



PUBLIC TRANSIT BLOG

May 03, 2024

IS THE U.S. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION STRUGGLING?

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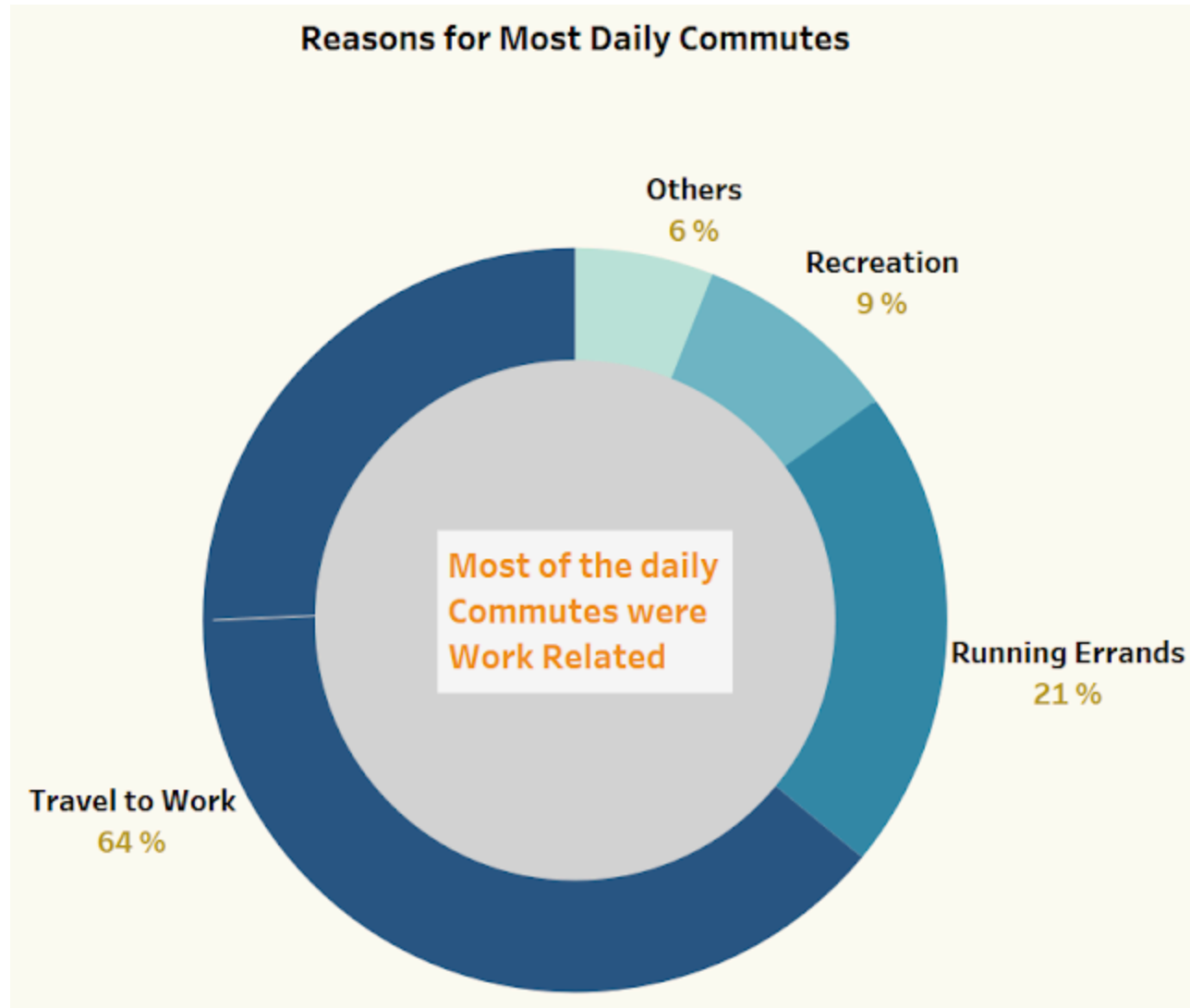
What is the future of public transportation in the U.S.?

