

Increasing Suburban Public Transportation

Growing up half Japanese I spent many summers living in Japan. I was always fascinated by the different ways that we would travel within the country. Going from the airport to my grandma's house we would have to take a bus, a subway, a train, a bullet train, and finally a taxi. Everything was conveniently connected, and it made it so we did not have to rent a car, drive on the opposite side of the road, or sit in traffic. What confused me was why there was nothing like this in my hometown of Plymouth, Minnesota. I have lived here for more than 17 years and I still do not understand why public transportation is not more often utilized in the suburbs. The community comprises a range of citizens, many of whom completely depend on cars to travel anywhere. According to *Public Transit for the Suburbs*, "There is no more convenient way of commuting for most suburban dwellers than the personal car. Walking or bicycling to public transit lines is usually too inconvenient due to distance, exposure to weather, and discomfort" (n.d.). The City of Plymouth should acquire funding and increase spending on public transportation because of its economic benefits, creation of jobs, its environmental friendliness, and its reduction of traffic. The City of Plymouth should undertake this issue because public transportation falls within its domain and there are people who work to fix issues like this in the Plymouth government. In this essay, I will discuss why more accessible public transportation is necessary for Plymouth, MN to undertake. First, I will introduce a counter-argument then the issue, then I will go over the economic benefits, job creation, environmental concerns, relationship to traffic, and finally, I will go over another counter-argument and propose a solution.

Indeed, my argument that increasing transportation will bring many benefits seems to ignore suburbanites' willingness to use said transportation. The issue may be that the city is

unable to expand public transportation because there is a lack of use by its residents. Suburban dwellers may argue that public transportation is less reliable, less convenient, and can be less safe compared to cars (Gonzalez, 2019). Just to use public transportation they would already have to drive to a park and ride anyways. While these arguments are valid, they are also circumstantial to the development of local public transportation. Take for example Japan's public transportation system. It is incredibly reliable, convenient, clean, and safe but also heavily developed (Arba, 2022). The more we develop our own public transportation the closer we can get to getting rid of the issues that prevent many from using it.

The first reason why improved public transportation is necessary for the city is that there is a lack of transportation throughout Plymouth. There is currently a transit system in place called Plymouth Metrolink that is operated by the city, although the system is not set up well for usability (Plymouth Metrolink, n.d.). There are six routes available; half go to and from downtown Minneapolis and the other half go to and from the University of Minnesota. The primary issue with this transit system is that the bus stops in Plymouth are largely inaccessible to those that would use them. Many of the stops are inconvenient to park at, lack protection from the environment and are not accessible by wheelchair. Although there are Park & Rides available, this defeats the point of public transportation because this requires the rider to have their own vehicle. A subpopulation in Plymouth wishes to be more environmentally conscious or is struggling to get around in their cars. They would benefit from better public transportation. There is also the issue of pollution. A system that relies on everyone owning and driving their own vehicle to and from work or school is incredibly damaging to the environment, especially in a large city like Plymouth with over 80,000 people. Something must change.

Why You Should Get on Board for Public Transportation

Whether you ride or not, public transportation is valuable to your community. Join us for Get on Board Day on April 25, 2019, to show your support for public transportation.

