



Detroit Regional Transit Study: A Study of Factors that Enable and Inhibit Effective Regional Transit



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An interdisciplinary team of six faculty members and six students at the University of Detroit Mercy (UDM)

If leaders work well together as ‘pragmatic caucuses,’ the resulting transit systems will fulfill the promise of efficient, reliable service to riders, and improved vitality and livability of our region to the benefit of all citizens of Metro Detroit.

conducted a comprehensive study of the factors enabling or inhibiting development of effective regional transit. Focusing on Metro Detroit and four peer regions—Atlanta, Cleveland, Denver, and St. Louis—investigators examined six key variables in transit success. The team employed a nontraditional research methodology driven not by numbers but by the narrative of firsthand experience, conducting in-depth interviews with more than 60 leaders in transit advocacy, development, and operation, from five regions across the country. The wisdom derived from their experience formed the foundation of this research.

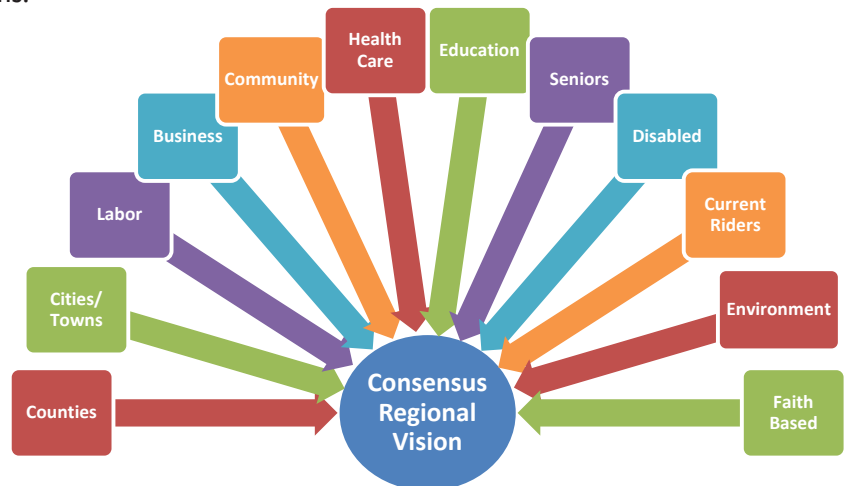
Study Methods

The team divided the project into six different variables and their influence on transit development and operation. These included leadership and politics, governance and law, finance, transit-oriented development (TOD), equity and access, and media and public opinion. The overview document provides an introduction to the project and summarizes the six reports and their key recommendations.

Findings

By choosing to investigate transit in four different peer regions—Atlanta, Cleveland, Denver, and St. Louis—the researchers were able to distill a wide variety of observations and experiences into insights that apply to the current situation in Metro Detroit. The

lessons, however, are not exclusive to the Detroit region. They are presented as case studies so that future researchers and planners can hone in on the findings and focal areas that apply to their region.



Policy Recommendations

Based on this study, the authors offer the following recommendations (among others):

- Transit advocates and leaders must raise the volume and bandwidth of communication and action for regional thinking in Southeast Detroit.
- They must organize a broad coalition that effectively advocates for transit planning, support, ridership and transit-oriented development in the Metro Detroit region.
- Most of the funds needed for an advocacy campaign to generate local support for the Regional Transit Authority's plans should be provided by local businesses that stand to benefit.
- Academic leaders should mobilize students from across Metro Detroit to staff transit education and advocacy efforts.
- Regional leaders, stakeholders, and advocates of transit must understand public opinion of their regions, not as a single voice but as a collection of opinions by affinity groups with values and objectives correlated to their locales, ethnicities, political parties, ages, pastimes, etc.
- Leaders should not allow the ideal of perfection to become an obstacle to progress. No transit plan will be perfect for any single stakeholder segment or individual, but any progress toward improving transit in Metro Detroit should be seen as a "win" for everyone involved.

About the Authors

Leo Hanifin is a Professor of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Detroit Mercy. Other co-investigators include Scott Anderson (consultant); Claudia Bernasconi, Assistant Professor of Architecture; Utpal Dutta, Professor of Civil Engineering; Alan Hoback, Professor and Chair of Civil Engineering; and Lloyd Semple, Dean, School of Law.

To Learn More

The findings of this study have resulted in four previously released reports in addition to this final report. The four reports offer nearly 700 pages of stories, discussion and analysis and are posted on the UDM Transportation Research Center website at (<http://eng-sci.udmercy.edu/opportunities/research/udmtc/reports/index.htm>). This final report, which includes an overview and six separate topical reports, is available on the MNTRC website at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1136.html