Source: Vox.com

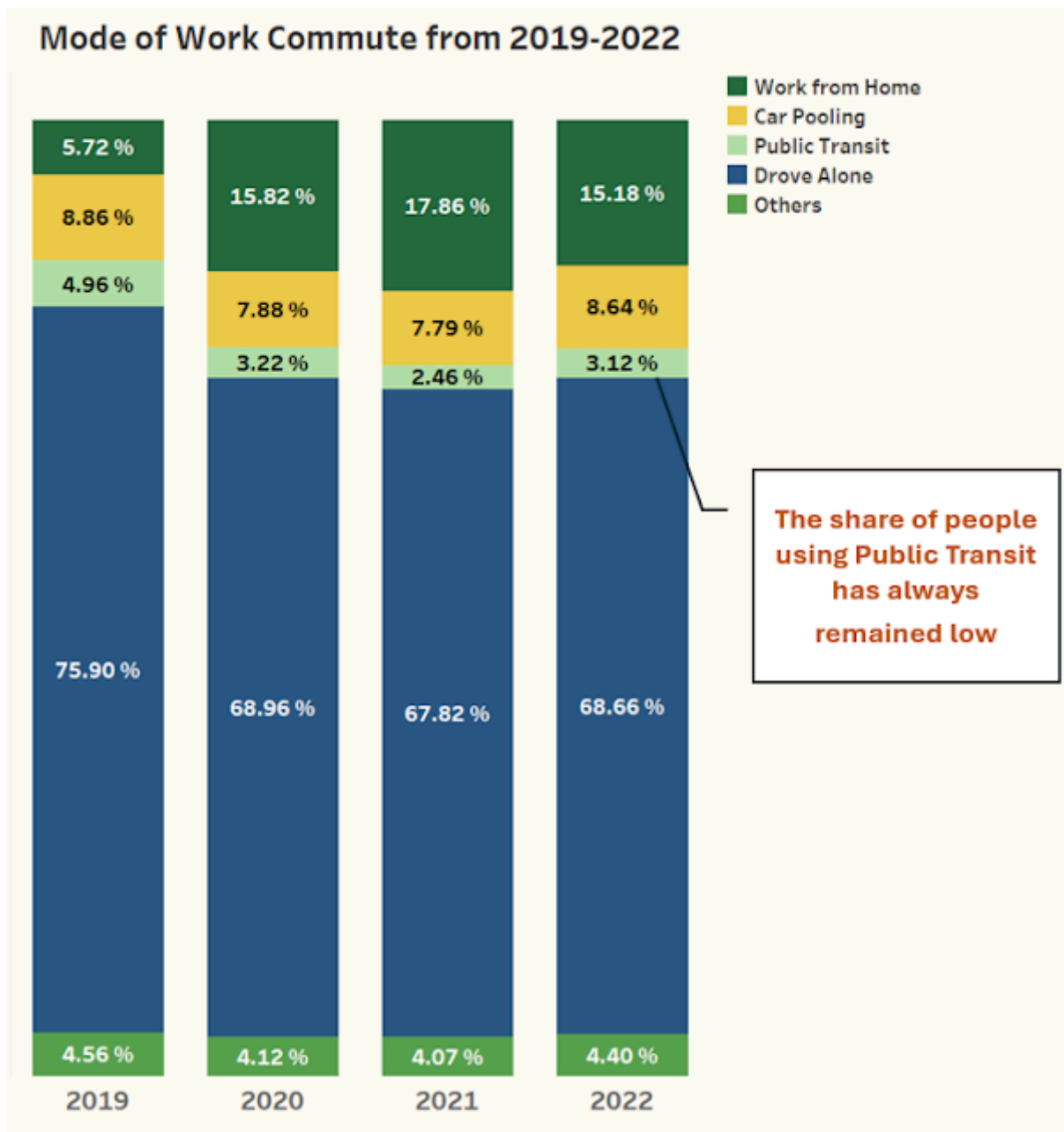
When the Pandemic arrived in the U.S. four years ago, the public transit system came to a screeching halt when the buses and subways made nearly empty daily trips. The revenue took a huge dip when people were locked in their homes and unwilling to travel with strangers. Though the Pandemic is now in the rear, did the U.S. public transit system recover from the near-death spiral? That's what we are here to find out!

How many people use Public Transit in the U.S.?

A study found that most of the daily commutes in the U.S. were primarily work-related followed by running errands and recreation. Most **work commutes lasted less than 30 minutes**, suggesting that many either lived close to work or preferred a faster commute.



Many people preferred driving to work alone, though some opted to carpool. The trend remained the same even after the pandemic, though the share of people working from home increased during this time. However, the usage of public transportation remained low throughout.



