



## Realizing Transit's Fully-Allocated Benefits

Innovation and technology offer tremendous opportunities for community and public transportation providers to address the priorities of their communities and customers. Like a manager at any business, transit leaders must make informed decisions on tradeoffs between operational efficiency and expanded services.

Even when armed with new technology and innovative strategies, there are seldom win-win scenarios where mobility providers can reduce their costs while delivering a better product at the same time. In an era of constrained investment, these organizations can utilize innovative practices and emerging technology to provide more options using the same resources, or they can provide the same options when fewer resources are available. They cannot do both.

Rural and specialized transportation agencies have long been pitched the concept of coordination, which is often just a misguided mandate that mobility providers finely thread the needle of doing more with less. Mindful of our industry's responsibility to be good stewards of public investment, its mission is to meet the mobility needs of a given region by operating responsive, effective and efficient service. Innovation and technology are important tools leaders in any profession use to achieve these objectives. But technology and innovation are not goals in of themselves. Delivering improved mobility requires commitment from communities and their elected officials.

For transit professionals and advocates alike, it's easy to get caught in an argumentative trap by those who portend to be in search of reasonable policy positions but are instead solely focused on cutting or reducing public investment. Community and public transportation does best in the marketplace of ideas when it delivers an honest articulation of its value to the communities it serves. That perspective

must acknowledge that the point of good mobility options are to realize positive outcomes, both individually for the riders they serve and collectively, for the communities that support them.

Too often, the value determination of transit service is understood as nothing more than the product of subtracting a system's capital and operating costs from its ridership numbers. That perspective assumes that a trip is the end result of access to mobility options. In reality, each trip is instead a means to an end, whether that's reaching employment, healthcare, housing, education and so much more.

In the transit industry, we often use the phrase *fully-allocated costs* to determine the totality of expenses incurred in providing a certain transportation service. It's telling that there's no corresponding phrase to account for the *fully-allocated benefits* of the opportunities that service provides.

In our previous [Mobility Trends infocard #4](#), we tackled the notion of the mythical, inefficient \$40 one-way transit trip. And that while the cost of that trip may be high, the positive outcomes it may generate in allowing the rider to avoid unemployment, hospitalization or social isolation – among other outcomes – amount to a screaming good deal for the public. When armed with reliable data to demonstrate these returns on investment, transit supporters have a fair fight in the argument that mobility providers should never be expected to do more with less.



### The Campaign for Better Rail Decisions

Passenger rail projects and services – ranging from intercity routes to streetcars – are often stymied or delivered in sub-optimal operating environments due to poor ideas & understanding of options. Join us to elevate the level of knowledge, development and support for meaningful passenger rail projects in North America: @RAILMag on Twitter & [www.railmagazine.org](http://www.railmagazine.org)

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