



# From Point A to Point B: How should we improve transportation around the region?

Last November, Kansas City, Missouri, voters did something that shocked local pundits: After defeating six previous proposals, they voted for a light rail plan. This and other recent developments have brought a renewed focus to the issue of transportation. For example, traffic congestion has convinced local governments to fund studies on using commuter rail along I-35 and I-70. Bus rapid transit service is making inroads along Main Street and, perhaps soon, along Troost Avenue. Wyandotte County faces replacing federal funds that helped get workers to jobs. Both Missouri and Kansas departments of transportation face drastic cuts in funding starting in 2009.

These developments and more are driving changes in how we think about transportation. But what should we do about it? There are limited public funds, so doing *everything* is out of the question. And can we – should we – make those choices as a region or each city and town on its own? The choices our community makes today will determine the economic and physical footprint of metro Kansas City for decades.

At *By the People*, we will focus on this issue: “Metro Kansas City has limited resources to spend to improve its transportation system. What do residents think should be the primary goal of transportation spending? Is it to improve economic development, to get citizens to jobs or to reduce traffic congestion?”

*This discussion guide provides background information along with three options for improving the transportation system. If you read the guide in advance, you'll feel more prepared during the discussion on October 20<sup>th</sup>. If you don't have a chance to read the guide, however, please do still attend By the People. You were selected because we need your unique perspective. There will be no pop quizzes and we promise we won't put you on the spot.*

## About By the People

BTP was created by MacNeil/Lehrer Productions to enhance the national conversation on important issues. BTP is partnering with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation on the 2007 Dialogues in Democracy project. Ongoing funding partners include the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. BTP is non-partisan and doesn't support any particular policy or viewpoint.

Kansas City conveners of By the People include KCPT Public Television and Consensus. For more information, go to [kcpt.org](http://kcpt.org) or [consensuskc.org](http://consensuskc.org).

This discussion guide benefited from the involvement of 222 local citizens who completed an online survey. It also benefited from local elected and appointed leaders, who generously gave of their time and thoughts.

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# What does the transportation system include and who's in charge?

There are a limited number of ways that metro Kansas City residents can get from point A to point B within the region. You can walk, bike or drive your car, or you can take the bus. Freight is shipped through the region via waterways, rail and airplane, and you can take Amtrak from Union Station to Independence or Lee's Summit, but the major ways to move people around the region are by bus or car. Who is responsible depends on which road and which bus.

**Roads and bridges.** The Missouri and Kansas departments of transportation are responsible for the state highway system, including the portions of interstates that pass through their jurisdictions. Counties are responsible for building and maintaining county roads, and each city or town is responsible for building and maintaining its own residential and surface streets.

**Buses.** Three entities provide local bus service:

- *Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA)* is the region's largest provider of bus service. KCATA operates The Metro bus service and the new bus rapid transit service on Main Street called MAX (Metro Area Express). It would also be responsible for implementing light rail in Kansas City, Missouri.
- *Johnson County Transit*, a department of county government, operates The JO, which serves Johnson County mainly during the morning and evening peak times. Johnson County withdrew from KCATA in the early 1980s. The JO's fixed-route ridership increased more than 65 percent between 1996 and 2006.
- *Unified Government Transit* offers The Bus, a fixed-route transit service for Wyandotte County, Kansas, with connections to The Metro and The JO. The Unified Government also contracts with KCATA for some routes.

Light rail and commuter rail are other modes of public transportation that different local jurisdictions have considered.

## Something to think about

- When you think about different modes of transportation, how important do you consider each mode – bus, light rail, car – to be?
- Much of metro Kansas City has low population density, which makes it difficult to operate public transit. How do you feel about making new developments more dense? If you live in a low-density suburb, should you expect to have access to public transportation?



## What are some basic facts about transportation and public transit?

- Between 1945 and 1980, 75 percent of government expenditures on transport went for highways. Only 1 percent went to public buses, trolleys or subways. In 2002, the combined annual government spending (all levels, from federal to local) on surface transport was \$172 billion, which included \$135.9 billion on highways (79 percent) and \$36.4 billion on public transit (21 percent).
- The percent of transportation costs paid directly by the user ranges from driving (98 percent) to transit (36 percent) to parking (1 to 4 percent).
- The cost for providing a passenger mile of transportation in 2002 varied by the type of transportation used, including: local bus (\$0.76); heavy rail (\$0.49); and driving (\$0.37).

