

City Best Practices to Improve Transit Operations and Safety

Project 1951

April 2021

Michelle DeRobertis, PhD
Christopher E. Ferrell, PhD
Richard W. Lee, PhD
David Moore



The purpose of this research was to identify the key policies and practices that influence, help or hinder surface public transit that are outside the purview of the transit agency but within the purview of cities and other local or state governments. This influence comes largely through the ownership and control over the streets, intersections and sidewalks used by transit vehicles and transit passengers. In addition, cities (and counties for unincorporated areas) have land use control authority and routinely enact developer conditions of approval and mandate mitigation measures which profoundly affect transit service to development sites and/or pedestrian access to transit stops and stations that serve the project sites.

Study Methods

The research methodology consisted of four main steps. First, a comprehensive review of professional and academic literature was conducted to identify the range of policies and practices that affect transit operations and

passenger access. The next step was to interview transit agency staff to learn, from the transit providers' point of view, those practices and decisions that help (or hinder) the provision of transit service. Five experts were then consulted to comment on and embellish these policies and practices. The final step was to discuss the list of policies and practices with five California cities; their input was used to refine and edit the list of policies and practices and to determine the institutional mechanisms used to implement them.

Findings

This research identified numerous city policies and practices that have a direct or indirect effect on the quality, safety, and convenience of transit services.

The city policies and practices that affect transit operations transit passenger safety and comfort, ridership and even funding fall into the following five categories:

- Infrastructure for buses, including bus lanes, signal treatments, curbside access.
- Infrastructure for pedestrians walking and bicycling to, and waiting at, transit stops and stations.
- Internal city transportation planning policies and practices.
- Land development review policies.
- Regional and intercity cooperation.

In addition to the city practices and policies themselves, how they are institutionalized is an important city practice.

Policy/Practice Recommendations

- Consider and treat the local and regional transit providers as if they were a city department and a full partner in the city's transportation network. For example traffic impact studies, development impact fees and developer conditions of approval should also address impacts on transit and transit needs; all too often cities only consider the infrastructure over which they have jurisdiction, such as roads and traffic signals.

A truly transit-friendly city considers transit a partner, not an impediment, in the urban transportation network and the use of city street right of way.

- Include the transit provider in interdepartmental communications regarding roadway and land development projects; invite transit agency staff to meetings where decisions are made.
- City guidelines and planning should align with transit agency guidelines and plans. These include engineering issues such as bus stop design and where to provide bus-only lanes as well as long-range planning issues such as coordinating land use zoning and densities with existing and planned rail and BRT stations and corridors.
- Institutionalize city policies and practices that affect transit. It is important to define and articulate city policies and practices via ordinances or written

guidelines, so that all affected staff as well as citizens know the policy exists and how to execute it. This will also ensure that policies and practices survive personnel turnover and leadership changes.



About the Authors

Michelle DeRobertis, Christopher Ferrell, and Richard W. Lee are Principals with Transportation Choices for Sustainable Communities. All have over 25 years' experience in sustainable transportation planning. Michelle DeRobertis, the Principal Investigator, was the lead author of the report titled **Transit and Traffic Impact Studies State of the Practice: An Informational Report of the Institute of Transportation Engineers**, 2019.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/1951



MTI is a University Transportation Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology and by Caltrans. The Institute is located within San José State University's Lucas Graduate School of Business.