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# Transit Means Business: Ten Reasons Why Conservatives Should Support New TEA Legislation

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“Private business should and will remain the engine of the American economy. But government has a necessary role in providing the tracks for that engine to run on. Those tracks are the infrastructure, which includes both roads and transit. The new TEA bill will above all else be an infrastructure bill, and that is a sound reason for conservatives to give it their support.”

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## Introduction

One of the important matters before the 108th Congress will be new legislation to authorize highway and transit appropriations over a six-year period. The new bill will be a follow-on to the earlier ISTEA and TEA 21 legislation. Its name and precise content are presently unknown; in this study, we refer to it as the new TEA bill. But its broad outlines are clear enough that we can examine it from a conservative perspective, as this short study does. We can also say what we think the new bill ought to contain, speaking as conservatives, and we do that too.

Some people, including some fellow conservatives, might ask, "Why do you care? Highways, OK, but why should conservatives be interested in public transit?"

We have addressed that question in our four previous studies of conservatives and mass transit (see the appendix to this paper for a summary of each). The basic answer is that public transportation is changing. Transit is no longer just a matter of providing buses to haul around people too poor to own a car.

If you would see public transit as it is today, visualize instead a fast commuter train, filled with businessmen, speeding to or from a city's center at 60 miles per hour while traffic on nearby highways moves at a crawl. The trains cars are new, quiet, and comfortable. On board, busy people, most of whom own two or more cars and could easily drive, work on their laptop computers, read, or get some rest as the train does their commuting for them.

To them, the train is a way to save time and stress. They are using public transit because they want to, not because they have to.

Or, visualize a Light Rail train running into town from the suburbs on the night of a big football or basketball game. Again, many of the people on board are middle or upper income. They could easily drive to the game. But instead of facing all the hassles and delays from backed-up traffic and scarce, overpriced parking, they prefer to take transit. The Light Rail train is fast, the ride is smooth and quiet, and the seats are comfortable. A Light Rail station is located a short walk from the stadium. And if someone decides to have a few beers during the game, so what? The designated driver is a transit system employee.

Usually, these "riders from choice," as they are called, want to ride a train, not a bus. But sometimes buses, too, can serve them. In many cities, special "express buses" run directly from outlying suburbs into the downtown, sometimes in their own reserved lanes on the interstate so they can bypass traffic jams. Other, "feeder" buses carry riders to and from rail stations. If you were to survey the people on these buses, you would find that many of them, too, have cars and could drive to work. They are riding transit instead because it saves them time, reduces the stress of commuting and allows them to work while they travel instead of just staring at someone else's rear bumper.

Beyond the fact that they use and like public transit, and want more of it, not less, something else unites these riders from choice. Politically, many, perhaps a majority, describe

themselves as conservatives. They earn high incomes, own several automobiles, and vote their interests, which usually means voting for conservatives. If you are a conservative Member of Congress, they are your constituents.

In the first of our four studies, Conservatives and Mass Transit: Is It Time for a New Look?, we addressed the historical reasons why some conservatives dismiss transit as a "liberal" issue. First, many conservatives believe that the present dominance of the automobile is a free market outcome. In reality, America's once-vast network of streetcars and interurbans, which was privately owned, funded from the farebox and paid taxes, was destroyed largely by government interference in the marketplace. As early as 1921, government was pouring more than a billion dollars annually into highways, while at the same time local governments regulated streetcar fares and kept them so low that the companies went bankrupt. By 1950, government was putting \$4.6 billion into highways, while transit got nothing. Not surprisingly, private transit companies simply could not compete with subsidized roads, and the 1950s and 1960s saw most of what remained of the private transit industry taken over by local governments. Today, both highways and public transit are subsidized, but highways still get the lion's share; most of the money in the new TEA bill will be for roads. Whatever one may think about America's current dependence on cars and highways, it is not a free market outcome but the result of more than 80 years of government policy.