## Two issues: Cost and traffic congestion

It's hard to find two things more important to people than money and time. Depending, how we get from Point A to Point B can take quite a bit of both.

### How does transportation affect our household budgets?

Along with easy driving, Kansas Citians expect to enjoy a low cost of living. It turns out, though, that while our housing costs are low, our transportation costs are among the highest in the nation. When both costs are combined, you might as well live in New York City.

The Center for Housing Policy studied the combined housing and transportation burdens of working families, those who earn between \$20,000 and \$50,000 a year. Working families, they found, typically spend the same percentage of income on housing as people of all incomes – about 27 percent. But transportation took a bigger bite out of the budgets of working families – about 30 percent rather than the national average of 20 percent for people of all incomes.

The Center looked closely at 28 metro areas. It found that working families spent an average of 57 percent of household income on housing and transportation combined. The range was from 54 percent in Pittsburgh to 63 percent in San Francisco. In metro Kansas City, working families spent about 23 percent of their income on housing, but 33 percent on transportation – an average of nearly \$11,000 per household – for a total of 56 percent. Only Atlanta had higher total transportation costs than Kansas City. Other metro areas that also spent 56 percent were Baltimore, Cincinnati, Detroit, Honolulu, Houston, Philadelphia and New York, New York.

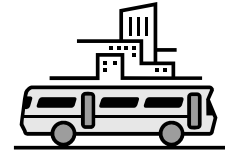
Real estate agents talk about the “drive until you qualify” phenomenon. Housing costs are generally cheaper the farther you go from the employment centers, so people trade longer commutes for a bigger house or less-expensive mortgage. The Center found that by the time a person has moved 12-15 miles from work, the increased transportation costs outweigh the savings on housing.

#### Something to think about:

- Did the cost of transportation affect where you chose to live?
- If you own a car, how does its cost affect your budget?
- Can you imagine living where you do and not having your own car?

### How does traffic congestion affect us here?

In 2002, the *Kansas City Star* published *Citistates Report/Kansas City*. Two out-of-state journalists spent more than a year on the ground in Kansas City surveying



"I don't like to be stuck in traffic, or spending more than \$3.00 for a gallon of gas. I would like to take the bus, but travel times are a lot slower."

"I am concerned that it takes longer and longer to get to work when driving on I-70 due to the ever-growing population in the suburbs."

"The Kansas City metro area is becoming increasingly congested with commuter traffic and I would like to see something in the area of rail being utilized."

*All quotes come from a Consensus online survey that was completed by 222 residents of metro Kansas City in August and September of 2007.*

the metro's strengths and challenges. In their report, Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson wrote, "We tried, time and time again, to see if there was any concern in the Kansas City region about the region's spread-out pattern and near-total dependence on automobiles. But we couldn't catch even a hint of concern."

Metro Kansas City has the nation's highest number of freeway lane-miles per capita. We have come to expect free-flowing traffic, but that may be changing.

While congestion here is much less than in other regions, it has grown. Between 1983 and 2003, rush-hour congestion more than tripled on metro Kansas City's roadways. In 1989, only 17 percent of our roadways were congested at peak hours, but by 2003 that number had grown to 42 percent.

Still, it could be much worse. The most recent Urban Mobility Report, released by the Texas Transportation Institute last month, showed that metro Kansas City ranks 64<sup>th</sup> in traffic congestion among 85 metropolitan areas. Of cities from 1 to 3 million in population, only Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Buffalo had fewer traffic delays. And, while local congestion levels are up slightly from last year, they are about what they were in the early to mid-1990s.

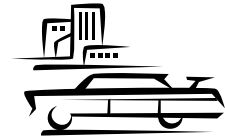
Experts suggest several reasons. The metro area is growing slower than other areas. We have a lot of roads for the size of our population. We are using new technologies, such as Kansas City Scout, to improve traffic flow. (Kansas City Scout uses an elaborate system of cameras to monitor freeways, so officials can detect crashes and remove disabled vehicles more quickly.)

