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## **Research Examines the Effects of Transit Service Restructuring in Tallahassee FL**

*Mineta Transportation Institute's report could help transit agencies, others with similar plans*

**San Jose, Calif., May 7, 2013** – After StarMetro, the public transit agency in Tallahassee FL, restructured its bus network from a radial system to a grid system, some challenges remained. Researchers at the [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) (MTI) just completed an analysis of the issues and preliminary outcomes surrounding that change. The report could be useful for transit agencies or others contemplating a similar move. [\*Analyzing the Effects of Transit Network Change in a Decentralized, Small-to-Mid-Sized U.S. Metropolitan Area on Agency Performance and Riders: A Case Study of Tallahassee, Florida\*](#) is available for free download from <http://transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1102.html>. Principal investigator Jeffrey Brown, PhD, is available for interviews. MTI was established by Congress and is affiliated with San Jose (CA) State University.

This research seeks to understand: 1) the effects of the service restructuring on the transit agency and its performance, 2) the effects of the service restructuring on transit riders and the larger community, and 3) the roles, influence, and attitudes of important local stakeholders who engaged in the restructuring debate and shaped the restructuring itself.

“StarMetro changed its bus network in July 2011 from a radial to a grid system because local officials and agency leaders believed would better serve the dispersed local pattern of population and employment,” said Dr. Brown. “This major service change occurred literally overnight, but it followed several years of public discussion and debate about the future of public transit in the community. The change has been embraced by some people and opposed by others, which is expected given the dramatic and unprecedented system adjustments.”

Although the changes are still new, noted Dr. Brown, the research report's short-term, or preliminary, results still offer important lessons to transit agencies, local officials, and transportation researchers regarding the consequences of major transit service changes for agencies and the community.

For example, overall ridership and productivity are lower than before the restructuring due to the short timeframe for rider adjustments and longer-than-anticipated headway. However, new ridership has appeared in previously un-served or under-served corridors and neighborhoods. The restructuring also resulted in longer walks to bus stops because stops were removed from many neighborhoods and relocated to major roads. Overall transit travel times are shorter due to more direct routing. No particular neighborhoods or community groups disproportionately benefited from or were harmed by the change.

### **The report offers takeaways and lessons**

A key takeaway from the study is that restructuring from a radial to a decentralized transit system can increase accessibility, if done right, but such a change requires careful attention to community concerns about route changes, stop locations, headways, access, and safety.

In addition, a longer time horizon is needed to see the results of a major service restructuring such as this. The net result is a modest decline in ridership and in productivity to date. Nevertheless, most local observers feel that the changes represent a clear step forward for transit's future in the community.

Dr. Brown said, "More research is clearly needed to explore the results over the long term and to determine what kinds of service levels – especially headways – are necessary and fiscally sustainable to make decentralized systems effective in such urban environments. The accessibility investigations presented here touched on issues of equity, which are also areas worthy of additional investigation."

The research team also included Florida State University doctoral candidates Tuna Batuhan, Torsha Bhattacharya, and Michal Jaroszynski.

**ABOUT THE MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE (MTI):**

MTI conducts research, education, and information transfer programs focusing on surface transportation policy and management issues, especially related to transit. MTI was established by Congress in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act and won national re-designation competitions in 2002, 2006 and 2011. The Institute is funded by Congress through the US DOT Research and Innovative Technology Administration, by the California Legislature through Caltrans, and public and private grants. In 2006 the US Department of Homeland Security selected MTI as a National Transportation Security Center of Excellence. The internationally respected members of the MTI Board of Trustees represent all major surface transportation modes. Visit [transweb.sjsu.edu](http://transweb.sjsu.edu)

**ABOUT THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

Jeffrey Brown, PhD, is associate professor of urban and regional planning at Florida State University. He received his doctorate at the University of California, Los Angeles. His research examines the role of public transportation in decentralized environments, the relationship between finance and transportation planning, and the history of transportation planning.

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