Second, many conservatives, including some conservative lawmakers, think that public transit is just for the poor; transit users are not a conservative constituency. As we noted at the beginning, this is an outdated perception. If transit offers high-quality service, which usually means rail service, it can garner substantial ridership from middle and upper income people. We will look at this issue in more detail further on. Here, let us give just one example. In Lake County, Illinois, which is served by Chicago's superb METRA commuter rail system, the mean earnings of rail commuters are more than \$76,000. Not only does that contrast with the income of bus riders, which is less than \$14,000, it is also twice as high as the income of Lake County residents who drive to work alone.<sup>1</sup>

Third, conservatives tend to assume that transit does not serve any important conservative goals. But it does. One of the most important conservative goals is economic growth. In city after city, new rail transit lines have brought higher property values, more customers for local businesses and new development.

Fortunately, a growing number of conservatives realize that public transportation is important, including to some of their own constituents. It is no longer fair to think of conservatives as "anti-transit." But that still leaves an important question: is the new TEA bill good legislation? Is it something conservatives should support?

We think it is, and in the remainder of this paper we offer ten reasons why. Our reasons are explicitly conservative reasons; we are, after all, conservatives ourselves. The case for the new TEA bill, like the case for public transit generally, can be made in conservative terms.

## **Reason Number One: Conservatives Are Using Public Transit**

We have already made the point that people whose demographics indicate they are conservatives are riding transit, especially rail transit. They have cars and could drive, but choose to take transit instead. Conservatives are choosing transit because it provides a better commute -- faster, less stressful, more productive -- than does driving. Not even a Porsche is much fun if it is stuck in traffic.

Let's put some facts and numbers behind these observations.

Chicago's METRA commuter rail system serves a six-county area. METRA represents public transportation at its best. Trains are clean and punctual, METRA's personnel are competent and courteous, and METRA's focus is on pleasing its customers.

What are the results? In the area METRA serves, 3.8 percent of all commuters travel by train, but a much larger percentage of higher income people commute on the train; 11% of commuters with incomes of \$75,000 or more and 8.5% of those with incomes of \$50,000 to \$75,000 take the train. Each day, more than 60,000 people with incomes over \$35,000 are riding METRA's trains (all figures are in 1990 dollars).

Some counties show even more upper-income ridership. In DuPage County, more than 15% of commuters with incomes over \$75,000 take the train. In Lake County, the figure is 13%.

Interestingly, all the Congressmen representing Lake and DuPage counties are Republicans.

Another way to look at the demographics of transit users, and thus their probable political leanings, is through on-board surveys. Surveys of METRA riders, taken in 1985, 1991 and 1995, show that they are overwhelmingly white (86%), well educated (66.7% college graduates), professional/technical (47.9%) or managerial/business owner (27%), and financially well off. In 1995, 24.9% of METRA's riders had household incomes of \$100,000 or more. Only 5.6% had incomes under \$25,000. And 85.6% of them had an automobile available for the trip, if they wanted to drive.<sup>3</sup>

Nor are these demographics peculiar to METRA or to commuter rail. Light Rail on-board surveys show similar results. A 1997 survey of riders on St. Louis's highly successful MetroLink Light Rail system found that only 27% either did not drive or had no car available. 55% owned two or more cars. 62% were white, not minorities; 32% had incomes over \$55,000; and, according to a 1995 survey, 85% had not previously used the bus.<sup>4</sup>

The political point is this: more and more conservative Senators and Congressmen have constituents whose demographics suggest they are also conservatives and who use public transit. This is true almost everywhere rail transit is now found, and it will be true in more places as rail transit spreads. These voters expect their representatives to look out for their interest in more and better public transit. In practical terms, that means supporting the new TEA bill, on which transit will depend for the next six years. Conservative politicians who think of transit as just a "liberal" issue are missing the train.

## **Reason Number Two: Transit Helps Reduce Traffic Congestion**

In a growing number of cities, traffic congestion is becoming a hot political issue. People are fed up with wasting hours each day, sitting in cars stuck in traffic. They want their elected representatives to do something about it.

Transit, especially rail transit, can and does reduce traffic congestion, especially during rush hours. As one recent study notes, "Data from the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) of Texas A&M University indicate that, in large cities with rail transit in major corridors, congestion increases at a 42% lower rate than in non-rail cities."<sup>5</sup>

The logic here is evident. As we have already seen, many of the people using rail transit are "riders from choice." If rail transit were not there, they would be driving. Most of them would be driving in rush hour, going to or from work, and most would drive alone. Those riders from choice thus each have a strong correlation with a car removed from rush hour traffic.

