

# TCRP Report 231: Recent Decline in Public Transportation Ridership: Analysis, Causes and Responses

To understand the **factors** contributing to the **recent decline** in transit ridership in the United States and **quantify the relative contribution** of each.

To identify **strategies** to mitigate or reverse those declines and to **evaluate the effectiveness** of those strategies.

# Key Lessons Learned

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## **Rethink Mission, Service Standards, Metrics and Service Delivery**

- Service = ridership
- Rethink metrics to reflect twin missions of good transit.
- Respectfully serve those who rely on transit on a day-to-day basis.
- Efficiently provide mobility in urban areas.

## **Use Fare Discounts / Rethink Fare Policy**

- Strategic fare discounts can increase transit ridership.
- Rethink fares as travel patterns change.

# Key Lessons Learned

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## **Give Transit Priority**

- True in rail (priority over freight) and in access transit services
- Reliability of service is key to ridership
- Speed of service enable competition among other modes
- Station design allows for faster, easier access

## **Careful Partnerships with New Mobility Providers**

- Ride-hail reduced ridership substantially

## **Encourage Transit-Oriented Density**

- Density and development supportive of transit can keep transit competitive

# **UC ITS - Future of Public Transit**

Issue Brief authored by Brian Taylor, Kari Watkins, and Laura Podolsky for the Institute of Transportation Studies

# Research Insights

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## **Public Transit Ridership was in Decline Pre-pandemic**

- Increased incomes and decreased costs of automobile use reduced transit use
- Cities have become less self-contained with fewer workers living where they work

## **Ridership Recovery has been Uneven**

- Commuter rail has been hit the hardest due to losses from telework
- Need to rethink roles to attract new types of riders and trips
- Pivot toward attracting new residents, customers, and tourists to urban centers

# Research Insights

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## **Fiscal Outlook is Mixed**

- Highest pre-pandemic farebox recovery agencies are hardest hit
- New financial streams are needed, including land value capture

## **State and Local Policies can Influence Ridership**

- Need to develop more higher-density, walkable, transit-friendly places
- Need to manage private vehicle travel through pricing



# THANK YOU!

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Many thanks to research partners too numerous to mention!