

## How Transitable Is Your City?

Rapid urban growth is putting unprecedented pressure on our nation's transit systems. New, frequently younger, customers are flocking to transit; their increasing numbers and demands have put cities and their transit agencies at a crossroads. To retain these riders, and for cities to continue to grow, transit must be faster, more attractive, and easier to use.

Transit agencies on their own are ill-equipped to adapt to these new demands. They depend on cities for their operating environments—primarily on city streets—making it difficult for them to deliver the reliability riders expect. They also can't dictate land use or guarantee safe and comfortable access to stops, all of which are essential to an attractive transit rider experience.

Cities depend on their transit agencies as well. A city's growth and continued prosperity rely on efficiently moving more people in a constrained space, especially since parklets, wider sidewalks, and bike lanes are also jockeying for use of the street (which is a good thing, of course). Yet a city has little or no control over the planning of transit systems.

To create modern urban mobility systems, cities must take a more active role in planning transit. City leaders are already thinking about how walkable and bikable cities are. They need to start asking a new question.

**“How transitable is my city?”** This shifts the focus and pushes municipalities to partner with their local transit agencies in order to improve transit performance and support cities' growth and economic goals. Cities can make streets work more efficiently for transit, by protecting buses and trains from congestion and giving them priority at signals. In exchange, transit agencies can provide better service and fill gaps in their regional networks to serve new mixed use areas.

Transitable cities elevate the entire passenger experience, recognizing that transit trips start long before riders board a vehicle. Every transit trip starts and ends as a biking or walking trip (even if just from a park-and-ride lot). Cities, working together with transit agencies, can ensure that sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike parking are natural extensions of the transit system. Cities can push for integrated trip planning, customer information, and payment options across all operators.

Perhaps most importantly, cities and transit agencies together can steer development and implement land-use plans that support transit. When transit and land use are planned in concert, ridership increases, and cities can capture real estate value from new transit investments. These funds can be reinvested in the system to continue to elevate the level of service provided.

**Seattle is already doing this.** Beginning in 2010, Nelson\Nygaard worked with the city on a transit master plan. In the two years since adoption, the city has developed its own transit division and improved partnerships with King County Metro. Together, they have advanced planning on three streetcar and bus rapid transit lines to support growth and transit-oriented development in hot markets in Seattle. They have implemented speed and reliability improvements in high ridership bus corridors, coordinated wayfinding across agencies, and electrified diesel bus routes to support the city's climate action goals.

In the coming decade, cities with good transit networks will be best positioned to prosper. Urban areas that can break down silos between agencies to get their transit systems right will attract new jobs and residents. Together, they will achieve a transit experience that seamlessly supports thriving cities, with services that are pleasurable, intuitive, and legible.



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