Again, St. Louis's MetroLink Light Rail system provides some hard numbers. In 1999, MetroLink's single 18-mile line (since expanded) carried 14.2 million passengers. According to a 1997 riders' survey, 69% were commuting to work. Most were doing so in rush hours, when highway congestion is at its worst. And only 27% of MetroLink's riders either did not drive or had no car available. Allowing a few percentage points for people commuting to work but not in rush hours, we can say that about 60% of MetroLink's customers were taken off the highways, minus about 25% who had no car available or did not drive. Since most Americans drive to work alone, MetroLink is removing about 12,500 cars from St. Louis's rush hour traffic every day.

Is that a significant number? We asked the City of St. Louis's then-Chief of Police, Colonel Ronald Henderson, what effect MetroLink has on St. Louis's traffic. He said:

"The MetroLink light rail system has proven its extreme importance to us not only during rush hour traffic, but it has significantly helped us during special events such as Rams' football, Cardinals' baseball, and Blues' hockey games. The number of riders on the system positively impacts our traffic patterns on a daily basis."<sup>6</sup>

So long as building codes mandate the separation of housing, shopping areas and work places, automobile traffic and congestion will continue to increase. That means that in most places, transit will reduce the rate of growth of congestion rather than congestion itself. But sometimes, rail transit is so effective in drawing riders from choice that congestion actually falls. A study by the Oregon Department of Transportation of Portland's Westside MAX Light Rail line found such a reduction:

"Looking at data collected in the periods of May 1993, October 1997, and May 1999, researchers found that 'transit's share of westbound trips leaving downtown during evening rush hour increased 5 percent, while the share of drive alone auto trips declined 3 percent.'"<sup>7</sup>

Just like a new highway, a new rail transit line has a significant impact only in the corridor it serves. But in that corridor, the effect can be dramatic. A study of a new Light Rail line proposed for Austin, Texas found that

". . . an Austin LRT (Light Rail) service would significantly alleviate future traffic flows on North Lamar and South Congress -- diverting up to 30% of automobile trips in the corridor to transit. In terms of person-trips, the initial LRT service was projected to carry nearly half of the total traffic flow on North Lamar Blvd., a major arterial, thus providing substantial relief for growing congestion."<sup>8</sup>

Building more highways is seldom a solution to urban traffic congestion, because there is no land left on which to build them. A two-track Light Rail line can carry more people than a six-lane freeway, and do so in a much smaller right-of-way (in the downtown, Light Rail usually runs on existing streets). A Heavy Rail line like Washington's Metro can carry five times as many people as a six-lane freeway, and does so underground.

Conservative political leaders whose constituents are clamoring for relief from road congestion need public transit, especially rail transit. The new TEA bill will offer many opportunities for cities without rail transit to get some, and for those with rail transit to get more. Perhaps the most important question for a politician to ask himself is, "Do I really want to hand the traffic congestion issue to my next opponent?"



### **Reason Number Three: Transit Spurs Development And Economic Growth**

Conservatives favor economic growth because they know that a rising tide lifts all boats. Locally, the key to growth is development: new construction, rising building occupancy and rents, and increasing property values. Transit, especially rail transit, has a proven record of delivering all three.

Washington's Metro provides a good example. An article in the Journal of the American Planning Association stated that:

"Average office rents near (Metrorail) stations rose with systemwide ridership; joint development projects added more than three dollars per gross square foot to annual office rents. Office vacancy rates were lower, average building densities higher, and shares of regional growth larger in station areas with joint development projects . . . Combining transit investments with private real estate projects appears to strengthen these effects."<sup>9</sup>

A study by KPMG Peat Marwick says, "Would development have occurred in Northern Virginia without Metrorail? Yes, but it would have occurred on a much smaller scale and been of lower quality." The same study quotes James C. Cleveland, president of Mobil Land Development Corporation, saying, "One of the primary factors in our decision to invest substantial capital in the development of Colonial Place was the commitment of the state and local governments to Metro. The proximity of Metro has enhanced our ability to consistently attract and retain quality tenants and maintain full occupancy in our buildings."<sup>10</sup>