There are some local traffic hot spots, though. The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) found that large segments of I-35, between Olathe and downtown Kansas City, would have the worst traffic ranking ("F") by 2020 if no improvements are made. Morning rush hour commutes are expected to increase 57 percent between 2004 and 2020, and evening peak periods are forecast to increase 76 percent. A similar study by the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) found that the commute on I-70 from Blue Springs to downtown Kansas City would increase from about 30 minutes now to 45 minutes by 2020.

As of the 2000 U.S. Census, congestion had not caused an exodus to public transit. Most Kansas Citians get to work by driving alone (82.8 percent). Other ways to get to work include: car pool (10.4 percent); working at home (3.4 percent); walking (1.4 percent); public transit (1.3 percent); or other (0.7 percent).

### **Something to think about:**

- How congested is your commute? Do the roads seem to be getting more crowded? If they are, how much does this concern you?
- Have you ever considered joining a car pool? What would factor into your decision about whether to drive to work with someone else?



### **What will it take for us to keep up with the growth in traffic?**

For some, the major concern about traffic congestion is the economy. As more businesses use just-in-time delivery of materials, more freight is being shipped by truck; traffic delays hurt business. For individuals, the time it takes to travel determines the number of jobs available and the opportunities for culture, dining and relationships.

One national study found that Missouri needs almost 2,000 new lane-miles at a cost of \$42 per resident each year; Kansas needs about 580 new lane-miles at a cost of \$49 per resident. It ranked Missouri 15<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states and D.C., and Kansas 34<sup>th</sup>, in terms of most lane-miles needed.

For the region, the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) estimates that in 10 years, metro Kansas City will need 275 more freeway lane miles and 1,900 more lane miles of other roads to keep up with growth.

# The state of different types of transportation

Whether road, rail or bus, each type of transportation faces challenges and offers opportunities for action.

## Roads and bridges: The foundation in peril

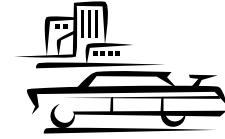
The rush-hour collapse of a Minneapolis bridge this summer brought concerns about the nation's roads and bridges into high relief. More traffic means more stress on the nation's roads and bridges. In part because cars are more fuel-efficient, though, the gasoline tax that funds repairs and new construction simply isn't keeping up. In Missouri and Kansas, fuel tax proceeds grew just 1 to 2 percent over the last two years, while construction costs rose 25 percent.

Missouri has the seventh largest highway system in the country and is 45<sup>th</sup> in the amount of money the state spends on the system per mile. The state has made some major strides in the quality of its roads lately, thanks to Amendment 3. In 2004, Missouri voters passed an amendment to use vehicle sales taxes to fund road repairs. At the time, it had the nation's third worst pavement conditions. By 2007, though, 74 percent of Missouri's major highways were in good condition.

Missouri also has 10,240 bridges in its state highway system. Of the total, 1,093 are in poor/serious condition. A new program, the Safe and Sound Initiative, will repair or replace the 800 worst bridges by 2012 and keep them in good condition for the next 25 years. This is one of the largest public-private partnerships in the nation and is considered a national model.

Progress in both Missouri and Kansas is likely to slow when construction funding plummets later this decade. In 2007, the federal highway trust fund is projected to go \$4 billion into the red. As a result, Missouri will lose \$300-\$400 million in federal funds and Kansas will lose \$130 million. In 2010, Missouri's current construction program of \$1.3 billion ends and state funding drops to \$569 million, slightly less than state spending before Amendment 3. In 2009, Kansas will complete a 10-year, \$13 billion construction program. After that, without a new funding program, Kansas will have only about half of its current budget to spend on major projects.

Some states are considering new ways to fund transportation infrastructure, given the fact that there is an average annual gap of \$50 billion between funds available and funds needed just to maintain the nation's highway and transit systems. The most common new methods include mileage taxes, public-private partnerships, and tolls.



