

## **Public Transit Investment Decisions: Per Capita Trends and Conditions**

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Over the past four decades, federal assistance for transit has continued to increase, as well as to become more specialized. Investments have been focused on economic development, job access, increasing transportation person trip capacity, environmental improvements, and quality of life improvements. As a result, individual agencies have had to become increasingly creative and knowledgeable when seeking federal assistance.

With increasing traffic congestion and a renewed focus on transit, local and state governments must re-evaluate the benefits that overall mobility contributes to their communities' economies, environment, and quality of life. The type and amount of investments are critical to the success of local mass transportation networks.

Researchers at the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida recently completed an investigation of per capita investment in local services, such as parks and recreation, library, historical, public health, and, in particular, transit services. In general, priorities for local services did not appear to always be equitable, and some local services appear to be greater consumers of local funds than others.

Researchers focused on per capita investment in and per capita utilization of transit services between 1993 and 1999, and they analyzed changes that have occurred over that time and the corresponding influences responsible for change (*BC-137-26*).

The study was based on investigations of the Sarasota County Area Transit Department (SCAT) and the Lakeland Area Mass Transit District (LAMTD). Both transit systems were found to be in a growth mode, although respective trends in funding were different; SCAT has experienced a reduction in federal assistance for which local funding has had to compensate, while LAMTD has experienced large increases in state and federal funding and so has not increased its local share. In both systems, ridership has increased but has not kept pace with increases in operating expenditures.

Researchers suggested that while ridership may provide a valuable indication of service utilization, the value of the transit investments may also be understood in terms of the community value of the ridership indicator, which was not studied. That is, there may currently exist unaccounted benefits that would suggest a closer relationship between operating expenditures and utilization.

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