Light Rail, too, delivers new development, as the Dallas, Texas DART Light Rail system shows. DART opened just six years ago, in 1996, but it has already given a powerful boost to development. DART board chairman Jesse D. Oliver wrote, "Developers are building on the success of DART's \$860-million light rail system with more than \$800 million in ongoing or planned projects near the stations . . . That's almost a dollar-for-dollar return on this public investment . . ."<sup>11</sup> A study by two faculty members at the University of North Texas found that properties adjoining DART stations grew 25% more in value than similar properties not served by rail transit. Strip mall owners near DART stations had a 49.5% gain in occupancy and a 64.8% rise in rent rates.<sup>12</sup>

Rail transit benefits housing and homeowners, not just developers and owners of commercial property. A study of San Francisco's BART rail system found that:

"BART station proximity is a key determinant of property values in Pleasant Hill. The research shows that single family homeowners are willing to pay, on average, nearly \$16 in home price for each foot closer to BART."<sup>13</sup>

The new TEA bill will ensure that communities all across America will be able to begin or expand rail transit, with all the proven benefits it brings to development and economic growth. Isn't that something conservatives would like to be able to take credit for?

## **Reason Number Four: The New TEA Bill Will Fund Both Transit And Highways**

Conservatives tend to be practical men, and as practical men we have never understood the argument of transit “versus” highways. The obvious fact is that America needs both. Some Scripture comes to mind here, from Saint Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians: “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? . . . And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”

Similarly, highways cannot say to transit, you have no role in transportation. Nor can transit say to highways, you do nothing for me. Each has its place and function, and each depends at least in part on the other.

The importance of highways is clear. Only half of the people in America have any kind of transit service, and unless they are all going to keep hot-air balloons in their backyards, the other half needs roads to get around. Even those who have transit don’t find it convenient for all types of trips. Who wants to take the bus to the grocery store and have to carry six bags of groceries on the return bus? The car is obviously more convenient.

But the same thing is true the other way around. Who wants to drive into the city center during rush hour, wasting an hour or more of time uselessly sitting in stop-and-go traffic, when they can get there faster on a punctual, comfortable train? Nor do people want to drive to the big game, spending mega-bucks on parking and worrying about gridlock. In bad weather, when we are ill, or when construction disrupts the highway we take into the city, we all want transit. And of course, some people have no other way to get around (when we are up in years, that may become true for many of us).

A look at any major city shows how highways and transit support each other. Riders from choice who take transit in rush hour reduce highway congestion for those who must drive. Many transit users drive to the commuter train, Light Rail or express bus station, or are driven there by someone else. Transit buses run on highways, including interstates, and Light Rail often operates on street trackage in city centers. People who have no car take transit to work, and some of those people provide vital services to other people who drive into town. Highways and public transit are ying and yang, part of the same whole.

Wisely, the new TEA bill, like its predecessor, will reflect this. It will provide for both transit and highways; indeed, it will fund highways more than public transit.

How many voters are satisfied with the transportation options they now have? How many conservative legislators can say that their state or district has no need of highways, or no need of transit (transit is expanding rapidly in rural areas, as populations there age)? One of the most important conservative virtues is common sense, and common sense says the new TEA bill takes the right approach to highways and transit: we need more of both.

## **Reason Number Five: The Previous ISTEA/TEA 21 Legislation Has Worked**

Conservatives are rightly skeptical about radical new departures, which too often reflect the sort of crack-brained ideas liberals come up with. Like the “Great Society,” they cost heaps of money and end up making things worse rather than better.

Fortunately, the new TEA bill will not be a new departure (except perhaps on some of the Light Rail lines the legislation will help build). It will continue what the earlier ISTEA and TEA 21 bills did. And those two pieces of legislation have worked very, very well.

We doubt there is a state or Congressional district which has not benefited from the earlier ISTEA and TEA 21 legislation. Virtually everywhere in the country has received needed highway funding; bought new buses or started a new bus system where there was none; built a rail transit line or upgraded an old one; benefited from research funded by the legislation; or even saved an historic railroad station, converting it for new uses such as a multi-modal transportation center. Big cities, small towns, and rural areas have all seen something good come out of ISTEA and the previous TEA 21 bill.

A review of some of those good things begun by the earlier ISTEA/TEA 21 bills and likely to be continued in the new one is helpful.

