

Good Urban Transit: A Conservative Model

By Paul M. Weyrich & William S. Lind



FREE CONGRESS FOUNDATION

The Free Congress Foundation
1423 Powhatan Street # 2
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 837-0030

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Paul M. Weyrich RIP

Paul Weyrich died on December 18, 2008, after this study was written but before its publication.

I first met Paul Weyrich in 1974 when we were both U.S. Senate staffers. A mutual friend insisted we get together, not because of our shared conservative politics but because of our mutual love of streetcars. From the time we were boys, we both realized the trolley cars were going away and we both lamented the fact.

Paul's political baptism came when, in his late teens, he attempted to save the famous North Shore Line interurban that served his home town of Racine, Wisconsin. That effort failed, but one of the joys of Paul's later years was witnessing the return of streetcars to cities across America. Not for the last time, Paul had been right too soon.

Paul Weyrich's two most strongly marked qualities were his vision and his political courage. Both led him to buck the conservative (really mostly libertarian) mainstream on transportation issues. Despite severe criticism from colleagues on the right, he stood up for public transportation, especially electric railways, as essential to America's future. He knew that automobiles answered yesterday's transportation needs better than tomorrow's, and that trains of every variety - - intercity, commuter, subways, Light Rail and streetcars - - offered not only a more efficient but also a more pleasant way to travel.

Paul's death is a vast loss for the conservative movement and for advocates of more and better public transportation. I have lost the person I worked with most closely for twenty-two years. But I know his work, including this final study in our series on conservatives and public transit, will continue to do good for many years to come. Thanks to Paul Weyrich, it will never be possible to say that neglecting or opposing public transportation is the "conservative position."

Paul M. Weyrich, rest in well-earned peace.

William S. Lind

INTRODUCTION

For many years, transit advocates and city planners have argued that we need more and better public transportation. Public transportation is not merely a service to the poor, something that enables people who have no car or do not drive to get around. Rather, it serves cities in many ways. Good public transit that can draw commuters out of their cars reduces traffic congestion. Rail transit has proven to be a powerful tool for spurring economic development. Downtown circulators encourage pedestrians, whose presence is vital to the life of cities. High quality public transportation leads regions to center on their urban cores, giving new life to the center city.

To these arguments, we can add another of particular interest to conservatives: national security. America's dependence on imported oil to fuel automobiles is perhaps our greatest national security vulnerability. Public transportation, if readily available and widely used, can reduce that vulnerability. Not only does transit use oil more efficiently than private cars (usually with just one person in them), transit can be electrified. Doing so requires no new technologies. Every person who leaves his car at home or at a park-and-ride lot and takes an electric streetcar, light rail, heavy rail (subways), electrified commuter train or trolleybus is doing his bit for his country. Energy independence will do more for America's security than any war for oil can ever do.

All of these arguments and more illustrate the need for good urban transit. But over the past year, the transit landscape has changed. Not only do Americans need more transit, they now want more and better transit, and they want to ride transit more than they have in the recent past. Why? In two words, gas prices. Fueling the SUV a couple of times a week became a painful experience. More and more people want to leave that SUV at home or in a transit parking lot and use public transportation for part if not all of their trip. While gas prices have fallen recently from their record highs, most Americans know the long-term trend points up. They want alternatives to driving.

More, if the Crash of 2008 becomes the economic depression of 2009 (and beyond), people will want to reduce household expenses. Each additional car a household owns costs it on average \$6,000 per year, not exactly pocket change. Using public transit instead of driving can save a lot of money, far more than the difference between the price of gas and transit fare.

Americans also want to ensure their mobility in those times when gas is not merely expensive but unavailable. Following Hurricane Ike, the American Southeast experienced serious disruptions in its gasoline supply. Many gas stations had no gas to sell, and those that did often had long lines for gas. Wars in the Middle East can easily create that situation all over America, lasting not for weeks but for months. Americans want to know that if that happens, they can still travel to their jobs, their schools, the doctor and the grocery store. Only public transportation can enable them to do so.

So American cities and their suburbs not only need more and better transit, they want more and better transit. Their representatives in Congress are listening to them. The political support for public transportation is growing fast. It includes many conservatives, both in Washington and at the local level.

But stronger support for transit raises a question: What does more and better public transportation look like? This study attempts to answer that question. It offers a model and a vision of good urban transit. Without a vision, it is impossible to set goals. "More money for transit" is not enough. Our vision must be a vision of results, of a model transit system, not just a vision of inputs. "More money for transit" may inspire the transit industry, but it is not likely to gain the attention of the public. It is like a streetcar line that ends in the middle of nowhere.

