

Prioritizing Public Transit

January 28, 2022

I wrote this paper for a class I just finished taking on business ethics. This class had a religious component to it, so do not be surprised by the religious references included within this paper.

This paper was presented to the class on January 24, 2022 and questions asked by my classmates are included at the end.

Question: Should the expansion of public transportation be prioritized?

Thesis: Public transportation has a long history of efficiently bringing people where they need to go, and expanding the transportation network will allow more people to go to various places more easily.

Expanding the nation's public transportation network costs a lot of money. Larry Hogan, the governor of Maryland, sought out ways to cut the costs of the under construction Purple Line light rail in 2015. His plan to save money was "by running trains less often and eliminating one of two planned staging areas for rail cars, for instance. Altogether, Hogan said his administration found ways to reduce the state's share of the cost from close to \$700 million to \$168 million." Even though Hogan has stated that he is not against the idea of public transportation and believes that the Purple Line will provide a benefit to Maryland, his data shows that running less trains will cut down costs and the leftover money can be used for other projects within Maryland.

I believe that public transportation should be expanded throughout the United States. The Church's Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church states that "the demands of the common good are dependent on the social conditions of each historical period and are strictly connected to respect for and the integral promotion of the person and his fundamental rights",

which include the access to transportation. The teaching also asks for every nation to work “towards a true worldwide cooperation for the common good of the whole of humanity and for future generations”.

Public transportation has a long history of efficiently bringing people where they need to go, and expanding the transportation network will allow more people to go to various places more easily. A bill was passed recently which included priorities for Amtrak to consider when creating new routes throughout the country. These new routes are to “link and serve large and small communities as part of a regional rail network”, “advance the economic and social well-being of rural areas of the United States”, bring “anticipated positive economic and employment impacts, including development in the areas near passenger stations, historic districts, or other opportunity zones”, and bring “benefits to rural communities”. Money is not a deciding factor in selecting new routes. This bill shows that the United States is working towards expanding the transportation network to help the country’s economy grow and bring people where they need to go. However, it’s not only nationwide Amtrak service that can be expanded. Here in Massachusetts, public transportation is being extended right now, with the South Coast Rail project being constructed to bring rail service connecting Fall River and New Bedford with Boston and is slated to open in 2023. In addition to building new miles of transit to serve new places, transportation access can be greatly expanded with renovations and relocations of some stations. Station platforms can be made more accessible to those with disabilities and speed up travel times for everyone using the train. Right now on Boston’s commuter rail, “on most trips only the rear / front 2 cars are used on a given trip, apart from peak hours, making embarking and disembarking a long and tedious process”. If platforms and stations were renovated to bring them up to modern standards, this process would be a lot faster, as seen on other rail systems in

the New York City area. Stations that are in more walkable and denser areas also see higher ridership numbers.

Even if transportation projects cost a lot of money, public transportation is a government service, and is not expected to turn a profit. The government currently spends a lot of money in other areas, such as the military and education. Those sectors do not turn a profit nowadays, and transportation should be the same. The amount of profit earned or money spent should not be the deciding factor in which transportation projects move forward, as these projects are guaranteed to provide a benefit to the communities they serve.

Works Cited

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Q & A

Some people might be hesitant to take public transportation with Covid. How might someone go about this?

Transit agencies have done their best to keep passengers as safe as possible during the pandemic. Social distancing, getting the vaccine, and wearing a mask covering both the mouth and nose can help a lot with keeping all riders safe on transit.

How should we go about expanding the amount of public transportation available to the people?

Transit can be expanded by both bringing new service to places that didn't have it (South Coast Rail and Green Line Extension) as well as making more stations fully accessible to everyone (high-level platforms, ramps).

How should society pay for public transportation?

Public transit is already funded with local, state, and federal tax dollars, as well as fare revenue collected by transit agencies. An expanded network would require that funding be appropriated in such a way that enough money is allocated to expansion projects. A rise in taxes to help fund this may be needed as well.

Should public transit look to partner with existing transportation companies like Uber and Lyft?

In some areas, especially those without existing local transit services, a partnership can be helpful. For example, a discount could be given to passengers taking an Uber or Lyft to a

commuter rail station instead of driving on their own. However, if there's already public transit in the area, a partnership is likely not needed.

How will public transport compete with other transportation services like Uber and Lyft who can arrive right at your doorstep and are far more convenient?

In denser areas, such as Worcester or Boston, transit agencies can work to bring local services closer to where riders want to go. In suburban areas, it isn't efficient to run a bus route down every main road. Some agencies have invested in microtransit, a form of transit that has a similar model to Uber and Lyft, where riders can call a phone number or open an app to request a ride to a destination within a certain service zone (see GATRA GO and RIPTA's Flex Zones).

Do you think there's enough public transportation already?

No. There is a demand for transit services that do not exist yet. There is clearly not enough transit to sustain the needs of riders, and agencies are responding appropriately to some of that demand (see Green Line Extension and East-West Rail).

Is it worth it to invest in privately owned transportation such as rideshare apps (Uber, Lyft, etc.), would money be better spent on public transit (buses, trains, bikes, etc.)?

It is a lot better to invest in high-capacity public transit, especially in denser cities, but also out in the suburbs. Buses and trains can carry a lot of people quickly without taking up a lot of space.

What would be the socially optimal amount of public transportation?

A socially optimal amount of public transit would be where all demand is met.

What kinds of transportation would be the most successful once increased?

Trains would be the most successful when expanded. Trains run on their own right of way, separate from other traffic on the road, and can carry many more passengers than a traditional car or bus.