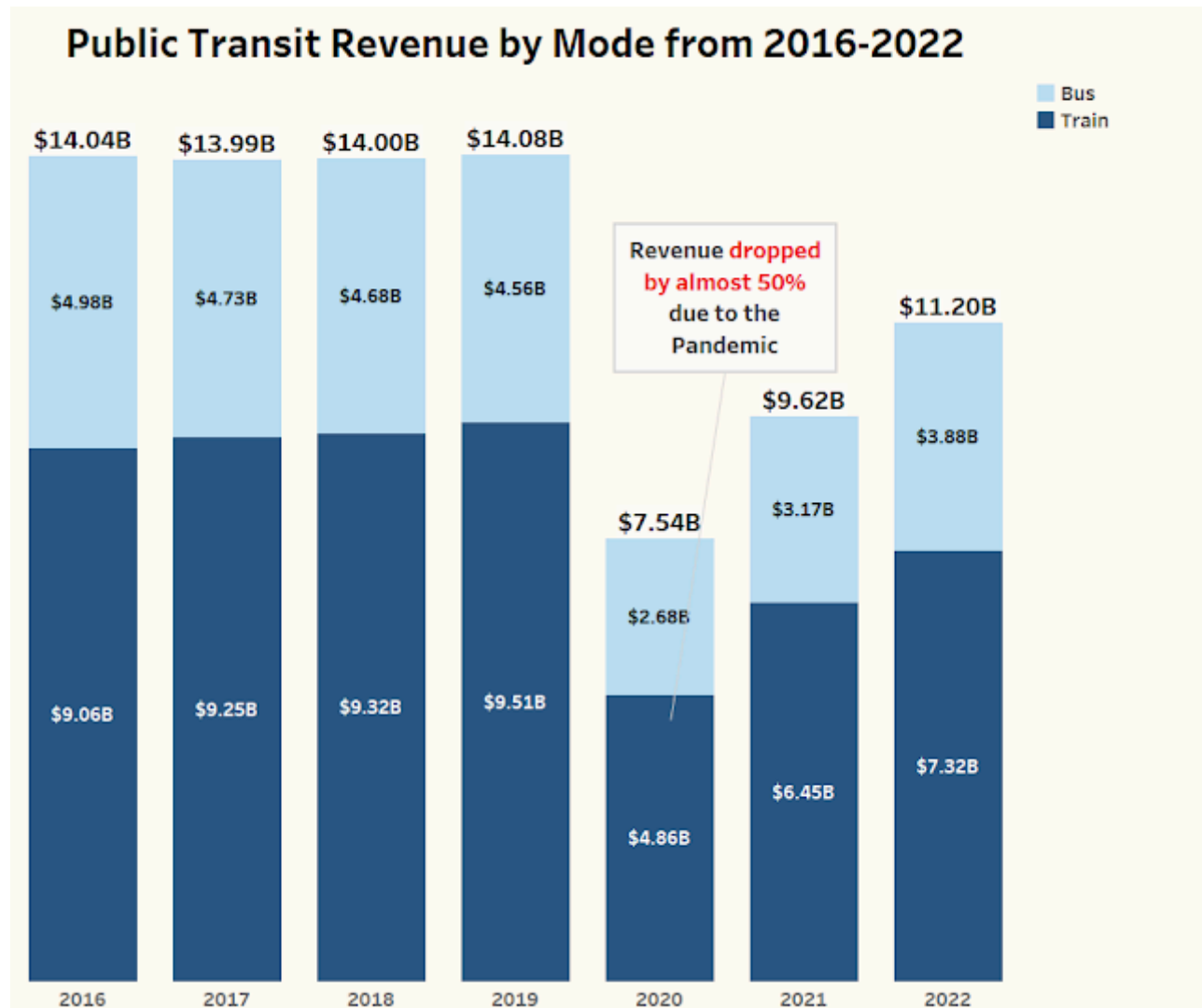
Unlike many European cities well known for their Excellent public transit system, we can't say the same thing here in the U.S. except for New York, Boston, Chicago, and SFO. Even during the pre-pandemic era, Public Transit ridership in Texas cities like Dallas and Austin was almost nonexistent.

Then came the Pandemic that no one saw coming!