- Small urbanized areas -- cities with populations under 200,000 -- were given significant new transit resources. As conservatives, we don't like to see old towns and cities die. They represent an important part of our nation's inherited capital, capital our forefathers created and bequeathed to us. They can be very nice places to live, places small enough that they can be genuine communities with old, stable neighborhoods. Transit helps keep them viable.
- Modernizing rail transit systems in older cities. Cities such as Boston, New York, Chicago and San Francisco have rail systems that date back in some cases to the 19th century. They remain vital for the ability of those cities to function, but they need to be modernized. Doing so is highly cost-effective, because the basic infrastructure is already in place. As conservatives, we don't like to see all the money go to the flashy “latest thing” (including boondoggles like maglev).
- The TEA 21 bill created a program to “afford domestic businesses the opportunity to become globally competitive in the export of mass transportation products and services.” Conservatives believe America needs to make things -- and export them -- if it is to remain prosperous. We used to export rail equipment all over the world, even to England, where railways began. It's time we started doing so again.

These are just a few of the initiatives ISTEA and TEA 21 began and the new bill is likely to continue. Conservatives are for what works. The earlier legislation has worked. Let's not walk away from a good thing.

## **Reason Number Six: Guaranteed Transit Funding Supports Federalism**

Most conservatives are federalists. We believe decisions should be made at local and state levels, rather than in Washington. Conservative thinkers call this principle “subsidiarity,” and they value it for two reasons: one, it helps preserve freedom by keeping Washington from becoming too powerful, and two, decisions made locally usually work better. They work better because local and state governments understand local realities better than Washington does.

What does federalism have to do with the new TEA bill? A provision likely to be in the new bill – it was in the previous TEA 21 legislation – supports local decision-making by allowing localities and states to plan. It does so by guaranteeing a certain level of transit funding each year over a six-year period. From the standpoint of state and local governments, these guarantees provide predictability, which in turn allows planning. Further, guaranteed funding allows the private financial markets to make scarce federal dollars go even further through innovative financing mechanisms and public-private partnerships.

The best way to understand this guarantee is to look at the earlier TEA 21 legislation, which, as we noted before, has worked well. Of the \$41 billion provided for transit in the 1998 bill, \$36 billion was guaranteed; the other \$5 billion was subject to the usual annual appropriation process. The new TEA bill ought to provide similar funding guarantees for highways and transit. Local and state officials need predictability for both.

Why is predictability important? Because without it, localities and states are jerked around by Washington to the point where their decisions become meaningless. Let’s say a city has decided to build a new Light Rail line. The local decision-making process has been careful and thorough, stretching out over several years. It included winning a referendum, which in turn required specifying the length and alignment of the new line so citizens could know which areas would be served. A detailed budget has been adopted, and the state has decided what level of funding support it will provide. That funding is now part of the state budget, which was debated and passed by the legislature.

Then, suddenly, the city and the state have the rug pulled out from under them. The funds they were told would be provided as the Federal share of the project are not available, because they didn’t make it through Washington’s annual appropriation process. It turns out that state and local decisions don’t count. Only Washington counts, which means federalism goes out the window. And the votes of the people who approved the referendum are worthless.

Conservatives don’t think government should work this way. Funding guarantees for transit and highways in the new TEA bill would make sure it doesn’t. They would push decision-making down to the state and local levels, and that is a good thing.

## **Reason Number Seven: The New TEA Bill Should Streamline Review Procedures**

Federalism means giving local and state authorities predictability, but it also means more than that. It means the Federal government should not constantly make them jump through hoops.

Conservatives have long and rightly lamented the degree of Federal intrusion into our lives. Ordinary citizens now have the Feds in their cars, their homes and even their bathrooms, in the form of government requirements and rules. Our ancestors, a sturdier people, would have met such effrontery with torches and pitchforks. For local and state governments, the problem is even worse, especially if they are trying to build something such as a highway or transit line.

Fortunately, at least as far as transit and highways are concerned, it appears that the new TEA bill will offer some relief – not as much as we might like (we'd make the EPA an endangered species), but far better than nothing. Again, the new bill seems likely to build upon its predecessor, the 1998 TEA 21 act. For example, the earlier bill helped streamline the environmental process for highways by allowing states to combine their environmental review with a highway's engineering and design. The new bill should, and we hope will, extend the same streamlining to transit projects. It should also say that once the environmental requirements are met, local and state governments don't have to do it all over again later in the process.

