

# Public transit called key to any recovery plan

This is the condensed summary of a report for Public Sector Consultants Inc. (PSCI) of Lansing on public transit in southeastern Michigan. It was prepared for the Greater Detroit Chapter of Commerce, AFL-CIO and Detroit chapter of Associated General Contractors. The conclusions are PSCI's.

The Greater Detroit Metropolitan Area has experienced four recessions in the past 13 years. Recession has contributed to deterioration of its manufacturing base and high unemployment.

It also has created some problems unique to Detroit — outmigration of its population and withdrawal of its major retailers.

There are a variety of approaches the region might pursue in its effort to reinvigorate the local economy and diversify its business base — more intensive development of its tourism and convention opportunities, creation of a high-density office, service and specialty retail center which would attract customers from all parts of the state, and diversification of manufacturing enterprises which could benefit from the advantages of close proximity to a shipping center but a few of the many possibilities.

Regardless of the approach the community selects, there is one primary element which is central to the success of whatever development option is chosen — a comprehensive, regional public-transit system which unites the major activity centers and which assists the flow of people from their homes to employment, educational, public service and recreational facilities.

Although not guaranteeing success in and of itself, no economic revitalization plan can be achieved without an efficient, comprehensive public-transit system.

THE DETROIT area is characterized by a wide dispersion of business-activity centers. Residential and business development has occurred over a wide geographical area rather than being concentrated around a core activity center (traditionally the downtown area or "central" business district).

One consequence of a comparatively low density of development is increased dependence upon private means of transportation. Individuals who do not have use of a private vehicle are effectively barred from any of the area's business-activity centers.

The transportation system, as currently configured, focuses on the downtown Detroit business center. Movement between suburban activity centers using public transit is time-consuming and difficult if not impossible.

This impedes additional suburban development and restricts the employment, educational, cultural and recreational opportunities of individuals whose mobility is determined primarily by the location and hours of operation of public-transit routes.

CONSTRUCTION OF a comprehensive transit system serves a dual purpose — improved mobility and economic development.

Construction and operation of a public-transit system, especially one which includes light-rail service, can generate significant economic-development benefits.

The first of these benefits would be creation of approximately 24,735 person years of construction employment over the current base of 9,765.

As more and more sections of the system become operational, a number of permanent jobs would be created. There would be need for about 2,000 more drivers, maintenance personnel, mechanics and other individuals involved in systems operation.

As more dollars are pumped into the local economies, other businesses will be induced to hire over 3,200 more employees in order to keep pace with this higher level of demand. It would result in a permanent employment increase of approximately 5,200 jobs compared to the number of jobs created by maintaining the current transit system.

BECAUSE 80 percent of the capital construction costs are financed by the federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration, the vast majority of initial expenditures would represent an infusion of money into the region rather than merely a redistribution of existing community resources.

For a 20-percent match worth approximately \$472 million, the Detroit metropolitan area would be able to tap a total of \$2.582 billion for development of public infrastructure and associated job generation.

By leveraging its investment in this manner, the region will be able to realize a higher return in public transit than in any other investment alternative currently available to it. The associated development, employment, sales and increased tax revenue will provide 11.2 times the state and local investment (\$5.310 billion).

CONSTRUCTION of the two light-rail corridors along Woodward and Grand avenues represents a major fixed investment in public-transit infrastructure.

As such, it provides a stronger, more permanent commitment to public transit in that immediate geographic vicinity than would be provided by a commensurate level of bus service. Bus routes are more readily modified or reconfigured than a light-rail transit line.

The higher volumes of customer traffic along the various transit routes are relatively more predictable in areas adjoining a light-rail corridor. By effectively guaranteeing minimum levels of pedestrian traffic at transit centers and along the rail corridors, property values should rise, and businesses should be more willing to commit to the long-term investments. An equivalent level of bus service would be incapable of attracting comparable amounts of business activity.

When the entire system becomes operational the seven-county region could realize \$51 million per year over current revenue levels. Revenue from construction expenditure would provide an additional \$235.2 million over a 14-year period.

PUBLIC IMAGE is an issue which is closely related to but distinct from that of economic development.

The presence or absence of a modern light-rail transit system can convey to business interests far more quickly and accurately than other types of information the degree of community involvement, the spirit of cooperation and the quality of communication among the region's residential, business and government leaders.

If the greater Detroit area is to be a viable competitor with other major metropolitan areas for new business opportunities, it must avoid sending an image of divided leadership, indecision and paralysis.

A SAFE, FAST and convenient public-transit system offers an acceptable alternative to private models of transportation.

Because a light-rail system provides faster, more convenient service than bus service, implementation of one or more rail

corridors could attract riders who are not dependent upon public transit for their mobility.

In addition to reversing the recent declines in transit ridership, new riders of choice who parked their cars in favor of public transit would reduce the number of vehicles during peak hours on crowded arterial highways connecting Detroit to the suburbs and the suburbs to each other.

**Movement between suburban activity centers using public transit is time-consuming and difficult if not impossible**

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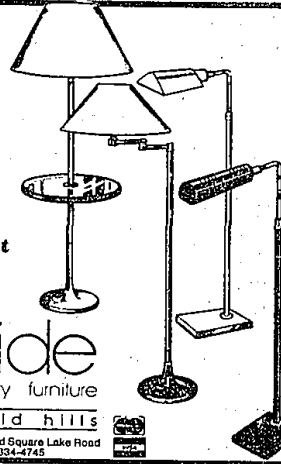
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