for other buildings along the street to buy and rehab.” (Cleveland Plain Dealer, Feb. 10, 2008). The project that is being referred to is an $8 million investment that bought and turned a 1910 auto showroom and service facility for Baker electric cars into the home of high

Baker Electric Building
(http://www.livecleveland.org/midtown)
tech researchers and entrepreneurs.

Pace tells the full story of his conversion from rejecting Euclid Avenue as a wise place to investing over $12 million of investments on Euclid:

"I was looked for building for laboratory and technology startups in 2002 and looked at the Baker Electric Building, but the condition of Euclid was a distractor, so I didn’t act on it. The area looked terrible, infrastructure needed investment. It was close to the Cleveland Clinic, but the dynamics weren’t there in 2002, so I bought a laboratory building from Republic Steel in an inner ring suburb, converted it and filled it up. In 2006, our regional transit authority had gotten the funding and started construction of the BRT along Euclid Avenue. That was critical and the biggest factor in my decision to buy the Baker Building in June of 2006.

So it’s really clear: without the transit investment (in 2002) I did not invest, and with the transit investment (in 2006), I did invest. It’s a real one to one relationship on the decision." (Hanifin, Interview of Richard Pace, 12-18-12)

As our region begins to plan, fund and build modern transit, whether it is modern streetcar like M-1 Rail, commuter rail from Ann Arbor or Bus Rapid Transit systems, we need our region`s most respected business leaders and developers to step forward to transform our streets and region, like Toby Cosgrove and Dick Pace did in Cleveland.

**Business Support for Advocacy Campaign:**

In the fall of 2014, the SE Michigan RTA will quite probably seek voter support for a funding mechanism to provide a continuing local source for funding part of their capital costs for new and improved services and for operations. Successful campaigns across the nation have shown that it is necessary to have a broad coalition of leaders from many segments of the community, including business leaders, and strong financial support for the advocacy campaign leading up to the referendum.

**Recommendation 6b: Business leaders should share in the leadership of the broad coalition recommended above (“Recommendation 3), but do not dominate it.**

It would be difficult to find a major urban region in our nations that had moved forward with the planning, funding and construction of effective regional transit without the support of broad coalitions of transit advocates that included business leaders, but also leaders from many other segments. Such coalitions are described in the UDM Regional Study Group’s report on four other regions (Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Other Regions 2013) and three of these are discussed further above in the section after Recommendation 3. It is important to
note the differing models for business leadership of these coalitions.

In its beginning, Citizens for Modern Transit (CMT) in St. Louis much of the CMT leadership was from the business community. However, they were aggressive in bringing other stakeholder groups into the campaign and into CMT. In fact, after the successful funding referendum, the CMT has retained leaders from non-business stakeholder groups, such as unions and educational institutions, on their board. (CMT 2012) This is a good example of effective expansion of the broad coalition of transit advocates from a beginning with primarily business leadership.

Another good example of strong business involvement, but not domination is MoveLA. Started by an ex-Mayor of Santa Monica, Denny Zane, MoveLA has grown to involve over 200 member organizations and sponsors from business, environment, education, health, community and labor organizations. MoveLA was a driving force in the passage of a sales tax in 2008 that will provide $40 billion of transit funding over 30 years. (Zane 2013)

The third, the Atlanta funding referendum of July 2013 (TSPLOST), is an example is an example of the absence of a broad coalition. In Atlanta, the business community played the dominant role in the “Untie Atlanta” campaign. It was run by the regional chamber of commerce through Citizens for Transportation Mobility, and was extremely successful in raising between $8 million (Walls 2012) and $12 million (reference from Atlanta interviews), almost exclusively from businesses. However, the “Untie Atlanta” campaign did not appeal to a broader spectrum of voters and failed on a 67% to 33% margin. In fact, some organizations that commonly advocate for transit support, such as the Sierra Club and the NAACP, joined with Tea Party to oppose the referendum.

While it is not politically effective for businesses to define and independently run transit campaigns, it is often necessary for them to shoulder the majority of the funding for them. The reason for this is simple. First, government agencies (including transit agencies) and foundations are prohibited from advocating for such taxation/funding. That leaves few “deep pockets” except corporations, business organizations and individual business leaders that are able to provide the millions needed for an effective campaign

Recommendation 6c: Businesses should provide most of the funds needed for the upcoming advocacy campaign for local support for the RTA’s plans to build and operate more and better regional transit in Southeastern Michigan.
Personally Advocate for Transit Support:

In addition to the financial and organizational support of transit planning and funding, business leaders need to lend their personal voice to the advocacy for the transit plan and its funding. That voice needs to be heard through very public vehicles as the voice of a few key spokespersons and in large numbers of private conversations with colleagues and other influential business leaders and organizations.

Recommendation 6d: The coalition of advocates needs to identify and attract a few widely respected business leaders to be spokesperson(s) advocating the transit plan and its funding.

This use of key business leaders as one of the “faces” of the campaign has proven to be a successful strategy in other regions. In Cleveland, the campaign to fund and build the Healthline involved having one of the region’s most highly respected business leaders who became the face of the campaign on televised, web and print advocacy. Dr. Delos (“Toby”) Cosgrove, President and CEO of the Cleveland Clinic, presides over a $5 billion health care system and is widely regarded as the “800 pound gorilla” in Cleveland. Dr. Cosgrove played off of his specialty as a cardiac specialist to create a very imaginative television promotion based on the need for both people and cities to have healthy arteries. Of course, the city’s artery that he was referring to was Euclid Avenue, and the Health Line BRT system was the way Cleveland was “reconstructing an artery that is great for the heart of our city.” Though this campaign, he became the most visible “public face,” lending the enormous influence of the Cleveland Clinic and himself to the case for building the system . . . which has now been funded and built.

In Detroit we have had key business leaders like Roger Penske and Dan Gilbert play private roles of leadership and influence to advance the M-1 Rail initiative and the creation of the RTA. One of them might be effective spokespersons for the RTA plan and its funding. Other top executives from hospitals or industry who have a penchant for leading civic projects may, such as William Clay Ford, may also be appropriate and willing to take on such an important role for the region.

Recommendation 6e: Business leaders should personally become the conduits to convey the key elements of the value proposition/case statement for transit to your constituent organizations and leaders.

Once business leaders become aware of the enormous benefits to business that effective regional transit provides they will become much more willing to advocate for transit among their colleagues and associates across their sphere of influence. It is up to the RTA, the advocacy coalition and campaign professionals
to make certain that they understand those benefits in general and how they will impact SE Michigan specifically. The business case needs to be fashioned to fit the transit plan developed for our region and to be responsive to perspective discerned from polling. However, it most certainly will include elements related to:

- the business impacts of improved vitality and livability in the region in retaining and attracting talent and companies
- transit oriented development and its impact on improving both a customer base and the tax base
- getting employees to the jobs that serve the corporations in the region and their customers, patients and students.

3. COMMUNITY LEADERS

The term “community leaders” is used here to cover a wide array of leaders and organizations whose priorities range from neighborhood vitality, social service and faith to transit riders, the environment, fitness and biking. Some have broader priorities and perspectives, such as the Detroit Futures organization that is seeking to redefine Detroit. (Detroit Works Project Long Term Planning Steering Committee 2013)

Recommendation 7a: Share in the leadership of the broad advocacy coalition recommended above (Recommendation 3), especially with regard to providing a conduit for citizens that are most directly impacted by transit service.

Detroit is fortunate to have many community organizations that are interested in and/or supportive of the effective regional transit. Foremost among these are Transportation Riders United (TRU) and their dedicated leader Megan Owens in Metro Detroit and Trans4M, a statewide advocacy organization. In additions, many other key organizations and their leaders recognized the value of regional transit and often focus on transit issues as they represent their members and invite the input of their members. Such organizations include MOSES (Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength, a faith-based organization centered on congregations), the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, Midtown Detroit, the Detroit Works Project, the Sierra Club, Warriors on Wheels, the Woodward Avenue Action Association, and others. Some leaders from these organizations have become members of the RTA Board of Directors (Lisa Franklin of Warriors on Wheels and Richard Murphy of Michigan Suburbs Alliance) and others have recently been appointed to the RTA Citizens Advisory Council (Megan Owens of TRU).
Many of the leaders of these and other community organizations should become involved in the formation and activities of the recommended advocacy coalition. At the Detroit Regional Transit Workshop, held at the University of Detroit Mercy last May, the participants identified over forty types of organizations that should be part of this advocacy initiative. (University of Detroit Mercy Transit Center 2013) These included those focused on senior citizens, community service, bicycling, ethnic and immigrant groups, people with disabilities, professional associations, community service, public health, labor, neighborhood associations, recreation and other community dimensions with an interest in transit.

Recommendation 7b: Become the conduits to convey the key elements of the value proposition/case statement for transit to your constituent organizations and leaders.

Like business leaders above, the leaders of these community organizations can play vital roles as both person voices of their constituent groups and also a conduit to convey the value of transit to their constituents in specific terms that resonate with their priorities. Examples of the effective advocacy of such community groups were common in the authors' examination of other regions. For example, in the 2010 successful funding referendum in St. Louis, includes an increased reach-out to the African American community. This was achieved by ensuring that the Proposition A steering committee was a diverse group, as well as by other means, such as rallies. For example the Metropolitan Congregations United held rallies targeting African American communities.

4. ACADEMIC LEADERS

Academic institutions, especially those at the high school and university levels, have special interest in transit for three reasons. First, transit is important to many of its students simply as a way for them to access their education. Second, those same students can be a powerful voice and workforce for the advocacy of transit. Finally, at the university level, transit researchers can provide an unbiased assessment regarding the various options and perspectives on transit, ranging from public opinion studies to evaluation of the effectiveness of various technical options or system configurations, or assessing the impact of transit on community livability and economic development.

In studying other regions there were several instances where academic institution played such important roles. In the successful funding referendum in 2010 in St. Louis, The students at Washington University were actively involved in the
2010 Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) campaign focused on Face-to Face communication with voters. Also, the voice of Washington University was influential in advocating for that funding. (ref. interview with CMT). That voice continues to support transit through the leadership of Rose Windmiller, Washington University Assistant Vice Chancellor, as a board member of Citizens for Modern Transit.

In Atlanta, the Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development at Georgia Tech, under the leadership of Catherine Ross and Harry West, have conducted numerous studies to inform the public and policy/decision makers on the issues related to transit in their region.

**Recommendation 8a:** Leaders of academic institutions in Metro Detroit should share in the leadership of the broad coalition recommended above.

The support of Wayne State University for the M-1 Rail project and the membership of academic leaders on transit boards (University of Michigan Professor Elizabeth Gerber on the RTA Board and University of Detroit Mercy Professor Leo Hanifin on the M-1 Rail Board and the RTA Citizens’ Advisory Council) are good steps toward a more vocal advocacy by university executives in the region.

**Recommendation 8b:** Leaders of academic institutions in Metro Detroit should become the conduits to convey the key elements of the value proposition/case statement for transit to your constituent organizations and leaders.

**Recommendation 8c:** Mobilize students from across Metro Detroit to provide the workers for transit education and advocacy campaigns.

With over 30 institutions of higher education in the four-county RTA region, their students can provide thousands of “boots on the ground” for conveying educational and advocacy information, and for get-out-the-vote campaigns.

**Recommendation 8d:** Academic researchers in our region should focus their studies on transit and its impact on the community in order to provide unbiased data and balanced perspectives.

Several such projects are currently underway through the Mineta National Transit Research Coalition’s member at the University of Detroit Mercy. These include the recent regional workshop on transit planning and advocacy (in partnership with APTA, the Center for Transportation Excellence and TRU), public opinion surveys and educational programs (in partnership with TRU) and a study of the impact of BRT through Transit Oriented Development. The results of the public opinion survey will be especially valuable in fashioning education programs and advocacy messages that are most effective with various segments of the regional community. In addition, a graduate course on transit as a vehicle of community
development will be developed an offered in the next year. (University of Detroit Mercy Transportation Center 2013)

5. ALL REGIONAL LEADERS

All regional leaders need to follow two key lessons learned from other regions studies and their planning and advocacy efforts.

Recommendation 9a: Don’t allow perfect to be the obstacle to progress.

This was an explicit “mantra” of the Denver RTA and advocacy leaders, but it was clear that other regions also embraced this principle. The logic is very simple. When many people and organization within a large region, it is inevitable that there will be a wide variety of values and priorities . . . often driving towards differing views on how transit should be planned, implemented, operated and funded. As such, it is virtually impossible that anyone will see the resulting consensus as the “perfect solution” consistent in every way with their personal or organizational objective and views. The only way to move forward will be of everyone to accept solutions that are locally imperfect, but allow progress for the region.

Recommendation 9b: Collaborate with other key dimensions of the region to assure consistency of messages, even as different elements of the overall case are emphasized in the segment that you represent.

Borrowing from the principles of physics, if everyone pulls equally in different directions there will be no motion.

D. OVERCOMING POLITICAL BARRIERS

There is considerable optimism regarding the future of transit in the Metro Detroit region, based substantially on the developments discussed in this report and a growing sense of regionalism across Southeastern Michigan. At the same time, there significant negative elements of public and political opinion that, left unaddressed, may foster opposition to increased transit funding, construction and operation. These elements include skepticism, dissatisfaction with current service, lack of trust of government and transit agencies, safety and security concerns, racial Issues, and funding sources/mechanisms. These issues are discussed in the authors’ chapter in the report “Current Detroit Transit” released in June of 2013 ((Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Current Detroit 2013) and summarized below.
Skepticism: “Metro Detroit, in general, has a deep skepticism of transit, because we’ve seen plans come and go for so many years. . . there’s this inherent skepticism when you live here that (that auto dependence and poor transit) can be changed, and we’ve seen that play out politically numerous times.” (Helms 2013)

Dissatisfaction with Current Service: In addition to concerns about poor bus service the marginal coordination of DDOT and SMART operations, and lack of well integrated fare and information systems, the lack of any rapid transit service frustrate regional riders.

Lack of trust of government and transit agencies: Across the nation, there is a declining level of public trust in government. The lack of public trust in Detroit has worsened with the corruption charges against city official, Detroit’s bankruptcy and cuts in DDOT service.

Safety concerns: Safety and security is a concern in every large city today. Unlike many transit agencies in other regions that employ their own security staff or transit police, neither DDOT nor SMART has the funds to do so.

Racial Matters: While our region and nation have made great strides in the elimination of racial prejudice and bigotry, racial issues remain as an underlying concern that impacts transit routes and funding.

Funding Sources/Mechanisms: The anti-tax forces, such as the Tea Party, have considerable influence across America and in our region. While many other large urban regions use sales taxes to support transit, such local sales taxes are prohibited by the Michigan constitution. Currently the mechanism of local support for transit used by SMART and indirectly by DDOT is property taxes. However property tax levels do not correlate well to the willingness to support transit and the need for transit.

Given these issues and concerns it is critical that the leaders and stakeholders who wish to advance transit in Southeast Michigan develop a strong case for transit that addresses them and also clearly articulates the many values that effective transit will provide to our region.

1. THE COMPELLING VALUE PROPOSITION FOR TRANSIT IN SE MICHIGAN

Recommendation 10a: The RTA board, the RTA Citizens Advisory Committee and the new transit advocacy coalition (Recommendation 3 above) need to develop the case for transit in Metro Detroit, and work with an advocacy consultant to develop the messages and media for a successful funding campaign.

While there is currently little overt or organized opposition to transit in Detroit, any
system that will require support from taxpayers can expect to have opposition from some residents, and even from others who travel the country opposing all transit and taxation. (Lind 2009). Some in the Detroit region who are not transit riders feel that we don’t need more or better transit systems. This perspective was observed by Matt Helms, a long time transit reporter for the Detroit Free Press, when he stated, “I think the biggest peril to (transit projects) has always been just kind of that metro Detroit skepticism itself. It’s the idea that, well, we’ve gotten along without trains for 50 years; why do we need to bring them back, kind of thing, and it will never work here, because we’re the Motor City.” (Helms 2013)

If transit is to be planned, funded, built and operated, the people of the region will have to support a case for better transit. The case that has proven to be effective in other regions, such as St. Louis and Denver, has provided a myriad of “values” that are provided to everyone in the region, including many important organizations, not just the value to current riders. As the St. Louis campaign of 2010 state “Transit . . . some of us use it, all of us need it.” (Schroit 2013) The needs of non-riders range from individuals who need the healthcare workers who use transit to come to care for them or their children who go travel to college on transit every day, to organizations like the businesses who need to get workers and customers to them, to the region that needs to retain young talent and needs to stimulate the economy and to create more livable sustainable communities. The following sections begin to explain some of the values and elements of the political case that will have to be made for transit investment in Metro Detroit.

The following is an outline of the elements that should be considered in the case for more and better transit in the Metro Detroit region.

a. Vitality of the region
   i. Economic development
   ii. Retaining the technical talent and the creative class
   iii. Riders of choice
b. Congestion and reduced cost of road construction and repair
c. Transit dependent riders
d. Transit as an essential element of infrastructure (like roads, the uses don’t pay the entire cost of transit)
e. Getting riders to work and workers to employers, including reverse commute and inter-suburban commute
f. Quality of Life issues
   i. Environment
   ii. Livability of community
   iii. Walkability of community

While each of these are impacts of transit that resonate with some segment(s) of
the population. Before any campaign for a transit plan and funding goes forward, in depth polling of public opinion needs to be done so that a few of these case elements that are most of value to large fractions of our region can be emphasized in the campaign.

For more depth of discussion of the case for transit, readers are encouraged to visit the website for the recent Metro Detroit Transit Workshop at www.udmercy.edu/mdtw. This workshop brought together transit leaders, consultants and advocates from across the nation to present how they were able to plan and fund transit systems in their regions.