Our vision of a model urban transit system is a conservative vision. You will not hear us call for a 100+ mile system of monorails or maglev. We desire no new technologies. We believe in building on what already exists. We take lessons from the past, when American cities had excellent public transportation. As conservatives, we know that what worked then can work now, and in the future as well. Let us then turn to the central question of this study.

WHAT IS GOOD URBAN TRANSIT?

The basic answer to that question is easy. A good public transit system is one that allows people to travel throughout an urban region easily, pleasantly and quickly without using a car.

What gives a transit system those characteristics? It must have four qualities:

First, coverage. The system must enable people to go wherever they want to go.

Second, frequency. Wherever possible, transit service must be frequent enough that people do not have to consult a schedule. Soon after they have arrived at a transit stop, a transit vehicle comes.

Third, ease of connection. Many trips will inevitably require transferring from one transit line to another. Making connections should be easy and quick. This is especially important when frequencies are not high, as will sometimes be the case, especially mid-day or in the evenings in areas remote from the downtown.

Fourth, as much transit as possible should be electrified rail, not bus. Some transit “professionals” like to call for “mode neutrality,” which usually really means favoring buses over rail. In fact, “mode neutrality” is unprofessional. Why? Because the public, transit’s customer, prefers trains to buses. Trains are usually faster and more comfortable than buses. More, people simply like riding trains, while few people like riding a bus. The customer is not “mode neutral,” which means “mode neutrality” is nothing less than deliberately ignoring the market. “Give the customer what he wants” is as valid a motto for public transportation as for a department store.

How might we give our model transit system these qualities? Obviously, frequency requires frequency and rail requires trains. But if we stand back and look at a city’s public transportation as a whole, we can identify three kinds of transit. Two were named by Professor

Vukan Vuchic of the University of Pennsylvania in his thoughtful book, Transportation for Livable Cities:¹ regular transit and commuter transit.

Regular transit is transit anyone can use at any time of day to go anywhere in the city and its surrounding suburbs. Professor Vuchic says:

Regular transit offers services on an integrated network, usually consisting of numerous lines and different modes, with convenient transferring. This basic transit category serves travel throughout the urban area . . . from early morning to late evening. This is the basic transit service that all groups of population can use for any trip purpose they need.

In contrast, he writes that

Commuter transit provides service exclusively for commuters traveling between suburban areas and the city center or other major activity centers. Thus, it provides “many-to-one” and “one-to-many” types of travel during the morning and afternoon commuting hours . . . Commuter transit supplements regular transit.

We would depart slightly from Professor Vuchic’s definition of commuter transit, in that we think some commuter transit can serve people who are not commuters.

To his two kinds of transit we add one of our own: Growth-creating transit. While both regular and commuter transit are about carrying people where they want to go, growth-creating transit has that task as its secondary purpose. Its primary purpose is to create growth, economic development or re-development, and also to channel that growth where a city wants it to go. Because streetcar lines have repeatedly proven they can both generate and channel economic development, growth-creating transit will almost always be provided by streetcars.

If the authors of this paper liked acronyms, they might suggest GREAT would make a great acronym for growth-creating transit. Since we are both charter members of SPIT – the Society for the Prevention of the Initials Trend – we will leave GREAT to others.

So much for definitions. If we look at regular transit, commuter transit and growth-creating transit in more detail, what do we see?

Regular Transit

In most cities, regular transit forms a square, rectangle or circle around the city center that stretches out almost to the countryside. It encompasses all but the most distant, most thinly populated suburbs. For reasons of cost, most regular transit is provided by buses and service outside commuter hours is not frequent. Regular transit can compensate for infrequency of service in two ways. First, if the city in question has a rail system, most bus lines feed into rail lines. Rail is usually faster than bus, so once a customer can board a train, he can speed his journey. More, Heavy and Light Rail lines usually have better frequency outside commuter hours than do bus lines, so the customer's wait at the transfer point is reduced.

The second way regular transit can compensate for infrequent bus service is with a system of timed transfers. Timed transfers mean that at designated transfer points throughout the system, buses from every direction arrive and leave at the same time. Instead of having to get off one bus and wait for 30 minutes or more for a connecting bus, usually in a less than attractive shelter and sometimes in a less than attractive part of town, the customer gets off one bus and immediately boards another going in a different direction. Timed transfer can make regular transit trips (which usually involve one or more transfers) faster, more comfortable (no one likes freezing or roasting for half an hour in a plastic lean-to) and safer.