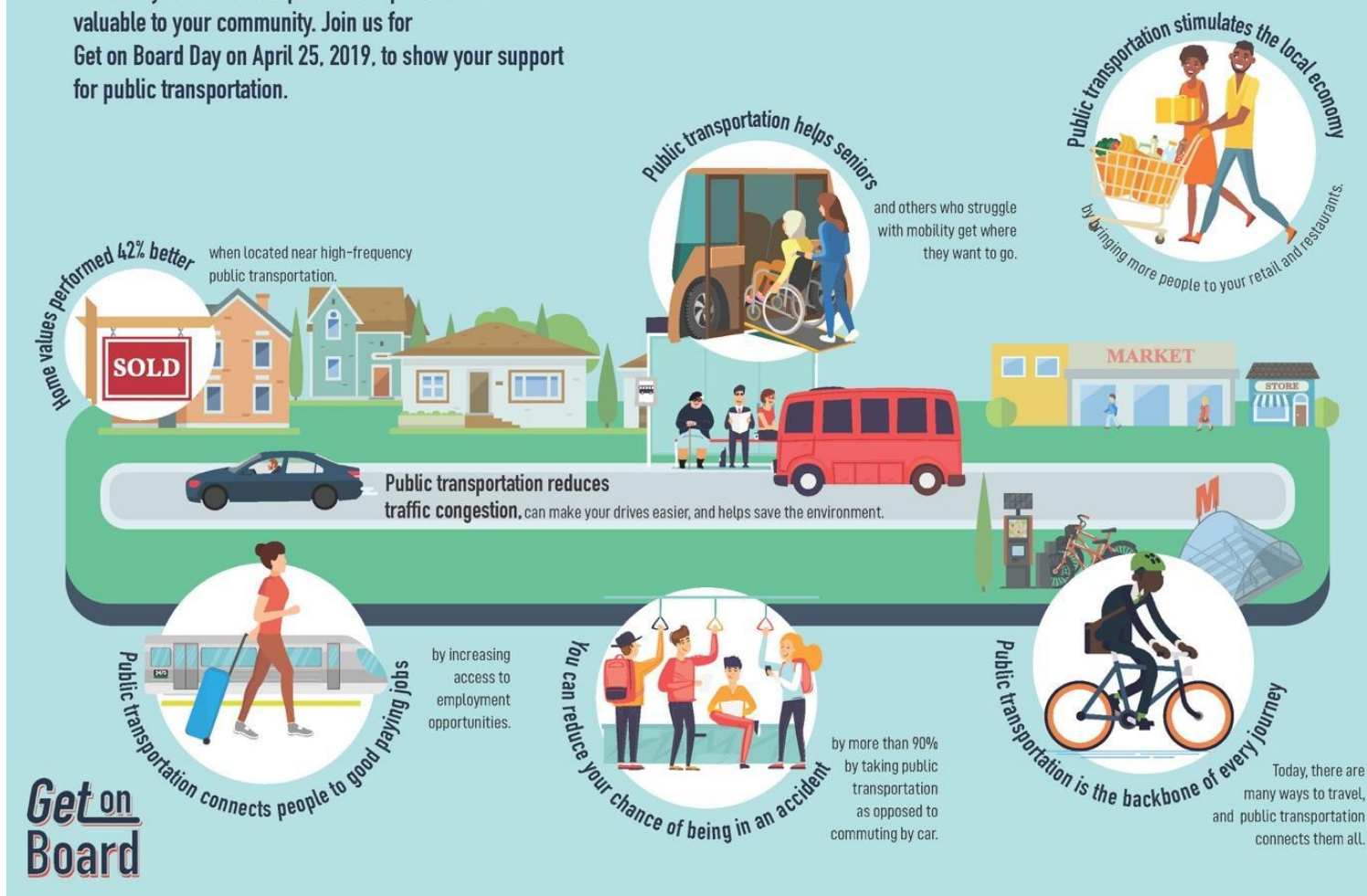


Figure 1 outlines some of the benefits of public transportation that will be discussed in this paper. Public transportation is economically beneficial to communities. According to the American Public Transport Association, “For every \$1 communities invest in public transportation, approximately \$4 is generated in economic returns” (Osman, 2019). This means that the more money that is put into public transportation, the more money comes back to the community. This could be because public transport brings in more business to small businesses.

When people have to walk a little more, they walk by businesses and buy more things. This can be a great thing for circulation within communities and the health of individuals.

For similar reasons that there are economic benefits, there is also job creation linked to increased public transportation. When more public transportation is available a wider variety of people can commute to work and with more people available to work more jobs can be filled. There would also be more job positions created such as drivers, maintenance, and engineers. Although some jobs may be created with more roads, Chris Plano says “By simply shifting our spending away from roads and highways and into public transit, we can create 20 percent more jobs without spending a single additional dollar” (2015). There would also be job availability to those that live in the city but want or need jobs that are located in the suburbs. Most job openings are located within the suburbs. According to Jean Anyon, there is a mismatch of jobs, and “most workers with low to moderate education levels like in central cities and low-income inner-ring urban suburbs, and most jobs which they qualify are located in outlying suburbs” (2014, pp. 92-93).