Trimming the environmentalists' rank beards is only part of the regulatory streamlining the new bill should offer. Other provisions conservatives ought to support include:

- Providing for much greater citizen involvement in the transportation process. Rightly, conservatives trust average people more than "the experts." Unfortunately, under present law, citizens' opportunities to comment on new transportation projects are limited and sporadic. The new bill should require that citizen involvement be early and continuous.
- Reducing the time required to develop transportation projects. Here, again, the main issue is the endless environmental requirements.
- Exempting three new categories of transit project from the Clean Air Act: expanding bus systems, improving rail systems and improving transit stations. All three expand transit use, which is good for clean air. Why make them prove it each time with expensive studies?
- Adding a new category to the FTA's recommendation process: "not ready for a funding recommendation." At present, a city can have a perfectly fine transportation project derailed by FTA giving it a "not recommended" rating, when all FTA is trying to say is that the project is not far enough along to be rated. At present, it cannot say that; the new bill should allow it to do so, saving local governments many headaches.

Again, as conservatives, we might go farther in getting Washington's nose out of local business. It is no accident that many of the most successful transit projects were ones that kept the Feds out by using only local and state funding. But the new TEA bill is likely to move in the right direction, enough so to merit conservative support.

## **Reason Number Eight: The New TEA Bill Will Provide For Growth**

As we have already noted, conservatives like economic growth. We would rather be baking a new, bigger pie than squabbling over who gets a larger or smaller piece of the old pie.

For the economy to grow, transportation must also grow. Transportation bottlenecks do a fine job of choking off economic growth. Nationally, they hurt the whole economy. Locally, they convince businesses to pick up and move someplace else (too often, overseas). That costs jobs. Our cities must offer transportation growth if they want growing economies and increasing employment. The new TEA bill will provide for growth in both highways and transit.

Importantly, much of the new money will go for projects that reduce highway congestion by drawing riders from choice onto transit. Some of the increase will go for new starts, which usually means new Light Rail or commuter rail lines. Another portion will go to modernize rail systems in cities that have them. Fixing up older systems is cheaper than building new ones from scratch, so that too makes sense.

Not only do all these rail systems, old or new, help individual commuters by reducing traffic congestion, they also help trucks. Most businesses depend heavily on truck traffic, and trucks get stuck in traffic congestion the same way cars do. When a car is delayed, someone may miss an important meeting. When a truck is delayed, a company's profits may suffer directly as an order goes unfilled. With the advent of "just in time" delivery of components, this problem has become more critical. A growing economy needs to keep its trucks moving.

A smaller portion of the budget growth in the new TEA bill is likely to go for buses. Buses do little to reduce highway congestion, but they do support economic growth in another way: by helping the transit dependent get to jobs. Many bus systems are establishing "reverse commuter service," which takes people from the inner city to jobs in the suburbs -- where companies can and do experience labor shortages. An adequate (and punctual) labor supply is also necessary for growth.

About half of the new money in the bill is likely to support transit growth in areas which in turn support economic and job growth (most of the rest will probably go proportionally to programs funded in FY 2003). As pro-growth conservatives, we like that.

## **Reason Number Nine: After 9/11, Transit Is Vital To National Security**

Conservatives have always been leaders where national security is concerned. We understand that providing security to all Americans is government's most important job. That means we are for a strong national defense and effective measures to prevent crime.

In the past, public transit was not seen as playing an important role in national security. But on September 11, 2001, that changed. Suddenly, it became clear that transit's ability to evacuate large urban areas quickly is vital to national security.

We would like to be able to say that more major terrorist incidents like the attacks on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon are unlikely. Unfortunately, that is not the case. As the world moves into Fourth Generation Warfare -- warfare waged by non-state entities -- the probability of more such attacks grows ever stronger. It is likely that some of them will include Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) -- nuclear, chemical or biological weapons with the potential to kill tens of thousands of Americans.

If an American city is hit by such a weapon, or if we get warning that an attack is imminent, we need to be able to evacuate the people who are directly threatened. To do that by private automobile would result in almost immediate gridlock, as everyone got on the road at the same time. Only transit can move the volume of people involved in the short amount of time available.