2. RECOGNIZING AND ADDRESSING THE MANY DIMENSIONS OF REGIONAL DIVERSITY

Recommendation 10b: Regional stakeholders and advocates of transit need to first understand the public opinions of our region, not just as a whole but as a collection of opinions by various affinity groups with values and objectives that are, to a significant degree correlated to their locale, ethnicity, political party, age, pastimes, etc.

It is important to recognize that there is no one “public opinion” for the region regarding transit. As discussed above under recommendation 7d, public opinion surveys, and later polls regarding alternative messaging are critical to understanding the values and priorities of various stakeholder groups within the region and assuring that the media conduits to them deliver a segmented value propositions that emphasizes the transit impacts that most resonate with them.

3. THE CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION TO ALL TAXES AND TRANSIT

Recommendation 10c: Transit leaders, especially those involved in the RTA and the broad transit advocacy coalition, need to anticipate the anti-tax/anti-transit arguments, and preempt their influence on public opinion through early and aggressive educational and advocacy programs.

The “good news” is that most of the arguments of such anti-transit and anti-tax organizations are well known. The book Moving Minds: Conservatives and Public Transportation documents their arguments, and provides compelling counter arguments that appeal to the values and objectives of conservatives. (Lind 2009) The “bad news” is that the arguments of the anti-tax/anti-transit organizations are well developed and tested in other regions, and have been effective in appealing to some (especially conservative) voters. This reinforces the need to communicate early and effectively with voters on education and advocacy. The ongoing
educational program of TRU is the first real start at such communication.

4. DETROIT AS A CORE REGIONAL ASSET, NOT A LIABILITY

The Brookings Institution’s recent book, The Metropolitan Revolution: How Cities and Metros are Fixing Our Broken Politics and Fragile Economy, sums up the interdependence of today’s cities and regions, “It is difficult to separate the city from its larger metro region – or to separate the metro from the city. In today’s world, the two are inextricably linked.” (Katz 2013)

This reality is not fully understood or widely embraced in Metro Detroit. Increasing the sense of regionalism would be a great boost to advancing regional transit here. However, as TRU director Megan Owens stated at the Detroit Regional Transit Workshop, “It is not necessary to solve regionalism to solve regional transit.” (University of Detroit Mercy Transportation Center 2013) In fact, improving regional transit would, through its impact on the region’s vitality, livability and economy, increase the sense of regionalism. As the system moved all people throughout the region, it would dispel many of the myths of anti-transit forces.

While Detroit’s financial plight naturally pushes suburbanites away from regional partnership with the city, there has been great progress in revitalizing the core of Detroit. By some, the recent progress in the core of Detroit is seen as model for a metropolitan revolution that will make it, once again, the center of vitality and economic drive of the region. Katz asserts that “Detroit is an incredible living laboratory where the future of American cities is being demonstrated, one project, one investment at a time. As counterintuitive as it may seem, Detroit’s intense civic engagement, networked leadership, and reevaluation of assets make it a model for other cities and metropolitan regions.” (Katz 2013)

E. TRANSIT PROVIDERS’ LEADERSHIP AND OPERATIONS

1. ASSURE TOP QUALITY LEADERSHIP

In the study of peer transit regions released in January 2013, the authors concluded that the region that should have the following attributes experience and competencies:

a. Knowledgeable and Experienced Transit Leader (understanding of transit finance, acquisition, operations, technology, law, unions, etc.)
b. Politically Astute Consensus Builder

c. Visionary Advocate and Articulate Spokesperson

d. Competent Administrator and Team Builder

e. Innovative Champion of Securing Funding from Varied Sources (Hanifin, Transit Leadership and Politics - Other Regions 2013)

Since that time Detroit RTA has appointed John Hertel as its CEO. He clearly fulfills all of these requirements. For over three years he has been the General Manager of SMART, the transit provider that serves the largest area of the region. Throughout his career as an elected and appointed leader, he has been a consensus builder. This was demonstrated within the transit arena where, as CEO of the Regional Transit Coordinating Council (RTCC), Hertel developed a regional transit service plan that was approved by the “Big Four” (the executives of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties and the Mayor of Detroit). Regarding the imaginative funding and vision, he led in the conception of the Woodward streetcar system, developed extensive support from business and foundation leaders, and led in the formation of The Regional Area Initial Link (TRAIL) Board (predecessor to M1 Rail).

2. SECURE TOP QUALITY STAFF WITH TRANSIT-SPECIFIC EXPERTISE

Competent Engineering Staff: Recommendation 11a: All transit agencies in SE MI that create and/or operate any transit systems should have a top quality engineering staff with competencies in the key areas of emerging transit operations.

This is increasingly important as such systems implement new propulsion, communication, sensing and control technologies. Therefore, the transit providers need to have competence in communications and control systems, propulsion systems (including alternative fuels and hybrid systems), safety and security systems, asset management and maintenance, intelligent real-time scheduling and rider notification systems, systems modeling, etc.

In our comparison of other regions significant differences were noted between the organizational structures of Detroit transit systems and other regions. The organization charts of regions like Denver have an array of engineers. This is a part that is lacking from DDOT and SMART personnel.

The concept of placing engineers on staff is not something new. Departments of transportation around the country employ extensive numbers of engineers. Engineers are a part of an effective transportation system and are typically key staff
members in such departments as IT services; Safety and Facilities operations, Operations, and Capital Programs. Engineering has a direct tie to capital projects. The build out of infrastructure is most certainly relies upon engineering experience and expertise, which justifies extensive engineering staff the Departments of Transportation around the country (United States Department of Transportation 2012). When the authors reviewed the staffing of the Denver RTD, the same strength in engineering was evident. Denver has a transit system that has a large and growing infrastructure, requiring engineers on staff to build out the system as well as oversee effective maintenance and operation of the existing system. (Regional Transportation District Denver 2012)

Without this skill on staff the transit agency would need to rely on consulting services, resulting in higher costs and potential discontinuities and inconsistencies between project and system components. While such large internal engineering staffs are affordable and needed for a large and growing transit system such as Denver, smaller, newer agencies, such as the new Detroit RTA, may still need to rely on consulting engineers, especially as it starts up. However, a small core of staff engineers is essential to specify the requirements for vehicles, stations and other assets; develop the overall system configuration and plan; to review technical quotations/bids by suppliers; and test and accept delivered systems. As the system grows, so do the needs for engineering staff to management and maintenance of the system.

While DDOT and SMART have not had engineers on staff, it is critical that the Detroit RTA develops a core internal engineering competence even if it must initially do so by hiring full-time, dedicated staff consultants as a short term solution. It should avoid a long term, deep reliance on consultant engineering services. It may benefit a newly formed RTA to see a partnership with MDOT to advise and even provide early engineering support, as has occurred in other staffing areas.

**Transit Focused Staff Expertise:** Recommendation 101b: All transit agencies should have staff (or share staff between transit agencies) with deep knowledge of transit systems in key areas such as legal, human resources, labor relations, accounting, etc., rather than depending on other sources such as other governmental offices for them. These staffs need to have knowledge of their fields that is specific to the transit industry and transit funding, building and operations. During his tenure as CEO of DDOT, Ron Freeland was frustrated that he had to compete with other city departments for the attention and effort of key functions, stating "a lot of our services come from downtown. For instance, the legal staff is downtown. Sometimes, quite frankly, they’re so busy and their caseload is so heavy, I can’t even get their attention." (Freeland 2013) In the other regions studied by the authors (Cleveland, Denver, St. Louis and Atlanta) those functions
exist within the regional transit agencies and were staffed by specialists with deep knowledge of their areas, as applied to transit.

Bill Nojay, another seasoned transit leader who was brought I as COO at DDOT expressed similar frustrations in an “op ed” in the Wall Street Journal. He described how payment for maintenance parts were prioritized by people outside of the transit department as follows, “A bureaucrat working miles away in City Hall, not responsible to the transportation department (and, frankly not responsible to anyone we could identify), decided who got paid and who didn’t. That meant vendors supplying noncritical items were often paid even as public buses were sidelined.” (Nojay 2013)

Recommendation 11c: DDOT should acquire the services of an experienced transit professional to manage its development and operation to replace Ron Freeland who recently left the CEO position. This can be done by hiring or by contract. If this cannot be done in its current configuration as a city department, the function of providing bus service within the city should be outsourced to a professional transit management organization.

3. IMPROVE BUS SERVICE:

Recommendation 11d: Substantive improvements to local bus service need to be made in the short term (coordination, efficiencies, and reach of existing systems) to create public trust and confidence in the regional concept and RTA before the referendum for major new systems occurs.

Public votes are often directly driven by the public’s assessment of the quality of service currently provided. The first step in such improvements should be to maximize their efficiencies to improve coordination between systems, thereby improving the overall quality of service to riders and minimizing their expenses for that service. This needs to be one of the RTA’s first priorities. This may include such actions as:

- Employing simulation and other modeling efforts to simultaneously improve service and reduce costs
- Creating heuristics that are driven by real-time locators on all buses to continually react to events that influence the flow of buses to minimize their negative impact
- Coordinate and then integrate the fare card/collection systems of DDOT, People Mover, SMART and the new RTA system/s
- Collaborate on purchases of buses, maintenance equipment and parts, and maintenance services to create cost and performance efficiencies.
4. TRANSIT PROFESSIONALISM AND PRIDE:

**Recommendation 11e:** The leaders of the transit providers in SE Michigan and their unions have to infuse and continually reinforce the **sense of pride and responsibility** that all employees should feel as transportation providers in this service industry.

The need for such a change in attitude was observed by Ron Freeland who were brought in to lead DDOT managers after a successful careers as a transit in Maryland. He was appalled at the lack of a professional attitude that service to the rider is first and everything else is secondary to that, stating, “I was shocked when I first got here. In the transit industry people show up at 6:00 or 6:30, or 7:00 in the morning. That’s when I show up, because that’s the way I was trained (as a transit professional). Why? Because you’re a.m. peak is already underway and, as a manager, as somebody who’s a supervisor, you need to be on site. Here, it’s more of a civil service job. These people don’t see themselves necessarily as transit professionals.” He went on to emphasize the need of all transit employees to always work and act as if “the person standing on the corner in the cold getting their ride on time is the most important person in the world” and not act in their own self-interest. Transit only exists for that person waiting for the bus. With a level of ownership in the system, employees are more likely to spot and fix minor inefficiencies in their daily work. When added up, a large number of minor improvements create a large change in organizational culture.

(Freeland 2013)
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Dr. Leo Hanifin is a Professor of Mechanical Engineering and the leader of research in transit and innovation at the University of Detroit Mercy (UDM). Previously, Dr. Hanifin was the Dean - College of Engineering and Science UDM from 1991 to 2012. Also, from 2006 to 2012 he also served as the Director of the Michigan Ohio (MIOH) University Transportation Center, a coalition of five universities supported by the US and Michigan Departments of Transportation. In one MIOH project he led UDM faculty members from engineering and architecture who partnered with Deloitte to develop the preliminary plan for the Woodward Transit Catalyst System (now M1 rail). He is a member of the M-1 Rail Board of Directors and the Citizens’ Advisory Committee of the Detroit Regional Transit Authority. He is currently the leader of a team of over 30 faculty members and students engaged in transit research, teaching and K12 outreach at UDM, as part of the Mineta National Transit Research Coalition.

SCOTT DOUGLAS

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CHAPTER 2

TRANSIT LEGAL STRUCTURES AND GOVERNANCE

Lloyd A. Semple

September 2013
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- David Bing, Mayor of Detroit
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- Ron Freeland, CEO Detroit Department of Transportation
- Beth Gibbons, Manager of Marketing and Communications – SMART
- Paul Hillegonds, Chairman of the Board – Regional Transit Authority
- Richard Murphy, Board Member – Regional Transit Authority
- Larry Salsi – Former Head of SEMTA and St. Louis Metro
- Bill Shea, Reporter – Crain’s Business
- John Swatosh, Chief of Operations – SMART
- Ernie Zachary, Detroit Developer
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Chapter provides recommendations related legal structures and governance issues impacting the quality, success and efficiency of transit systems in the Metro Detroit region. For one primary reason, this Chapter will be brief. The recent enactment and effectiveness of Act 387, Public Acts of 2012, creating the Regional Transit Authority for Southeastern Michigan (the RTA) which should solve many of the governance and structural issues that have been negatively impacting the development of an efficient and coordinated transit system in the region. This development, which occurred during the research period covered by this project, significantly reduced the number of recommendations that otherwise the author would have made.

Nevertheless, as the newly formed RTA will not, at least initially, own and operate the existing systems, there remain a few areas the author suggests should be addressed.
A. INTRODUCTION

This Chapter provides a few recommendations related to legal structures and governance issues which should enhance the success of regional transit in Southeastern Michigan. These recommendations are based upon the study of these issues over the past several months by the author, including the review of extensive literature and many interviews on the history of Detroit transit, and similar research and visits to four comparable regions, Atlanta, Cleveland, Denver and St. Louis.

The recommendations, in each case, follow a report on relevant information acquired from the four regions visited and studied.

B. BASIC STRUCTURE

All of the four regions visited, Atlanta, Cleveland, Denver and St. Louis, operate their systems through independent authorities created through State enacted authorizing legislation. All of these systems are relatively successful in their goal to provide reliable, efficient and affordable service to the public in their respective areas. Functioning as an independent agent or authority, as opposed to a department or division of the city government, has many benefits. Among them are

1. Accountability for the performance of the transit system housed within an authority rests ultimately with the authority’s Board members, who, if carefully chosen or elected enhance the diligence of oversight.

2. Appointment of the Board Members creates an opportunity to draw upon community leaders, business executives, lawyers and accountants who bring to governance a variety of important skilled sets. Such persons can also be valuable proponents for the system and transit in general.
3. The ability of the system to hire and retain a highly qualified management team is enhanced, as the compensation necessary to attract such persons in the national market often exceeds the compensation structure existing in most municipalities.

4. An independent organization chart can be created providing for self-contained services within the Authority, such as human resources, legal, financial, public relations and the like. This eliminates the inefficiency of required reliance on separate municipal departments to provide such services.

Of the transit systems, only DDOT operates as a legal subdivision (department) of a municipality, that being the City of Detroit. While the Detroit Transportation Company, operating the Detroit People Mover is a corporate body separate from the City, its Directors are city employees except for one appointee from SMART. It effectively operates as a department of the City.

Both Ron Freeland, former CEO of DDOT, in a personal interview, and Bill Najoy (who also served as CEO) expressed in a Wall Street Journal piece, frustration with the difficulties of running an efficient transit system as a City department (See Chapter 1).

RECOMMENDATION:

So long as the various existing transit systems remain independent but under the umbrella of the RTA, those functioning currently as Authorities should retain their structure. Effort should be undertaken to transfer all of DDOT’s assets and functions to a new independent Authority as permitted by enabling Michigan legislation now in effect. This would afford DDOT, among other things, the benefits outlined above. If possible, the Detroit Transportation Company should in some form be included in a DDOT spinoff to an Authority.
C. BOARD COMPOSITION

The four regions visited and studied had independent governing boards for their transit authorities, either appointed or elected (Denver) with a view towards oversight by a body with a balance of skill sets and community visibility and representation. Cleveland’s Authority has long and successfully functioned with a board representation from elected or appointed officials employed by certain of the municipalities existing both within and outside of the service area. Atlanta was initially the most successful in recruiting high profile citizens from the business community to lead the MARTA Board. St. Louis has appointees on its Board which include educators, financial experts, lawyers and labor leaders and other community representative. The elected process in Denver has produced a Board comprised of well-qualified, well-educated and experienced persons with diverse backgrounds in business, real estate, urban planning, law and the like. All four of these Boards appear to be functioning effectively by providing informed and diligent oversight over the management and operations of their respective systems.

Atlanta and St. Louis appear to have made appointments consistent with the statements of Larry Salci, former head of SEMTA and the Metro in St. Louis. “Boards really ought to be a mixture of people with real business savvy and social savvy”, he said “You need the social conscience and the business conscience. And they need to respect one another and defer to one another. How do you insure that you have that mix? It’s up to the stakeholders who appoint the board members. Someone has to get to them and say these are the qualities of the people that you want to appoint and convince them to appoint top quality board members who serve the region first.” (Salci interview)

Salci went on to say “The ideal mix would include people with financial backgrounds, engineers who understand the technical issues, people who understand the social issues of the community, a private developer . . . But the problem is that when they come from different jurisdictions, they [the persons making the appointment] all want to appoint someone who represents their areas interests and/or someone that they want to reward for past favors. “
Clearly the Michigan State Legislature understood the importance of a strong and diverse independent Board of Directors to oversee transit. Public Act 387 creating the RTA provides that it shall be governed by a Board of Directors of ten members with specific business, financial and transit qualifications as provided in Section 5 of the Act. Representatives are appointed in a manner designed to provide proportionate and appropriate representation from the service areas, and the legislation contains specific and appropriate limitations on eligibility for service on the Board. Board Members shall not be an employee of the County or City appointing the Board Member, nor an employee of a public transportation provider operating in the region. The Board Member shall not be currently serving as an elected officer of the State or political subdivision of the State. The affirmative requirements are (a) the Board member must be a resident of and a registered elector in the county or city from which he or she is appointed and (b) a Board member shall have substantial business, financial and professional experience relative to the operation of a corporation or public transportation system. In the author’s view, these restrictions and affirmative requirements capture the most important elements of successful governance for the systems researched, and clearly set the appropriate “tone” for transit governance in the region.