Impacts due to the Pandemic

As ridership dropped during the Pandemic, unsurprisingly the revenues also took a big dip. Some agencies **lost up to 80% of their revenue** from April to June 2020. As the fare

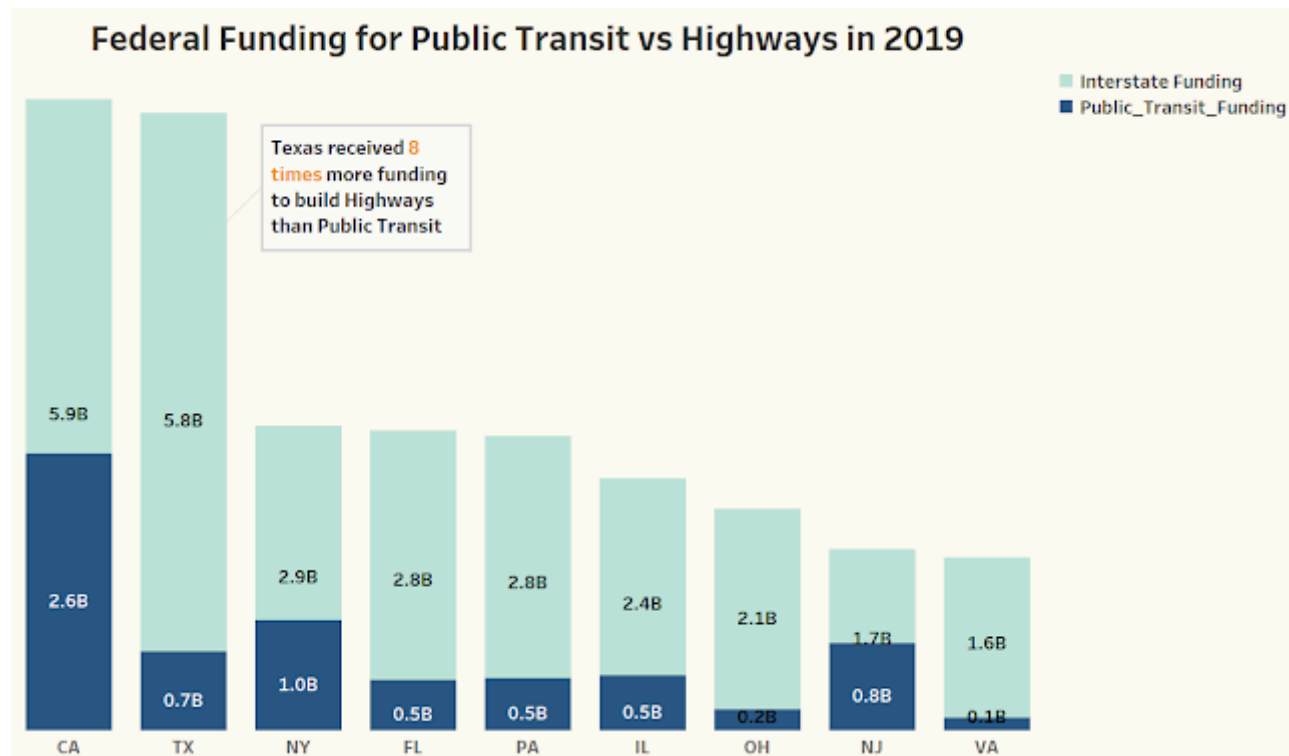
revenue is the transit agencies' most significant income source, there were worries that some Transit systems may go bankrupt if the trend continued



Fortunately, that didn't happen! After the vaccine was rolled out, ridership started to improve, and revenue **recovered almost 80%** of the pre-pandemic levels as of 2023. Though far from perfect, **the U.S. public transit system is still struggling post-pandemic, but is very much alive and will continue to be!**

Why is Public Transportation Not Growing in the U.S.?

