



Memorandum

To: Todd Muck, Deputy Executive Director
From: Christina Watson, Principal Transportation Planner
Meeting Date: August 28, 2019
Subject: 2019 APTA Rail Conference

On June 23-26, 2019, I attended the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Rail Conference in Toronto, Canada. This was an excellent networking opportunity with rail professionals around the country. The program of the conference is available here: <https://www.apta.com/conferences-events/rail-conference/>. Highlights of some of the sessions I attended:

Prioritizing Rail in the Region

- Travel demand modeling focus on cost/benefit to the user omits the cost/benefit to society:
 - User impacts: transit fares, road tolls, gas tax, travel time, auto costs.
 - Societal impacts (“externalities”): greenhouse gas emissions, auto congestion, road safety.
- Phoenix light rail celebrating 10th anniversary (<http://valleymetro.life/>):
 - Four goals: connecting communities, enhancing customer experience, driving the economy, and fostering community health.
 - Performance measures show job creation, access to education, safety improvements, and affordability. They found that affordable housing improves health and leads to community prosperity and upward mobility.

Priorities and Perspectives from U.S. Federal Partners

- Federal Transit Administration (FTA):
 - A new focus on safety oversight is shifting the way FTA operates – as of March, they have certified 31 state safety commissions, have safety plans in development with grantees nationwide, and have allocated \$3 billion in State of Good Repair funds since 2017.
 - FTA has approved 8 projects for the expedited project delivery pilot program for public-private partnerships with a 25% federal match, including the BART to San Jose project.
- Federal Railroad Administration (FRA):
 - Their continuing safety focus has two railroads with fully implemented Positive Train Control (PTC) and 16 more in testing mode (implementation deadline of 12/31/20). To date, the industry has spent \$40 billion on PTC implementation, and now the operating/maintenance costs are coming to light. Peskiest issue is “interoperability” – ensuring different trains can use the same wayside technology.
 - Statistics show it is now 18 times safer to take the train as compared to driving.
 - Funding is available for grade crossing improvements via the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program.

Transit Agency Interactions with People Who Are Homeless

- Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) has a “quality of life initiative” to address the interrelated issues of homelessness, fare evasion, cleanliness, and safety on the trains, at stations and in yards or other excess properties. They have faced many safety challenges such as encampments and fires on their

properties; they're coordinating with local jurisdictions to provide sites for tiny houses and other services for persons experiencing homelessness. BART partnered with the community group Urban Alchemy to hire previously homeless persons to staff elevators and help cut down on complaints regarding safety, hazardous/biological waste, and vandalism in elevators.

- Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) arranged for Project HOME to set up a homeless outreach center on SEPTA property.
- Dallas Area Rail Transit (DART) increased their police presence on trains and promoted the "say something" smartphone application.

Connecting TOD and Stations with Expanded Mobility Options

- Train stations can be more than just transit access – they can be community centers with art, music, food, shopping, reflecting the area's culture, society and history.
- Station planners should work with the area's departments of health and aging advocates to evaluate the accessibility of the stations from a mobility standpoint as well as to assess the audiovisual wayfinding and announcements.
- Key quote: "Transit is the O.G. shared mobility."

High Performance Intercity Passenger Rail

- Wales enacted the "Well-Being of Future Generations Act" in 2015 which, among other initiatives, invests in electrifying the Country's entire rail network.
- Amtrak is spending \$1.5 billion on capital investments including new equipment (mostly for the Northeast Corridor) that will have a max speed of 160 miles per hour, although by and large the infrastructure does not support that speed. Amtrak is evaluating cutting long-distance corridors in favor of the shorter services connecting major metro areas.
- The Cascadia High Speed Rail project would connect Seattle, Portland and Vancouver BC for an estimated \$108 billion.
- When implementing a new service, rail equipment can be the longest lead item. Life cycle costs can be the most expensive element (e.g., landscaping should be drought-tolerant).

As always, this conference focused on rail projects provided inspiration and illumination from other rail planners internationally. One such inspirational quote:

"The true measure of success is to plant trees under whose shade you'll never stand."