With timed transfer, our square, rectangle or circle of regular transit service looks like a grid, not a spider web. It is designed to allow customers to move up, down or across more than into or out of the city center, although of course it permits that too. The grid is not made up of regular squares, because timed transfer points are located where bus lines logically come together and also to facilitate transfer to rail. But it is a grid nonetheless, a pattern that has proven optimal in urban transportation since most city centers held statues of Augustus Caesar.

Commuter Transit

Most commuter transit should be rail, commuter rail, Heavy Rail or Light Rail. Why? Because most of its prospective customers are “riders from choice.” They have cars and can drive. Most riders from choice will not take a bus. Some may be willing to park their cars at park-and-ride lots and take express buses that run straight downtown on an Interstate highway, but, if that is the only option, most will drive the whole way. However, experience in many cities shows that a significant number will park and take a train.

The rail network is radial, leading into and out of the central business district. Unlike the regular transit network, commuter transit does look like a spider web.

Commuter trains are usually not frequent outside the rush hours. In fact, there may be no non-rush hour service. However, Heavy Rail and Light Rail lines that serve commuters do have fairly frequent service throughout the day and into the late evening, though rush hour service will be more frequent.

Commuters will ride “feeder buses” that take them between their homes and the train, and between the train and their workplaces. However, because most commuters, especially those from the more distant suburbs, will drive to the rail station, rail lines should be carefully integrated with major highways. Wherever possible, the highway should have a dedicated exit leading directly into the rail station parking lot. Where this is not possible, signage must make the route from the highway to the rail station clear. Ample free parking must be provided

Growth-creating Transit

Growth-creating transit has no typical “shape.” The location of streetcar lines will follow the city’s desire for development or redevelopment. Wherever it has a decayed area it wants to bring back, or a low-density area it wants to convert to high-density, the streetcar will go

However, it is safe to say that in many older cities, streetcar lines will go where streetcars once went. Cities used to have dense networks of streetcar lines serving the urban

core, and they will probably want to bring many of those lines back. The fact that too many urban cores have decayed and need re-development will add weight to calls to restore old streetcar lines. The same is true for inner-ring suburbs, which were called “trolley suburbs” for a reason. Just as streetcars created them, so streetcars can rejuvenate them.

Wherever streetcars run, service frequency should be high throughout the day. A good policy is “Always a streetcar in sight.” By the time someone who just missed a streetcar sees its tail lights disappear, he should see the headlight of the next car coming. “Always a street car in sight” was the motto of many a street railway company in the first trolley era, and it is still the practice of some systems today, including New Orleans’ St. Charles Avenue line and the Market Street line in San Francisco.

Why is such frequent service necessary? Because the purpose of streetcar lines is to create growth. They do that by acting as “pedestrian facilitators.” Frequent service means people can get off the streetcar, spend some time as a pedestrian, then easily and quickly get on another car. That time as pedestrians is what generates new growth. It is pedestrians, not people in automobiles or on streetcars, who shop, have meals in restaurants, go to shows and do all the other things that give an urban area life. Streetcars work their developmental magic by making all those activities easy. But they are only easy if the people doing them know there is always a streetcar in sight.

What do we see when we put these three types of public transportation – regular, commuter, and growth-creating transit – together? We see what good urban transit looks like. Regular transit offers coverage. Heavy Rail, Light Rail and streetcars offer frequency. Timed transfers offers ease of connection. And many trips can be made, in part if not in whole, on electrified railways.

As we will see shortly, each type of transit can be thought of as a separate map. But in the end, all the maps are laid on top of one another to create a complete transit system. No

function is “pure.” Regular transit riders ride trains for as much of their journey as possible. Commuters and regular transit riders both may take streetcars. Rail commuters may use buses for a part of their trip, and the regular transit system enables them to get home outside the rush hours if they need to do so. Each type of transit reinforces the others and makes them more useful to customers. That is what good transit looks like, and that is how it works.

A MODEL CITY: CLEVELAND, OHIO

The best way to see how our vision of good public transportation can help cities is to see it applied to a real city, as a model. Our choice is Cleveland, Ohio.

Why Cleveland? As conservatives, we want to find ways to revive America's older, industrial cities. Good transit can help make that happen. Older cities also have lots of infrastructure that can be built on. Conservatives prefer building on what exists to creating vast systems from nothing (at vast cost). Cleveland was America's model city for the better part of a century, from the 1890s up through the 1930s. There was good reason for that – a walking tour of downtown Cleveland reveals splendid commercial buildings, some with awe-inspiring interiors – and conservatives believe in bringing old things back. Finally, we know Cleveland. Mr. Lind is from Cleveland. Mr. Weyrich was a cub reporter in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a city similar to Cleveland. Conservatives think it prudent to write about places they know.

