

DEVELOPING BUS TRANSFER CENTERS FOR MAXIMUM TRANSIT AGENCY AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Bus transfer centers are often regarded as ‘undesirable neighbors’ that are difficult to site and difficult to gain support for due to concerns over noise, exhaust, traffic congestion, and the presence of unwanted passengers. In fact, there are some locations where major bus transfer activities are not only not welcome, but are probably not in the best interests of the surrounding development. Finding the right circumstances and locations for bus transfer centers has troubled transit agencies and communities for decades. Bus transfer centers often get shunted off to low visibility sites and are rarely received enthusiastically by the surrounding community.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this project is to identify transit agencies that have been successful in designing and implementing bus transfer centers that are assets to the surrounding communities. Researchers will identify and analyze centers that are not only acceptable to the host communities but that are factors that contribute to positive community development. The ultimate goal is to explain the circumstances under which the facility was built in hopes that the lessons learned from those jurisdictions could be emulated by public transit agencies in other cities.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This project identified five bus transfer centers, in four different cities, that represent examples of extremely functional facilities that serve the needs of transit customers and, more importantly, that help to achieve the goals of the surrounding community for positive community development. The four transit agencies that accomplished these objectives were located in Corpus Christi, Texas, Columbus, Ohio, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Charlotte, North Carolina. The key findings of the study include the following:

- Transit managers need to expand their self-image beyond being mobility managers to include possibilities to serve as facilitators of community development. They have access to grants that can help pay for improvements and spur new development.
- A new bus transfer facility should serve more than just the needs of transit passengers; it should be consistent with a comprehensive plan and help the surrounding community accomplish its broader development goals. The question transit managers must ask themselves is, “What can we do to help our community succeed?”
- Transit centers can be more beneficial to surrounding communities when developed in partnership with a broad array of public and private partners who are concerned with positive community development. Additional partners can bring more resources to bear and help generate support for the facility.

- Complete community involvement in the planning of a new transit center is vital to ensure (1) community support for the facility is generated, (2) functions deemed important and beneficial by the community are included, and (3) the right services for the community are implemented.
- The transit center can accommodate many non-traditional, non-transit purposes (e.g., day care centers, health clinics, schools, bank offices, etc.) and should strongly consider including them if they help gain community acceptance and if they promote the prosperity of the surrounding area.
- Thoughtful architectural design that incorporates local cultural characteristics can greatly enhance the acceptance of a transfer facility; furthermore, it can create the center as a gateway to the community of which the locals can be proud. When completed, the facility should look like it has always belonged where it was built.
- There needs to be a no-tolerance stance taken when it comes to crime and vandalism if the center is to be regarded as a community asset. The transit center will not be a community asset unless it invests whatever is necessary to provide top-flight security and maintenance at the facility.
- The transit agency should take steps as quickly as possible to address the issues of bus noise and exhaust. Minimizing these irritants will help gain community acceptance.

BENEFITS

Bus transfer facilities that are community assets that contribute to positive community development can help to raise the host community's regard for transit. The successful development of a bus transfer facility can make it a community problem solver and an important participant in the betterment of the host community—as opposed to being regarded as a nuisance. Public transit agencies can use funds, available only to such agencies, to help make improvements to surrounding areas and thus encourage further public and private investment and result in many positive developments. By using appropriate architectural design, the bus transfer center can become a gateway to the surrounding community and a respected landmark.

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