

Overview of Trends Impacting Transit

What trends are impacting the fixed route transit industry?

Some national transportation trends are not terribly positive for transit operators. In particular, transit is not greatly increasing its share of overall personal trips. This can be attributed to a number of factors: a nationwide increase in vehicle miles traveled; the dispersing of work centers throughout suburban areas, in contrast to concentrations in central business districts, which are easier to serve with transit; the perception by some that transit is primarily intended for low income persons; the increasing trend towards working couples, which affects the need to transport children to day care and the desire to minimize travel time; and, the general public's love for transportation privacy and comfort of the single occupant vehicle (SOV), as especially promoted on a regular basis by advertising for automobiles.

On the other hand, while these national trends aren't encouraging, ridership of many Colorado systems is increasing. In a state concerned with its quality of life there is increasing recognition that we can't build and pave our way out of congestion. Transit is often considered to play a vital role in efforts to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality.

Another major impact is the **welfare to work movement**, which attempts to decrease welfare roles by limiting eligibility and placing strong incentives for employment. This has strong transportation implications, since these welfare recipients need reliable transportation to their training facilities and new jobs. The expense of an automobile can be a tremendous burden for someone earning low or minimum wages, so the availability of public transportation is vital.

In **resort areas** there is a recognition that narrow mountain valleys and box canyons have limited space available for streets and parking, and that unlimited car usage can choke a valley and make it a less desirable destination. Transit offers an effective way of moving the thousands of skiers that crowd the resort communities. Another key development is the trend for many of the resort workers to be unable to afford to live in the resort community. They must live in distant communities, creating long commutes and air quality problems. Transit commuter service can efficiently serve those resort employees.

What trends are impacting rural and specialized transit operators?

An increase in certain federal regulations has prompted some **incidental operators** to move out of the transportation business in favor of contracting for service. Among those regulations: required drug and alcohol testing of drivers of vehicles accommodating 16 or more passengers; increased training in wheelchair handling as a result of the Americans With Disabilities Act; and, Colorado Drivers License licensing of drivers of vehicles with 16 or more passengers. Naturally, these added regulations place burdens on transit operators. But there are also some positive outcomes: more safety measures; increased professionalization in the industry; and, increased coordination and consolidation of transit operations as a result of contracting.

The **developmental disabilities community** is moving increasingly towards more "mainstreaming"—moving appropriate developmentally disabled persons from sheltered workshops to mainstream employment, and from large residential facilities to smaller ones or to inde-

pendent residences. These job shifts create service problems, since the jobs sites are scattered rather than centralized, and the job hours are unpredictable and scattered. Likewise, it is less efficient to move clients from a larger number of residences than it is to centralize pickups and destinations in a few locations.

We are witnessing a significant growth in the number of **people who have physical disabilities**. This is in large part due to tremendous life-saving advances in medical science, and in the rehabilitative work of hospitals like Englewood's Craig Hospital. People are surviving accidents and diseases like never before. But, in many cases, while they are surviving, they still have disabilities that may affect their transportation options, including the inability to drive. In some cases they need the assistance of public or specialized transit.

In the **aging community** there has been strong concern about how our population is aging and society's preparations for baby boomers reaching their retirement years. There is an increasing emphasis on long-term care alternatives - that is, alternatives to nursing home care, such as adult day care, home health care that allows an elderly person to remain at home, etc. A key element in such alternatives is transportation.

In **rural areas**, there is strong concern about the loss of many community services, such as medical facilities. Transportation to more distant locations becomes a key component of keeping elderly residents in the community rather than moving to larger cities that have more services. Also, as more families become working couples, some of the poorer families will have transportation problems if they can afford only one car.

There is an increasing recognition that there are many **negative impacts to adding lanes to a highway**. Among those negative impacts:

- Loss of open space, increased noise, and placement of the highway uncomfortably closer to homes and businesses.
- Economic pressures on land values. That is, as we devote more of our land to streets and highways, less land is available for other uses. This tends to increase the cost of that remaining land, simply based on the law of supply and demand. This impact is especially acute in urban areas, where fly-overs and cloverleaf intersections gobble up large tracts of land.
- The loss of homes and businesses for right of way acquisition, or their diminished value.
- Additional lanes tend to quickly fill up after they are added. Sometimes the additional traffic comes from other arterials that see traffic reductions; but often, as drivers notice traffic reductions on those other arterials, they shift their traffic patterns, setting off yet another vicious circle of increasing congestion.
- Adding lanes on a highway is not a solitary action. If more traffic can be loaded onto Interstate X, chances are it puts pressure on Boulevard B that is getting more off-ramp traffic from Interstate A. Once again, a vicious circle. ❖