To show how our model would apply to Cleveland, we offer four maps.² The first (Figure 1) illustrates the current transit system, which is also the regular transit map. The regular transit system forms a U around Cleveland's central business district. The area covered by the U reaches out into the more remote suburbs, well beyond the boundaries of Cuyahoga County.

To adopt our proposed model, the bus lines that provide most of Cleveland's regular transit would be restructured to form an irregular grid (see Figure 4). Bus lines would come together from different directions at the points where timed transfer would occur. Wherever possible, those points would be stations on Cleveland's Rapid, its mix of Heavy (Red) and Light (Blue and Green) rail lines.

At present, Cleveland's bus and rail transit lines operate largely as separate systems. Bus lines usually run straight downtown. Figure 4 shows more than a move away from a radial pattern of bus lines, feeding into and out of the center city, to a grid. It also illustrates the change to using buses as feeders for rail. In all but a few cases, such as the new Bus Rapid Transit line that runs from University Circle to Public Square, bus passengers heading

downtown will transfer to the Rapid or to streetcars. This will in many cases speed up their journey. It will improve reliability in winter weather. It will reduce congestion on freeways and bridges downtown by removing many buses from them in rush hour. Finally, it will shift transit mileage from diesel to electric power, helping Clevelanders do their bit for energy independence.

With timed transfer, the new regular transit grid will make journeys not centered on the downtown easier and faster. It will create a much more user-friendly transit system for people who are transit-dependent. Many of their trips are not to or from the central business district, but between outlying locations. Ideally, transfers at timed transfer points should occur at regular intervals, e.g. quarter-to and quarter-after each hour, so for a given transfer point, it is easy to learn and remember the schedule. At transfer points that are also Rapid stations, Rapid trains should be timed to meet the buses. To ensure transferring bus passengers get seats on the Rapid, it might be a good idea to reserve Rapid cars for them, especially for people transferring from Express buses, which offer a higher quality of service and draw large numbers of riders from choice. To make regular transit work well, as much thought needs to be given to schedules as to routes and transfer points.

The second map (Figure 2) shows the commuter transit system. Here, we are able to show the whole system we propose. As our model requires, it is primarily rail, although some commuters will use the regular transit system too.

Our vision for Cleveland uses two types of rail transit for commuters. The first is commuter rail, trains running at rush hours on existing railroads. In our conservative view, it is wasteful to build new rail lines when we can serve commuters equally well by running trains on tracks that already exist.

Like most older, industrial cities, Cleveland is rich in railroads. They enter the city from every direction except the north, which is coastline. We have chosen four for commuter service:³

- The former Nickel Plate Railroad running west along the lake to Vermillion.
- The Nickel Plate running east to Madison.
- The former Baltimore & Ohio Railroad running southwest to Medina.
- The former Erie Railroad running southeast to Solon.

Each of the areas served has sufficient population to justify commuter rail. The rail lines involved do not have heavy freight traffic, so there is capacity to run commuter trains. The Erie had commuter trains on it up into the 1970s.⁴

Some investment would be required in each case, but not vast amounts. Track has been lifted from a short section of the B&O leading into Medina, but the right-of-way is intact. Where new facilities are required for commuter service, the commuter rail project should pay for them.

However, in some other cities railroads have tried to play the robber baron, refusing to run commuter trains unless they were given hundreds of millions of dollars for track and other improvements that benefited freight traffic but had little or nothing to do with commuter service. Should that happen here (or in other cities), we recommend the commuter rail authority take train “paths” by eminent domain. A train path is not a track. A train path is the right to run a train on a given track at a specified time. That is all the commuter trains need.

While we would hope to avoid lengthy and expensive litigation, the threat of using eminent domain would encourage a railroad to be reasonable in its demands for track, signaling and other improvements, limiting them to what commuter trains actually require. We favor a national program to provide railroads capital funds to improve freight service, but those funds

should come from a separate program, not from playing the robber baron with local transit authorities.

We would recommend that commuter rail service on the four lines we have identified initially be provided by Rail Diesel Cars (RDCs – this acronym is so old even conservatives can use it). As demand for service grows, they could be replaced by longer commuter trains with more seats, and the RDCs could be shifted to other rail lines to create new commuter rail service.

However, there is another approach we would prefer. As demand rises, the four commuter rail lines would be converted to what the Germans call “S-bahn.” That would mean electrifying them and running fast, frequent service all day, not just in rush hours. If we are serious about national energy independence, as conservatives should be, we should seek opportunities to electrify transportation. We are presenting Cleveland as a model city. What could be more visionary, yet also entirely practical, than having Cleveland create America’s first S-bahn network?

