

Project: [Understanding Ridership Trends in Transit](#)

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Summary

After seeing positive ridership trends growing at twice the level of population and totals not seen since the 1950s, in 2014, Florida trends changed dramatically. Ridership trends have hit a period of decline despite an improving economy, growing population, and generally increasing levels of service. In Florida, the trends have been broad-based and more pronounced than typical industry averages. This research report, supported by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), aims to explore the issue of declining transit ridership. While the motivation for understanding and responding to ridership declines for public transportation is self-evident, it is important to fully understand the nature of changes in travel behavior, explore the factors that may be underlying the changes, and provide insights on perspectives on what responses might be appropriate.

In evaluating potential solutions, service reconfigurations, new investments in services and amenities, and other actions, while supportive, are unlikely to quickly reverse the trends over the past several years not enable public transportation to return to previous productivity levels. Rather than hoping to restore public transportation, the most prudent path forward involves ensuring mobility options are available to all residents. It also involves striving to ensure that travel choice is resource-efficient and have minimal negative externalities. This report suggests taking the following steps to improve public transportation and its ridership. All steps are discussed more in-depth in the full report.

- Acknowledge the magnitude and complexity of the changes in transit and engage stakeholders in exploring responses going forward
- Aggressively monitor changing transit ridership and travel behavior characteristics to make sure planners and policymakers are aware of and understand changing trends
- Execute the delivery of public transportation with excellence- make sure basic elements important to travelers (e.g. cleanliness, safety, professionalism, efficiency) are delivered to the best extent possible
- Other public policies (parking, land-use decisions, etc.) should be sensitive to their consequences on transit ridership
- New technologies should be leveraged by public transportation to enhance its competitiveness
- Revisit transportation planning and public transportation practitioners in light of the nature of changes that have been occurring and are anticipated to continue
- Where traditional public transportation cannot be competitive, or cannot be in a cost-effective manner, other options should be explored
- Identify opportunities where emerging modes and business models are characterized by transportation network companies, short-term vehicle rental, bike and scooter sharing services, etc. may be opportunities for connecting with transit and/or substituting for transit in a fashion that is both cost-effective and responsive to customer needs

- Watch the emergence of automated transportation services carefully so the industry can position itself to embrace automation where appropriate

Ultimately, the changes in ridership on public transportation in Florida appear to be primarily associated with the fact that more travelers now have additional options for carrying out their activities or traveling to and from them. In general, transit service in Florida has not deteriorated, and in fact, has continues to expand in many communities. Further, while Florida's land-use and activity patterns are acknowledging as not conducive to cost-effective high-quality public transportation service, changes are simply not fast enough to be dominant influences in recent ridership changes.

The ridership changes are more likely effects of travelers replacing travel with communication, for example working at home and shopping via e-commerce. It is not that transit has gotten worse, but other options have gotten better. Accordingly, the challenge facing transit is not one of undoing actions that hurt ridership but rather finding new ways to be more competitive.

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