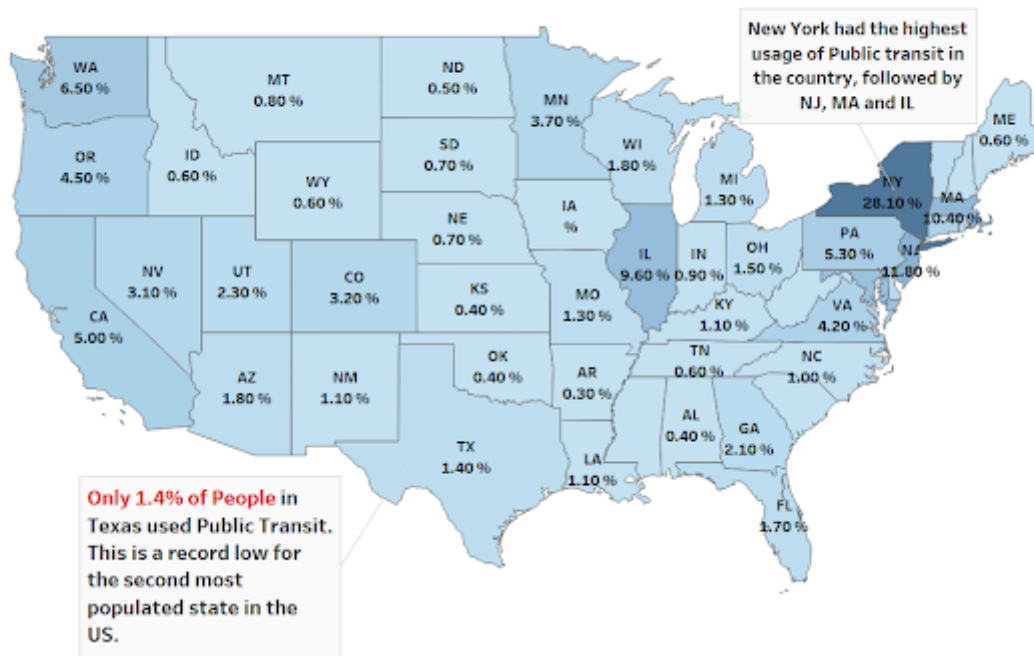
The answer is simple! **There are not sufficient resources to operate, expand, and grow simultaneously.** The fare revenue is the only primary income source for public transit, and without adequate funding from the state and federal governments, public transportation cannot grow any further!



After the 1956- Federal Aid Highway Act was passed, more money was funneled into building interstate and expanding highways while public transportation was slowly shrinking. For instance, in 2019, **Texas received eight times more funding to build highways than public transit funding**. Also, sadly, Texas ranked in the top in the number of road casualties in the same year.