Commuter rail would be part of Cleveland’s commuter transit system. The other part would be extension of Cleveland’s Rapid lines (which are electric) so they end in more useful places.

At present, only one of Cleveland’s Rapid lines terminates sensibly: the west Red Line, which ends at Cleveland Hopkins airport and offers a direct rail connection between the airport and Public Square. The east Red Line, the Blue Line and the Green Line (the latter both part of the famous Shaker Rapid) end largely in the middle of nowhere.

In our model, rail lines should enable commuters to drive only part of the way into the city instead of having to make the whole trip by car. Therefore, we would extend the Red Line and the Blue Line so they end at three Interstate Highways, I-90, I-271 and I-480. These end points would have large, free park-and-ride lots, and where possible they would have dedicated exits from the Interstates.⁵

As our map shows (Figure 2), the east Red Line, which now has little ridership, would be extended to I-90 (and Route 2) at Euclid Square Mall, a defunct shopping mall that offers a large park-and-ride lot. If what has occurred in other cities is a portent, the arrival of rail transit will revive the shopping mall as well as give thousands of automobile commuters a viable transit option.

The Blue Line would split, with one branch ending at I-271 and the other at I-480 east. Each branch would also serve large, new planned developments. Here we see how types of transit overlap. Although the main purpose of the Blue Line extensions is commuter transit, they would also serve as growth-creating transit. The planned new developments would be far more successful with rail transit service than without it.

For the proposed extensions of Cleveland's Rapid to be successful, service frequencies must be improved from what they are now. At present, rush hour frequency is every seven minutes, which might be adequate. But non-rush hour service is only every fifteen minutes, which is not sufficient. Trains should come every ten minutes at a minimum throughout the day and well into the evening, and we would recommend offering "owl" service as well, which is service throughout the night at less frequent intervals.

Our third map (Figure 3) illustrates our vision for growth-creating transit for Cleveland, transit whose main purpose is to generate and channel economic redevelopment. All the new growth-creating transit lines we propose are streetcar lines.⁶

In our vision, there would be two loops of rail transit through Cleveland's central business district. The first would extend the Waterfront line, looping it south on East 32nd Street to the current RTA line, then back into Cleveland Union Terminal. This line would be Light Rail, using existing Green and Blue Line cars, and it would serve the thousands of students at Cleveland State University.

An inner loop, using streetcars, would run from Public Square out Euclid Avenue (it would be easy to add tracks and wires for streetcars to the new Euclid Avenue busway) to East 12th Street, north on East 12th to Lake Avenue, west on Lake Avenue to Ontario and back on Ontario to Public Square. This inner loop would offer easy pedestrian access from the streetcars to every important downtown destination.

As will be true in other cities, bringing streetcars back to Cleveland does not just mean restoring old streetcar lines. Since streetcars last ran in Cleveland, the city has changed, and many once-vibrant areas that had streetcar lines are now dormant. (Could there be a connection between urban decay and loss of the streetcars? We think so.) While the purpose of growth-creating transit is to bring dead or dying urban areas back to life, it is not practical to try to do that everywhere at once.

Therefore, our model envisions restoring the following lines on roads that once had streetcars:

- Madison Avenue west through Lakewood, a classic “trolley suburb.” Madison Avenue was the last streetcar line to close in Cleveland, in 1954.
- Clifton Avenue west through Lakewood. Clifton is a broad boulevard where the streetcar right-of-way is still intact. If Cleveland’s plans to convert the limited-access Shoreway to a boulevard are realized, the streetcars would run in that new boulevard out to Clifton.
- West 25th Street out to Brook Park Road, serving the densely populated area of Parma.

All these westside routes would serve areas that have been fading ever since they lost their streetcars. They need the impetus to redevelopment streetcars would bring.

Those who know the City of Cleveland will quickly realize restoring these lines will mean re-opening the famous trolley subway that ran on the lower deck of the High Level Bridge.

Clevelanders and visitors to the city will once again enjoy that magical ride high above the Cuyahoga River that no one who took it ever forgot.

Cleveland's eastside is better served by the (extended) Rapid than the westside, so our vision proposes just one restored streetcar line there. It would lead up Cedar Hill and Euclid Heights Boulevard (where, like Clifton, the rights-of-way are intact), then cross on Coventry to Mayfield Road, ending at Green Road. In addition to spurring new development on Mayfield, this line would serve many eastside commuters.

