

Deputy Administrator Speeches 2016

1/13/2016	Transportation Research Board Mobility Panel
---------------------------	--

Transportation Research Board Mobility Panel



1/13/2016

**Therese McMillan, Acting Administrator
Federal Transit Administration**

**Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting: FTA Mobility Panel
Wednesday, January 13, 2016**

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Introduction

Thank you for joining us today.

This session is about mobility, and we're going to look at that topic from two perspectives.

The first is the broad view. We'll talk about the ways in which the very concept of mobility is changing, and what that means particularly for providers of public transportation.

The second view comes to us from those who are actually working on-the-ground to put theory into practice.

Across the country, forward-looking transit agencies are re-imagining the role that they'll play in their communities in the decades to come.

And though we at the Federal level may inspire, research, and sometimes even fund innovation, it's really all about the work that gets done on the ground.

And so we're fortunate to get to hear from some of those visionaries today.

At the Federal Transit Administration, I can tell you that we see this as a time of extraordinary promise.

We're convinced that, rather than subtracting from the importance and power of public transportation, new services like ridesharing can multiply transit's purpose and its reach.

Rides to Wellness

A perfect example of that is access to healthcare.

Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, many of the same people who rely on public transportation every day now have - perhaps for the first time - reliable, affordable access to regular check-ups, screenings, and management of chronic diseases.

In fact, if the Affordable Care Act is going to work as advertised, we need people who are in the habit of going to the Emergency Room for routine care to begin taking charge of their own health and using the opportunity

they now have to get regular medical care. And yet – and yet – it’s estimated that 3.6 Million Americans already miss or delay non-emergency medical treatments every year simply because they lack transportation.

Let me reiterate: the transit industry is already serving a lot of them. At FTA, we believe we have both the opportunity and the obligation to help close that gap.

In 2015, we began a new initiative called Rides to Wellness that’s bringing together Federal agencies and stakeholders from the transit and healthcare industries to overcome the barriers that often prevent people from accessing medical services.

That’s one example of how mobility is changing, not just in its methods, but in its destinations as well. And so we’ll talk a lot today about Rides to Wellness as an example of the new mobility.

Smart City Challenge

Cities are also going to need to take advantage of new technology and new modes of travel to meet the challenges of ahead of us.

That’s the idea behind USDOT’s Smart City Challenge. To show what’s possible when communities use technology to connect all of their transportation services into an interactive network, the Smart City Challenge will concentrate federal resources into one medium-sized city, selected through a nationwide competition.

Funding of up to \$40 million will help that city put forward bold, data-driven ideas that promise to improve lives by making transportation safe, easier, and more reliable.

Applications for the first of two solicitations are due February 4. You can find out more on USDOT’s website at **transportation.gov**.

At FTA, we are very excited about the Smart City Challenge. One city with the right vision and the know-how will have the opportunity to not only improve mobility for itself, but also to lead the way for other cities in the decades to come.

We believe that public transportation will be the backbone of the kind of integrated transportation networks that we’ll need to serve an expanding population and growing demand.

Extension, Not Disruption

This is really about taking hold of the opportunities that lie before us.

As you may know, one of the favorite words out in Silicon Valley is “disruption.”

Even now, bright young minds are working on ways to “disrupt” industries from banking to healthcare to energy – in the same way that Amazon.com disrupted not only bookstores, but bricks-and-mortar retailers of all kinds.

Certainly Uber and Lyft and other ridesharing services have “disrupted” the business model of taxi companies, and local governments are still trying to catch up.

If we can be a bit self-effacing for a moment, let’s recall that the transit industry has been through that sort disruption itself.

We are proud – and rightly so – that for the last few years, transit ridership has reached levels not seen since the 1950s.

But there’s a reason we haven’t seen that level of ridership since the 1950s.

There’s a reason that today, when many cities tear up their streets to build new, modern streetcar lines, they find old rails still buried beneath layers of asphalt.

More than 60 years ago, we allowed the convenience and prestige of personal automobiles to disrupt public transportation services that had served many well.

The result was a change in development patterns that are now recognized as unsustainable.

And more importantly, we lost the opportunity to bolster services for the people who still relied on transit. The power of public transportation to provide “ladders of opportunity” was divided instead of multiplied.

The point of the history lesson is simply this: let’s see these new technologies as what they truly are – a way to complement, not compete with public transportation – an extension, not a disruption.

To learn more about how we can do that, please join me in welcoming our distinguished panel.

###