



MYTHS AND FACTS

Transit Overview

Myth: The cost per-passenger-mile of public transit and rail is much greater than transportation by highway (and hence, not as cost-effective).

Fact: Even on a strict “cost/benefit” basis, transit and auto travel costs per mile are comparable: When the full panoply of transit’s economic benefits are included in the calculation, transit is the clear winner

- According to the AAA, the cost of driving on average is 51.7 cents per mile, an increase of 1.7 cents from 2002. The average car costs \$7754 per year to fuel, insure and repair. According to the Federal Transit Administration, transit costs a comparable 45 to 56 cents per mile.
- Further, many public transportation critics’ estimates of the cost of driving do not include the full cost of automobiles, including road building, maintenance and design, whereas estimates for the cost of public transportation do include the cost of the entire transit system.
- Perhaps most important, the critics’ numbers fail to take into account the incredible cost-savings that transit can provide. Transit financially aids our public health system, environmental protection efforts, and families across America. Investments in transit can serve to:
 - Reduce the annual cost of health damage from motor vehicle pollution (between \$29 billion and \$530 billion)
 - Reduce the costs of asthma-related treatments (\$14.5 billion annually, including over \$3.2 billion per year to treat increasing rates of childhood asthma)
 - Increase savings for all Americans (for every \$10 million invested in public transportation saves more than \$15 million, for both highway and transit users, including savings of about \$1,500 and 200 gallons of gas per year)
 - Reduce families’ needs for additional cars, a yearly expense of between \$4,800 and \$9,700.
 - Help all citizens realize the American dream of owning a home through Location Efficient Mortgages (LEMs). These special mortgages allow homebuyers who purchase homes near transit or their workplace to qualify for a larger loan. For example, a potential buyer who would avoid \$500 in auto costs by living in a convenient area could qualify for a larger mortgage.

Myth: Overall, driving an automobile is cheaper than using public transportation

Fact: Public transportation is a better deal for the nation’s pocketbooks

- The median driving bill in 2001 was over \$7653, with public transportation costing \$400 less per year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey. The total estimated cost of driving in the U.S. is between \$798-836 billion, not including road building and maintenance.
- In fact, US taxpayers and citizens spend between \$400-997 billion per year in hidden subsidies to autos through emergency services, construction and maintenance, lost property taxes from road construction, parking subsidies, vibration damage, petroleum policies, trade deficits and uncompensated auto accidents.



Myth: Current federal investment in transportation is not responsive to the needs and demands of the general public and does not reflect the true travel patterns in the U.S.

Fact: Americans overwhelmingly support public transportation and want to see a larger investment in transportation choices.

- A recent poll by Wirthlin Worldwide showed that 72 percent of Americans support increased investment in public transportation. Regardless of locale, residents voice support for public transportation options and funding in their communities -- urban (64%), suburban (59%), rural (51%) and small town (55%).
- Another study reveals that 80% of commuters would prefer to be using convenient public transit to driving. Over 10 million Americans use transit for their daily work commute. Another 25 million people use transit less frequently, but on a regular basis. Transit projects provide an estimated 150 million annual transit trips. Without transit, the nation's \$40 billion in annual traffic congestion losses would be \$15 billion higher.

Myth: Public transportation is overly dependent on federal funding

Fact: Transportation funding comes from diverse sources, including users and local governments.

- The total portion of GDP that is spent on all forms of transportation (short and long distance, people and goods, capital and operating) was \$1.6 trillion in 2001. Of that amount, just 10 percent was covered by public revenues at the federal, state and local levels. The U.S. transportation system already relies on the traveling public and American businesses for most of the full cost of traveling.
- Local share of the cost of building urban rail projects has been steadily increasing. Local communities interested in pursuing major transit investments, such as light rail, must now put up significantly more local funds to “match” the declining federal share. The estimated local share for projects in final design and preliminary engineering has increased from 20% to 50%.

Myth: Transit use is decreasing, so public assistance to transit should also decrease.

Fact: Overall, transit ridership continues to grow and deserves continued support.

- In the last five years alone, public transportation use has risen 21 percent faster than vehicle miles traveled on our roadways and airline passenger miles logged over the same period. In 2000, Americans used public transportation 9.4 billion times--the highest ridership level in 40 years. An estimated 14 million Americans ride on public transportation each weekday. Overall, transit usage increased by 6.4 percent in the decade from 1990-2000. Though federal funding for transit is just one-fourth federal funding for highways, public transportation ridership has increased faster than vehicle miles traveled on roads in the past six years. Recently reported minor declines in public transportation use should not be considered out of this context.



Myth: Public transit infrastructure needs are decreasing, while highway needs are increasing.

Fact: The nation's public transit system is in dire need of additional investment.

- According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, in today's dollars, \$20.6 billion is needed annually to maintain and improve performance of the nation's transit systems.
- The American Association of State and Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Bottom Line Report documented investment needs of \$43.9 billion each year to improve and expand public transportation.
- Additionally, one in four American households still have no access to public transportation, and one half have only limited service. Overall, the U.S. has seen an increase in transit ridership over the last decade, with funding demands for the public transportation infrastructure increasing accordingly.