RECOMMENDATION:

DDOT would benefit greatly from oversight from a diverse and qualified fiduciary board representative of the Detroit community with special skill sets to contribute to the governance process. This can only be accomplished, of course, if DDOT is transferred to an independent authority. The Detroit Transportation Corporation (DTC) which owns and operates the Detroit People Mover, should either join with DDOT in its transfer to an authority, or, in the alternative, should amend its Articles of Incorporation to diversify its Board which now is comprised five City of Detroit employees and one SMART designee. The goal for the DTC (People Mover) would be to provide, either indirectly or through a reorganized DDOT, or through its own Board of Directors, unaffiliated persons with business, financial and leadership skills and backgrounds in oversight positions. With regard to the other transit authorities under the umbrella of the RTA in the region, it is not recommended that their structure be revised or their Board representation materially modified. Nevertheless, those agencies should strive to achieve representation on their own Boards with the qualifications and skills as outlined in the RTA enabling legislation.
D. BOARD TRAINING

In Atlanta, St. Louis and Denver the author observed extensive training manuals and orientation materials that had been prepared and were delivered and discussed with each new Board member of the respective authorities. Related training and orientation sessions proved to be extremely valuable to new Board members, and permitted them to quickly make substantial contributions to the Board as each fulfilled his or her fiduciary duties. While the author became aware of some similar orientation efforts for Board members at SMART, no evidence was displayed of systematic and comprehensive governance and transit education for new Board members at the various authorities. It is the understanding of the author, however, that the new RTA has developed and has implemented an orientation process for its new Board members.

RECOMMENDATION:

Each of the governing bodies of the existing transit entities should review and update their board training and procedures and training materials.

E. ADVISORY BOARDS

Each of the transit systems observed had a strong Advisory Board. These Boards are designed to provide citizen input, review and comment on the performance of the system on a systematic basis and to advise on policy changes that effect older adults and persons with disabilities. None of these organizations was mandated by statute, but each, to the author’s best knowledge, provides a vehicle for compliance with federal requirements for advisory activities relating to access and utilization of the system by the elderly and disabled. These groups, in addition to providing a sounding board for better service to the community, can be used to increase the profile of the transit system to increase ridership and to
obtain other related support.

Both SMART and the Ann Arbor Transit Authority have functioning advisory Councils. At DDOT, however, a mandatory advisory board has existed over the years but appears to have had little or no influence on the operations of the system. Indeed, while the Advisory Board (designated an Advisory Commission in the Home Rule Charter) previously held regular monthly meetings, it currently does not appear to be functioning and is waiting mayoral appointments. In September 2012, the Mayor’s office submitted a request for applications for the Advisory Commission but appointments to date have not been made.

RECOMMENDATION:

Inasmuch as Advisory Boards serve a useful purpose, as witnessed by the statutory requirement in the RTC Act for it to appoint a functioning Advisory Board, the Advisory Board mandated by the Charter of the City of Detroit to advise DDOT should be reconstituted and immediately begin to function. The Board (or more properly the Advisory Commission) is no longer holding meetings, and currently is without any Mayoral appointments. This circumstance has existed for over a year and should be remedied.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Lloyd Semple is a professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law. Before joining the School of Law in 2004 he practiced corporate and business law with Dykema Gossett, a four hundred lawyer Detroit based national law firm. While at Dykema he served as its Chairman and CEO from 1995 to 2002 and was a member of boards of directors of several business entities and charitable organizations. One of those organizations was Metropolitan Affairs Coalition, an affiliate of SEMCOG which among other things did an in depth study of the feasibility of bus rapid transit in Southeastern Michigan. Professor Semple served as Dean of the School of Law from 2009 to 2013.
CHAPTER 3
SOCIAL EQUITY / ACCESS –COMPARISON AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Alan Hoback

August 2013
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The opinions, findings and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of U.S. Department of Transportation, Michigan State Transportation Commission or the Michigan Department of Transportation.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transit captive people have very limited choices in where they can work in the in several regions of the country, but is especially limited in the Detroit MSA. Transit captive and drivers are certainly not equal in the number of jobs that they can reach.

Bus riders originating in the City of Detroit can reach between 3 to 9 percent of the jobs that that someone driving a car can reach in one hour. The average is 6%, and is much lower than the 33% that Brookings found for the City. Detroit’s rate of 6% compares to our calculation of 15% for comparison regions.

The scenario is much worse for suburban residents that are transit captive. They can only reach 0 to 9% of jobs that a driver can reach. The average is 2%. It is better in the comparative regions where it varies from 2% in Atlanta to 9% in Cleveland.

The Brookings method found significantly higher access to jobs (20%) than this study did (4%) for Detroit. The great difference in results shows the need for further comparison of the methods.

It is unlikely that improvements in transit will be able to make opportunities completely equal, but significant effort should be taken to make it more equitable. It was found that transit enhancements such as Bus Rapid Transit along spokes increased job access to the transit captive who had good existing local bus service.
FUNDING COMPARISONS

Two of the biggest questions of social equity in transit are:

- Who pays for transit versus who uses it?
- Does the transit provide access to an equitable number of jobs?

Funding sources are an important issue for equity because nearly all funding mechanisms redistribute money. That issue is examined in this section.

NATIONAL TRANSIT DATABASE

The National Transit Database (NTD) information from 2011 was used to find the overall operating and capital funding sources for the comparative regions. See the tables below. (U.S. Federal Transit Administration 2011) The agencies studied are:

- Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA)
- Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA)
- Denver Regional Transportation District (DRTD)
- Bi-State Development Agency (Metro) in St. Louis, MO.
- Detroit-Total: City of Detroit Department of Transportation, Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation, Detroit Transportation Corporation (DDOT, SMART, DTC, respectively.)

Table 1. Operating Funds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>MARTA</th>
<th>GCRTA</th>
<th>DRTD</th>
<th>METRO</th>
<th>Detroit-Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fare Revenues</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Funds¹</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Funds</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Assistance</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Funds²</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Local Funds: Any funds generated locally or regionally. Traditionally include regional sales taxes, but can sometimes be reported as State Funds if the State collects it. In the case of DDOT, local funds are budgeted City funds. In the case of SMART, local funds are primarily property taxes in opt-in communities.

² Other Funds: Any state government or any local government funding sources that are not dedicated to transit at their source or are not included in the budgeting process of general revenue funds. These funds include:
- Vehicle licensing and registration fees
- Communications access fees, surcharges, taxes
- Lottery and casino proceeds
- Sale of property and assets
Table 2. Capital Funds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>MARTA</th>
<th>GCRTA</th>
<th>DRTD</th>
<th>METRO</th>
<th>Detroit-Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Local Funds</td>
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<td>64%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Funds</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Assistance</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Fundsa</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this we see several patterns:

- The systems receive nearly proportionate Federal Assistance funds for operating.
- The Detroit systems rely heavily upon Federal Assistance for capital funds. They do not have a significant source of local funds for capital purchases. Cleveland and St. Louis are also relatively high in relying on Federal Assistance.
- The Detroit systems are an exception in receiving significant state funds.
- Among peer regions, 55 to 66% of operating funds are from local funds, but among the Detroit systems, it is much lower.

One equity issue related to these points is that the Detroit systems over rely on federal and state funding compared to the other regions. This has implications on level of service. If local sources of funding are not as available, then the systems are not supported financially, and they can’t as effectively do their core duty of providing access to residents of the region. A low funded system is less equitable than a more funded system.

**SOURCES OF LOCAL FUNDING**

Local funding, which includes regional funding, are the main source of funds for the comparison regions. Since there is significant variety in the means of collection of these local funds, it is important for equity to evaluate each type of funding.

According to the companion report to this, Transit Lessons for Detroit from Four Peer Regions, the chapter on Transit Financing by Scott Anderson cites that all regions rely most heavily upon regional sales taxes. Other minor sources of income may be found in some of those regions.

Largely because the State of Michigan Constitution does not allow for regional sales taxes, the local systems rely upon other means of collecting local funds. The City of Detroit provides its funding to DDOT from collected tax revenue which is largely from property and incomes taxes. SMART receives local funding from property taxes from opt-in communities.
Analysis of Equity in Local Funding

Levels of equity were defined in the previous report in this sequence. The levels consisted of:

1. Layman’s Equity: Getting fair value for direct support such as taxes and fares.

2. Consideration: Taking into account that some groups need more help adjusting to change.

3. Equality: Remediation of previous inequity.

The first and third equity levels have the most bearing on funding mechanisms. The second level is more about what is done with funding, rather than how it is raised. One significant difference among the first and third levels is that they are opposing views of redistribution of income. Pure Layman’s Equity would require that all local funds come from fares or congestion pricing of tollways. Pure Remediation would require none of the local funds come from fares, but progressive taxes be used instead.

Redistribution of income can happen in two directions. Commonly, transit is thought of as redistributing tax revenues to lower income people. This is true if wealthier people pay for it and lower income people use it.

However, there can also be reverse redistribution. In this case, it worsens historic social equity issues. An example of that would be using regressive sales taxes to support commuter systems where a majority of their riders are wealthy. The Long Island Railroad (LIRR) runs one tenth as many trains in reverse commute as it does in towards downtown New York. Also, bus connections at commuter rail stations are often not set up to handle reverse commute. (Fessenden 2008) The LIRR’s primarily source of Local Funding is a payroll tax. However, there have been discussions there of congestion pricing of tollways.

Common funding mechanisms are compared in the following table. A funding mechanism is considered highly redistributive if the fee payers are largely not the same people not benefiting from the transit directly by riding or indirectly through congestion mitigation. A funding mechanism is considered moderately redistributive if the many, but not all of the fee payers benefit directly or indirectly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Equity Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding of basic bus service</td>
<td>Laymen’s equity. Not redistributive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding of LIRR type commuter rail</td>
<td>Laymen’s equity. Not redistributive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Equity of Local Funding
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congestion Pricing of</th>
<th>Laymen’s equity and moderately redistributive</th>
<th>Laymen’s equity and moderately redistributive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tollways</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Taxes</td>
<td>Regressive and moderately redistributive</td>
<td>Regressive and reverse redistributive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payroll tax</td>
<td>Progressive and highly redistributive</td>
<td>Progressive and moderately redistributive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Taxes</td>
<td>Progressive and highly redistributive</td>
<td>Progressive and moderately redistributive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle Registration</td>
<td>Progressive and highly redistributive</td>
<td>Laymen’s equity and moderately redistributive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this it is seen that if a regional authority wanted to promote remediation of previous inequity, property taxes and vehicle registration fees would ring some bells. In practice, funding is more of a function of political expediency, so regressive and mildly redistributive funding mechanisms such as regional sales taxes are more common. Relying on property taxes such as SMART does may reduce political salability and may make it harder to keep communities opted into their program. Future studies could determine if there is more support for sales taxes based on the publically recognized regressive nature of the tax. Although sales taxes would not directly remediate previous inequity, by having a highly supported transit system, the same goals can be indirectly met.

## ACCESS COMPARISONS

### BROOKINGS RESULTS

The comparative regions were analyzed for access with using a similar methodology to that of the previous work on Current Detroit. The Brookings Institute (Tomer, Transit Access and Zero-Vehicle Households 2011) found that a portion of the population could reach an average job. This is shown in the Table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. Access to Jobs via Transit with Brookings Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access (city)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access (suburbs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access (average)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Brookings work shows that the suburbs consistently have a much lower access to jobs via transit. This means that someone who is transit captive in the suburbs has a significantly more difficult time reaching jobs. According to Brookings, Denver has the highest access to jobs, and the least ratio between city to
suburbs. The suburban resident in Denver has twice or more the job access percent compared to other cities.

These results will be compared to our own study using different assumptions that were shown in the Current Detroit chapter. Among the assumptions by Brookings was that three hours of commuting per day was the limit.

NEW METHODOLOGY
Methods
The methodology for finding access to jobs for people driving was the same as in the previous report on Current Detroit. Roughly 10 to 12 starting points were mapped for each city using Google Earth’s placemark tool. Again, the focus will be on finding how many jobs a random person can reach instead of an employer perspective of how many employees can reach the job.

The transit methodology was to use Google Earth’s Get Directions tool for transit. This required some corrections:

- Google Transit didn’t plan for people to arrive at bus stops in advance of the expected bus arrival. Instead, Google Transit gave the latest that someone could leave to arrive just on-time. Studies show that people plan to be at the stop about two minutes early. Therefore, this time will be built in.

- When service is unreliable such as in Detroit, people significantly vary behaviors, sometimes planning to meet the previous bus just so that if that one doesn’t come, they can still reach work on-time. This behavior is not accounted for in Google Earth, but to realistically predict behavior in Detroit, it should be taken into account. This irregular schedule would also have to be taken into consideration at transfers.

- Google Transit does not limit trips to 0.25 miles of walking per segment.

- Google Transit assumes that someone is leaving at the time and day that do the search. To have a consistent time and day, it should be set to one value.

The population density for the areas of study is shown in the following figures. The starting points chosen in high density areas are shown in the figures. Each figure has the central city outlined in a bold black line.
Figure 1. Atlanta Population Density

Figure 2. Atlanta Placemarks
Figure 3. Cleveland Population Density

Figure 4. Cleveland Placemarks
Figure 5. Denver Population Density

Figure 6. Denver Placemarks
Results
Jobs were found for each hypothetical commuter just like in the Current Detroit section. If a driver could leave the MSA boundary within an hour, those jobs were not considered. See the Figures for job densities. See the Tables for jobs within one hour.
Figure 9. Atlanta Job Density
Figure 10. Cleveland Job Density
Figure 11. Denver Job Density
Figure 12. St. Louis Job Density

The job density figures show similar patterns. There are high job densities in downtown central business districts, and in some other major business districts in the City, but the majority of jobs are located in the suburbs.

The following Figure shows the sample jobs analysis for Atlanta Downtown. The red polygon represents the distance that someone on transit could reach in one hour. The blue polygon represents the same for driving.

The shape of the polygons are often roughly oval. In the case of Atlanta in the figure below, there are two protrusions from the general oval shape. One goes to the northeast, and the other goes south. This likely reflects express bus or lightrail service in those directions. In the case of the southern protrusion, it leads to Hartsfield Airport.

The figure after that shows a transit polygon for Cleveland, starting in Parma. The protrusion follows the 54 bus line to the Cleveland Hopkins Airport.
Figure 13. Sample Job Analysis for Atlanta Downtown Transit Rider

Figure 14. Sample Job Analysis Cleveland-Parma Transit Rider
### Table 5. Atlanta Jobs Within One Hour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Driving</th>
<th>Transit</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City-near SW</td>
<td>2250000</td>
<td>281633</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-near NW</td>
<td>2250000</td>
<td>224107</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown</td>
<td>2230000</td>
<td>496012</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roswell</td>
<td>2130000</td>
<td>3719</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brookhaven</td>
<td>2220000</td>
<td>81053</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-NW</td>
<td>2220000</td>
<td>3274</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-near East</td>
<td>2220000</td>
<td>101774</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves</td>
<td>2160000</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marietta</td>
<td>2210000</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rex</td>
<td>1990000</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-SE</td>
<td>2140000</td>
<td>196776</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Point</td>
<td>2110000</td>
<td>201765</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6. Cleveland Jobs Within One Hour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Driving</th>
<th>Transit</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akron</td>
<td>1510000</td>
<td>56857</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-West</td>
<td>1270000</td>
<td>240787</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-SW</td>
<td>1270000</td>
<td>212776</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown</td>
<td>1270000</td>
<td>172097</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-Near NE</td>
<td>1270000</td>
<td>187980</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-near SE</td>
<td>1270000</td>
<td>182666</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Heights</td>
<td>1240000</td>
<td>223021</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Lake</td>
<td>1270000</td>
<td>50215</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-NE</td>
<td>1280000</td>
<td>105241</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parma</td>
<td>1290000</td>
<td>113784</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-SE</td>
<td>1260000</td>
<td>213018</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakewood</td>
<td>1270000</td>
<td>186140</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7. Denver Jobs Within One Hour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Driving</th>
<th>Transit</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downtown</td>
<td>1370000</td>
<td>386894</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-near E</td>
<td>1370000</td>
<td>365962</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-near W</td>
<td>1370000</td>
<td>286798</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>1330000</td>
<td>33010</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornton</td>
<td>1470000</td>
<td>144114</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-airport</td>
<td>1390000</td>
<td>38293</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boulder</td>
<td>1400000</td>
<td>78671</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Littleton</td>
<td>1310000</td>
<td>75613</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Aurora</td>
<td>1340000</td>
<td>60034</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8. St. Louis Jobs Within One Hour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Driving</th>
<th>Transit</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City-East</td>
<td>1340000</td>
<td>174047</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakewood</td>
<td>1320000</td>
<td>70251</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-West</td>
<td>1220000</td>
<td>207100</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clayton</td>
<td>1220000</td>
<td>136810</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-near West</td>
<td>1220000</td>
<td>193419</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-North</td>
<td>1220000</td>
<td>176185</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown</td>
<td>1220000</td>
<td>186857</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-near SW</td>
<td>1220000</td>
<td>195414</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. St. Louis, IL</td>
<td>1210000</td>
<td>137572</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florissant</td>
<td>1180000</td>
<td>48643</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granite City, IL</td>
<td>1200000</td>
<td>20343</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella Vista</td>
<td>1210000</td>
<td>30796</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-SW</td>
<td>1220000</td>
<td>215204</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webster Groves</td>
<td>1220000</td>
<td>46559</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Charles</td>
<td>1190000</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below compares average job access of transit users as a percent of the jobs that drivers could reach.

Table 9. Comparison Between Cities and Methodologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooking</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current work</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time of day is a major factor in these analyses. All analyses represent morning travel behaviors. Observing the same regions in the afternoon or evening often produces different polygons. Therefore, the results above should not be quoted to great accuracy. Instead, the general patterns should be observed as discussed below.

The job accessibilities found by Brookings consistently higher than in the current
work, and 290% on average. Part of the reason for this was that they used 90 minutes instead of 60 minutes to limit the commute time. Also, it is thought that they did not adjust the Google Earth assumptions to represent reality, and they limited walking time to ¾ mile instead of ¼ mile. It didn’t appear that they accounted for walking times, so their total commute time could conceivably be two hours. Another factor that could have impacted this was that they phrased the research question from the viewpoint of the employer rather than the commuter. Rather than finding how many jobs a person could get to, they found how many employees could get to a job.