A study found **less than 2% of the population in the DFW metro used public transit**, which is too low for the country's fourth-largest metro and the city that has seen enormous growth in the last decade.

Share of the Public Transport Usage by State



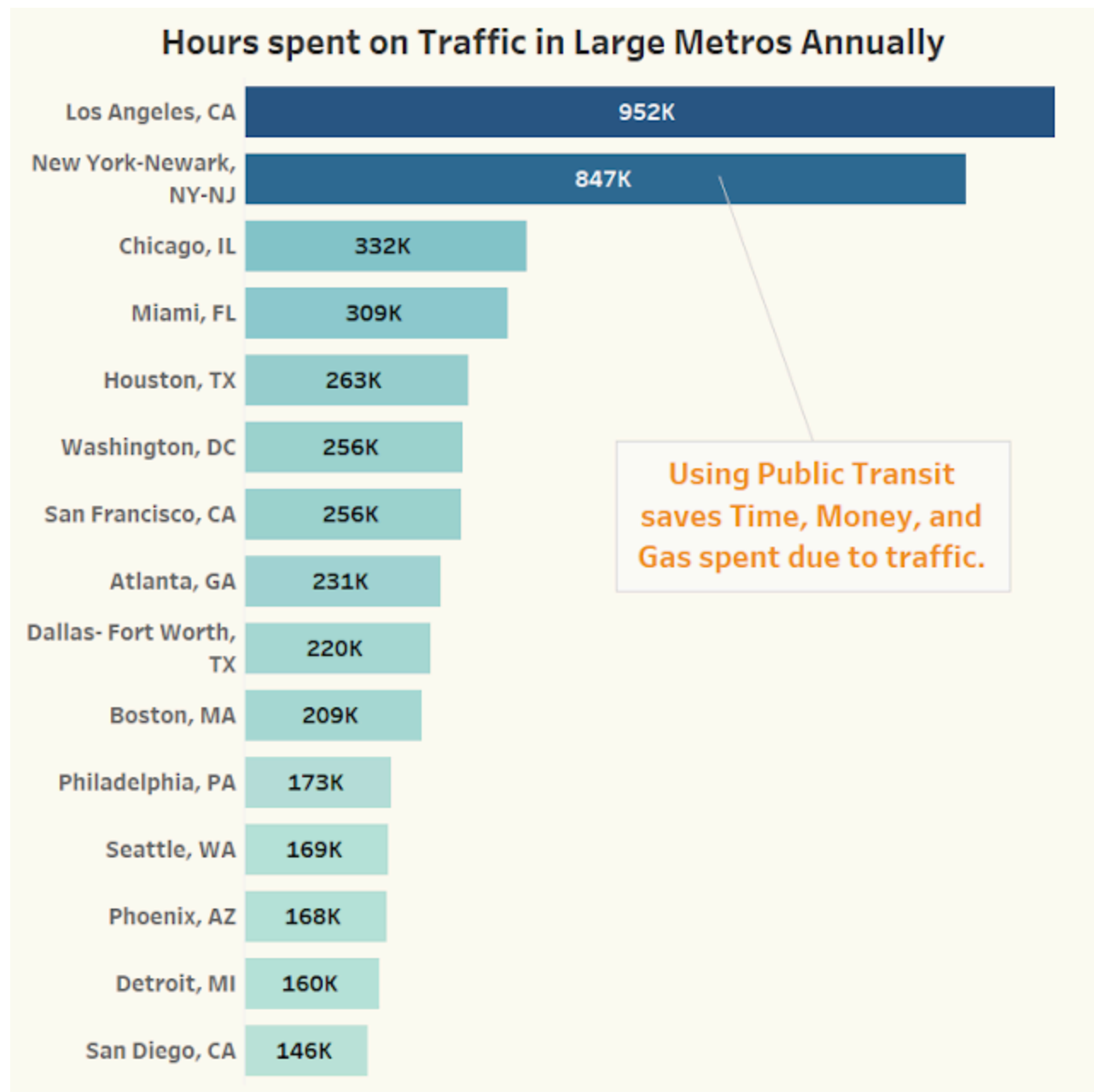
This is also the main reason why the ridership hasn't been improving. **The situation will stay the same unless public transit funding is prioritized and more frequent, faster, and reliable services are introduced.** There is no compelling reason to let go of comfortable car rides for unreliable public transit.