Unlike the old streetcar lines, this eastside line would offer fast service into downtown Cleveland. How? At the base of Cedar Hill, the streetcars would get on the Rapid's Red Line and run express into Cleveland Union Terminal. They would make no local stops, because the Red Line is high-platform. Riders not going all the way downtown would transfer to the new Euclid Avenue busway to reach their destinations conveniently.

The concept of running streetcars express on Rapid Lines, which is drawn from the German "tram-train" idea, would be applied to the westside as well. There, streetcars would run on the Rapid's Red Line to the Brook Park station, where they would join a typical streetcar line running up Engle Road to Bagley Road in Middleburg Heights. The streetcars would run on a T-shaped line on Bagley from Front Street in Berea to Pearl Road in Middleburg Heights, spurring Transit-Oriented Development on Bagley and serving commuters in two densely-populated suburbs.

On all the streetcar lines, service frequency would be high throughout the day and evening, with "Always a car in sight." High frequency service is a requirement if streetcars are to serve as "pedestrian facilitators," which is their role in economic development.

Now, let us put all three maps on top of each other, in Figure 4. What do we see? We see a model of good public transportation. Our three types of transit, regular, commuter and growth-creating transit, do not exist in isolation. Each feeds into and facilitates the others.

From the customers' perspective, they are a synergistic whole, enabling people to travel throughout the region on public transportation quickly, comfortably and safely. Most trips, including those that involve automobiles for part of the journey, are made largely by rail. The next time gas costs \$4 per gallon or more, Clevelanders can rest secured, knowing their mobility does not depend on events in far-off lands.

A VISION FOR EVERY CITY

While we have chosen Cleveland as the example to illustrate our model, our vision of good urban transit applies to all cities. What can we generalize from the plan for Cleveland?

First, use what you already have. Good transit mostly means rail transit, but building new railways is expensive. A city's transit vision should make maximum use of rail lines that already exist. Adding commuter service to existing tracks is usually the least costly way to offer more rail transit. Don't build new Heavy or Light Rail lines that parallel tracks you can run commuter trains on. On the other hand, do extend existing Heavy or Light Rail lines so they intersect with major highways. You want to make it easy for commuters coming in cars from distant, low-density suburbs to use transit for part of their journey, then run into the central business district where traffic is usually congested.

Second, design for national energy independence. That means favoring electrified rail wherever possible. Trolley buses are another electric mode, and we are all for them, although we doubt potential customers will ride them as enthusiastically as they do rail transit. Use diesel buses primarily as feeders for electrified rail lines. You want as many of your city's total transit miles to be electric as possible.

Third, where you have to employ buses, make bus travel as convenient, quick and comfortable as possible. High frequency service works best, but it is not always affordable, especially outside rush hours. Where you cannot run buses frequently, use a system of timed transfers. Timed transfers are especially helpful to transit dependents, many of whose trips both start and end outside the central business district. Remember that these trips, too, will usually be faster and more comfortable if part of the journey can be made by rail. Design your bus system accordingly.

Fourth, bring back the streetcars! Nothing works as well as a spur to urban redevelopment. The decline of many cities' downtowns and inner-ring suburbs began when they lost their streetcars. The lifeblood of cities is pedestrians who have disposable income.

Streetcars are pedestrian facilitators, and middle class people with disposable income like riding streetcars. Streetcars draw them back into urban neighborhoods as pedestrians like cream draws cats. But just building streetcar lines is not enough. Service frequency must be high, high enough so there is always a car in sight.

Finally, while it can be useful to consider each type of transit individually – regular transit, commuter transit and growth-creating transit – they must all work together. By offering a separate map of each, we make it easier for people to understand our vision of good transit. But in the end, all the maps must be laid on top of one another to create an integrated transit system. No type of transit is “pure,” used only for its designated purpose. Equally important is the integration of automobiles with transit. Your transit system should make transferring from cars to transit as easy and attractive as possible

These general rules, embodied in our vision of good transit and our example of Cleveland, allow people to travel throughout an urban region easily, pleasantly and quickly without a car, which is our stated goal. They give any city’s transit system the four qualities we identified as critical: coverage, frequency, ease of connection, and maximum use of electrified rail. They serve a vision that reaches out into the future, far enough to stand the test of time. Such a vision can harmonize the actions of generations of city leaders, as Cleveland’s famous Burnham Plan did at the beginning of the 20th Century.

CONCLUSION

Some people may ask, how is our vision of good public transit conservative? Our answer is, in many ways. It calls for no radical, unprecedented construction of vast new systems based on “future technologies,” all at a cost of tens of billions of dollars. We want no monorails, no maglev. All the technologies our vision employs existed a hundred years ago. All are proven, in billions of miles of faithful service. When done right, their capital and operating costs can be modest.

