

Intercity Passenger Transport for Iowa?

Comments for the Interim Study Committee on Mass Transit

The Iowa House of Representatives
December 14, 2007

By
Public Safety Committee
The Governor of Iowa

• Speaker Background

• Definitions

What is Public Transportation?

Public transportation is "transportation by a conveyance that provides regular and continuing general or special transportation to the public..." as defined by the federal government. It includes service by buses, subways, rail, trolleys and ferryboats. It also includes paratransit services for seniors and persons with disabilities as well as vanpool and taxi services operated under contract to a public transportation agency.

(American Public Transportation Association, *Public Transportation Fact Book*, 2007, viii).

Key terms--Urban transit;

Intercity public transportation

Committee Charge

• Seven elements

Extensive—far reaching—requiring detailed research

- 1. Service between Iowa communities
- 2. Effects of transit availability
- 3. Impacts of transit within communities
- 4. Effects of mass transit on greenhouse gases/air quality
- 5. Need for mass transit
- 6. Costs and funding for mass transit
- 7. Iowan's attitudes and habits; education promoting transit's advantages

1. Study ways to employ mass transit to provide public transport between Iowa communities.

- 16 regional transportation services exist (and 19 urban systems)
- Intercity bus, Amtrak and air carriers serve between cities.

Do: Target opportunities with intercity bus, the existing regional services and Amtrak.

Auto availability

2. Consider effects of transit availability on those unable to drive or without an auto.

- Nationally 8.8% of households are without vehicles.
- Iowa's percent is likely lower.
- Some of the carless use existing intercity services; taxicabs are an important resource in cities.

Overall relatively few Iowans are affected by a lack of intercity public transportation; likely more are affected by the cost of private transportation.

Vehicles per household

Households by Number of Vehicles: 2006

- 1 vehicle (33.2%)
- 0 vehicles (8.8%)
- 2 vehicles (38.0%)
- 3+ vehicles (20.0%)

• Note: Data covers the household population and exclude the population living in institutions, college dormitories and other group quarters.

• Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey, annual issues.

Transit impact

3. Determine any impact of transit within communities on population levels, quality of life, and economic development in urban job centers, small and satellite communities, and rural towns.

- Positive effects come with high use, achieved primarily in dense urban areas. Overall fewer than 5% of all work trips in the U.S. are made by public transportation; far fewer other trips use public transportation.

Iowa's population isn't dense; public transport's impact on the factors in the Committee's charge are likely small. If Iowa is going to offer more urban transit services, land-use changes to promote greater urban density are needed.

Journey to Work

Nearly 9 out of 10 workers in 2000 traveled to work by car, truck, or van, and most of those driving to work drove alone. In particular, the census data show that the share of workers driving alone to work increased and carpooling decreased between 1990 and 2000, while the share of workers using public transportation remained about the same.

Mode of Travel to Work: 2000 Mode

Percent Car, truck, or van—drove alone 76.3

Car, truck, or van—carpooled 11.2

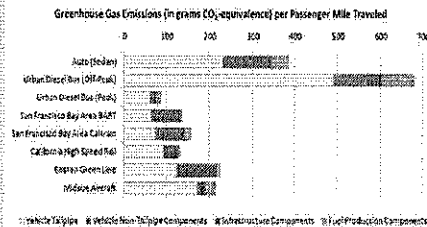
Public transportation (including taxi)—5.2

Walked 2.7; Other means 1.4; Worked at home 3.2

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Supplementary Survey for the United States, available at <http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/C2SS.html>.

4. Identify effects of mass transit on greenhouse gases and on overall air quality.

- Studies rank the various modes on emissions. How well a mode ranks depends on occupancy. Public transportation in urban areas or intercity doesn't always do well.



Funding

6. *Identify potential costs and funding for developing and maintaining specific mass transit services.*

- Iowa's \$11 million (\$3.64 per capita) puts it in the middle compared with similar states (higher than neighboring KS, NE and MO but far below MN and WI).
- Iowa funds transit with part of the vehicle sales tax; 10 other states do the same, 19 use the gas tax, 12 the general fund, 10 bond, 10 registration fees, 9 use the general sales tax.

Potential funding could be the state's gas tax or its general fund.

6. *Potential costs and funding for developing and maintaining services.*

- Federal money could come from reauthorization.
- The new rail safety bill adds to Amtrak.

Iowa has funding sources for transit or intercity passenger transport that have not been tapped, such as the state gas tax or general revenues. Local government finance is also possible, and the most common local source nationwide other than general funds is the local option sales tax. Increased federal transportation funding may be forthcoming, but there will be much competition.

Attitudes

7. *Assess attitudes and habits of Iowans concerning personal transportation and ways to educate the public about the economic, social, and environmental advantages of mass transit.*

- Little specific information is available about Iowan's attitudes or behavior.
- Education on relative impacts of transportation choices is likewise sparse.

An attitudinal survey by the Iowa DOT as part of its continuing transportation planning efforts would seem a reasonable undertaking. Further research support at the state and national levels for work on transport externalities is called for.

Concluding suggestions

1) Rely upon the state's transit operators and your DOT to monitor service needs and federal funding opportunities for urban transportation (including but not limited to transit), and to report back to the General Assembly as opportunities arise. Become prepared to propose specific service improvements that meet new federal funding initiatives.

Concluding suggestions

2) Rely as well on DOT to monitor and report intercity passenger transport opportunities as federal funding undergoes revision and restructuring. However, do not anticipate new intercity passenger initiatives to be implemented in the foreseeable future in Iowa, and realize that matching state and local funding will prove necessary.

Concluding suggestions

3) Request an investigation by your DOT of special opportunities to support enhanced intercity bus service for Iowa, perhaps as an element of an intercity bus plan and program.
Innovative motor-coach operations have sprung up in the Midwest and elsewhere over the past few years, leading to a recent ridership growth rate of some 7%, following decades of decline. Newer carriers operate without conventional terminals, using curbside locations and public transit facilities.
This mode has modest capital costs, quick start-up opportunities, and positive environmental effects versus alternatives. The economics of intercity bus service appear well suited to the intercity demands of a state such as Iowa.