One big difference between the methodologies was that the method used in this work looked only at high density residential areas. An inspection of the combined SMART and DDOT bus routes in metro Detroit shows they the further from the City they are, the more spread out they become. Since bus service is sparser in lower density residential areas, the access is likely lower. Job density is also lower, so the number of jobs reached in 60 minutes would be less from there.

Transit captive who live in the suburbs consistently have fewer opportunities than the captive who live in the cities. On average, the have only 40% of the job opportunities that someone living in the city would have. The worst is people living in suburban Detroit. They can reach only 2% of the total jobs in the region in one hour. Among the comparison regions, the average is 4.9% with Atlanta at 2.2% and Cleveland with 9.6%.

Satellite cities were defined as cities 25 to 35 miles away from the core city, that had areas of high population density, and significant total population. Those areas were Ann Arbor (Detroit), Akron (Cleveland), Boulder (Denver), and St. Charles (St. Louis). No satellite cities were found around Atlanta that met all of those criteria. Atlanta has significant centers of suburban population, but not in the range of 25 to 35 miles away.

The results for satellite cities showed no clear patterns. Compared to other suburban locations some cities had more jobs access from driving (Boulder) or less (St. Charles) or essentially the same (Akron). All suburban locations had lower job access via transit then the average for core cities, but compared to other suburban locations, the satellite cities had varying job access. The key seemed to be whether the satellite city had its own significant bus system.

SCENARIOS

The impact of two scenarios was considered in Detroit. One was to improve the
reliability of the existing bus service. The other was to find the impact on access to jobs from adding Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along transportation spokes.

**BASIC BUS SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS**

With the current 2013 DDOT bus reliability, it was found that City residents were only able to reach 6% jobs on average in one hour. This is because of severe operational problems in the system at this time that keep it off schedule. However, if the system operating effectively, it is projected that the same residents could reach as many jobs as the other regions. (10%) This would be two-thirds greater reach to jobs.

**BUS RAPID TRANSIT**

Detroit is an exception among large cities in its lack of rapid transit. Several models of BRT in the region have been proposed. One key aspect of most is a spoke-like system of lines. Another common aspect is outer loops connecting the counties in the region. For the purpose of making scenarios, not to prejudge BRT proposals for metro Detroit, a spoke system will be assumed.

Adding rapid transit will impact access to jobs. Faster systems increase access because more jobs may be reached more quickly. The primary questions about this are: who benefits, how much do they benefit. It may also be possible to see design guidelines from this to maximize use of new resources. These are important questions for equity concerns, because equity is related to how people benefit.

The only means to estimate this impact at this time is to look at other cities. Cleveland and Denver were highlighted above for how transit line created protrusions in the general oval shape of transit access. The Parma polygon was truncated to make it more oval in shape. That reduced the number of accessible jobs to about 100,000. Therefore, under these conditions adding an express route might increase job access by 14%.

The Parma placemark showed the most dramatic protrusion. The other polygons viewed often had one or two protrusions. This is because there are some transit lines which are better for different residents. In order to improve the job access of all residents living in high density areas, many new transit lines would have to be added. Then it becomes likely that each resident would have one transit line that improves their job access, just as Parma had.

Until better numbers for Metro Detroit are available, this could be used as a guideline. Bus Rapid Transit and other express services could be generalized as improving job access 10-20%.
CONCLUSIONS

There are several patterns found in the work on access. For example, Bus riders originating in the core cities can usually find transit available to them and use it to reach a small share of jobs in a reasonable time. Across five cities the average was 13.2%. Denver fared better with 18.3%, but Detroit fared worse with 6%.

Transit captive residents living in the suburbs, even living in high density residential areas, often had difficulty reaching transit with a reasonable walking distance. However, transit captive individuals may locate in areas that have better transit.

Either way, transit captive people have very limited choices for where they can work. It is certainly not equal opportunity between people with cars and those without, or who have disabilities. It is unlikely that improvements in transit will be able to make opportunities completely equal, but significant effort should be taken to make it more equitable.

Scenarios were considered to enhance transit in metro Detroit. Improving the reliability of basic bus service may improve reach to jobs by two-thirds. Adding new spoke BRT may improve job access 10 to 20%, but more research is needed to further quantify this.

Related to funding, there are numerous funding mechanisms available. Most funding mechanisms in use are not highly redistributive. For example, regressive sales taxes are preferred for funding bus systems that serve lower income people. Income taxes are used to fund systems serving higher income people, such as in the LIRR. Detroit is an exception in that a progressive property tax is used to fund both the SMART and DDOT systems. Although progressive taxes meet the goals of equity focused on remediation, the lack of a sales tax may be limiting the political viability for additional transit services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations related to social equity need to be tempered with issues of political acceptability. Generally solutions are politically acceptable when the number of winners is perceived to be more than the number of perceived losers. (Litman, Using Road Pricing Revenue 2011) Even if someone doesn’t intend to use transit, it could be a value to them if many people they know might use it.

The issue is larger than just who rides and who pays. The reality is that issues such as spurred development mean many people are impact in many positive
and negative ways by these decisions. The goal then of social equity analysis of transit plans is to be sure that those who have been inequitably treated in the past are not continued to be treated unfairly. For example, they shouldn’t be taxed to pay for a system that will give rides primarily to affluent suburban residents.

Previous efforts in metro Detroit to bring transit, such as in the era of SEMTA (1967-1989), were careful about weighing were growth would occur. Light rail plans were said to bring development, and this caused suspicion that suburban taxes would support development in Detroit. SEMTA was very careful to say that growth in Oakland County would continue happening there despite transit bringing development to the City of Detroit. This sort of solution is equitable to Oakland County because they get their money’s worth. It is also equitable to Detroit because they get development.

WHY BUSES ARE A PRIORITY
Bus access strongly correlates to weeks worked per year. (Sanchez 1998) It is to be determined whether this means 1) that access to buses helps people find jobs, or 2) people locate closer to bus routes so that can get to work faster, or 3) property near transit is valued higher, so working people can afford it better. It is probably a complex interaction between all of these factors. However, the point is the same that buses get people to work.

Another issue that causes a preference for buses is gentrification that happens around rail lines. (Pucher and Renne 2003) Since rail lines are more permanent and generally a faster means of travel, people and businesses prefer to move near to rail line stops. It is an ideal location for Transit Oriented Development. This causes property values to rise, and makes it less affordable for lower income people to live there.

Regular buses do not cause the same increase in property values. If lower income people have been pushed away from rail lines by gentrification, then buses are a means to bring them in.

If Transit Oriented Development is done right, it can minimize the gentrification impact. For example, if parking expenses can be unbundled from the rent, then the poor can more likely afford it. (Litman, Parking Requirement Impacts On Housing Affordability 2011)

WHY RELIABLE SERVICE IS A PRIORITY
It has been shown by service in Atlanta that reliable service is key maintaining ridership. After the MARTA services became less reliable, they lost ridership. (Visser 2013) However, this is likely from a reduction in choice riders. The trans-
it captive riders are still likely captive to the less reliable service.

There are several reasons why reliable service is an equity issue. First, employees that rely on transit may lose their job if they are not on-time to work. This means that people who ride unreliable transit could be consigned to hopping between jobs each time they are fired for lateness. It is inequitable that they should be relegated to types of employment that have rapid turnover.

Related to this, because of unreliable service people can’t reach as many jobs in one hour. Since DDOT buses are on average four minutes late, the average rider waits an extra four minutes for the bus. (Owens 2012) This limits the number of jobs that they can practically reach within one hour. Other factors such as buses that never arrive mean that some riders have to take an earlier bus just in case their preferred bus never arrives. (Owens 2012) This results in wasted time being too early for their shift. Again, it limits how far they can travel in an hour.

It was heard that some people leave for work earlier so that they are guaranteed to reach work on-time either from the earlier bus in case the regular bus is cancelled or late. Another study could be done to see the impact on this behavior.

**CHARGING MORE FOR PEAK HOUR SERVICE**

Peak hour service is the time when the most riders are on the system. That time and those riders determine the amount of capital funds that have to be spent to construct the system, and they create an overhead for operating the system during the rest of the day. It is a common practice to charge these customers more for the service. This can be done with posted fees at ticketing stations. (Litman, Evaluating Transportation Equity 2012) This impacts equity because many lower income workers have shift schedules and don’t commute during peak hours. (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2004) Therefore, they shouldn’t have to pay the higher costs necessary to make the system work properly in peak hours.

**BALANCING COMMUTER SYSTEMS FOR REVERSE COMMUTE**

Many lower income workers live in core cities and commute outward to service jobs in suburbs while suburbanites commute inward to the downtown. Rapid transit systems are often designed to deliver suburban commuters downtown. This is because they are a large share of the ridership. One thing that is done to help them is to have the collector buses coordinated to drop off at the rapid transit station just before the morning train arrives. Then the buses leave right after the train drops off the riders in the evening. Care should be taken so that this setup works for reverse commuters too who arrive at non-standard times of day. According to tours by the research team, it appears that at least one of the comparison cities (St. Louis) does this. However, the current bus system in metro
Detroit is not set up for off-peak reverse commute since resources do not allow the current bus systems to coordinate service.

**AVOID REDIRECTING RESOURCES AWAY FROM BUSES**

Financial pressure sometimes means that sacrifices are made. Systems that serve more politically savvy groups, such as suburban riders receive favoritism. This was the case in St. Louis according to Larry Salci when the bus system was disproportionately defunded compared to the Metrolink. (Salci 2012)

**SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Background: Attention needs to be paid to doing more than talking about justice, to action, and then results. For example, a conflict can arise between trying to provide fair value to those people who are taxed for supporting the transit system versus providing it to those who need it as a bridge out of poverty.

   Recommendation: Regional transit authorities should come to an understanding about how they are going to deal with those types of issues.

2. Background: Reliable basic bus service has the greatest impact on providing access to people living in poverty. Reliability is important because without it, planning a bus ride is unmanageable for most people. Bus service is essential, because in most cities it is the collector system which is the most important link. Other modes of transit can have an impact but are limited. In addition, it has a practical impact on mainline commuter routes that reliability makes those systems technically possible.

   Recommendation: Therefore, regional transit authorities should place reliable basic bus service at the top of their agendas.

3. Background: Some commuter oriented systems, especially commuter rail, primarily benefit commuters going toward the city center. Hours of operation, schedules, and coordination with basic bus service are all normally set up to benefit the commuter to downtown. It is difficult for someone living in the city to reverse commute to a service job that has hours that are not 9A to 5P, and to have buses ready at the right times to drop them at those disperse jobs.

   Recommendations:

   a. Therefore, it is most equitable to have suburban commuters pay for the overwhelming majority of the expenses for systems that serve them only. Vehicle registration taxes represents a funding mecha-
nism that rings social equity bells as well as provides congestion mitigation for car owners.

b. If providing new commuter systems brings efficiencies in service offerings, other bus routes should receive the benefit from those efficiencies through redistribution of resources to them.

4. Background: A segment of the mobility disabled population finds level boarding more equitable for them. Also, it helps to maintain schedules. Level boarding is required for fixed rail systems, but not for bus systems. Express bus systems such as BRT are not required to have level boarding, but it improves equity and maintaining schedules to do so. Level boarding helps all riders, not just the disabled.

   Recommendation: Therefore, level boarding is should be used for BRT systems.

5. Although reliable basic bus service has the greatest impact on access for people living in poverty, access is improved somewhat by providing new commuter systems.
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Dr. Alan S. Hoback, PE, is chair of Civil, Architectural & Environmental Engineering at the University of Detroit Mercy. Dr. Hoback has a diverse set of research interests related to transportation. His transit research has ties to the areas of psychology, energy use, planning and cost, economic impact, community development, social justice, geographic information systems, health and safety. Dr. Hoback’s research has applied these ideas to the areas of light rail transit, commuter rail and buses. Dr. Hoback was a co-investigator on the “Woodward Transit Catalyst Plan Project.” Dr. Hoback teaches the senior capstone course in Civil Engineering that frequently has themes of transportation and planning.
CHAPTER 4

COMPARISION OF TOD RELATED ACTIVIES IN VARIOUS CITIES INCLUDING DETROIT

Utpal Dutta

August 2013
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TOD related activities of four transit authorities namely Atlanta, Cleveland, Denver and St. Louis are summarized. Though, Metro Detroit does not have a dependable any formidable transit system, still a number of TOD related activities similar to the above mentioned cities have taken place. In addition, a summary of an in-depth study which identified various factors favorable to BRT related TOD is also included. Finally, a set of recommendations are developed after examining the activities of various cities including Detroit as well as BRT related TOD report. Some of these recommendations are of general type along with BRT specific TOD favorable recommendations. It is to be noted that these TOD specific recommendation are primarily prepared for the Regional Transit Authority (RTA)
I. TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

In this section TOD related activities of four transit authorities namely Atlanta, Cleveland, Denver and St. Louis are summarized. (Hanifin 2013) Even though, Metro Detroit does not have any formidable transit system, however, a number of TOD related activities similar to the above mentioned cities have taking place. In addition, a summary of an in-depth study which identified various factors favorable to BRT related TOD is also included. Finally, a set of recommendations are developed after examining the activities of various cities including Detroit as well as BRT related TOD report. Recommendations are also provided while presenting various TOD related activities of a specific city when appropriate. However, at the conclusion of this report a list of general as well as specific recommendations are included.

ATLANTA

Metropolitan Atlanta Regional Transit Authority (MARTA) carries more that 500,000 riders every day. In addition to MARTA, other agencies, namely Georgia Regional Transit Authority (GRTA), Cobb Community Transit and Gwinnett County Transit provide express bus service. More than $4 billion has been invested along MARTA’s corridor as a part of TOD. It is to be noted that MARTA contributes $476 million/year to Atlanta’s gross national product. In order to encourage transit oriented development within the vicinity of transit stations, land use, demographic, zoning, walk score, density etc information are available for more than 30 stations.

CLEVELAND :

Cleveland RTA serves 1.28 million residents of 39 cities and townships. Various attributes of the Cleveland system are presented in Table 5. Since 2006, a significant amount of development has taken place along its transit corridor. A major highlight of the Cleveland system is the development along the Healthline, a bus rapid transit line. Unlike other cities, readymade information surrounding any transit stop is not available.

The world renowned Cleveland Clinic and University Hospital has sponsored their BRT line along historic Euclid Avenue and branded it as the Health Line. The Cleveland RTA in conjunction with the city and local business were able to attract market rate and affordable housing development along with others. By 2010, more than $4.3 billion had been invested along the Health line corridor.
However, TOD along other corridors namely along LRT and Bus lines are not significant.

**Recommendation:** The mission of the RTA should be to provide mobility for all people by means of sustainable world class transportation system (Cleveland Health line) keeping long range investment in mind.

**DENVER:**

Regional Transportation District (RTD) of Denver provides bus and LRT services right now but as a part of their FASTRAC initiative train and BRT will be added within the next few years. The system presently carries 300,000 bus riders and 50,000 LRT riders daily. RTD uses a set of 8 factors in planning and implementing TOD. The RTD has been a model of innovative engagement and collaboration to move forward TOD implementation. For example, along the west corridor the cities of Denver and Lakewood and their housing departments formed a joint venture to do a corridor wide implementation plan focusing on equitable development. RTD is very active in locating station and park and ride lot to support TOD. Even a private development group invited RTD to move a station onto their property to facilitate TOD. RTD’s “Land Bank” is a very successful venture. They sold five parcels of land next to Union station for $30 million and are planning to invest in TOD. FASTracks provides long term funding for TOD related activities, which is very unique. Regional Transit Agencies and other metropolitan planning organization have played a key role in planning and implementing TOD in Denver by providing funds.

**Recommendation:** With the assistance of the Urban Land Institute, the RTA should work closely with the Michigan Land Bank (www.Michigan.gov/landbank). It is to be noted that the mission of the Michigan Land Bank is to “promote economic growth in this state through the acquisition, assembly and disposal of public property, including tax reverted property, in a coordinated manner to foster the development of that property, and to promote and support land bank operations at the county and local levels”. In this context Denver RTD’s approach should be followed.

**ST. LOUIS**

St. Louis Metro (BI-State) provides both bus and LRT services along with some Para transit. More than 54,000 daily riders use this system. St. Louis metro earns the most revenue per rider in compare to other visited transit systems. Since its inception more than two billion dollars were invested as a part of TOD. They developed the most comprehensive database for 37 existing Metrolink light rail stations. This data includes demographic, land use, zoning and other related information within the one-fourth to one-half mile radius of selected LRT stations. However, unlike MARTA, St. Louis does not provide “Walk Score’ and “FAR” re-
lated information. This information can be used to determine the potential for TOD around each of the 37 LRT stations.

**Recommendation:** As TOD is moving towards generating a Transit Oriented Community (TOC), a variety of “Livable Community” grants are available from HUD and the USDOT to support community development. The RTA should pursue these funding sources. It is to be noted that St. Louis Metro and MARTA were very effective in getting livable community funding.

**Recommendation:** Similar to St. Louis Metro and MARTA information on demographics, employment, land use, walk Scores, etc. within a half mile to one mile radius should be readily available to encourage potential TOD developers. Examples of walk score maps, zoning maps and land use maps are included in appendix. GIS based layer maps should be available for each station highlighting various attributes. (UDM can assist in this effort.)

**DETROIT:**

Information related population, median income, mean travel time, land area of various cities including Detroit are presented in Table 1. Based on the 2010 census population density of Detroit is close to Cleveland, Pittsburg and St. Louis and lot higher than Atlanta, Denver and Charlotte. Thus, designating Detroit as a city of vacant land is just a myth and there is no truth on such designation.

