Why Better Bus Service May Mean Fewer Trips

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There's no denying that, on average, bus ridership in the U.S. has declined recently. Myriad factors are at work, ranging from increased telework, growth in Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft, and strained public budgets leading to the dreaded *transit death spiral*: an undending chasm of service cuts and fare hikes.

One element impacting ridership that's received scant attention are trends in the transit industry towards bus network redesign. Many bus-focused transit systems are restructuring their bus routes to offer more one-seat rides to passengers. This reduces the need to transfer between lines, saving time and making transit a more attractive option. This is often a primary goal of new bus rapid transit (BRT) projects.

These improvements may have the net effect of actually reducing the number of trips counted by the system, at least on paper. Here's why.

Public transit trips are documented as *unlinked trips*, or one person taking one ride on one transit vehicle. So, if a rider needs to transfer between two routes to reach their destination, that's two trips, but still only one person. The same method counts a round-trip journey as (at least) two separate trips.

Thus, if a community works to make its bus service an easier experience for riders via more direct routes, the need for fewer transfers or funneling multiple lines through dedicated lanes, **_less trips could happen at the same time as more people are riding_**.

Transit data always requires context, as numbers never tell the full story on their own. What matters are outcomes: are people getting where they need to go? Learn more about evaluating mobility outcomes:

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