## Who pays how much to fix our roads and bridges?

The states provide most of the total funds – 49.4 percent – used to repair all the nation's roads and bridges.

- Counties, cities and other local governments pay for 28.1 percent.
- The federal government provides 22.4 percent of the combined total.

Total highway expenditures by all levels of government increased 44.7 percent between 1997 and 2004, according to a Federal Highway Administration report.

- More than half of funds went to repairs to existing roadways and bridges.
- During that time, the condition of the nation's roads has improved. Between 1998 and 2005, the percentage of poor urban interstate mileage has fallen by 31 percent, and in 2005 the number of deficient bridges also fell slightly.
- The study ranked Kansas as the third best road system in the nation and Missouri 17<sup>th</sup>.

## Something to think about:

- Have you seen improvements in the highways in the region?
- How concerned are you about the safety of roads and bridges here?
- What would factor into whether you were willing to pay more for maintenance and improvements for interstates and highways?

## The bus: The region's transit workhorse

If you don't own a car, can't drive, or want to avoid congested highways, you may be able to take the bus. In some cases, you can go from one state or county to another without transferring or paying an additional fare; in others, you will need to transfer to a bus operated by another service provider.

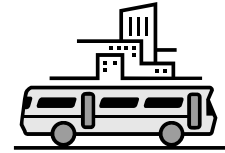
The region's largest provider, KCATA, was initially intended to serve as the public transportation provider for the region. It was formed by a bistate legislative compact in the mid-1960s, the first bistate compact in the region's history. It was formed at about the same time as other transit agencies around the country, but unlike many of them KCATA does not have taxing authority. While KCATA has a legal jurisdiction of seven counties in both Missouri and Kansas, its base is service to the City of Kansas City, Missouri, which provides 92 percent of its local funding. It also provides service on contract to other cities.

KCATA is governed by an appointed board with five members each from Missouri and Kansas. The board includes one representative for each county involved, plus a representative for each of the two Kansas Cities. In the past, groups have recommended that the board include more representatives from Kansas City, Missouri, and that the board be elected rather than appointed.

When they reviewed the current state of public transit for *Citistates Report/Kansas City*, Johnson and Peirce said that the KC region should make a radical improvement in the region's existing bus service. The bottom line of an effective system, they said, was customer service, which they defined as comfort, reliability, and travel times that could start to compete with the private car. "Communities that denigrate bus systems as something just for 'them' – minorities or the poor – fail to rally the support, or funding, for the quality, competitive systems successful regions will demand in this century."

Those comments were echoed by the Labor Party Transit Club. In "The Future of Kansas City Transit," the group said, "The prevailing attitude among economic and political leaders in this area has always been that real people drive cars...They treat transit as if it were part of the welfare system."

In the 1990s, employers in Johnson County and a few other suburban sites complained that weak public transit made it impossible to fill service jobs. Today, other suburban centers like Zona Rosa and Village West face the same problem.



"A circular argument is being used to limit investment in public transportation. That argument is, since not many people are riding public transportation we'll cut back service, which causes fewer people to ride, which leads to more cutbacks of service. That results in only people without a choice using an inferior product."

"I am a blind person and mass transit has been a lifesaver in making me independent. It's easy for people to tell you to get someone to drive you around, but just try finding that somebody to do it."

"Transportation should be accessible to all, especially to those without autos. I believe (lack of transportation) is a huge barrier to having good jobs, good health and a good life."

Recently, KCATA estimated the cost to provide additional services to the Unified Government to get workers from downtown Kansas City, Kansas, to Village West. The total would be about \$683,000 for things like “swing shift” service and extended Sunday and Saturday hours. At the time, the Unified Government paid almost \$6 million for public transportation.

Since then, the county has learned that in 2008 it will lose about \$1 million in federal funds used to help low-income people get to work. The program pays for bus service to jobs at odd hours, low-interest car loans and subsidized cab fares. A 2007 survey of 1,000 low-income residents in Kansas City, Kansas, found that 55 percent had lost a job or quit because it was hard to get to work.

