

Derailing the myths ... and telling the truth.

Myth: *New transit, especially rail, is needed to reduce traffic congestion.*

Fact: Rail systems do not reduce regional traffic congestion.

The Texas Transportation Institute found, in their 2004 Urban Mobility Report, that rail systems do not reduce regional traffic congestion. It was found that, of the 10 most congested U.S. urban areas, all except the 10th (Houston) had rail in 2002. Furthermore, of the 20 most congested U.S. urban areas, 15 had rail in 2002. Portland, for example, has three well-publicized light-rail lines converging downtown but has no better transit market share than Seattle with an all-bus transit system. Nor did

Portland's traffic congestion decrease with the advent of rail. As a transportation strategy, rail stirs considerable passion among advocates and detractors. As a solution, it has proven to be expensive and largely ineffectual at increasing system-wide ridership or in reducing traffic congestion. Furthermore, Puget Sound modeling shows that when and if completed, Sound Transit's light rail line will carry a mere 1.3 percent of all daily trips, of which nearly two-thirds will simply change from riding the bus to light rail. In effect, we will spend \$157 Billion dollars to accommodate little more than one-half-of-one percent of new riders.

Myth: *Eventually, we will need rail everywhere.*

Fact: Rail cannot support the highly varied travel demands of today's metropolitan residents.

People must live and work close to a rail line for them to be potential riders. Park & Ride stations help attract riders from more distant locations, but most people are attracted from about a half-mile either side of the rail line. Except in a few small areas, most

urban corridors do not have sufficient population density to warrant rail service. Given the limited ridership potential in most corridors, such as Puget Sound, and the high cost of building rail, it's no surprise that most cities with newer rail systems have built only one or two lines. As stated above, with the reality of projected ridership at 1.3 percent of total trips, and a price tag of \$110,000 dollars per household, light rail makes no sense for Puget Sound residents.

Myth: *People must change their attitudes so that they depend less on the automobile.*

Fact: Transportation analysts have long recognized that consumer choices are made based on rational comparisons of time and cost, rather than on abstract values or attitudes.

The often-cited American love affair with the car is believed to be a root cause of traffic congestion. If people would only change their attitude about cars, it is argued, it would be possible to change travel behavior, making people more willing to share rides, take transit and walk or bike to work. However, Americans

tend to base their decisions on cost and convenience, not values. In downtown Seattle, for example, 36% of workers ride the bus to work because it's significantly less expensive than parking: a two-zone monthly bus pass costs \$72 while the average monthly parking price is \$213 (PSRC, Parking Trends for the Central Puget Sound Region 2002-2004, Nov. 2004). Technological advances are quickly moderating concerns about automobile pollution, energy consumption, and safety (which may currently limit people's driving). New vehicles have eliminated over 90% of emissions with some now approaching zero emissions; hybrids are greatly improving fuel efficiency