In good conservative fashion, our vision builds on what already exists. Most cities have rail lines leading into them. Older, industrial cities are usually richer in this respect than are the new cities of the Sun Belt. Virtually every city has a bus system which can be restructured around timed transfer. Dozens of cities have plans for bringing back the streetcars, because news from cities such as Portland, Oregon of what streetcars do for development and growth has spread fast. Any city that once had streetcars can have them again.

Conservatives believe in learning from the past, and the past tells us we can travel between and in cities speedily and comfortably without using automobiles. Trains, trolleys and electric interurbans (which we now call Light Rail), not cars, built most of our cities. Most people enjoyed riding them. A good conservative motto is, “What worked then can work again.” Past can and should be prologue.

Finally, our vision of good urban transit embodies the most important principle of conservative politics, prudence. Prudence means acting now on the basis of probable long-term results. The long-term future of an automobile-dependent society has grown dim. If we are to do our duty to future generations, we need to bequeath them living, thriving cities that do not depend on imported oil. Prudence demands energy independence, for our cities and for our nation. Building good urban transit now, transit based on electric railways, promises good long-term results.

Why not make Cleveland our starting point? Let's build the transit system we have recommended for Cleveland and see how it works to revitalize a city. We know it takes more than good transit to bring an old, industrial city back. It also demands a national policy of reindustrialization. No country can become or remain a great nation without making things. But good public transportation is an important support for industry, as it is for everything that gives life to a city.

Just as Cleveland was once America's model city, let us make it a model city again. It is worth some federal dollars to build a demonstration project. Given the large number of American cities our model applies to, is it not prudent to try it in one city? The year 2009 will see Congress debate the next multi-year transportation authorization bill. Let's find a place in that bill for Cleveland, and through Cleveland a vision of good public transit for every city in America.

NOTES

1. Vukan R. Vuchic, Transportation for Livable Cities (Center for Urban Policy Research, New Brunswick, NJ, 1999) p. 46-49.
2. The authors are grateful to the Greater Cleveland RTA for assistance with the maps.
3. Commuter Rail for Northeast Ohio: An Assessment of its Feasibility and Effectiveness, Report of the NEOrail Study, August 1999, prepared for the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency. The data in this study remains useful, though the authors of this paper do not always agree with its conclusions and recommendations.
4. If commuter rail service is to work in Cleveland, commuter trains, along with intercity passenger trains such as badly needed Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati rail service, must come into Cleveland Union Terminal. Cleveland Union Terminal is located under Cleveland's famous Terminal Tower, directly on Public Square, which has been the center of the city since Cleveland was first surveyed in 1796.

Unfortunately, when Cleveland Union Terminal was redeveloped in the 1980s as Tower City, an upscale shopping mall, all passenger train facilities were eliminated. The Amtrak station was moved to a poor location on Cleveland's waterfront. For decades in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Clevelanders complained bitterly that the main rail passenger station was located on the waterfront, far from Public Square. The brilliant Van Sweringen brothers solved Cleveland's problem by building the Terminal Tower and Cleveland Union Terminal, which opened in 1930. The folly of leaving trains out of Tower City was compounded recently when a state office building was constructed in a location that partially blocks the rail right-of-way entering Cleveland Union Terminal from the west. Poor Cleveland; how badly has it missed "the Vans" visionary leadership!

However, all has not been lost. Commuter trains and other passenger trains can still enter Cleveland Union Terminal from the west by running on the Rapid tracks. Modern rail traffic control systems can easily handle the density of traffic for the few hundred feet where joint traffic with the Rapid is required. Once through "the throat," the old tracks, platforms and stairways can be restored. The thousands of passengers who will again pass through the station will provide welcome customers for the shops in Tower City.

Cleveland is currently planning to build a new convention center adjacent to the Terminal Tower. It is of critical importance that this new construction not block areas under Terminal Tower that will again be needed for passenger train tracks, which is all the area than once held tracks.

The need for commuter trains and other passenger rail service to go into a convenient central station is not unique to Cleveland. It is true in every city. As in Cleveland, that will often mean recreating a central station that has been lost. It is a bill that will have to be paid. Rail service, commuter or intercity, that fails to serve the city center conveniently will never live up to its potential.