There are a number of TOD imprints in Detroit, especially along the Woodward Avenue. Woodward Avenue Action Association (WA3) is a very active TOD advocacy group within the State of Michigan (Hanifin al 2013). The objective of economic and community based organization is to shape the future of the 27 miles along Woodward Avenue from downtown Detroit to Pontiac by promoting TOD. The Master plan of all the cities along Woodward corridor staring from Ferndale to Birmingham has TOD elements. A list of WA3 partners is included in Table 2
WA3 developed a number of tools for communities along the Woodward Avenue to facilitate their TOD activities (Figure 1). They also designed a set of renderings of different sections of Woodward Avenue before and after the implementation of TOD. It is to be noted that Michigan will have more growth of older population in the future, thus plans should be undertaken to create a livable community for them. TOD can play a significant role in this context.

Michigan’s Golden Spike, is another TOD initiative focused on southeast Michigan’s key transportation corridors (Hanifin). It is a collaborative effort among the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, Michigan Environmental Council and Tourism and Economic Development Council. Golden Spike is funded by a grant from the People and Land program of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Golden Spike has published a document “Using transit-Oriented Development to Create Economic Vibrancy in Neighborhoods: A guide for Elected and Appointed Officials in Michigan” to assist communities in implementing TOD. Recently, the Michigan Land Bank (State of Michigan 2013) has been very active in developing public private partnership. It is to be noted that the mission of the Michigan Land Bank is to “promote economic growth in this state through the acquisition, assembly and disposal of public property, including tax reverted property, in a coordinated manner to foster the development of that property, and to promote and support land bank operations at the county and local levels.” The Michigan Land Bank is in the process of signing an agreement with the Magic Plus LLC to develop the former state fairground. As a part of their development plan, a transit station is included. The City of Dearborn has developed a comprehensive TOD around

Table 1. Attributes of Detroit and Other Similar Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Atlanta</th>
<th>Cleveland</th>
<th>Detroit</th>
<th>Miami</th>
<th>Minneapolis</th>
<th>Nashville</th>
<th>Omaha</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Toledo</th>
<th>St. Louis City</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>Denver</th>
<th>Charlotte</th>
<th>Chicago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population, 2010</td>
<td>420,008</td>
<td>398,816</td>
<td>713,777</td>
<td>392,467</td>
<td>395,704</td>
<td>319,294</td>
<td>620,201</td>
<td>600,158</td>
<td>721,384</td>
<td>2,055,558</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population, percent change, 2000 to 2010</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>-3.0%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>-6.8%</td>
<td>-0.3%</td>
<td>-4.0%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
<td>-9.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population, 2000</td>
<td>416,974</td>
<td>492,896</td>
<td>661,720</td>
<td>392,467</td>
<td>294,260</td>
<td>310,144</td>
<td>661,151</td>
<td>664,508</td>
<td>640,201</td>
<td>2,045,018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population 18-64, percent, 2010 (q)</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank perecent, percent, 2010 (q)</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+, 2008</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>96.2%</td>
<td>78.7%</td>
<td>87.6%</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
<td>96.0%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income, 2000 to 2010</td>
<td>$45,171</td>
<td>$27,349</td>
<td>$28,917</td>
<td>$29,624</td>
<td>$30,019</td>
<td>$30,062</td>
<td>$30,386</td>
<td>$34,701</td>
<td>$362,446</td>
<td>$345,977</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty level, percent, 2006-2010</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land area in square miles, 2010</td>
<td>122.16</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>186.76</td>
<td>35.37</td>
<td>66.37</td>
<td>51.01</td>
<td>180.03</td>
<td>163.00</td>
<td>207.89</td>
<td>227.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population per square mile, 2010</td>
<td>3,582.30</td>
<td>5,427.2</td>
<td>5,582.2</td>
<td>1,138.9</td>
<td>831.4</td>
<td>1,527.5</td>
<td>7,671.6</td>
<td>3,622.5</td>
<td>3,487.1</td>
<td>1,084.3</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
their planned intermodal transit station.

**TABLE 2. WA3 Partner cities and Agencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Municipal Partners:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Berkley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Ferndale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Huntington Woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Royal Oak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Private Partners:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beaumont Health System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit Zoological Society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Agency Partners:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michigan Suburbs Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan Department of Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Michigan Council of Governments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXPERIENCE OF OTHER CITIES ON TOD AND BUS RAPID TRANSIT:

Breakthrough Technologies Institute of Washington D.C (2008) conducted a study to examine the impact of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on TOD in six cities namely Cleveland, Boston, El Monte, CA, Ottawa, Brisbane, York Region, and Ontario. Survey methodology was used to gather input from developers and government agencies on attributes of BRT that are considered when planning development. Among the major findings were:

- Cooperation among key stakeholders, including public agencies, non-profit development organizations, property owners, and private developers, is critical to success.

- For developers, permanence of the BRT is an important factor. However, this perception can be created even with relatively low infrastructure investment, if there is a clear, long-term public agency commitment.
• Frequency, speed and convenience of the service were important to many developers and property owners. These features differentiated BRT from conventional bus service, which was generally not considered appealing for TOD.

• In downscale corridors, streetscape improvements that accompany the BRT may be at least as important as the transit service for attracting new investment.

• In some cities, developers and properties owners cited the value of a prominent visual profile for the BRT and aesthetically appealing infrastructure.

• It does not appear to be necessary to provide financial incentives for BRT-related TOD. Developers appeared much more interested in an expedited permitting or rezoning process, as time is a critical factor in making development projects financially viable.

RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT) RELATED TOD

• Cooperation among key stakeholders, including public agencies, non-profit development organizations, property owners, and private developers, is critical to success. The RTA should take a lead role in this context.

• For developers, permanence of the BRT stations/routes are important factor. However, this perception can be created even with a relatively low infrastructure investment, if there is a clear, long-term public agency commitment. The RTA should pay attention to the “Permanence factor” of BRT.

• Frequency, speed and convenience of the service is important to many developers and property owners. These features differentiated BRT from conventional bus service, which is generally not considered appealing for TOD. The RTA should evaluate the level of service of various providers yearly and develop means to improve them.

• In downscale corridors, streetscape improvements that accompany the BRT may be at least as important as the transit service for attracting new investment. The RTA should apply due diligence in this regard.
• In some cities, developers and properties owners cited the value of a prominent visual profile for the BRT and aesthetically appealing infrastructure (i.e. Health Line in Cleveland). The RTA should visit Cleveland to have a real experience about the prominent visual profile of the Health Line.

• BRT-related TOD developers are more interested in an expedited permitting or rezoning process, as time is a critical factor in making development projects financially viable. The RTA should work with cities, townships, counties and others to expedite TOD related permitting/zoning processes.

General Recommendation Based On All Regions:

The recommendations provided below are based on the exposure of the project team while visiting four transit facilities, review of various transit related events in Detroit in last fifty years as well as examination of related literatures. Some of these recommendations are of general type along with BRT specific TOD favorable recommendations. It is to be noted that these TOD specific recommendation are primarily prepared for the Regional Transit Authority (RTA)

• The RTA and all transit providers in Southeast Michigan should believe in “the person standing at the corner in the cold waiting for the ride is the most important person in the world and they only exist for that person” and act accordingly above and beyond their self interest.

• Aggressive efforts should be taken to develop Public Private Partnership (P3) funding while implementing TOD/and walk-able streets using the Complete Streets concepts.

• The Michigan Land Bank is in a process of signing an agreement with the Magic Plus LLC to develop the former state fairground. As a part of their development plan, a transit station is included. The RTA should work closely with mega developers (namely Magic Plus) so that the fairground as well as other future developments (such as, the planned Masonic Temple surrounding development) will include transit friendliness as one of their attributes.

• RTA should recognize places of historical significance and use historical credits to aid development in partnership with developers.

• Master Plans of all cities along the Woodward corridor from Ferndale
to Birmingham contain TOD elements, even without a fully operational RTA. The RTA should work with cities along the main transit corridors to develop consistent corridor-wide zoning. RTA could suggest best practices for TOD favor zoning (or even a master plan).

- At least one transit station within each city along the transit corridor should be designated as that city’s information center, resulting in that station being maintained by that particular city. (The RTA needs to provide some design standards to assure maintenance & quality of the transit system’s visual image.)

- Applicability of the Smart Street concept should be considered while building transit routes. (Examples are included in the appendix.)

- Mexican Town, Masonic Temple, New Center, Pontiac, Shelby Township, and Roseville station sites (end points of different transit routes) should be considered as prime candidates for BRT related TOD.

- The City of Dearborn has developed a preliminary TOD plan of their intermodal transit center. The RTA should examine that plan.

- The RTA should work closely with existing agencies, such as the Woodward Avenue Action Association (WA3) and Golden Spike to promote TOD concepts along the Woodward corridor and other transit corridors.

- Board members of the RTA should familiarize themselves with the TOD initiative tools developed by the WA3, Golden Spike, and other similar agencies.

- At this point, M1-rail is an autonomous organization. In order to encourage transit related development from a funding and zoning standpoint, M1-rail and RTA should convey a unified transit voice, even though they are not the part of the same operating entity. (For example, common stations, integrated trip planning, unified ticketing.)
APPENDIX

Exhibit 1. Detroit Walk-Score Map

Examples of Information around any Stop:

**Stop Name:** Woodward & 7 Mile

1. Existing Amenities within a 1 mile radius

- **Fitness** – Joc’s Gym, No Limits Training for Life
- **Medical** – Francis Animal Hospital and Grooming, Motown Pharmacy, Franklin Medical Pharmacy
- **Restaurants/Coffee Shops** – Subway, McDonald’s, Sillas Restaurant, Ancient Pyramid Bakery, Golden Gate Café, Royal Kabob, Tigris Restaurant, Bahi Restaurant, Stonehouse, Motown Fish & Seafood, Fish Fry Taronda, Dennis Julian’s Coney Island, Bread Basket, La Dolche Vita, San Diego Coffee Shop
- **Groceries** – John R Food Market, Caesar Food Center, Mid Fair Party Store
- **Child Care/Schools** – Greenfield Union Elementary School, Emmanuel Head Start Program,
- **Parks** – Palmer Park, Coventry Park, Michigan State Fairgrounds, Hunt Playground
• **Bookstore** – Holli-Joi’s Bookstore

**Woodward & 7 Mile**
19059 Woodward Ave., Detroit, MI  
Walkscore: 55 / 100

Exhibit 2. Surrounding Bus Stops [www.maps.google.com](http://www.maps.google.com)

Exhibit 3. 1 mile radius around the location [www.freemaptools.com](http://www.freemaptools.com)
2. Possible Additional Amenities to raise Walkscore and increase pedestrian friendliness

With a Walkscore of 55, this location scored as “Somewhat Walkable”. Not much can really be done to significantly increase the score due to lack of available land.

Exhibit 5. Detroit Downtown Parking Diagram: Abundance of surface parking Lot (Not good for TOD)

Exhibit: 7. Attributes that encourage TOD


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The contents of this report reflect the views of the authors, who are responsible for the facts and the accuracy of the information presented herein. This document is disseminated under the sponsorship of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s University Transportation Centers Program, in the interest of information exchange. The U.S. Government assumes no liability for the contents or use thereof.

The opinions, findings and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of U.S. Department of Transportation, Michigan State Transportation Commission or the Michigan Department of Transportation.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the Detroit Metropolitan Area enters a new era in public transportation, with the enactment of a set of laws enabling a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) in 2012 and the groundbreaking for an initial light rail segment in 2013, we find it helpful to examine the financing and funding structures for transit in peer regions, to look at Detroit's history of transit funding, and to make recommendations for short term and long term funding strategies.

Unlike peer regions studied and nearly every large urbanized area in North America, metro Detroit does not have, and never has had, a stable, long-term local source of funding for public transit. The RTA laws passed by the State of Michigan allow the Authority to seek funding but do not provide any, beyond a modest start-up budget to allow the Authority to start its work.

The lack of local funding is magnified by Federal transit-funding formulas that tie Federal project funds to local match capability.

It is critical that metro Detroit craft a strategy to provide a stable source of funds for transit, as other regions have done, in order to be competitive for Federal funds to improve service and make the region more attractive to potential employers and residents. We will recommend two strategies, one more likely to be immediately possible and the other more likely to be effective over the long term. We also recommend a reduction, at least in the medium to long term, in the number of operators in order to convince the public (which must vote to approve any funding envisioned) and the Federal transportation authorities that we, as a region, are moving down a road of greater efficiency.
FUNDING MECHANISM COMPARISONS

In looking at funding for transit in any region, there are two essential questions:

- What are the funding mechanisms?
- How much money do these mechanisms provide?

It is most common to consider funding in disparate regions on a *per capita* basis, so that is what is done here.

FUNDING MECHANISMS

Funding for transit comes from five sources, generally speaking: Federal, state, local, farebox, and miscellaneous (sale of advertising, for example). The miscellaneous category, for nearly every transit provider in North America, is insignificant and so will not further be explored here. Federal funding is tightly coupled to the remaining sources, so in general can be considered a side effect of local funding choices.

Nationally the most common dedicated source of funding is a locally originated sales tax. All of the peer cities use this mechanism; in Michigan it is prohibited by the State constitution (which does not allow for local-option sales taxes for any reason whatever) so can only be considered a long-term option. Sales taxes are not the only form of local revenue; Denver for instance uses sales tax bonds (bonds backed by future sales tax receipts), Federally guaranteed loans, and other mechanisms. The provision of such local sales taxes has frequently come only after fits and starts; this is described in detail in an earlier report.

Detroit *per se* has no dedicated, local source of transit funding. The City’s bus service is operated by a municipal department, the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), which relies on an appropriation from the City’s general-fund budget for its operations. As the City’s finances have famously struggled, this appropriation has diminished to where Detroit, with about 40% of its peak population, operates less than 2% of the bus service it once did (in units of bus trips per week).

In the suburban communities surrounding Detroit, in Oakland, Macomb and suburban Wayne Counties, the regional bus operator, SMART, relies on a property tax. This tax depends upon public approval, and has always passed by a comfortable margin (though attempts to increase it have not). There are two problems with this mechanism. First, the law which established SMART allows each
County to determine whether local communities can decide to participate on a community-by-community basis.

Only in Macomb County is the tax collected County-wide, and service of some kind is provided to every community in the County. In the denser, near-City areas of south Macomb County, typical urban-style fixed-route service is provided. In the rural areas to the north, paratransit-style service is provided, in partnership with community based organizations. In Oakland County and suburban Wayne County, individual communities can decide to pay the SMART tax, or not, at a local level. This has led to a combination of insufficient funding for SMART to provide reasonable service to the huge area served, and gaping holes in the service (such as Livonia in western Wayne County, which had participated in the SMART tax but decided in 2006 to opt out).
The recession of approximately 2008-11 also shone a light on a difficulty with property-tax based funding. Property tax is a function of property values, and from 2007 to 2011 – as job losses made transit service more important – property values and thus property tax collection plummeted. For example, in Oakland County, residential property values fell 36% from 2007 to 2011. This was roughly mirrored in the other Counties, leading to funding shortfalls that necessitated re-
peated cutbacks in SMART’s bus service.

Farebox revenue is another important source of funds for all transit systems. In the metro Detroit systems, Ann Arbor has the highest percentage of operating expenses paid by farebox revenue, at 21%. For DDOT and SMART it is 14% and for the Detroit PeopleMover, 5.5%. This is low by comparison to the studied peer cities and to other big-city regions. Ann Arbor’s system is significantly different from the others for many reasons: in Ann Arbor, the college population is a very significant percentage of the overall population; the property tax supporting the Ann Arbor bus system is collected at a much higher rate than in the rest of metro Detroit; Ann Arbor’s buses do not compete with other transit providers along the same streets.

One likely reason for the metro region’s comparatively low farebox revenue is the lack of any regional rapid transit mode, which decreases ridership overall and also contributes to low farebox revenue in another way: when a system has rapid transit modes, they tend to have the highest farebox collections per vehicle-hour in the entire system. Another is the surprising fact that riders cannot transfer from the People Mover to or from the local bus systems, to this day. Contrast this with, for example, the Washington DC metropolitan area, covering parts of two states in addition to the District, and featuring multiple localized bus operators and the regional Metro system, all of which reciprocally accept a single type of fare medium (known as the “SmartTrip” card) and all of whom provide some kind of reduced-fare transfer when traveling between systems.

State funding for transit varies enormously from state to state. In some states such as Mississippi, no state operating funds are provided for local transit systems at all; in Delaware, 100% of operating subsidy is provided by the state. Michigan law provides that up to 10% of specific tax revenue (including gas taxes) may be provided to support local transit operations, but that 10% ceiling is never reached. The actual funding is typically 6-8% and can be used to fund transit operations as well as to provide local match funds to support Federal investments.

**FUNDING AMOUNTS**

Overall, metro Detroit’s transit funding, taking into account all sources, is lowest among the peer regions studied and one of the lowest nationally. In 2011, metro Detroit spent under $81 per person on transit. The average of the peer cities studied (St. Louis, Denver, Cleveland and Atlanta) was over $206; the lowest of the peer cities, Cleveland (at just over $133 per person) was 65% higher than Detroit.
2. COMPETING TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES IN DETROIT

Detroit had, at one time, an excellent system of public transportation, including local streetcars and buses, longer distance “interurban” light rail, and long distance passenger rail to several neighboring cities. The decline of importance of public transportation mirrored Detroit’s rise as the automotive capital of North America.

As Detroit became more and more a center of automobile manufacturing, it was natural for the City and region to experiment with auto-centric communities. Detroit had the first mile of concrete road (Woodward Avenue), the first sub-surface urban expressway (Davison Freeway, now M-8) and has always been a leader and innovator in traffic management devices and designs. As the region spent more and more of its energy on designing for the automobile – an important thing to do if we were going to convince the rest of the world to buy and drive cars – naturally public transportation suffered, for several reasons, none apparently deliberate.

