

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

Viable Alternative to Rail? Perspectives from San Antonio

Metropolitan Transit

ADVANCED TRANSPORTATION DISTRICT

The Impact of Regional Rail: A Seminar for Central Texas

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What is BRT?

"Permanently integrated package with strong system identity"

Seven Key Components

- Stops, stations and terminals
- Vehicles
- Rights of way
- Intelligent transportation systems (ITS)
- Fares and Fare Collection Systems
- Route structure and services
- Marketing

What is VIA's Project?

- Almost 10-mile corridor
- Connects two largest employment centers in the region (Downtown and Medical Center)
- Fredericksburg Road is primary arterial with more than 10,000 transit boardings per day
- Conceptual design is 50% exclusive ROW, 50% mixed-traffic
- Initial Cost Estimate: $42M
- Timeline: Initial Service Operational by 2010

Why Is San Antonio Choosing BRT?

- The Voters Have Spoken
  - Light rail referendum soundly defeated in 2000
- The Dollars Aren't There
  - VIA collects only 5/8 cent sales tax from a smaller tax base than Dallas or Houston
- The Community "Fit" is better
  - Need to understand the local community and develop the best solution to the identified problem
  - Basic approach- start with BRT in one corridor, prove the value, build upon success

Other Attractive Features of BRT

- Service and operations flexibility
  - Respond to changing demands & needs
- Infinite incremental development possibilities
  - Add elements as success increases
- Modest implementation costs-
  - Far less expensive than other high-capacity transit alternatives
- Reduced impact to adjacent business during construction

Has BRT Been Successful?

	Vehicle Features						System Measures			
City	Distinct Livery/ Image	Color-Coded Station	Type & Length	Level Board	Number of Doors Board/ Exit	Bus Capacity	% Ridership Increase	% Time Savings	System Speed mph	Capital Cost per Mile $M
Boston	Silver	Stops & Stations	Artic 60	Full Low Floor	3 / 3	97	>80	-	6.6*	11.3
Honolulu	Rainbow Wrap	Stops	Artic 60	Step Low Floor	1 / 3	62	38-100	43	16.8	-
Los Angeles	Color Coded	Stops	Low Floor 40	Step Low Floor	1 / 2	51	40	25	19	0.2
Alameda	Color Coded	Stops	40 Van Hool	Full Low Floor	3 / 3	70	35	17	15	0.3
Pittsburgh	-	Stops & Stations	Std & Artic	Some	1/2-3	40-49	38**	41-44	30-40	6 - 55
Miami	-	Stops	30' & Artic	Some	1 / 2	40+	53**	28	18	7

Ridership Increases, But What About Economic Impact?

- While evidence is not as strong as rail, early indications are promising
  - Examples
    - Pittsburgh
    - Ottawa
    - Vancouver, B.C.
    - Seattle
    - Columbus
    - San Antonio
- "Any major BRT investment should be reinforced by transit-supportive land-development and parking policies. BRT should be an integral part of land use, transportation, economic development, and master-planning efforts." – Ellen Greenberg

What is...

What could be...

A Quality of Life Package

- Impetus for economic development & urban revitalization
- Fannie Mae Smart Commute Program
- City of San Antonio
  - TIF, TERZ, Empowerment Zones
- City of Balcones Heights
  - “Main Street” revitalization opportunities
- Station area & transit-oriented development
- Transportation choices

Summary

- BRT is a package of elements that offer significant advantages over traditional bus
- Emphasis on quality, both in service and infrastructure
- Linkage to economic development and quality of life
- Works best if part of overall corridor and system plan...must be a partnership effort!
- BRT appears to make sense for the San Antonio area and VIA

Thanks!

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