The more people use public transportation the more environmentally friendly it is. Having greater access to public transportation allows citizens to utilize it more. The more it is utilized the more environmentally conscious the whole city becomes. Burning fossil fuels, like the gasoline in cars, leads to the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. These gases in the atmosphere cause the earth to warm up, this is known as climate change. We are seeing the results of this today. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, “Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation account for about 27 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, making it the largest contributor of U.S. GHG emissions. Between 1990 and 2020, GHG emissions in the transportation sector increased more in absolute terms than any other

sector” (*Carbon Pollution From Transportation*, 2022). Within the label of transportation light-duty vehicles, like the average car, make up 57 percent (Fast Facts on Transportation Greenhouse Gas Emissions, 2022).

Another benefit of public transportation is that it reduces congestion and traffic on the roads. According to Mark Buchanan (2019), “public transport is among the most direct ways to reduce congestion if done in the right way. The key is making sure that the layout of a public transport system makes access to mass transit easy for a high fraction of people in any city.” Although congestion is not necessarily felt in suburbs, many commuters from the suburbs experience traffic jams daily while commuting. Traffic is reduced because there are fewer vehicles on the road even though there is the same number of passengers. A popular study that is cited when researching the reduction of traffic due to public transportation is the study of the 2003 Los Angeles public transit system strike. An increase in traffic was contributed to the lack of public transit system workers because they were on strike (Lo & Hall, 2006). This shows that public transportation makes a difference in congestion. Traffic can be solved by increasing public transportation.

Increased public transportation is the best solution for Plymouth because there is a lack of public transportation. This can be seen in how people travel and how they are inconvenienced when they wish to take the available public transport. Currently, almost everyone travels by car. There is no other option unless the desired bus route happens to be within walking distance. Even with the buses, citizens are most likely to use the Park & Rides. This increased public transportation could be more buses, light rails, and walkways/ sidewalks. The combination of these amenities would make it much easier to move throughout the city. The solution can be based on a working system like Japan’s public transport system. According to Hideo Tokuyama,

because of Japan's intelligent transportation system, "...it is expected that there will be an expansion of economic frontiers, balanced national land development, and the creation of a standard of living for the people such that they can realize a truly comfortable and affluent lifestyle" (1996). Then there is the matter of paying for the upgrades. According to Todd Litman (2014) "Although federal and state/provincial funds often help finance transit improvements, additional local funding is generally needed" (p.43) Litman then goes on to discuss ways to acquire this funding. This literature should be reviewed by the local government to decide on how to fully fund this project.

I argue that increasing transportation will increase economic benefits, increase jobs, better the environment, and help fight against climate change. Yet some readers may challenge this view and argue that increasing public transportation will also increase crime which will outweigh all benefits. Many people who live in cities that rely more on public transportation will likely conclude that increasing public transportation will also increase crime rates. This interaction can be seen in Andrew Newton's *Crime on Public Transport*. Newton states:

...the dynamic nature of the public transport system creates unique environments, through which specific modes of transport traverse, transporting potential targets and victims, on a system that passes through areas with different levels of crime risk, and therefore continuously receives different inputs and outputs over time. This creates a unique, potentially specialized, and certainly concentrated arena within which crime and disorder may occur (2014, p. 710).

Although I grant that crime may increase, couldn't it be possible to create public transportation that is resistant to crime? Newtons also states:

The design, environment, and management of stations and stops can influence crime rates, and there is a growing evidence based on how improvements to the design of public transport infrastructure can reduce crime levels (Clarke, 1996; La Vigne, 1997; Smith, 2008; Ceccato et al, 2011) including better lighting and illumination and removing dark corners and hiding places (2014, p. 717).

Being more conscious of how transportation is built and what spaces are available to travelers can make a difference in the possibility of crime. Making sure to research these details before bringing in transportation may help decrease the predicted crime increase.

In conclusion, Plymouth, Minnesota is currently suffering from a lack of transportation. This causes an inconvenience to the population and requires almost everyone to own a vehicle to transport themselves. This is costly to the citizens and the environment. Citizens must purchase their own vehicle to work or go to school, constantly buy expensive gas, and waste their time sitting in traffic. The city of Plymouth should invest in more public transportation because of the economic benefits, it creates jobs and makes it easier to get to jobs, it's better for the environment and would help fight climate change, and it reduces congestion and traffic. The solution to this is quite simple. Acquire funding either from the federal or state government and/or other funding then build more public transportation infrastructure. This issue has a simple solution that should be enacted as soon as possible by the City of Plymouth.

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