

Frequency Is Freedom

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In the United States, only about 9% of the population commutes to work via public transportation, cycling, or walking. Meanwhile, over 75% of people in the United States drive alone to their jobs. Many cities lack robust transportation systems because they have prioritized infrastructure for private vehicles. To better understand the state of sustainable transport in North America, ITDP developed a suite of 12 indicators and tested them on 25 cities. These indicators ranged from city characteristics such as weighted-population density to job accessibility by transit.

One of the indicators is People Near Frequent Transit (PNFT). This measures the number of residents in a city who live within a short walking distance of frequent (transit that runs every 12 minutes or less, 7AM-9PM) transit. ITDP looked at the percentage of a city's population that lives within a 10-minute walk or bike ride of a frequent transit stop.

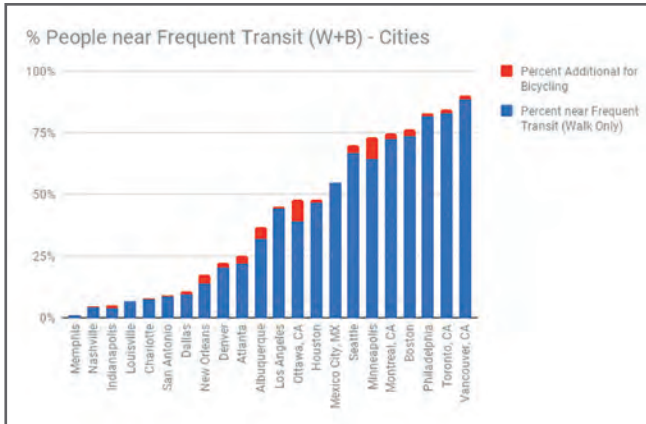
ITDP's analysis revealed several patterns of interest. The first is that good biking infrastructure improves access to frequent transit. Protected bike lanes provide a safe road space for cyclists to and from transit, in some cases solving the first-last mile problem. On average, bike lanes increased access to frequent transit by 2.5% or about 21,000 people. Protected bike lanes are an inexpensive way for cities to increase the number of people using frequent transit lines.

One city that accomplished this is Minneapolis. By investing in a quality bike network, Minneapolis increased its PNFT from 64% to 73% or about 35,000 people. This was the largest increase among all the cities that ITDP evaluated. Minneapolis has a Sustainable Transport Mode Share (STMS) of 24.3%. In contrast, Dallas—which has a limited frequent transit network—has a PNFT of 9.5% and an STMS of 6.2%. This shows that the higher a city's PNFT, the higher the

Minneapolis' frequent bus network, with frequency of 15 minutes or less for buses designated as part of Metro Transit's "Hi Frequency" network.

Photo: Minneapolis/
St. Paul Area Metro Transit

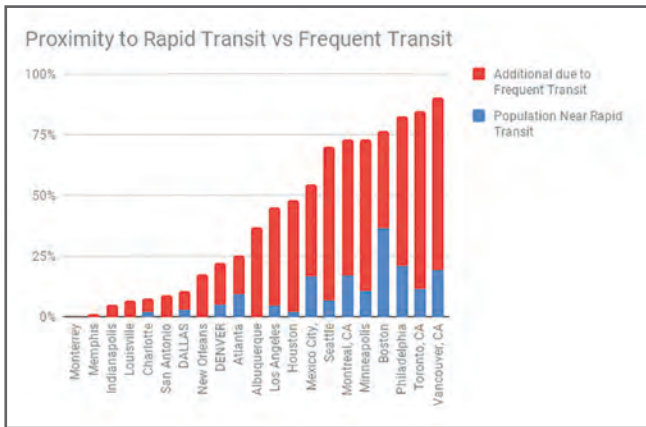




All cities in ITDP's study have higher percentages of people near frequent transit than near rapid transit

number of people walking, biking, and using public transport.

Frequent transit is an important feature of any city's transportation network. It often determines whether people will use the network at all. With frequent transit, riders do not have to plan their day around a bus schedule because a bus will arrive at a stop shortly after they do. Jarrett Walker, of the well-known blog Human Transit, often says "frequency is freedom." High-frequency transit networks are convenient, easy to use, and critical for cities looking to increase ridership.



ITDP also examined the correlation between frequent transit coverage and STMS—walking, biking, and public transportation. The data shows that high-frequency transit correlates with higher ridership. Frequent service enhances transportation networks and improves the passenger experience. While major transit projects are most visible, cities often overlook more simple solutions like increasing bus frequency, improving bus service, and adding protected bike lanes. Even cities that already have several rapid transit systems find it useful to add frequent transit.



The DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) station at DFW Airport.

Photo: Jed Record via Flickr

Clear frequent transit corridors and bike lanes that connect to transit are easy things cities can do to increase the number of people using sustainable modes of transport. As North American cities look for ways to increase ridership and mitigate climate change, frequency is a simple solution. It makes cities more accessible and inclusive. It helps people reach the places they need to go. Frequency is freedom.

PNFT is only one of 12 different indicators which are part of a larger benchmarking effort for North American cities. Results for all indicators and analysis is available at itdp.org.