



Logical Fallacies That Plague Transit Decision-Making

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“We hold these truths to be self-evident...” are the defining words of the first sentence of the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, which goes on to list a trio of foundational principles: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Americans hold these rights as the bedrock of our society, and are values that community and public transportation providers strive to make possible in their communities through reliable and accessible mobility options.

But unlike these aspirational ideas articulated so eloquently at our nation’s founding, there are assertions made when discussing transit policy and decision-making that don’t meet those same self-evidential standards. And yet, a simple utterance of one or more of these claims can often halt innovation, change or improvements in their tracks, or promote less-than-optimal choices on new projects.

To be clear, these arguments don’t inherently stem from those of bad faith and are just as likely to be made by those who are sincere in their desire to do what’s right for their community or customers. Nonetheless, in the spirit of it’s harder to speak truth to your friends than your opponents, clear refutation of these refrains is essential to make best use of limited investment opportunities and achieve better outcomes for more people.

Answering these claims is often challenging, as those arguing these positions believe they’re so unassailable they don’t need a rationale or warrant to support them. And while a response that assembles the relevant facts and data to address the assertion seems the most obvious path, often what’s needed is a change in mindset. That comes from awareness of, and experience with, new ways of doing things and a realization that transformational improvement requires decisions that don’t follow the path of least resistance.

- 1) We’ve always done it this way
- 2) The specific concerns of the few outweigh the general benefits for the many
- 3) We’re not opposed to this idea in theory, just how it impacts us (NIMBY)
- 4) Because this result is true in this situation, it is true in all situations
- 5) Our community/region/operation is so unique, we have no choice but to make the worst possible decision
- 6) We’ve already invested in X, so we can’t do Y (sunk costs)
- 7) We cannot ever inconvenience single occupant drivers
- 8) Tangential economic benefits outweigh the direct usage of a service (development > ridership)
- 9) Unless it’s perfect, we shouldn’t do it
- 10) Let’s just get it started and we’ll make it better later
- 11) If you build it, they will come
- 12) Public transportation operations should be profitable



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