

## Transit Growing Faster than Driving

### A historic shift in travel trends

For the first time ever, the growth in transit ridership has exceeded the growth in driving for five years in a row. Statistics recently released by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) show that transit ridership has grown by 21 percent over the past five years, while the number of miles driven has grown by 12 percent.

#### Transit Use Growing Nationwide

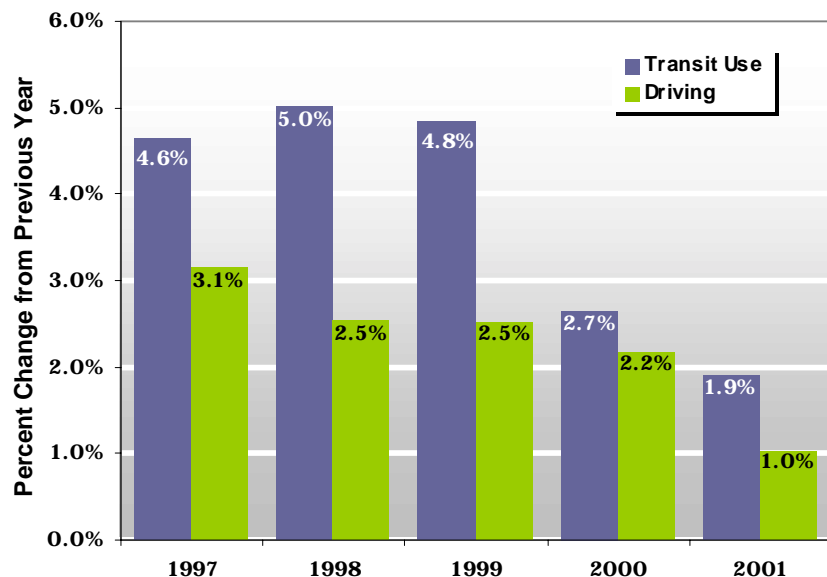
From 2000 to 2001, transit ridership increased by nearly 2 percent, with driving growing at half that rate, 1 percent, during the same period. In fact, taking into account growth in population, miles driven per person has dropped slightly in the last year. At the same time, transit use per person has increased.

The national growth in transit use in 2001 occurred despite slower than usual growth in New York City, the nation's largest transit market and home to the systems most affected by the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. Bus, train, and ferry use across the New York region grew by 2.5 percent for the year, but remained almost flat in the third quarter, with growth of 0.08 percent. Nationally, transit use climbed every month of 2001 except September.

Many of the systems experiencing dramatic increases are in places better known for their reliance on automobiles. In California, Orange County's buses were almost 10 percent busier in 2001 than in 2000, mirroring the decade-long trend

showing a 7.3 percent increase in transit's share of commute trips across the region. Denver's expanding light rail lines drew 36 percent more trips than a year earlier. Many small bus systems also experienced explosive growth as new service was added: ridership in Laurel, Maryland grew by 53 percent, Kankakee, Illinois grew 45 percent, and Bloomington, Indiana grew 40 percent.

Twenty percent more Americans use transit today than did in 1995. Altogether, more than 9.5 billion trips were made by transit in 2001, the highest number of trips in more than 40 years.



#### Road Mileage Far Exceeds Transit Capacity

Transit's growth is especially remarkable because Americans have far greater access to automobile travel than they do to travel via transit. The U.S. is criss-crossed by 8.2 million lane miles of roads. Transit buses or parallel passenger rail lines run on only 168,603 miles of this vast net-

work. This equates to almost 50 (48.8) times as many lane miles of roadway as route miles of transit service. Even when evaluated in terms of 'center-line miles' (not counting the number of lanes), only 4.3 percent of the 4 million miles of roads are served by transit.

The lack of transportation choice is clear on the household level as well. More than 90 percent (91.7%) of American households have access to an automobile (according to the Census Supplementary Survey in 2000), and it would be reasonable to assume that almost all Americans have access to paved roads. But less than half of all Americans (49%) report living within one-quarter mile of a transit stop, and only 8.3 percent of households surveyed have subway service available.

While the American preference for driving is often cited as the reason for low transit usage, a new Bureau of Transportation Statistics survey found that only 41 percent of non-transit users cited this reason for not taking the bus or train.

**Only 4 percent of the nation's roads are served by transit.**

A higher percentage – 47 percent – said they did not use public transit because it was unavailable for the destinations or times they were traveling.

### Investment Leads to Transit Growth

When transit trips are 'competitive' with automobile travel, people choose transit at a high rate, and this is part of the reason for transit's recent growth. Many systems that have invested in added transit capacity have been experiencing annual ridership growth in the double digits. While the reasons for the slowdown in the growth in driving are less clear, we do know that additional road capacity is doing little to stem rising traffic congestion.

For the first time since the introduction of the automobile, transit growth is consistently outpacing the growth in driving. Similar but shorter periods occurred during the recession years of the early 1980s, the 1974 oil crisis, and World War II.

#### Sources

American Public Transportation Association. *Transit Ridership Report: Fourth Quarter 2001*. April 2002. <http://www.apta.com/stats/ridershp/>

Bureau for Transportation Statistics. *Omnibus Household Survey, April 2002*. May 2002.

Center for Urban Transportation Research. *Public Transit in America: Findings from the 1995 Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey*. September 1998.

Federal Highway Administration. *Traffic Volume Trends: December 2001*. March 2002.

For further information, see:

STPP's report [Easing the Burden](#) and Decoding Transportation Policy & Practice #2, [The Nation's Road Capacity: How fast is it growing?](#) - <http://www.transact.org>