For speed during peak periods, bus rapid transit is an increasingly popular option. Bus rapid transit uses upgraded vehicles, better waiting areas, exclusive right-of-way, the ability to change traffic signals, and sometimes off-board fare payment and park-and-ride access. When studies have compared other transit options with bus rapid transit for local routes, bus rapid transit has been found to be more cost-effective and better able to handle large numbers of riders.

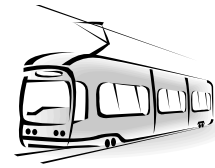
KCATA began bus rapid transit on Main Street in 2005 and called it MAX. Since then, MAX ridership is up 50 percent and customers give MAX the highest satisfaction rating. KCATA expects to get bus rapid transit going on Troost in 2009-2010.

Johnson County officials are considering spending \$46-\$68 million on bus rapid transit to ease congestion on I-35. This would reduce commute times in part because the buses would be allowed to travel on the shoulder if traffic is moving at 35 miles per hour or less. Earlier this year, consultants recommended a bus rapid transit line instead of commuter rail as a way to ease congestion on I-35. They found that commuter rail would cost less than building new highway lanes or light-rail track, but bus rapid transit would be four times less expensive and could carry four times more passengers.

## Light rail: Trolleys revisited?

Ask old-time residents of Kansas City how they used to get around, and they'll tell you about an extensive system of trolleys that once ran through town. In 1946, trolleys and buses served 135 million passenger boardings, but 60 years later buses served only about 14 million despite a population growth of at least 50 percent. Some see light rail as a return to a form of mass transit that once served a broad, economically diverse group of residents.

Light rail is used in urban areas with significant population centers. Like a trolley or streetcar, it can operate in a street or in a dedicated right-of-way like commuter or heavy rail. Its stations are simple and closely spaced, it operates at



“To get from the Argentine Neighborhood where I work to downtown Kansas City, Kansas, it takes more than three hours one way. The connections to suburban Johnson County are equally frustrating.”

“I am temporarily disabled and in a wheelchair. I could be dismissed from the hospital but because there is no affordable and reliable public transportation from my home to my hospital outpatient therapy unit near the Plaza, I am headed to a nursing home.”

“The thousands who flock into the new Power & Light District should not end up on clogged roads with inadequate parking, they should use a viable public transit system.”

medium speed, offers all-day service, and people pay their fares on board rather than at the station.

Kansas City, Missouri, is currently the only local community that is committed to building a light rail line. Voters there approved a ballot initiative proposed by activist Clay Chastain. In previous years, Chastain had offered four and KCATA had offered two proposals for light rail, all of which were rejected by voters. But in November 2006, voters approved a 3/8-cent sales tax for 25 years to pay for a 27-mile light rail route, an aerial gondola/tram system from Liberty Memorial to Union Station, 60 electric shuttles connecting light rail stations, and operating expenses. According to Chastain, the plan would take about \$473 million in federal and \$94.5 million in state funds, along with \$23 million a year from the sales tax, to construct the system.

A study conducted for KCATA and the City by HNTB found that the cost of the Chastain plan would be more than \$600 million above the original estimate, with the total cost for construction at \$1.5 billion. HNTB found other challenges, as well. For example, federal parkland regulations won't allow running light rail through Penn Valley Park and the Heart of America Bridge isn't strong enough to carry a two-car train. It would cost as much to strengthen the bridge as it would to build a new one.

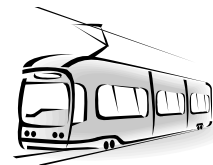
What worries some people is that the funding mechanism for light rail would, in effect, gut the city's bus service. The 3/8-cent sales tax for buses that could have been renewed in 2009 would be diverted to light rail for 25 years under the voter-approved plan. That means that KCATA would lose about 40 percent of its \$70 million annual budget, which would dramatically affect bus service. The Federal Transit Administration sent a letter to KCATA this spring saying that Kansas City must be able to fund the light-rail project without hurting the city's bus service if it hoped to compete for federal funds for light rail.

In August, local activists gathered enough valid signatures to force the city council to repeal the light-rail plan or to put it back on a ballot.

Also in August, KCATA held public meeting to find out what citizens thought about light rail. Its goal is to outline a realistic project that would include both light rail and bus, and to then start the process to get federal funds.

