



| Transi | | i



Peer-to-Peer Information Exchange on Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Bus Priority Best Practices

Background

Bus rapid transit (BRT) has generated great interest among large U.S. cities as they look for ways to improve mobility and accessibility as well as achieve a more efficient use of their street space, all at a relatively low cost. While there has been substantial success with these projects, the size and density of many U.S. cities have created unique challenges for implementing BRT, as has the age of the underlying infrastructure in many older cities. Issues such as traffic impacts, physical separation, and utility conflicts are of great concern and can often inhibit the fast and effective implementation of BRT in large cities, particularly within the central business district or areas with mature road infrastructure and street grids developed more than a century ago.

Objectives

The purpose of this effort was to foster a dialogue among peers at transportation and planning agencies about their experiences with promoting public transit and, in particular, the challenges they face related to BRT projects, as well as the solutions they have developed in response. The central feature of this project was a set of facilitated discussions among practitioners from large U.S. cities about their experiences with promoting public transit, in particular, BRT projects. The workshops focused on three major themes: Network, Route, and Street Design; Traffic Operations; and Building Political, Interagency and Stakeholder Support—BRT as a Driver of Economic Development. In organizing the workshops, the Rudin Center supported the Federal Transit Administration's objective of addressing the unique barriers to the implementation of exclusive BRT running ways on the streets of highly-congested, large cities.

Findings and Conclusions

Presentations, discussions, and tours provided excellent examples of how BRT systems generating significant transportation and development benefits can be planned, designed, and successfully implemented, even amid the challenges presented by the highly-congested, physically-constrained environments of most large, central cities in the U.S. The results of the Peer-to-Peer Information Exchange on BRT and Bus Priority Best Practices program make clear that better public transportation in general and BRT in particular can be cost-effective and useful for improving transportation and the environment and restoring the livability of America's large cities. The benefits of BRT that were highlighted from the perspective of central cities include:

- In highly constrained, congested, and transit-dependent places such as the urban cores of New York, Boston, Cleveland, and Los Angeles, BRT has succeeded in increasing total transit. It has done so by providing the improved mobility for entirely new trips to be made and diverting significant numbers of existing trips from cars and taxis.

- Transit ridership gains translate to fewer vehicles on the road with commensurate decreases in congestion, noise, and emissions and increased city life. Besides increasing transit's competitive attractiveness, transit revenue speed increases also translate to lower bus operating costs and emissions.
- In Boston and Cleveland, one of the objectives of BRT was the revitalization of inner-city neighborhoods. Success can be measured in the \$750 million+ (Boston) and \$4 billion+ of development that would probably not have otherwise occurred in the sustainable urban core locations of the Silver Line and HealthLine corridors, respectively. This development translates to more mobility with fewer cars today and in the future and healthier central cities—the financial, government, cultural, entertainment, and educational capitals of our country.

Benefits

This report forms a compendium of key findings and best practices for successfully configuring BRT running ways, stations, and other infrastructure on the streets of large, highly-congested cities. As major cities in the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere have struggled with these issues and developed solutions, they have identified certain ideas and actions that are applicable in other locales facing similar challenges. Convening practitioners from these cities created an unparalleled opportunity to share lessons learned and strengthen BRT projects around the country. As a result, other practitioners and researchers beyond the workshop participants clearly stand to benefit from access to these materials.

Furthermore, the success of the Peer-to-Peer Information Exchange could form the foundation of a more comprehensive capacity-building program targeted to the needs of a central city constituency of mid- and high-level policy and managerial professionals within in the transit community. Although this constituency is vital to the success of full-featured BRT and other higher-order bus-based transit systems, it has not been specifically targeted before. To ensure the best results, such an endeavor should be coordinated by an independent organization with strong capacity-building credentials, in cooperation with NACTO.

Project Information

FTA Report No. 0009

This research project was conducted by Marta Panero, Hyeon-Shic Shin, and Allen Zedrin of the New York University/Wagner Rudin Center for Transportation Policy and Management; the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO); and Samuel Zimmerman of the World Bank and AECOM. For more information, contact FTA Project Manager Helen Tann at (202) 366-0207 or Helen.Tann@dot.gov. All research reports can be found at www.fta.dot.gov/research.