Perks of Using Public Transit

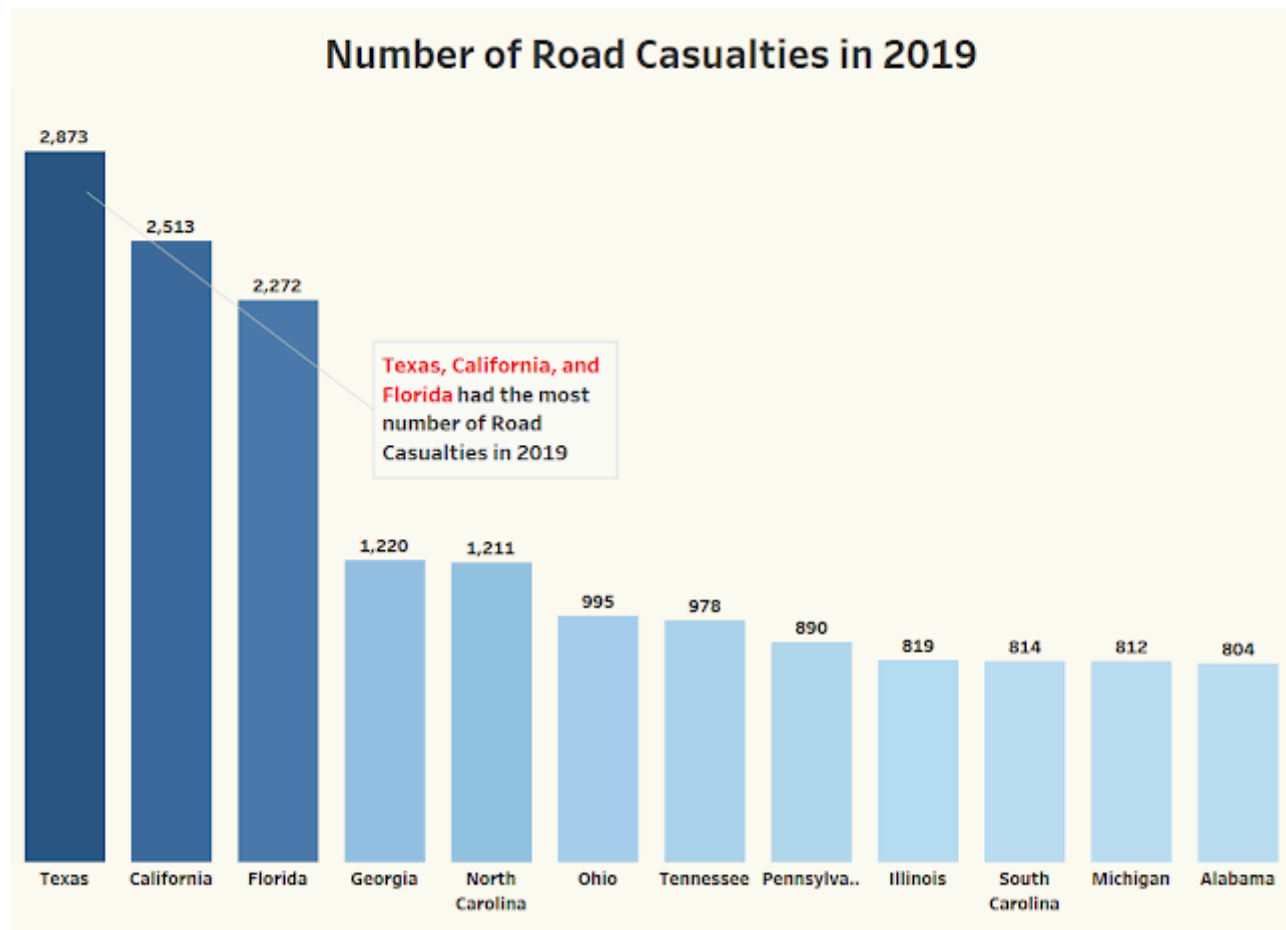


Source: Riders Almanac blog

Though car rides are more convenient than Public Transit, they come with a big price tag. A recent study found that taking **public transport is 20 times cheaper than owning a car annually**. With the rising interest rates, new and used car prices have risen by almost 40% in the last three years. Auto insurance and maintenance costs are also on the rise due to the raging inflation. Also, Auto drivers spend hundreds of hours stuck in traffic.



Safety is another compelling reason for using public transit. Auto accidents are the leading cause of road casualties in the U.S. In 2022, almost 47 thousand people died due to road accidents, most of them involving cars and trucks. The bus and public transit share was less than 1%, making it a much safer alternative.

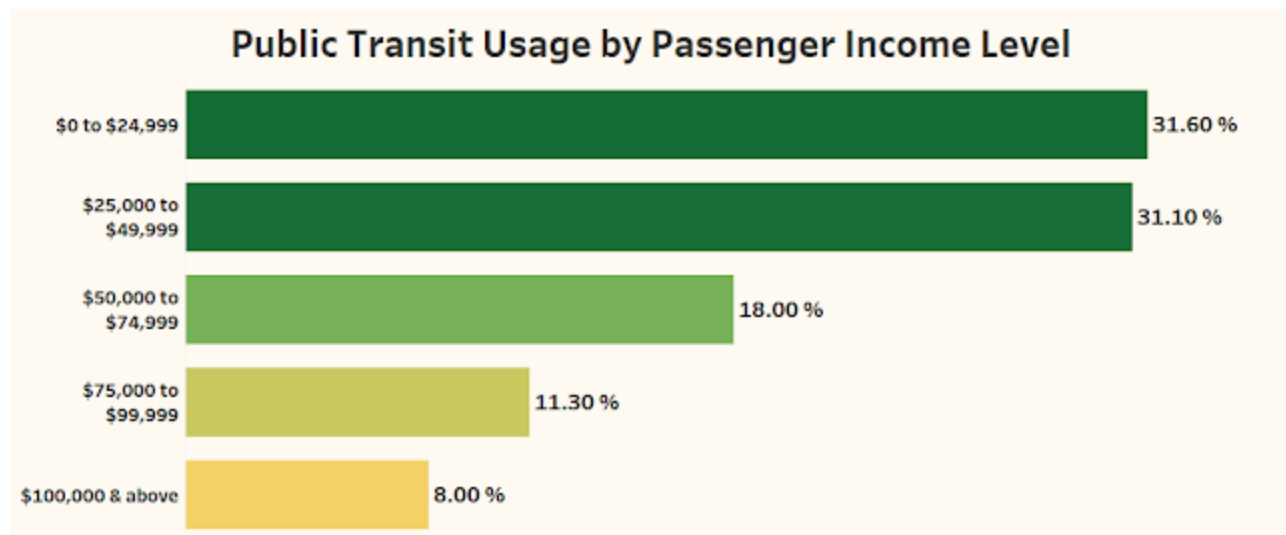


Other perks include relaxing and winding down after a long day while riding the transit instead of stressing out crawling through crowded city traffic behind the wheel.