So what's at stake with light rail? Increasingly, having a light-rail system is seen as the sign of an up-and-coming, progressive city. Thirty-one U.S. cities have adopted light rail since San Diego built the 20<sup>th</sup> century's first light rail system in 1981, making light rail the fastest growing type of public transit. Among communities with light rail are St. Louis, Little Rock, Denver and Minneapolis.

A major reason for its popularity is the impact light rail can have on economic development. Fixed-rail transit changes the communities around transit stops and rail lines. As Peirce and Johnson wrote in *Citistates Report/Kansas City*,



"How sad it is that we covered over all of the trolley tracks."

"We are getting further and further behind the curve in terms of transportation options. Failure to have robust transportation options will make our community less economically viable."

"I take the bus to and from work most days and enjoy this method of transportation, but I miss the subways and trains of New York where I lived until two years ago. I also miss the ease with which I could get an Amtrak train to other cities."

“light rail, in almost every city, generates hundreds of millions of dollars of new development. It draws stores, offices, residences. Over time, it creates its own residential and business nodes and its own ridership.” The first rail line, the authors found, often “leads quickly to demands for more.”

In Dallas, between 1994 and 1998, the increase in taxable value of properties near Dallas Area Rapid Transit stations was 25 percent higher than elsewhere in the metro area. In Phoenix, light rail won’t be operational until 2008 but has already attracted \$600 million in investments. Portland adopted light rail in 1986 and, according to one article, “(f)ormerly languishing neighborhoods now have first-floor shops and second-floor offices along rail lines.”

KCATA has supported the idea of a light-rail line from downtown to the Plaza for decades because of the potential economic development benefits. Kansas City’s strategic planning project, FOCUS, endorsed light rail as a tool for redevelopment and a way to enhance traditional urban values.

Critics, however, say that light rail comes at the expense of bus service to poorer areas. Randal O’Toole, of the libertarian Thoreau Institute in Portland, says, “The whole point of rail is to attract white suburbanites out of their cars while cutting service for minority, low-income people.”

## What about a regional approach to transit?

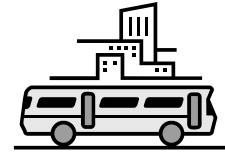
What might it look like if metro Kansas City cooperated across state and county lines to provide transit services? One possibility is a plan called Smart Moves.

Smart Moves is a regional transit plan developed by the Mid-America Regional Council, KCATA, Johnson County Transit and Unified Government Transit. Smart Moves develops detailed service plans for the seven-county area, linking them together and defining the strategies needed to fund the plan. It would take about \$169 million annually to implement, with about \$90 million available from passenger fares, state and federal sources, and an existing Kansas City, Missouri, ½-cent sales tax for transit. The remainder would need to be raised regionally.

Smart Moves originally used mainly buses, including Greyhound-type buses, articulated vehicles that can bend around curves, large standard buses, small buses, van, and bus rapid transit vehicles. It also allowed for the use of unspecified fixed-guideway (rail) vehicles.

Smart Moves includes four major types of services:

- Freeway Flyers (commuter express) – Higher speed service with very few stops.
- Rapid Riders (arterial express) – Bus rapid transit and airport express service with limited stops, exclusive lanes, and unique vehicles and



### Something to think about:

- How competitive would transit – the bus or light rail – have to be in terms of time before you would use it rather than your vehicle? What other considerations do you use to decide whether to take transit or your car?
- What is your biggest personal barrier to using public transportation?
- What do you think about the assumption that the bus is only for those who cannot afford cars? What about the assumption that light rail is mainly for the affluent?
- What do you see as the major differences between the bus and light rail? Is one more attractive to you than the other?
- If you live in Kansas City, Missouri, what factored into whether you went to the polls to vote for or against light rail?
- If you don’t use the bus, are you willing to pay to have the bus available for those who need it?

stations.

- Local Link connectors – Buses that move people within or across a single city or county, with a high level of access to commercial, retail and residential development along the route.
- Local Link circulators – Buses that provide the most local neighborhood service as determined by the needs of residents.

