

[Sample Op/Ed on the importance of transit to environmental concerns]

Public Transportation: An Environmental Bargain

According to a recent study, drivers in a third of cities surveyed spent 40 hours a year in traffic that wasn't moving at all. Just as important as what they weren't doing was what their cars were: idling, and, in the process, pumping pollutants into the atmosphere that cause smog and contribute to global warming.

That's just one example of how congested roads harm the environment -- and how increased investment in public transportation can help it.

Transportation sources are responsible for nearly one-third of emissions of carbon dioxide, the gas that causes global warming. At least 70 percent of carbon monoxide emissions -- and upwards of 40 percent of ozone emissions -- come from transportation as well.

Because public transit is vastly more efficient than personal automobiles, it can cut down considerably on all those pollutants. Each year, it prevents the emission of more than 126 million pounds of hydrocarbons, which cause smog, and 156 million pounds of nitrogen oxides, which cause respiratory illness. One person can save 9.1 pounds of hydrocarbon, 62.5 pounds of carbon monoxide and 4.9 pounds of nitrogen oxides by using mass transit for a year rather than driving to work.

[Insert local data and anecdotes as appropriate.]

Consumers conserve gasoline by using public transportation as well -- 1.5 billion gallons of it a year -- and that means they save money too. A typical family living in an area with a wide variety of public transportation options saves \$250 a month in automobile expenses.

The environmental impact of existing levels of transportation and traffic -- and, therefore, the environmental benefits of public transit -- are just the beginning. Without more investment in public transportation, vast swaths of natural lands and green spaces will have to be paved over to meet the needs of a fast-growing and increasingly mobile population. Public transportation, by contrast, helps to conserve natural beauty and open space, making communities more livable and ecosystems more viable.

[Insert info on local livability issues.]

A cleaner environment is a compelling justification for investing in public transit, but it is hardly the only one. Public transit is a critical component of any viable economic development strategy. It creates jobs directly -- some 30,000 nationwide -- and thousands more through economic benefits that ripple out across the community. It helps get people to work and customers to businesses, all while minimizing the loss of potentially

productive time to traffic delays. And public transportation helps to attract the best people and businesses by enhancing quality of life.

If those sound like the makings of a great bargain, they are: Government spends \$15.4 billion on public transit a year, but public transportation creates more than \$60 billion in economic benefits. It boosts state and local tax revenues by at least 4 and as much as 16 percent. Every dollar we invest in running public transportation systems boosts business sales by another three. A \$10 million investment in building public transportation systems creates more than 300 jobs, and the same amount spent on running them creates nearly 600 more.

[Insert local data and anecdotes as appropriate.]

Everyone in *[community]* stands to benefit from increased investment in public transportation, but several of our neighbors depend on it especially. Many elderly people or people with disabilities have no other way to get around. Nationwide, 94 percent of welfare recipients have no other way to get to work -- and, therefore, no other way to get off welfare.

Those are all good reasons for policymakers to expand public transportation options in *[community]*. *[Insert local needs.]*

To be sure, government has to make difficult choices about where to spend its money. But few priorities could be more important than a healthy environment. And none are a better bargain -- for the environment, the economy and *[community]*'s quality of life -- than public transportation.