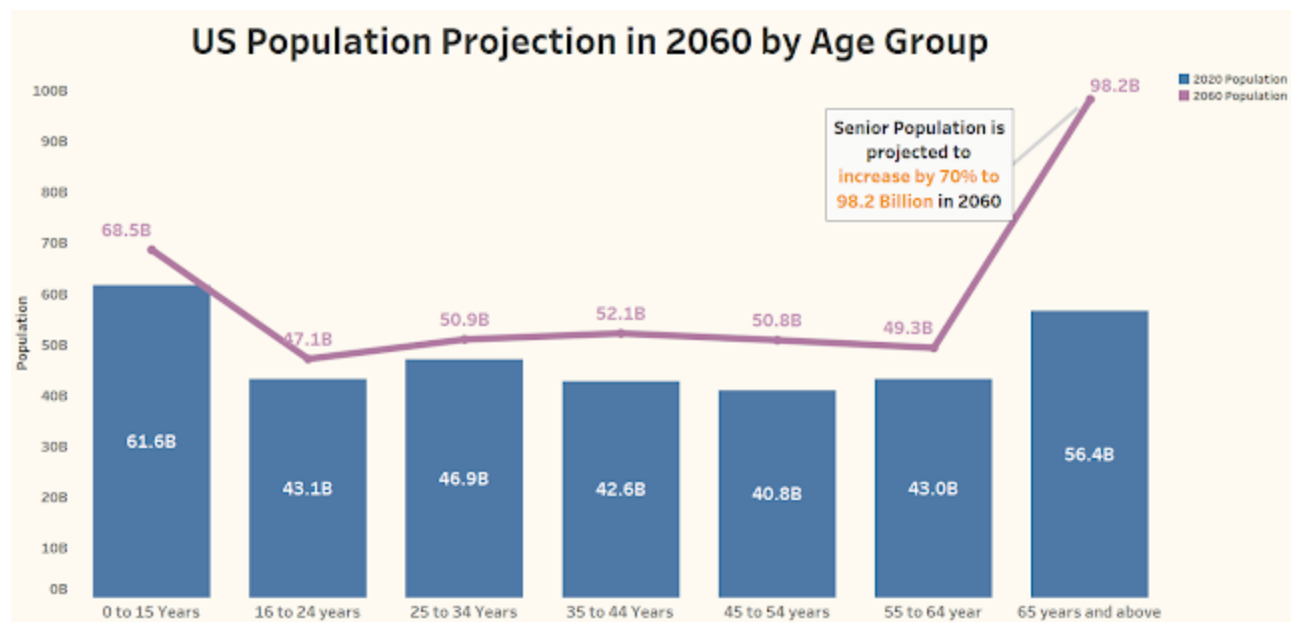
The environmental benefits include reducing air pollution by burning less gas. Also, the employment opportunities can be undermined either.

Why Investment in Public Transit is necessary?

Low-income earners **making 50k or less annually primarily use public transit**. Car ownership and maintenance is a massive burden for many families that live in cities without reliable transit. Investing more in the ever-growing metropolitan cities such as Dallas, Los Angeles, and Austin, which have almost non-existent public transit, can benefit low-income earners.



According to a recent study, seniors aged 65 and above are the most significant age group that uses public transit. It is estimated that the senior population may grow by 70% to 100 million by 2060. Hence, there is a compelling reason to invest more to adapt to the demographics of the future.



A typical passenger vehicle is estimated to emit up to 4 metric tons of carbon dioxide each year. Cutting down on cars and riding public transit can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and be environmentally responsible.



Source: DART service

To summarize, the state and federal governments need to work together in prioritizing Public transit to help build a safer and better future as the cities may realize sooner that they cannot operate efficiently without reliable transit systems. The public should also understand the benefits and give it a chance, **so Public Transit not just survives but also thrives.**

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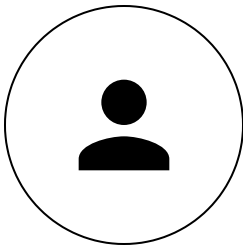
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