MARC is currently updating Smart Moves in response to recent transit activity in the region. The update is expected to incorporate a light-rail alternatives analysis under way in Kansas City, Missouri, a new Wyandotte County community master plan, Johnson County Transit's new five-year strategic plan, alternatives analyses of I-35 and I-70 corridors, and bus rapid transit studies of Troost Avenue and State Avenue. The update will include about 25 public meetings, as well as the results of this *By the People* discussion of transportation.

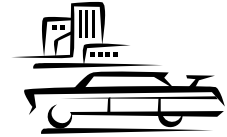
A 2005 survey tested attitudes about funding for public transportation. The survey found that more than 78 percent of residents in Johnson, Clay, Cass, Jackson and Platte counties favored bistate legislation to let citizens vote on a regional sales tax to fund public transportation. Residents were five times more likely to think improvements should be funded by a regional tax than a local one.

A bistate tax for public transportation would use the same legislation that was used to renovate Union Station. Missouri revised its legislation this spring to allow funds to be used for transportation. Senate Bill 825 allows Clay, Platte, Jackson, Cass, Ray and Buchanan counties to raise funds for regional transit services. Missouri, then, can fund transit even if Kansas doesn't pass similar legislation.

A bill authorizing use of a bistate tax for transit in Johnson, Wyandotte and Leavenworth counties died in a Kansas legislative committee in 2006. According to one Kansas leader, one problem was a dispute between the county and the cities in Johnson County about how increased sales taxes would be shared.

Because of the Kansas City vote for light rail and the lack of enthusiasm in Kansas for funding and governance aspects of Smart Moves, MARC said it would quit pushing for a regional transit tax on the Kansas side of the metro area.

*This discussion guide maps out three approaches as a way to promote public deliberation of this important issue. Fueled by values, each option expresses a distinct, but not mutually exclusive, perspective that could drive public policy. Each option has a foundation for action and each action has consequences and trade-offs that must be considered.*



## Something to think about

- Imagine that the region is working together to provide public transportation and that the system is operating very well. How would the region be working together? What kind of public transportation would we have? What would you need or want to do differently to take advantage of it?
- Would you be willing to pool your city's money with that of other cities to pay for public transportation, such as through a bistate tax?
- What concerns would you have? What do you think might be the benefits?
- If there was a regional approach to transportation, what agency should manage it, or do you care which agency would manage it?

## Option One: Get workers to jobs

Many jobs don't pay enough for workers to afford their own cars, but they are still jobs worth having. Our transportation improvements don't need to be flashy or terribly expensive. Instead, they should focus on the goal that will make a difference to the business owners and working people of metro Kansas City: Making sure people can get to jobs.

### Actions we could take

- Consider housing and transportation policies together by doing things like building affordable housing near bus stops and encouraging infill development of inner-city and older suburban neighborhoods near job centers or transportation access.
- Reduce the cost of commuting by rewarding car sharing or by making car ownership more accessible and affordable through subsidized loans or insurance.
- Develop an expanded, regional bus system that focuses on moving workers to and from major job centers downtown and in the suburbs.

### Arguments for

- Many people on welfare could hold a job if only transportation was available. This approach can change lives.
- Businesses need service workers but those jobs pay too little to cover all the costs of a car. Workers in other cities rely on public transit to get to work, so why not here?
- If we create a bus system that really works for workers, it will also serve those who are too old or young to drive and those who are disabled.

### Arguments against

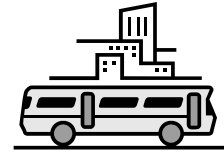
- The community shouldn't help businesses get workers if those businesses pay too little for people to afford a car.
- The bus is seen as the option of last resort already. Why would we want to encourage the same old stripped-down approach to transportation?
- Focusing on lower wage workers reduces the potential ridership and, therefore, the potential voters for public transportation or subsidies.

### Values

Efficiency

Independence

Equal opportunity



"We have a great road system in the metro, but a lousy public transportation system. If we are going to be great we must work together between states and counties to put together a real public transportation system that serves our citizens, our businesses and our visitors."

