

20 March 2011

(Draft of a speech not yet delivered)

We can now safely declare that the Albuquerque metro area is finally behind more and better transit (although the People in general did beat them to it). So now the central transportation issue in our region becomes how to anchor this expanded network — **Bus or Train?** Most major Western cities have long since answered this one, in favor of the latter.

The title of this piece is misleading. “Versus” is not the right word. There’s room for both Light Rail Transit (LRT), including Modern and Rapid Streetcar, and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in a complete transit network. But BRT (meaning those custom-built trackless guideways) is a complement, not a substitute for LRT or Modern Streetcar.

There’s some logic to presenting BRT as a stepping-stone to LRT. BRT is better than nothing. But we believe we should quit treating Rail transit like political poison (even if it is). It’s just too good a solution to too many problems.

Modern Rail gets smeared a lot in New Mexico as Liberal or too expensive, and is also held to cost-benefit expectations **never** applied to other modes. Any kind of modern Rail is a key component of good transportation, and good transportation is good for everybody. **Here’s how urban trains compare to busses:**

- Urban trains get 400-500% the fuel / energy “mileage” that busses do.
- Roads last for years; tracks last for generations.
- Ditto for busses compared to Rail cars.
- Rail lines are made out of “greener” materials; steel and rocks, not petroleum by-products (add this to your fuel economy).

- Rail carries 3 to 8 times the people (or freight) per lane-mile as do roads and streets.
- Rail transit recovers more money at the “farebox” than bus transit does.
- Rail facilitates walking and biking, as well as neighborhood bus transit.
- Trains are easier to secure than busses (meaning more effective deployment of police officers). Nobody can afford to put an officer on every bus, but you can do so for a train. An Urban train operator doesn’t have to try to be a cop; just run the train.
- Rail facilitates the renewal of city centers and older suburbs.
- Rail promotes sustainable and efficient development. Since a Rail line is a lot harder to re-route than a bus line, developers can plan from a reliable permanent transportation anchor (This principle is at least 150 years old).
- Trains almost never get stuck in traffic, and offer a smooth, quiet ride compared to busses.
- Trains don’t spawn tire emission and disposal problems.
- Good multimodal transit saves regular full-time users about \$7-800 / month, even after paying their share of transit taxes (This applies to bus-only transit too, but keep reading):
- Rail attracts riders of all ages, colors and economic levels, not just people who have no choice but to ride transit.

And **here’s another one:** Rail transit easily complies with CMAQ and other pollution-control concerns; especially if—as in, say, Calgary, Alberta—the trains get all their power from renewable sources.

We don’t make this stuff up. Rail is the big “no-brainer” in transportation, energy and land

use planning, and just about everybody but us already knows it. Thank you.

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