Roads built to carry voluminous automobile traffic are inherently not nice places for pedestrians. Michigan highway M-59 across central Oakland and Macomb Counties is a modern exemplar of this. If one were to try to take a bus to and from a job at one of the many offices or shops along such a corridor, one would have to walk across the street either at the beginning or end of a shift – not a pleasant prospect. (The width of M-59 in many places, curb to curb, is about 240’, with four lanes of travel in each direction.)

Shopping centers and office parks built to accommodate motorists must provide significant amounts of parking. It is expensive to build parking decks, so this is only done where it is required by local fiat or where real estate is sufficiently expensive to make it practical. Where neither condition occurs, large surface parking lots prevail, adding to the impracticality of transit trips.
Further, suburban developments in which it is anticipated everyone will own cars typically are built to lower densities than are necessary to make fixed-route transit practical.

As investment and population left Detroit for the suburbs, beginning in the 1950s, people and jobs moved from where transit had been an important piece of transportation infrastructure to where it was less and less important, increasing dependence on automobiles and auto-centric roads and facilities.

**IMPROVING TRANSIT IN DETROIT: PAST & CURRENT EFFORTS**

Detroit’s current efforts to improve transit are not the first attempt. Over the years, several attempts have been made. One relatively recent effort in the mid 1970s led to the creation of the elevated automatic railroad known as the People Mover which makes a one-way circuit around downtown Detroit.

The original concept was for this to be a two-way circuit feeding several rapid transit “spokes” emanating from downtown Detroit into the suburbs. The projector of the two-way elevated system exited the business, and nobody else had bid on a two-way system, which led to the current, one-way loop. The spokes died of local political strife exacerbated by technical decision-making difficulties.

For example, the Woodward spoke which was to have fed the People Mover from northern Detroit and the near northern suburbs ran aground over the argument as to whether it ought to be run at the surface or below grade. A surface light rail system would not be as fast, but as it would be cheaper per mile, it could extend into the suburbs, which therefore preferred it. A below-grade system would have been faster but could not have reached much (if at all) beyond Detroit, so Detroit preferred that solution. In any case no agreement was reached so neither system was built.

Such jurisdictional issues and the lack of regional governance have stymied efforts to make significant transit improvements for many decades.

The current situation has improved, based on two related efforts. Beginning in 2007 the Regional Transit Coordinating Council (RTCC) embarked on an effort to develop a starter light rail line along the Woodward Avenue corridor between downtown and midtown Detroit, a distance of approximately three and a half miles. This attracted a great deal of interest and investment from private industrial concerns, nonprofits and the academic community, and has led to what is now known as M1 Rail, a streetcar-style light rail line which is expected to break ground in fall 2013 and be operational during 2015.

At the same time, the RTCC’s main effort was to produce a regional transit plan
and to have it approved by the RTCC board, consisting of the Mayor of Detroit and the heads of the three Counties. This effort was completed in December 2008, and provided the foundation for the additional work that culminated in a white paper describing a possible, initial bus rapid transit system for the tri-County area, which formed the basis for the package of bills that led to the creation of the area’s first Regional Transit Authority in late 2012. Significantly, this is the first time that metro Detroit has ever had a regionally approved transit plan, and the first time an organization has ever existed which has the charter to implement such a plan.

**TRANSIT AS A BASIS FOR INVESTMENT**

**TRANSIT MODES AND “STRANDED DEVELOPMENT”**

The author has had the opportunity to participate in several meetings and give presentations about transit generally, and bus rapid transit in particular, over the last few years. One of the common questions posed is whether bus rapid transit attracts investment. Generally, it seems the people asking such a question have presupposed an answer (“no”). While it is known that rail transit systems generate a return on investment averaging approximately 800% (that is, for every $1 spent to build rail transit, an average of $8 in new physical development subsequently occurs near the rail stations), bus rapid transit has not as extensively been studied, simply because it is newer, there aren’t as many systems, and they vary widely in several critical characteristics.

We will not try to discuss all the characteristics and drivers of transit oriented development here, as that is done in another chapter and detailed in other reports. Rather, we will focus on where the argument about BRT vis-à-vis TOD should take place, as opposed to where it is taking place. We argue that transit mode *per se* may not be as important as specific details of transit and location.

Since it’s not possible to establish a precise dollar-per-dollar-spent number for BRT, it may be instead useful to discuss in general why businesspersons build developments where they do, and more importantly, why they don’t build developments where they don’t. One overarching principle is called “stranded development”.

Simplistically, people build where they feel they can make money, but the char-
acteristics of any location change over time. A typical developer has limited re-
sources and cannot, for example, build a shopping center in the middle of the
woods, and then build a highway to service it, water lines to deliver water, sewer
lines, a natural gas main, and so forth. She would prefer to build where all of
these things already exist, and in particular where people have better access to a
site than if it was built a mile away.

However, access to resources can change over time, usually a long time. Co-
hoes, New York was an important city on the original Erie Canal, but as the rail-
routes came and the canal was relocated, its importance waned. When the origi-
nal U.S. Highways were created, mainly by linking and designating existing
roads, in the early 20th Century, a great many public facilities such as restaurants
and roadside cottages were built, only to fall into disuse and abandonment when
the U.S. Highways were generally replaced (in travel importance) by the Inter-
state Highways from the 1950s through the 1970s. The southern part of I-280
south of Toledo was clustered with gas stations, restaurants and motels when it
(oddly) had several at-grade intersections as originally built, but when it was fully
upgraded to Interstate standards in the 1990s, most of these intersections be-
came difficult to reach from the highway, and many of the businesses failed.

This situation, in which a formerly advantageous location becomes disadvantag-
ous, is what is meant by stranded development. Given enough time and
change, any location can become less advantageous. A developer’s goal is to
find a location that is likely to be advantageous for a significant period of time.

This brings us to the core of the question: what types of transit attract develop-
ment? And the answer, now, is obvious: one likely to be advantageous for a sig-
nificant period of time. Yet the devil lies in the details. What makes a transit sta-
tion likely to be an advantageous development location? Looking at the more
common rail development, in which certain locations develop much more than
others but always more than at a common bus stop, two characteristics seem to
jump out.

First, development follows permanence of infrastructure. A freeway interchange
or a light rail line is exceptionally difficult to pick up and move. If a freeway inter-
change is built at a certain location, or if a light rail station is built in a certain
place, there is the perception of permanence, that the facility is going to stay right
where it is for the foreseeable future.

Second, development follows its own likely utility. A developer wants to try to
figure out where people will want to shop in order to decide where to site a shop-
ing center, or to figure out where it will be convenient for professionals to work
when siting an office park.
In looking at transit, the obvious difficulty with bus rapid transit is that it does not inherently have permanence, or rather, its level of perceived permanence depends on how it is built. Bus “rapid” transit consisting of buses, no matter how nice, traveling along regular streets in mixed traffic and stopping at bolted-down bus shelters, has very little perceived permanence to recommend it to developers. Give the bus some or all of its own dedicated right-of-way, stopping at stations obviously constructed on site and which only could be relocated with great difficulty and expense, and the situation changes. It is the tendency for communities to build BRT systems in the middle of this spectrum that makes the study of ancillary development complicated.

Utility is obviously location based and has less to do with the details of a transit system than of its surroundings. An office park in the middle of nowhere has a strike against it regardless of how easy it is to reach from other places. A transit location’s usefulness has to do with many things: connectivity to other forms of transit such as local buses and taxis, how easily one can walk or bicycle to it, what other facilities are nearby, and the like.

The attractiveness of any transit station to developers, then, has to do with the perception of permanence and the overall desirability of the location as a place for people to want to be and which is easily reached. Attractiveness can be nudged upward, with tax incentives and the like; but as with all other real estate investment, development near transit favors overall desirability of location.

1. FUNDING STRATEGIES FOR THE NEW RTA

Funding Mechanisms: short and long term

In this section we describe funding for transit from two points of view. First, we talk about what a local funding mechanism might look like in the short and long term, and why those are different. Second, we discuss how much transit might be funded by such a mechanism.

As described above, the most common local funding source for transit is the local-option sales tax. That is not a short-term solution for metro Detroit because it requires a change in the Michigan constitution. It is likely a desirable long-term solution because its popularity speaks of its success. While changes in sales tax collection are subject to economic turmoil, broad-based sales tax collections are likely to be much less volatile than taxes based on a single economic indicator such as real estate valuations.
In the short term, the legislation which created the RTA envisions a regional vehicle registration fee, in addition to the current fee, to fund transit improvements. Such a fee would be subject to a public referendum in the region. This could be enacted in the short term as it would not require a constitutional amendment. Vehicle registrations are not profoundly affected by changes in the economy, as most households in every American city have and need at least one car. Also, there is a reasonable linkage between the fee and benefits to the motorist, as increased use of transit tends to ameliorate highway congestion.

The RTA acts do not specify how much money the Authority should raise, and only give it three active tasks. First, the RTA should incorporate the two existing regional transit plans (Ann Arbor and the metro tri-County) as its own, with a view toward updating them. Second, the RTA should plan for and then construct and operate the bus rapid transit system, referred to in the acts as “rolling rapid transit”, once it has funding capacity to do so. (Raising the funds is, both obviously and explicitly, part of the latter task.) Third, it should coordinate service among local providers.

Nothing in the RTA acts prohibits the Authority from raising more money, though, and it has the opportunity to merge the second and third tasks by raising enough money to operate both BRT and local bus service in the eastern three Counties, including Detroit. There are several advantages to this. First, this gives the RTA the opportunity to present the transit funding plan as a replacement for the existing SMART tax in the communities where that tax is now collected, rather than a new tax. A dedicated transit tax in the City of Detroit would relieve the pressure from the general fund of having to provide all of the subsidy for local bus service.

**OPERATING STRUCTURE**

In Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties, it seems apparent that a single bus operator should provide all bus service, local and rapid, within that portion of the region. The existing two-operator system is inefficient and is not justified by any transit needs but rather historical developments and jurisdictional issues. To the author’s knowledge, nobody has ever tried to point out how this structure benefits the riding public. It may or may not be possible to accomplish this in the short term, but at the very least it should be considered for the medium term.

A single transit operator (whether an existing bus operator or private third-party) could operate a completely redesigned local bus system, developed to take advantage of the bus rapid transit lines and M1 Rail and focused on current employment and housing densities and transit needs, without the jurisdictional and
historic baggage of the existing systems. The RTA would be responsible for overseeing the route redevelopment, likely contracted out to private consultants (as it is not efficient to hire permanent staff to do a job that only needs to be done once every several years).

Such a revised system would have none of the latent inefficiencies of the current two-operator system, such as duplicated management and an oversupply of bus storage and maintenance facilities. It would also have none of the overt inefficiencies, such as seeing differently colored buses pass each other on the main arterial roads.

The type of local transit service provided should vary by density, as is done today in Macomb County. Densely populated centers in Detroit and its suburbs, including areas of residential density and areas of employment density, deserve to be served by frequent fixed-route service. As density diminishes, service can be provided by less frequent community circulators using smaller buses, or paratransit type vehicles in an on-demand service mode. Unlike today, where most bus routes are very long despite the slow travel and frequency of stops, the BRT service will allow for shorter local routes using the BRT to serve long-distance travel.

This discussion has left out Ann Arbor, for several reasons. There seems to be no reason to merge Ann Arbor’s transit operation into anything else. The local support is much higher there than elsewhere in the region. Unlike the rest of the region, Ann Arbor’s buses serve an area dominated by a college population. There is no route overlap whatever between Ann Arbor’s service and that of any other provider. While it is beneficial to consider Washtenaw County’s use of, and connection to, eventual BRT service, that part of the region has a local service fundamentally different than what is provided in the other three Counties.

CONCLUSIONS

Detroit’s transit system fell into disuse over time, for a variety of reasons relating to growth of auto-centric communities and the region’s love of the automobile generally. Past efforts to improve transit floundered for political and other reasons, but recent developments such as M1 Rail and the State’s enactment of laws creating a Regional Transit Authority represent a positive trend. The question as to how much development will happen around BRT stations has a great deal to do with the specifics of BRT implementation.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The RTA should propose a vehicle registration fee funding mechanism for the short term, sufficient to fund BRT and local bus operations in the eastern three Counties, and to fund BRT and supplement local bus operations in Washtenaw County. This will replace the SMART property tax and create a more stable source of funding. Long term, a local-option sales tax should be considered, as this has proven successful in many communities nationwide.

2. If a purpose of BRT is to create opportunities for redevelopment of underused land, the specifics of BRT implementation must be perceived as sufficiently permanent to enable redevelopment and overcome developer’s fears that such a system can cheaply and easily be relocated away from their developments.

3. There does not appear to be any justification for two separate bus systems operating side by side in the eastern Counties, and the RTA should move toward implementing, even if this is considered a medium to long term solution, a redesigned route system based on current conditions and using a single operator.

4. Washtenaw County’s local operations should be left to AATA, and discussions should take place to decide how to supplement that organization’s local service with the rapid bus service (and any eventual other services) to be provided regionally through the RTA.

5. The RTA should direct the service providers to implement a common fare medium and compatible farebox equipment such that each provider can accept transfers from others, each within its own rules for such transfers, so that travelers can complete a trip without having to repeatedly pay single-operator fares. This might be an early (and small) use of funds raised by a new dedicated transit tax, in whatever form that tax might take.
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Scott Anderson taught mathematics and computer science for many years at the University of Detroit Mercy. He has a master's degree in Computer Science from the University and a bachelor's degree in Computer Science from the State University of New York (Albany). Scott was a member of the team that developed the initial concept of the “Woodward Transit Catalyst Project”, now M1 Rail, and assisted with the visioning of bus rapid transit in metro Detroit that formed part of the basis for the 2012 RTA legislation. His interest in logistics generally, and transit in particular, goes back many years, and he is co-author of the paper Walking and Transit with Dr. Hoback. He consulted to private industry for many years, specializing in freight logistics systems.
CHAPTER 6

ROLE OF MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION EFFORTS

Claudia Bernasconi, Mariarosaria Di Palo, and Krysia Bussiere

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This section of the report provides recommendations for transit agencies and advocacy groups on the role of media and public opinion and involvement efforts in enabling or inhibiting Regional Transit in Southeast Michigan. Methods utilized in the research are presented, together with an overview of findings from previous reports (Bernasconi and Di Palo, Media and Public Opinion- Transit Lessons for Detroit from Four Peer Regions 2013; Bernasconi and Bussiere, Media and Public Opinion - Detroit Transit History 2013; Bernasconi, et al., Media and Public Opinion - Current Detroit Transit 2013). Comparisons with characteristics with other regions and the study of the Detroit region were utilized to compile a list of key recommendations for successful media and public opinion efforts in the Detroit region, efforts that can promote and sustain regional transit in Southeast Michigan.
INTRODUCTION

This section of the report provides recommendations for transit agencies and advocacy groups on the role of media and public opinion efforts in enabling or inhibiting Regional Transit in Southeast Michigan.

Purpose of the study

The overall goal of this study is the understanding of the nature and impact of media and public opinion efforts towards the development of support for transit. This section is based upon the research conducted by the authors over the past two years, which included research in regard to success or failure of key media and opinion initiative in four comparative regions: Atlanta, Cleveland, Denver and St. Louis (Bernasconi and Di Palo, Chapter 6: Media and Public Opinion - Transit Lessons for Detroit from Four Peer Regions 2013), a study of media coverage on transit in the Detroit region from a historical perspective (Bernasconi and Bussiere, Media and Public Opinion – Chapter 5: Detroit Transit History 2013), and the study of current (2007-2013) media initiatives and public opinion efforts in regard to public transit in the Detroit region (Bernasconi et al., Chapter 6: Media and Public Opinion – Current Detroit Transit 2013). The study of successful media and public opinion efforts and the analysis of unsuccessful ones provided with suggestions to strengthen the impact of such efforts in the Detroit region. The mentioned reports can be found online at http://eng-sci.udmercy.edu/udmtc/reports/index.htm)

Methods

Methods used to analyze the data on media and public opinion efforts and to formulate recommendations on the topic include the following:

- Analysis of local news coverage on transit issues and initiatives (2007-2013),
- study of key media events and media coverage in history (1994-2007),
- study of transit reports on public involvement and media initiatives,
- reports and interviews from team visits to this and other regions,
- interviews to key local transit, advocacy, and media people,
- analysis of public opinion surveys, riders survey, and likely voters surveys,
- study of transit agencies’ and advocacy groups web site information and news releases,
• analysis of levels of engagement in social media by transit groups and agencies,
• study of campaign/outreach materials of transit agencies’ and advocacy groups in comparable regions and the Detroit Region.

I. KEY ISSUES IN MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION EFFORTS

Media issues and public opinion are extremely important in the transportation field as the support of public transit by users and the general public is key to its success, and regional transit with its natural crossing of geographic, political, cultural, economic and racial boundaries is subject to the inflammation of controversy through the rapid and unfiltered exchange of opinions from diverse perspectives across all of those boundaries. Nonetheless, media and public opinion efforts can increase alignment between transit agencies’ plans and priorities, and the public’s needs and concerns. Media strategies can promote visibility of transit agencies and their initiatives, foster good levels of communication and interaction with the public, and become the basis for the inclusion of the public’s perspective and input in the planning process.

Public Involvement

“Public involvement” (also identified as “Public Participation”) in transportation can be defined as “The active and meaningful involvement of the public in the development of transportation plans and programs” (U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration 2007). Public Involvement is the result of strategies and techniques geared towards increased communication and collaboration between the State, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, public transportation providers, and the communities they serve.

The exchange of ideas and knowledge during public involvement efforts events is reciprocal: the dialogue increases public understanding and knowledge of transportation issues and plans as well as a better understanding and knowledge of transit officers and planners on issues, perspectives, values and needs of community members and groups. Effective and real public involvement does not expire in the pure communication process but requires the openness of public agencies (public transit providers, transit authorities, etc..) to suggestions, opinions, and views of citizens.