"I'm frustrated. I live in Blue Springs and work just west of the Plaza. I live within two blocks of a bus stop. I'd love to take the bus to work a couple of times per week, but I can't because the 'hours of operation' are so out of synch with my hours."

"People that depend on the \$7 an hour jobs, which are more and more created by way of shopping centers way out in the prairie, are not able to get there. Or if buses are available, you're talking a minimum of one hour and a half of travel time."

## Option Two: Improve economic development

Fixed-rail transit systems include light, commuter and heavy rail. These systems have been powerful economic development tools in other communities and tend to promote development along transit hubs. This region should invest major dollars in fixed-rail transit that spurs development and attracts tourists as well as commuters who could choose to drive.

### Actions we could take

- Agree on a workable light-rail plan for Kansas City, Missouri, and get started building as soon as possible.
- Take another look at commuter rail, focusing on routes with the potential to improve economic development.
- Use buses mainly to connect neighborhoods with light rail lines.
- Raise taxes and user fees to discourage automobile use.
- Require developers to pay more of the cost of new road systems.
- Require that developers pay for parking, which is now heavily subsidized with public funds.
- Provide incentives for new developments near fixed-rail transit hubs.

### Arguments for

- More compact development patterns would create more vibrant, livable communities and better transit options.
- If we're ever going to attract a critical mass of transit riders, including people who ride by choice, fixed-rail transit is the only answer.
- Rail costs more to begin with, but it has the potential for a solid return on the investment.

### Arguments against

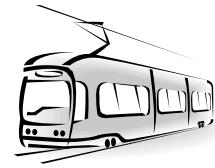
- It is impractical to change development patterns. Metro Kansas City has a lot of available space and we might as well use it.
- People who drive cars shouldn't have to subsidize transit that they don't use, and shouldn't be penalized for driving.
- Recent studies show that commuter rail is much more expensive than other options. It's too great a risk to take with too little guarantee of a payoff.

### Values

Innovation

Urban living

Entrepreneurism



"People expect (transportation) to be perfect, but don't want to pay very much for it. You get what you pay for."

"People who live far south or north are driving for 30 to 45 minutes twice a day. We are expending tremendous resources to each drive alone in our own cars."

"Our huge urban sprawl makes this a challenging issue. We've built a car-friendly city that won't work in the future as gas prices rise and traffic congestion grows worse."

## Option Three: Reduce congestion

There's nothing wrong with spreading out if your metro area, like ours, is lucky enough to have a lot of land available. The great majority of people in metro Kansas City don't want to live in dense urban developments and they like the independence of driving their own cars. Let's keep our development pattern the way it is and simply solve the problem of congestion.

### Actions we could take

- Use special lanes for high-occupancy vehicles as well as other incentives to make it more attractive for people to car pool.
- Use mixed-use zoning and mixed-income dwellings in new suburban developments so people don't have to drive so far to work or to stores.
- Expand the use of bus rapid transit to get commuters from the suburbs to downtown quickly.
- Increase our spending on roads and bridges so the commute is as safe and comfortable as possible, and add new lanes as needed to reduce congestion.

### Arguments for

- Trying to convince local residents to accept high-density, transit-oriented development is a losing battle. That's not why they live here.
- The more people who use car pools and bus rapid transit, the less congested the highways. These measures are much cheaper than building new highway lanes, so they make a great first step.
- Our roads and bridges are better than they used to be, but we still don't spend as much as we need to on maintenance, repairs and improvements.

### Arguments against

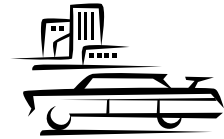
- Sprawl simply shifts people and jobs within the region, without producing a net gain.
- Building roads may not help with congestion. "Induced traffic" is a situation where the more highway lanes you build, the more traffic you get because people find it agreeable to move farther away.
- This approach offers limited help to people who don't drive, including all of those aging Baby Boomers.

### Values

Practicality

Independence

Realism



"What I can tell you is that I love my car and having the freedom and money to drive it."

"I prefer the independence my car gives me. With a mass transit system, however, I might consider (using it) if it were easy and convenient with reliable scheduling."

"How are the elderly and children supposed to get around in a society like ours?"