

# ISSUE BRIEF: Transit

## Improving Access to Regional Economies, Activities and Communities

Transit is an integral component of a safe, efficient multi-modal transportation system. The U.S. is at a point where investment needs for system maintenance and new capacity far exceed available resources, and regions across the country are considering transit a core component of their transportation network to alleviate capacity and maintenance demands. The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) advocates mode neutral options for regions, affording them access to and funding for transportation alternatives, including public transit in order to meet regional priorities.

Through the metropolitan transportation planning process, local governments, business, and citizens work collectively to plan and program future transportation investments. New funding mechanisms designed to support transportation systems must respect this well-established and transparent process ensuring future transportation investments are tailored to the defining characteristics of each region.

As we enter an era of planning that is plagued with federal, state and local financial challenges funding for transit must not be undervalued. The federal government's transportation funding share is approximately 45 percent of every dollar spent with state and local governments contributing the remaining share of funds. Of the 18.4 cent per gallon federal fuel tax, 15.44 cents is dedicated to the Highway Trust Fund and a mere 2.86 cents to the Mass Transit Account, which funds transit needs. This disparity fosters a perception that transit is not an important part of our national transportation network.

Transit investments and development are key elements in strengthening regional economies and supporting long-term sustainability and growth. Congested highways, limited open spaces for road building and expansion, and environmental restrictions are requiring regions to explore transit as a viable option for increasing capacity and improving access to economic opportunities. For this reason Councils of Governments (COGs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) should be increasingly involved in transit planning, programming and coordination of projects and operations throughout the country. To support these activities transit funding to regions and localities will have to grow.

In supporting the access to opportunity and health care as well as helping reshape a workforce, COGs and MPOs are well situated to ensure that transit investments are leveraged for critical coordinated human service planning activities. Regions are committed to providing safe access and mobility to all citizens, particularly seniors, people with disabilities and low income residents – issues that cut across city, county, and state boundaries. With a regional perspective on land use planning and infrastructure development, COGs and MPOs can collaborate with key stakeholders to increase and simplify access to all transportation options available to residents.

NARC advocates for increased investment in mode neutral transportation, which includes transit. NARC also promotes providing more authority and opportunities for COGs/MPOs to make transit-related decisions that will have positive, long-term benefits in their regions.

For more information, please contact Shannon Menard at [shannon@narc.org](mailto:shannon@narc.org) or 202.986.1032, x. 217. For transit best practices, reports and resources: <http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/CUTS/trb/confpapers/Resour.htm>.