5. The Brook Park station on the west Red Line lies close to I-71 and I-480 on the west side, it has adequate parking and it needs only good signage showing drivers on the Interstates how to access the park-and-ride lot.
6. Cleveland is now considering building its first growth-creating streetcar line. The Lake Shore Electric Railway, named for Cleveland's most famous interurban line, is a non-profit enterprise (Mr. Lind serves on its board of directors) that wants to run streetcars through a new commercial and residential development projected for the east bank of the Cuyahoga River. The line would loop off the existing Waterfront line of the Rapid. The Lake Shore Electric has a large collection of antique streetcars and interurbans, which could run on the new line as well as on the other lines our vision for Cleveland proposes. Running antique streetcars on weekends and holidays has proven popular in other cities such as San Francisco, where they have drawn many tourists.

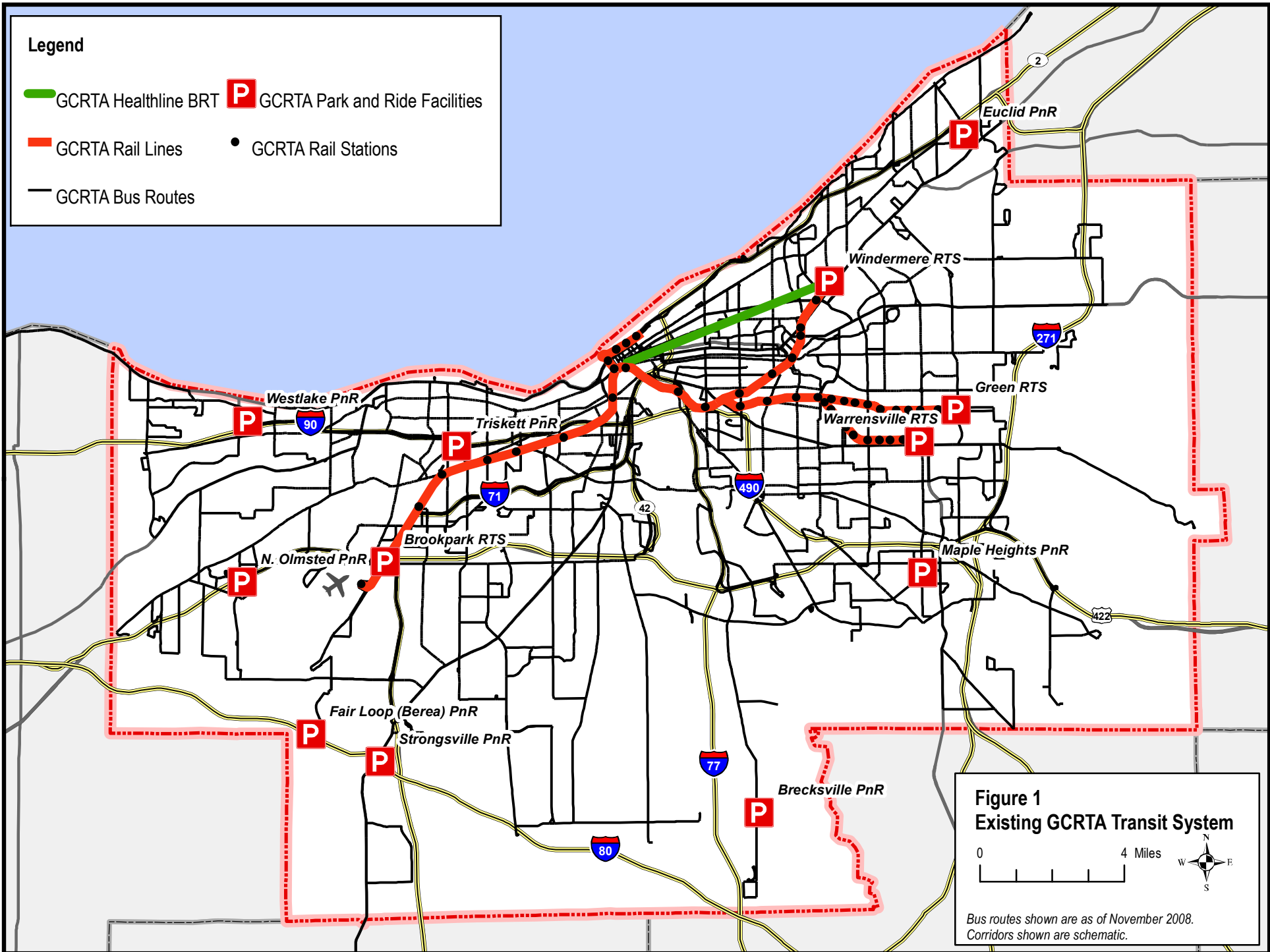


Figure 1
Existing GCRTA Transit System

0 4 Miles

Bus routes shown are as of November 2008.
 Corridors shown are schematic.

