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## Public transportation's new direction

### APTA's Dump the Pump Day spreads awareness of the important benefits of the steadily growing world of public transportation

Recent spikes in nationwide public transportation ridership illustrate the relevance of the American Public Transportation Association's National Dump the Pump Day on June 19. The event exists to spread awareness of one important fact: when gas prices soar, you've got a friend in public transportation. Public transportation is the final link in a truly multimodal transportation network that our country needs. It helps the economy by creating jobs and lessening congestion on our roadways. It also helps motorists save money on gas and delay car repairs. In fact, APTA's Transit Saving Report revealed that a two-person household can save, on average, more than \$10,174 per year by downsizing to one car – and presumably utilizing their city's transit options more often.

While not every American is ditching his or her car any time soon, many are becoming intrigued by the convenience and cost-effectiveness of various public transportation options. A 2013 America THINKS survey from HNTB Corporation revealed that 76 percent of Americans are open to taking public transportation over driving – up seven percent from when HNTB last asked that question in 2010. According to APTA, Americans took a staggering 10.7 billion trips on public transportation in 2013, which is the highest that number has been in 57 years. Since 1995, public transit ridership is up 37.2 percent, a figure swelling

faster than U.S. population growth and total vehicle miles traveled, which saw 20.3 and 22.7 percent hikes, respectively.

It seems these increases are caused by the public's two aforementioned interests in public transit: convenience and cost effectiveness. The same America THINKS survey found that 41 percent of Americans who would choose public transit over driving would do so because of high gas prices. Fifty-eight percent said they would boost ridership if it was conveniently located.

With this knowledge, a question is posed: What new convenient, cost-effective transit choices do Americans have?

One of the most viable options is the fast-developing system of bus rapid transit. BRT retains many of the features of rail-based public transit, but is much more easily implemented and cost efficient. These systems also often carry additional benefits, including electronic and/or automatic payment methods, real-time arrival and departure updates and environmentally friendly vehicles. BRT funding can often be cobbled together from multiple sources, including metropolitan planning organizations, municipal or county transportation funds, or even state highway maintenance budgets. HNTB recently introduced a BRT endeavor in Kansas City, Missouri, called the Metro Area Express, which was

smoothly integrated into an existing bus system. The project efficiently linked major areas of the city, uses the latest technology in the transit industry and serves as a prime example of where BRT is headed. According to the survey, many Americans are open to new forms of public transportation, such as bus rapid transit. It found that 73 percent of Americans who currently don't have a bus rapid transit system where they live would support that kind of development.

While providing a very practical option, BRT alone can't sustain the transit needs of an entire community. A strong set of multiple public transportation systems is key to bolstering economic development in individual cities. According to the survey, Americans see a range of economic benefits from public transportation: 50 percent cited less-congested roads, 31 percent mentioned a better quality of life for locals, 26 percent saw an increase in new business in their area and 18 percent saw an increase in property value.

When it's all said and done, successful communities thrive when there is a healthy mix of transportation choices. This never has been more true as the costs of commuting by car and congestion on America's highways continue to increase. There certainly is hope, however, and it's encouraging to see our nation's cities tackle so many public transportation endeavors.

*Liz Rao is chair public transit services for HNTB Corporation. HNTB currently is involved in numerous large-scale public transit projects nationwide. These include the renovation of Chicago's historic Wilson Station, the design of a seven-mile light rail line extension connecting Seattle with the cities of Bellevue and Redmond, and construction engineering and inspection for Florida's SunRail, a commuter rail system in greater Orlando that began service in May 2014.*

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