Public reaction is solicited and evaluated and must subsequently be incorporated into future planning, coherently with limitations and other project priorities. For
this reason public involvement must happen early on in the planning process. The following statements on public involvement can be found in the Federal Highway Administration web site, through the Office of Planning, Environment & Reality (HEP) page Public Involvement/Public Participation: “Public involvement needs to be an early and continuing part of the transportation and project development process. It is essential that the project sponsor know the community’s values in order to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts, as well as to narrow the field of alternatives (for planning) and alignments (for projects). The community also needs to understand the constraints and tradeoffs of the transportation planning and project development process and to "buy-in" to the transportation needs and purpose” (U.S. Department of Transportation 2012).

**Effective public involvement is defined by a process versus a one-time event, and requires continuous interactions between transit/planning officers and public throughout planning and development stages of transit projects.** The public involvement process can include interactions at a small scale, for example in the case of community meetings, and at a large scale, in the case of major campaigns to inform and shape public opinion on specific transit issues or plans.

Outcomes of effective public involvement strategies indicated by literature review include:

Public ownership of policies/sustainable and supportable decisions, decisions that reflect community values, efficient implementation of transportation decisions, Enhanced agency credibility (O’Connor 2000);

Relationship building, process efficiencies, and on the ground outcomes benefiting to the planning process (U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration 2007); and

Increased visibility of agencies, reduced project cost, and reduced construction delays (Zhong 2007) as the community is “bought-in” the project and facilitates its implementation rather than opposing or resisting it.

Outcomes of effective public involvement can have larger repercussion on the social and built environment. These broader outcomes include community revitalization, increased transit access for residents and to businesses, and increased sense of community ownership of transit corridors and urban areas.

**II. FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES**

**Findings from the Comparable regions**

Research has been conducted on the four selected comparable regions (Cleve-
land, St. Louis, Atlanta, and Denver) in order to develop findings on effective models of public opinion and public involvement efforts that would be of guidance for the Detroit region. The analysis included the study of key transit events and key media events in history, the analysis of recent and current public opinion efforts, and the evaluations of these efforts in regard to the success or failure of key media and opinion initiative in each of the four regions.

1. Campaigns

Campaign efforts in comparable regions were studied. Table 1 includes an overview of major campaign efforts per region. An item to note is the Atlanta failed T-SPLOST vote. Details can be found in the Bernasconi and Di Palo, Chapter 6: Media and Public Opinion - Transit Lessons for Detroit from Four Peer Regions 2013. Overall the following elements distinguished the failed campaign in Atlanta:

- Public perception of lack of clarity of plan due to mixed road project, funding allocations, and priorities
- Wish list approach that jeopardized public stakeholders’ involvement and support
- Low plan endorsement also due to unsolved racial/socio-demographic issues
- Ineffective education of media
- Campaign failed to portray a positive vision (mostly concentrated on mitigation of negative aspects of transit such as traffic)

Table 1. Recent campaigns in the St. Louis, Atlanta and Denver regions

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<th>REGION</th>
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<td>ST. LOUIS</td>
<td>PROPOSITION M (2008)</td>
<td>- Citizens for Better Transportation (CBT) and political consultants close to County Executive Dooley organize campaign. CBT was not able to raise significant funds</td>
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<td>Ballots: 562,965</td>
<td>- Metro Transit engages in community meetings and outreach outlining potential cuts if funding is not approved</td>
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<td>48.45% YES votes</td>
<td>- CMT forms Greater St. Louis Transit Alliance (which was also working on other campaigns)</td>
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<td>- African American community was not well represented by Transit Alliance, nor reached by CBT.</td>
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<td>- Considerable voter drop-off, as 48,849 did not vote of the last ballot</td>
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<td>Many did not believe cuts would really happen</td>
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<td>County Executive Dooley supports tax initiative (2009)</td>
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<td>John Nations, the Republican Mayor of Chesterfield, agreed to run the Advance St. Louis, the Vote YES campaign</td>
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<td>CMT sponsored an educational campaign before the Vote YES on A campaign started</td>
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<td>Ballots: 151,613</td>
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Overall our findings suggest that the following elements, among others, have been key to the success of transit campaigns in the comparable regions:

- Setting-up a pre-campaign ground action to widen support (e.g. a petition versus and immediate ballot) and educate the public on general transit issues
- Good on grassroots educational efforts in collaboration with local community leaders, civic groups, advocacy groups (with a local person or “transit champion”) that are captured by media
- Presenting/advertising a clear and coherent vision for the plan/initiative (versus a list of projects or an overpromising prediction) including clear plan restrictions from the beginning of the process (including visually mapping and explaining the plan)
- Conducting public opinion surveys before the campaign to understand perceptions and during the campaign to gear messages to the public’s expectations and opinions and to portray benefits of transit to the public
- Addressing issues of diversity in stakeholder groups/population groups (in particular urban versus suburban interests)
- Negotiating and communicating/advertising a shared vision (versus a collection of individual interests)
- Involving marketing and political consultants to guide the campaign process and work with media

2. Public Involvement in the four regions

The St. Louis and the Denver regions presented strong and coordinated public involvement approaches. Metro Transit has been involved in public opinion efforts; such as participation to community meetings transit workshops and major campaigns.

In the St. Louis region initiatives included a public engagement effort to develop the Moving Transit Forward transit plan for the St. Louis region and to move Metro Transit into the future, involving people throughout the region. As stated in the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report of June 2011, Metro Transit “received the second place award from the International Association of Public Participation for the innovative program used by Metro to create the region’s first 30-year long
range plan” (p. 11). Agency personnel (St. Louis October visit) emphasized the priority of communicating with the public, and referred to an ideal scenario in which a person from within the community could make the case about transit to the local audience, and promote the transit initiatives and plans. Among the strategies used by the agency to foster public involvement are the following:

One on one conversations (200 in few months) with community leaders and phone calls to explain the importance and significance of public involvement;

- Numerous public meetings (2010-2012) to receive the public’s input on the design of the system;
- Board meetings and Committee meetings; and
- Campaigns (2008, 2010);
- Surveys (1993, 2008) on the public’s priorities and on public opinion on the transit long-range plan.

A key element of the success of media and public opinion efforts in the St. Louis region appears to be the proactive ground game in the campaign for the 2010 vote. During our team visit (St. Louis October visit), Dianne Williams, Director of Communications at Metro St. Louis, emphasized the high priority of communicating with the public from a grass-root perspective, with local community members and leaders involved in the campaign. Three items were pointed out by Metro Transit personnel as critical in the relationship of the agency with the public:

- A regional vision,
- The divulgation of data to show the impact/benefits of transit to people, and
- Clarity about the plan outcomes portrayed to the public.

In the Denver region RTD appears strongly engaged in public involvement during planning and expansion programs. In particular, the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) and the FastTracks program have been characterized by the extensive public involvement initiatives. Studies for a Master plan, Expansion Programs and improvements continued until 2004 with strong public participation.

As stated in the RTD 2011 Annual Report on FasTracks, the agency ensures internal and external communication during each phase of the program implementation using two major tools: the Public Information Strategic Planning and the Communications Program Implementation. “A Strategic Public Information Plan serves as the overarching approach to program-wide public information and outreach… The FasTracks Public Information Team communicates and engages
internal and external stakeholders through seven strategic Communication Programs: Internal Relations, Public Involvement, Public Outreach, Government Relations, Media Relations, Issues Management and Crisis Communications” (Regional Transportation District 2012).

In 2011 the public opinion efforts undertaken by the RTD in order to inform, educate, and involve the public included:

- Public Education Campaigns using a variety of tools such as newspaper ads, bus and light rail ads, banners, social media, and outdoor advertising with quick and simple messages.
- The “Call to the People”, a two-week campaign to inform the public of a sales tax increase vote that used community newspaper advertising, social media, a video and an online survey.
- T3 Industry Forum to encourage proposals on how to complete the FasTracks transit expansion program quickly and with reduced cost of agency’s operations.
- Telephone Town Halls, a new method of public outreach through telephone town hall meetings. RTD reached out more than 400,000 people.
- Annual FasTracks Public Opinion Survey, which provided RTD with helpful insights on public perception about the agency and the transit expansion program.
- Information Materials to inform and educate the people about FasTracks such as a general FasTracks brochure, the Transit Times District Newsletters, project fact sheets, and Program brochures.
- Photo/Video Documentation showing the progress of FasTracks.
- Video Education to help educate the people about the progress of the program.
3. Key findings from the comparable regions

Several key findings emerged for each of the comparable regions. Table 2 includes a summarized overview of findings.

Table 2. Summarized findings by region.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>KEY FINDINGS</th>
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| CLEVELAND | - Importance of a branding approach to transit that is captured and amplified by media  
            - Visibility of a key project/corridor and its effect in uplifting the entire agency’s image  
            - Strengths of public-private partnerships in promoting increased awareness of transit benefits in the public  
            - Importance of the ability of transit leaders to communicate with media  
            - Payoff and importance of good public engagement efforts and engagement with social media and internet |
| ST.LOUIS  | - Importance of educating media and educating the public  
            - Effectiveness of a good on-the-ground educational and public participation work that targets diverse groups  
            - Importance of clarity in communicating plans to community members  
            - Importance of transit advocacy groups alignment (and consistency when conducting a campaign with the agency)  
            - Importance of support by local media |
| ATLANTA   | - Openness of media outlets to diverse positions and interests groups can be critical  
            - Importance of interacting with diverse stakeholder groups to build up transit support (low level of interaction contributed to the failure of the 2012 campaign)  
            - Lack of clarity in future vision and plan is captured by media and amplified giving voice to frustration and criticism  
            - The campaign should concentrate on positive future visions that resonate with diverse groups |
Three key overarching themes emerge from the findings:

- the centrality of a good transit image,
- the importance of educating the public and media about transit, and
- the critical nature of appropriate strategies for educational campaigns in view of key transit events (e.g. a vote).

Findings from the research on the four regions confirm that the capability of transit agencies/operator to strategize a branding approach to the public image of the agency/operator and of the transit system/s is key to the success of regional transit. A proactive approach to image can build up and create a ripple effect as media coverage captures and amplifies the branded image.

This “image” should be articulated into two components: the physical/environmental image and the digital/media image. Both are equally important and complementary. An effective public opinion and media effort should take into account both aspects of the transit image.

The physical/environmental image of transit encompasses all design and environmental design aspects of transit, including the branding of stations and buses/cars, and the streetscape design that helps identify transit as an efficient, attractive and cohesive system. Streetscape design can include station design, benches, and other elements such as planters, pavement design, and lighting. Streetscape design can become a catalytic element for transit success and both spur and reflect economic development in the transit system area. Environmental design is key for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), as stations are more likely to be perceived as permanent if the design creates a continuum between the station and the streetscape of that area. In addition streetscape design can alter the stigma round public transit in regions were the economy and transit have declined and ridership is low.

A perfect example for this component of the transit image, with its elements of strategic re-branding of transit, of station-street continuum, and of physical expression of economic development, is the Cleveland Euclid corridor (Figures 1
and 2). The GCRTA HealthLine neat design and the excellent streetscape design improve the transit experience of current riders and can attract additional choice riders, as it conveys a “rail like image” and is “fast, simple, safe and first class” (team visit interview, August 20, 2012).

Figure 1. Euclid corridor in Cleveland (Images from team visit, August 20 2012)

Figure 2. Station design of the HealthLine in Cleveland (Images from team visit, August 20 2012)

The second component of transit image consists of the digital/media image. This image is the result of a multilayered and complex compilation of all media communications on the agency’s or transit operator’s initiatives, transit plans, public involvement practices, as well as reports on the state of the system and the agency/transit operator in relation to performance levels. The digital Image of transit speak to the public about the agency’s philosophy, priorities, overall im-
pact ton the region, as well as the capability of the agency to involve the public and target community identified needs and priorities.

The online presence of the agency/transit operator, from websites, blogs, social media, press releases, reports, plans, and document available online is key toward achieving an effective interface with the public. It is particularly important that key transit initiatives be clearly portrayed in websites and other public documents, as well as all community engagement practices (e.g. attendance to community meetings, events, etc).

All transit initiatives should be clearly available to the public as the research conducted for this study suggests that when the public is clearly informed on plans it tends to be more supportive of transit and more willing to take certain actions, for example endorse a plan with a vote. In the Cleveland region, both physical/environmental image and media/digital image are strong. The GCRTA employs a range of communication tools, with a good online presence thanks to an up to date website, good community engagements practices, good regional and national visibility, thanks to conferences, awards, and media coverage.

Educating the public about transit issues, transit initiatives and plans, and benefits of transit, and ensuring the involvement of the diverse stakeholder groups in transit planning is key to the promotion and development of effective regional transit. This study documented a variety of educational tools employed in the four comparable regions. Inclusiveness of public educational efforts is crucial, and findings suggest that agencies/transit operators should employ a range of tools that spread across two polar scales of educational efforts. One extreme consists of online engagement tools that are ubiquitous and far reaching streams of information and feedback (web sites, online visuals, navigation/mapping tools, blogs, social media), the other extreme is punctuated by diverse grass root local community engagement tools, such as one to one conversations, with community leaders and phone calls, to participation to community meetings and hearings. In between lays a variety of hybrid tools such as larger local events, surveys and conferences, and print media coverage. Typically successful campaigns utilize comprehensive multimedia approaches that range from the local/grass root to the ubiquitous scales of engagement. Three of the comparable regions are good examples of good communication ad interaction with to the public: Cleveland, St.Louis and Denver.

This study focused on news coverage regarding regional transit issues from 1994
to 2006 in the effort of understanding the public debate on transit from an historical perspective. Two databases have been consulted: the LexisNexis and the Newsbank. Articles from all news sources typically implied that people perceived mass transit quite positively and believe that it is a key factor in reviving the city of Detroit and the surrounding region. More commonly, articles highlight disagreements between groups and communities regarding specific plans or proposals for mass transit. These disagreements have played a role in preventing progress. Two case studies are presented as examples to understand the complexity of media coverage and the nature of the public debate on transit issues for years prior to 2007. Case study one reports on the years 1994 and 1996. These years were selected to illustrate the issue of regional fragmentation with service administered through poorly coordinated transit systems. Year 2003 was selected as second case study, to illustrate media coverage orientations and capture public opinion through media coverage in regard to DARTA.

Further research needs to be undertaken to uncover media reaction connected to SEMTA (1967) and earlier years not available through the consulted databases.

Though it is extremely difficult to measure reactions of the public to transit events in history, the analysis of media coverage for key events can suggest what the general opinion toward public transit initiatives might have been in the Detroit region in the recent past. The study strived to understand whether or not these articles provided for an outlet for local public opinion and if print media was capable of shaping and guiding public opinion on significant changes in transit history of the region.

Overall certain regional themes in public debates and opinions on transit issues have emerged through the analysis of external contributions. In particular the diversity of positions and interests of a divided region and the political divide that created difficulties in agreements and even more in actual enactment of decisions and plans. Overall the climate and public opinion seems to have been characterized by a sense of disillusion and by public distrusts in positive outcomes or successes of transit initiatives as well as the lack of a regional cohesive vision on transit issues and on what transit means and does for the community at large.

More details on media coverage in history for the Detroit region can be found in Bernasconi and Bussiere, Media and Public Opinion – Chapter 5: Detroit Transit History 2013, which also includes an appendix with summaries of all consulted articles, including observations of specific events.
5. Findings from the Current Detroit Region’s study (2007-2013)

Research was conducted in order to identify key transit events, key media initiatives and public involvement efforts in relationship to transit issues and events over the last 7 years (2007-2013). In depth press review was conducted for the years 2007- May 2013 for three major newspapers (Crain’s, Detroit Free Press, and Detroit News); online documentation (press releases, newsletters, annual report, general web site info, social media) on local transit providers/agencies and local transit advocacy was studied in regard to public opinion efforts and public involvement/outreach. Two local transit reporters and four coordinators/directors of local advocacy groups have been interviewed in regard to current media issues and engagement efforts.

a. Local Transit Providers and Advocacy Groups

From the study of current efforts by transit providers the following themes emerged:

- The strong variability of outreach efforts conducted by the transit providers (in particular in the case of SMART);
- The general low level of visibility of outreach efforts;
- The insufficient use of online and social media tools;
- The availability of great amount of data from surveys to capture satisfaction levels and specific needs of the ridership; and
- The in-ward focused quality of communications (e.g. through e-newsletters emailed to riders lists and not available online), which reduces the capability of the system to speak to larger populations/interests groups.

Overall local advocacy groups, such as TRU and MOSES, seem strong, complementary to each other in their target groups and specific focus, and well inclined to collaboration. Their efforts have been limited due to resources and capability of each organization but seem to have been well organized and effective. Press review indicated a low level visibility of collaboration efforts among advocacy groups.

b. The Perspective of Local Media

Several overarching themes emerged from the interviews with local reporters and advocacy groups. Summarizing the themes include:

- The importance of media in shaping the discourse about regional transit;
The interrelatedness of print media and social media/blogs;
- The politicization of the discourse about transit in the media;
- The disconnect between experts and the public;
- The positive image of transit as an abstract element, and the negative image of local transit in the media;
- The importance of visible and cohesive advocacy groups; and
- The importance of flexibility in messaging and involvement strategies.

More details on these findings from the Current Detroit study can be found in Bernasconi et al., Chapter 6: Media and Public Opinion – Current Detroit Transit 2013.

c. Public Involvement

In terms of public involvement some items to note for the Detroit region are:

- the Community Partnership Program (CPP) developed by SMART, in which the agency and the community collaborate to improve quality of services and to fulfill the need of the community;
- the work by MOSES, which connects to congregational institutions, unions, and educational institutions both in the city and in suburban contexts, and trains groups and communities to speak for themselves with policy makers and planners;
- the work by TRU centered around grassroots organizations and focuses on expanding the communication network and enabling activism; and
- the work by the Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit Alternatives Analysis (AA), “an extensive public outreach campaign designed to educate and enlist the involvement of area residents, businesses, and institutions in the process” (Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit 2013).

III. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE STUDY OF COMPARABLE REGIONS AND DETROIT

The study of media and public opinion and involvement efforts in the Comparable Regions and in the Detroit Region suggest five broad areas of importance towards the improvement of transit spurred and supported through communication tools. These areas include:

1. The importance of a positive transit image. The dual nature of the
transit image (physical and digital) has already been highlighted. By comparing data on the four selected regions and Detroit it becomes clear how several transit agencies in the peer regions have successfully portrayed a positive image of the transit and of the agency itself to the public and how this has been one of the key elements for the success of regional transit in those regions (Bernasconi and Di Palo, Chapter 6: Media and Public Opinion - Transit Lessons for Detroit from Four Peer Regions 2013). On the contrary the fragmented structure of transit Detroit region has determined a weak image of transit, a public opinion characterized by a sense of disillusion and distrusts in the possibility of positive outcomes of transit initiatives, and the lack of a regional cohesive vision on the importance of transit (Bernasconi and Bussiere, Chapter 5: Media and Public Opinion - Detroit Transit History 2013). The general low visibility of positive transit initiatives and the uncertainty of future scenarios characterizes media coverage currently (Bernasconi et al., Chapter 6: Media and Public Opinion – Current Detroit Transit 2013);

2. **the importance of educating the public and media about transit.** Cleveland, St. Louis and Denver are all positive examples of good communication to the media and public as well as good cases of public involvement and effective grassroots educational efforts. These three examples show how educating the public about transit issues, benefits, initiatives and plans, is key to the promotion and development of effective regional transit (Bernasconi and Di Palo, Chapter 6: Media and Public Opinion - Transit Lessons for Detroit from Four Peer Regions 2013);

3. **the centrality of regional complexity and political issues.** in a region that has been characterized by lack of regional cohesiveness and the disconnect between general public and experts on the topic (Bernasconi et al., Chapter 6: Media and Public Opinion – Current Detroit Transit 2013);

4. **the importance of public involvement.** Three out of the four comparable regions are characterized by transit agencies that have been capable of structuring effective public involvement in their regions. In particular Denver’s transit Agency (RTD) was very effective in undertaking public opinion efforts in order to inform, educate, and involve the public, ensuring the involvement of diverse stakeholder groups in each phase of the planning process (Bernasconi and Di Palo, Chapter 6: Media and Public Opinion - Transit Lessons for Detroit from Four
5. The crucial role of educational messages and appropriate strategies for transit campaigns. Campaigns can fail if the plan and the message are not clear and coherent, if it is not portrayed a positive and shared future vision, if media and public are not educated about transit, and if grassroots and local community leaders are not involved in public educational efforts (more details are included in the Comparable regions report).

### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

These five broad areas of importance have led to the identification of a set of recommendations in regard to: 1) engagement with online tools/social media; 2) open communication with the media world; 3) educating the public about the regional complexity; 4) public involvement strategy; 5) branding: the building up of the transit image; and 6) messages that bridges regional divides.

#### 1. Engagement with online tools/social media

From interviews with local media people (Detroit Free Press, Crain’s Detroit Business, Detroit News) and study of print and online materials, it was evident that there is a sophisticated and elusive web of news dispersion on which reporters rely. Matt Helms (Detroit Free Press) stated that much of his research also focuses on reading blogs and Facebook/social media entries, in which the public disperses links to more in depth articles or provides information that might not have been available otherwise (Helms 2013). Though both Matt Helms and Bill Shea (Crain’s Detroit Business) agreed that much of the social media/blog conversation is polarized and exaggerated, they acknowledged that social media influences what print will be writing and covering (Shea 2013).

Recommendation 1: It is crucial that all transit agencies and advocacy groups recognize the role and importance of online information through websites/blogs/social media as it cycles back and feeds into more traditional and authoritative communication channels (i.e. print media). Current levels of engagement with online and social media by transit providers and advocacy groups in the Detroit region are inadequate and should be improved as soon as possible.

Allocating funds to media for transit, partnering with educational institutions and students, and keeping or participating to blogs should not only be the tasks of ac-
tive advocacy groups but of transit agencies that proactively seek to build up communication networks and improve their image.

The “Digital Image” of transit (i.e. the online image of services, systems and agencies) reinforces and enhances the physical one, as certain images can become powerful tools that embody and portray to the public key benefits and potential benefits of transit. These images circulate through print media, TV and online communication and impact the public perception of transit. The Cleveland corridor, for instance, represents a positive example of effectiveness in developing a key corridor showcasing change and uplifting the agency image (more details are included in the Peer regions report).

2. Open communication with the media world

From interviews with local media people (Detroit Free Press, Crain’s Detroit Business, Detroit News), study of print and online materials and visits to other regions the following emerged among other findings: journalists interview those who are willing to talk and those that make themselves more visible. This element uncovers the embedded subjective and political nature of views on transit that are portrayed through media. “Media is driven by the info derived from the private groups” (Shea 2013). Bill Shea argued that journalists need to be skeptic about sources, and are usually able to understand who is a trustworthy source of information and who is not. Finally, effective communication with media people requires time and should not be "one time emergency communication".

Recommendation 2a: In order to make an impact on media, all transit agencies/advocacy groups should understand the priority of ensuring that transit managers/designated personnel become readily available and “desirable” for local media people when these seek information on current transit issues. Continuous communication can ensure an increased comprehension of the struggles and contribution to the region of work by transit agencies.

Recommendation 2b: Local transit agencies/providers and local transit related advocacy groups should strive to educate media about their efforts. A good example of effective media people educational efforts by transit agencies can be found in the Denver region, where the FasTracks Public Information (PI) Team promotes a good working relationship with media organizations: it conducts annual visits with local media organizations and community newspapers to provide information on FasTracks and give the media an opportunity to ask questions about the program; it gets feedback on the elements of FasTracks of most interest to them, their readers, viewers and listeners through FasTracks Media Working Group with representatives of local media entities; RTD is characterized by a
good level of engagement in social media (for more details see RTD Strategic Information plan and the active education of media on RTD through specific programs in Bernasconi and Di Palo, Media and Public Opinion- Transit Lessons for Detroit from Four Peer Regions 2013, p. 69-72, retrievable at http://eng-sci.udmercy.edu/udmtc/reports/index.htm).

Regular annual or by-annual meetings/visits for updates on plans and priorities of the transit agency would ensure a better knowledge and understanding by media people on complex transit issues versus sparse communications on urgent issues. The St Louis region, represents a good example of an effective on-the-ground educational and public participation work that targets diverse groups: the transit agency understands the importance of clarity in communicating plans to community members and the importance of local media support (more details are included in the Bernasconi and Di Palo, Media and Public Opinion- Transit Lessons for Detroit from Four Peer Regions 2013).

Journalist, activist, and bloggers are the real mediators to the public and must be educated in their turn by the transit agencies.

3. Educating the public about the regional complexity

Press review conducted on transit related articles on three major newspapers (Detroit Free Press, Crain’s Detroit Business, Detroit News) for years between 1994 and 2013 suggest that political issues are central is transit issues and that this centrality is well captured in the print media. Transit articles written between 2007 and 2013 display an increased coverage of political issues connected to transit. Several interviewees in our study mentioned the disconnection between experts and the people/public and the lack of awareness and understanding of the political mechanism behind transit issues and transit planning by the public. The real accountability structure is invisible to the public in its complexity as well as the interrelation between decisions by different political subjects in the various regional geographic areas (or counties). The public fails to understand this complexity. The public also fails to understand/know about the political levels and steps necessary to make a vote possible.

Recommendation 3a: Local transit agencies/providers and local transit related advocacy groups should strive to educate the public about the interrelated benefits of regional transit for different stakeholder groups and about the complexity of policy/political mechanisms that impact transit planning and implementation. Better education would help overcome the disconnection between transit experts and the people/public. The lack of awareness and understanding of the political
mechanism behind transit issues on the contrary favors misconceptions in regard to accountability and responsibilities for transit management and development and can lead to the build up of distrust in transit agencies and groups.

**Recommendation 3b:** The public should be engaged at different scales: the community level through outreach or grassroots efforts, and the county, and regional levels, through mass communication tools (TV, RADIO, SOCIAL MEDIA). It is crucial that the public becomes more aware of how decisions are made, and what their role and input can be at certain steps of the process (from mobilization, to participation, to ridership).

In the interview with Bill Shea the lack of coordination between advocacy groups was brought up, together with the general low visibility of such groups and their leaders (with exception of TRU). In the interview with Joel Batterman (Batterman 2013) a different picture emerged. MEC, Tran4M, and Michigan Suburban Alliance seem well connected and interacted with other citizens groups (Moses, Sierra Club, TRU, Metro Coalition Congregations, and Tras4M) during their most recent campaign. Our research has uncovered a good level of coordination among existing groups in the region, but a low level of visibility of collaborative efforts for non-transit experts or affiliates. The issue therefore seems more related to the visibility of these groups and the visibility of their actual coordination. The Regional Transit workshop held at University of Detroit Mercy (May 17th-18th, 2013) also focused on the strengthening of a visible and strived broad coalition of regional leaders in the field of transit.

**Recommendation 3c:** Local citizens and transit related advocacy groups should better communicate to the public their coordination/collaboration, as well as increase in size, and reach through “coalitions”. Through coordination and coalition the spectrum of stakeholder groups that can be effectively reached can widen and be more representative of the whole region’s social and political diversity.

### 4. Public involvement Strategy

From interviews with local media people, advocacy groups and agencies personnel and study of print and online materials it appears that the Detroit region has not been characterized by coordinated and continued public involvement efforts but rather by limited and small involvement and outreach efforts typically not coordinated among transit providers/agencies. Furthermore, compared to other regions such as Denver and Saint Louis, it appears that the Detroit region “does not even have experience with taking [on] any major media outreach” (Edgar 2013).
Recommendation 4: The strategizing and establishment of a coordinated public involvement approach is a priority in the Detroit region. The involvement of the public should be an early step in the planning process, assuring the build up of public ownership of the plan and substantial participation in each phase of the process. The FasTracks Public Information Team in Denver, for instance, involved the public in each step of the plan and communicated and engaged internal and external stakeholders through seven strategic Communication Programs:

1. Internal Relations,
2. Public Involvement,
3. Public Outreach,
4. Government Relations,
5. Media Relations,
6. Issues Management and
7. Crisis Communications

The St. Louis and Cleveland regions are other good examples of effective communication and interaction with the public. In particular the St. Louis’ transit Agency has undertaken several media and public opinion outreach efforts, such as participation to community meetings, transit workshops, major campaigns, and public involvement in the creation of the new plan.

5. Branding: the building up of the Transit Image

The HealthLine corridor development in Cleveland, was also very successful in terms of communicating the benefits of the new plan to the public through educational processes. GCRTA was also able to involve local business leaders and to develop a strong public-private partnership. This winning approach was astutely complemented by an effective rebranding of the transit image, including new streetscape design and environmental graphics. The Cleveland Euclid corridor has become an urban showcase of the current and future transit opportunities. This has lead to increase in ridership with the attraction of additional riders, but can also strengthen regionally the image of transit for the general public of non-riders and suburban residents (more details are included in the Bernasconi and Di Palo, Media and Public Opinion- Transit Lessons for Detroit from Four Peer Regions 2013).

Recommendation 5a: It is crucial to recognize the role and importance of imagery and design (captured and distributed by media) in shaping the collective image of transit in the region. Pilot corridors, the new branding of the agency, buses, and bus stop, and the dispersion of new images via internet and print media (of
current transit or future plans) are powerful tools towards increased understanding of transit potential and increased support by the public. Other typical tools include: e-newsletters to riders, mailing lists, e-blast notifications, and answer lines. In addition to these tools, it is critical that communication also include information and images available to non-riders (through both online and print media), in particular considering that in this region “The people who pay the most for transit (taxpayers) are often the people who ride it least.” (Curtis 2013)

**Recommendation 5b:** Transit agencies should showcase increased visibility of their efforts in order to strengthen public support and increase communications channels with media and the public.

The Atlanta case study can clearly exemplify how that lack of clarity in the future vision and plan, captured and amplified by media, determined frustration and criticism and ultimately favored a cascading effect of events that brought to the failed vote on transit. Visibility remains a key issue in the Detroit region, characterized by a general low visibility of the public involvement efforts as well as lack of clarity and visibility of collaboration efforts among advocacy groups.

### 6. Messages that bridges regional divides

Press review (2007-2013) allowed us to detect the overall negative image of transit providers that print media portrays in current times. The focus is often on the failures or pressing issues faced by transit agencies/providers or their user groups. At the same time, press review indicated that “transit development” or “transit” at large is portrayed by media as an important and necessary element in the region, revealing a disconnect between the “abstract concept” and concrete local transit entities/systems. Interestingly, the pilot public opinion survey conducted by the University of Detroit Mercy in collaboration with TRU in 2013 (307 responses) revealed a similar disconnect. While the majority of people don’t think transit is important for them or their families, the majority of the people agreed that transit development is important for the region.

**Recommendation 6a:** Educational messages and campaigns should strive to bridge the disconnect between personal priorities and perceptions about importance of transit and “regional perspectives” and priorities. In particular transit development/enhancement should not be portrayed as a remedy to negative issues/problems but as a positive element in itself. A good strategy should include unveiling benefits to non-riders, as well as demonstrating the versatility and potential for the system for likely riders.

A clear example of different approaches to messaging for transit can be seen in
the contrast between the St. Louis message “Some of us ride it, all of us need it” focuses on inclusion an coexistence of population groups with different needs, and the Atlanta 2012 campaign which focused primarily on reducing traffic congestion and proposed transit as a remedial move in a negative scenario (more details can be found in the Bernasconi and Di Palo, Media and Public Opinion-Transit Lessons for Detroit from Four Peer Regions 2013). Underlining and potentially invisible benefits should be highlighted and brought to the attention of the public. An excellent example of effective campaign messaging that focused on positive outcomes and proposed new optimistic perspective on transit and its future to the public can be seen in the Salt Lake campaign designed by R&R Partners (more details are included in the Metro Detroit Transit Workshop Final Report 2013, retrievable at http://eng-sci.udmercy.edu/udmtc/reports/index.htm).

One pressing issue in terms of public opinion on transit deals with the capability of the plan, in the way it is crafted but also in the way it is portrayed to the public, to speak to diverse stakeholder groups. Several pressing regional issues interfere with how a plan or vision for future transit expansion and/or coordination of transit will be received by different groups, as the region is characterize by several layers of divide (e.g. the Detroit+ring/wider suburban areas split, the political divide, and the social/racial divide). The potentially negative element of having competing transit projects (that are distinct from a geographical, scale and social levels) is portrayed in a DFP article by Marie Donigan (Donigan 2010). The divide between the reality of the struggling DDOT system, with continuous cuts and their effect on the Detroit public, and the new launched regional plan and the funding involved, is portrayed by Gerrit (Gerritt 2011). Furthermore, Joel Batterman (Batterman 2013) emphasized the issue of taking for granted Detroit’s support in a future vote, due to this imbalance between new plan and failing old system.

As emphasized by Batterman (Batterman 2013) the upcoming vote would/will be the first of its kind as it will not be conducted county by county but a whole region vote (first time in our region). This requires a careful understanding of regional complexity and regional divides.

Recommendation 6b: Local transit agencies/providers and local transit related advocacy groups should strategize an effecting new “presentation” of a “transit vision” for the region, distinct from previous anticipations to media or guess predictions by media. The message should be based on a coherent shared vision, that encompasses both the regional-commuter system and the local bus system and on their complementarities to one another. In the short term, Detroit’s complex situation (including DDOT’s present and future prospects and Detroit’s bank-
ruptcy) cannot be “virtually ignored” in the plan presentation and should be dealt with in connection to the plan in order not to undermine public support.

Matt Helms (Helms 2013) pointed out that there is no real tradition in this region of analyzing factors that determine positive or negative campaign outcomes. Joel Batterman proposed that students, young people, elder/mobility/disability groups should be reached at in the whole region. Additionally, as it can be anticipated that funding mechanisms and spending strategies will be a key factor, we suggest that putting transit spending into the larger transportation spending context would enable the public to understand the bigger picture and the relative weight of certain funds compared to much larger ones.

Recommendation 6c: The analysis of factors that determine positive or negative campaign outcomes is key. A key strategy should include a clear message segmentation in order to speak to diverse groups and explain why the plan would be valuable to them.

The Public Opinion Survey conducted by a team at UDM and the Metro Detroit Transit Workshop (MDTW) suggested several key themes important for future campaigns:

1. The need of an organized educational campaign strategy, including an organized Pre-campaign to educate and outreach people in order to build public support and to avoid opposition; and to anticipate opponents’ arguments and preempt them before they gain traction;

2. The importance of having a shared vision of the plan with the public that can be summarized with a slogan or catch phrase;

3. The importance of a clear message that should be able to reach different people at different levels: be clear on what are the benefits of public transportation not only for riders but also for supporters that probably will not use the public transit system.

4. Building up trust: Agencies must demonstrate accountability so that taxpayers feel that funds are being used wisely;

5. Divide up constituencies, send different messages and answer the question: “Why now” though?

6. Develop a specific engagement strategy for key constituencies including business community that play a vital role in bringing funding; engage professionals, marketing and political consultants in the campaign;
7. Constantly engage community in the process, conduct public education efforts and include grassroots educational outreach: everyone should be aware of the distinct but complementary roles of agencies and advocates;

8. Build up proactive media relations.

9. Advertisements are really important to communicate with the public and their messages need to be kept simple and positive; it is also important to show numbers and make them visual. Transit campaigns can be conducted not only through TV, radio, theater, and online, but also through social media. Ads and spots using community champions can be useful to bring credibility and to communicate to the people who are supporting the plan.
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