Consider what happened in Washington after the Pentagon was hit: Metro kept operating. People who wanted to leave the city could do so easily, almost normally. There is a lesson here for transit authorities everywhere: while normal operating practice dictates a shut-down if there is any danger to riders, that is not true if the city is attacked. Regardless of risks, the transit system must keep operating.

And there is a lesson here for legislators as well: every American city that could be a terrorist target needs a transit system. That system must have the resources to deal with an attack -- enough capacity to move many people quickly -- and it must plan for such a situation.

The new TEA bill will help deal with the resources requirement. The overall increase in transit funding likely to be included in the new bill will help give transit the capacity it needs for emergencies.

As conservatives, we need to realize and to make the point to others that transit is now a vital part of our national security. In fact, we would urge conservative Members of Congress to go further. A good conservative amendment to the bill would be one requiring that transit agencies plan for emergency evacuations in the face of terrorist attacks, including attacks with WMDs. Planning and practice now is better than chaos later, when it happens.

## **Reason Number Ten: Government Has Always Helped Build Infrastructure**

Conservatives are rightly wary of government sticking its nose into things private industry can do better. At the same time, we recognize that only government can do certain jobs. If we look at our nation's history, we see that government has usually helped provide the infrastructure private businesses depend on.

Early in America's history, transportation meant harbors and waterways. Government was involved with both. One of the best examples is Pennsylvania's famous Main Line of Public Works, a combination canal and railroad system that linked Philadelphia with Pittsburgh. You can still take a journey on it thanks to Charles Dickens, who described his trip over the Main Line during his visit to America in 1842. New York's Erie Canal was another government infrastructure project.

The railroads brought increased federal involvement in providing infrastructure. West of the Mississippi, the federal government owned vast expanses of land. To encourage railroad construction, it gave some of that land to railroad companies -- not just enough land for the tracks, but far more, land the railroads could sell to immigrant farmers, who would in turn provide markets for the railroad. Without that government involvement, the settling of the West would have gone much slower.

As we have noted elsewhere, government at all levels -- local, state and federal -- provided immense subsidies to highway construction, beginning in the 1920s. Those government-built roads were a major reason for the disappearance of the privately-financed electric railways that previously provided most urban transportation. As early as 1921, government was putting \$1.4 billion into highways, and in the 1920s a billion dollars was a lot of money!

Not only does history legitimize a strong government role in providing infrastructure, so does conservatives' belief in the importance of economic growth. Development and growth require a growing infrastructure, not just in terms of highways and public transit, but also water and sewer services, schools, police and fire departments, etc. Areas without adequate infrastructure have difficulty in attracting new businesses; in fact, anti-growth forces often seize on the issue of inadequate infrastructure to oppose new development. We should not give them that stick with which to beat us.

Private business should and will remain the engine of the American economy. But government has a necessary role in providing the tracks for that engine to run on. Those tracks are the infrastructure, which includes both roads and transit. The new TEA bill will above all else be an infrastructure bill, and that is a sound reason for conservatives to give it their support.



## Conclusion

We hope this short study leads conservatives to look positively on the new TEA bill, and on public transit in general. In it, we have applied some of the lessons and insights we developed in the course of our four earlier studies of conservatives and mass transit. All of those studies support one basic observation: conservatives do have a stake -- an important one -- in public transportation.

We have a stake in public transportation because, as conservatives, we know that humans are social creatures. No man is an island. As social beings, we tend to live where other people do, in towns, suburbs and cities (rural areas too have their societies; look at the Amish). And we want those places to work. We want life in them to be as easy and pleasant as possible (no road rage, thank you).

In areas with few people, cars are undoubtedly the best way to get around. But as more and more people congregate in one place, the car begins to become a disadvantage, at least for some types of trips. If life is to be easy and pleasant, we need better ways to get around than on congested roads. That is what good public transportation can offer.

Conservatives should support public transit for the same reason they support highway construction, fire and police services, water and sewer projects, sound building codes (which permit traditional neighborhood development) and so on. They are all necessary for life in community. And community is itself a very important conservative value, because communities, not laws, best enforce moral behavior. Few men really don't care what their friends and neighbors think.

We are old enough to remember when getting around in America was a great deal more pleasant than it is now. It was so because we still had passenger trains -- lots of them, and good ones -- and streetcars. If we want to give our children a country where travel is once again an enjoyable experience, something to look forward to, we need to bring our trains and streetcars (Light Rail is just a faster, fancier streetcar) back. The new TEA bill will be a step in that direction. As conservatives, we believe we owe the next generation -- and our ancestors -- an America that is at least not worse than the one we inherited. We hope to see more steps on the same (rail) road.

## Notes

1. Calculated from data in 1990 Census Transportation Planning Package, BTS-CD-02-06 IL, IN. Washington: U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 1993.
2. ibid.
3. Results of Metra On-Board Surveys -- 1985, 1991 and 1996, Metra publication, unpaginated
4. Summary of Results: Systemwide On-Board Survey Spring, 1997, prepared by Bi-State Development Agency, Tables 6, 12, 13, 16, 17, and 19; Partners in Progress: Bi-State Development Agency Annual Report, 1994, p. 5; and Market Research Report On-Board Survey, Summer 1995, prepared by Bi-State Development Agency, p. 5
5. "Projected Ridership for New Light Rail Starts: Issues of Accuracy and Impact on Congestion," by Lyndon Henry and Samuel J. Archer, Proceedings of the 2001 APTA Rail Transit Conference, p. 6
6. Communication from Col. Ronald Henderson, Chief of Police, City of St. Louis, March 13, 2001
7. Henry and Archer, op. cit. p. 3
8. ibid., p. 1
9. "Rail Transit and Joint Development: Land Market Impacts in Washington, D.C. and Atlanta," by Robert Cervero, in Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol. 60, No. 1, Winter, 1994, p. 83
10. KPMG Peat Marwick, Fiscal Impact of Metrorail on the Commonwealth of Virginia, November, 1994, p. 2-6
11. Inmotion, the official newsletter of the Dallas Area Rapid Transit, Spring, 2000, inside front cover
12. ibid., p. 2
13. Policy and Planning as Public Choice: Mass Transit in the United States, by David Lewis and Fred Laurence Williams, Ashgate Publishing Co., Burlington, VT, 1999, pp 234-235

## Appendix

Over the past several years, Paul M. Weyrich and William S. Lind of the Free Congress Foundation have written four studies of public transportation, each of which looks at an aspect of the subject from a conservative point of view. All four earlier studies are still available from the Free Congress Foundation or from the American Public Transportation Association. In order of publication, they are:

- Conservatives and Mass Transit: Is It Time for a New Look? This study looks at three common conservative perceptions about mass transit -- that the current dominance of the automobile is a free market outcome, that no conservatives actually use mass transit, and that transit does not serve any important conservative goals -- and finds that each is open to question. It also offers a number of conservative suggestions for improving the efficiency and quality of public transportation.
- Does Transit Work? A Conservative Reappraisal In this paper, the authors address the "one percent argument:" the argument that transit is not important because it only carries about one percent of total trips. They find not only that the number is wrong, but that the yardstick itself, total trips, is inappropriate and misleading. They propose a new measure, "transit competitive trips," which is defined as the trips for which transit can compete. By this measure, the importance of transit to virtually every American city becomes clear.
- Twelve Anti-Transit Myths: A Conservative Critique Here, conservatives Weyrich and Lind take on the libertarian transit critics and their usual arguments, such as "Light Rail has been a failure everywhere," "Transit does not relieve congestion," "Most Light Rail riders are former bus riders," and the greatest chestnut of all, "It would be cheaper to lease or buy a new car for every rider than to build a new Light Rail system." The study refutes them all, giving transit proponents useful arguments when the critics' flying circus hits town just at referendum time.
- Bring Back the Streetcars! A Conservative Vision of Tomorrow's Urban Transportation Rail transit's greatest challenge may well be explaining what it is and what it can do to people who have never ridden a train of any sort in their lives. When those people are asked in a referendum to vote money for "Light Rail," they often have no idea what Light Rail is. The solution? According to Weyrich and Lind, start with what people do know: streetcars. Building a new streetcar line, with Vintage, Heritage or modern equipment, is far cheaper than Light Rail and provides a way to introduce rail transit that most people welcome. Three case studies illustrate alternate approaches that fit almost any city's needs and resources.