



Executive Memorandum

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CENSUS SHOWS COMMUTERS ARE REJECTING TRANSIT

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Data released by the U.S. Census Bureau show that over the past decade, 39 of the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas experienced a decline in the share of commuters using public transit—buses, rail, and subways—to get to work. (See Table 1 on back.) Of the 10 areas that saw an increase, the gains were modest except for Las Vegas, where a 100 percent increase in transit market share occurred—largely in a new transit system contracted out to private operators.

Overall, the decline was substantial and occurred in older cities where transit is well-established, such as Philadelphia and Boston, and in places like Atlanta and Dallas, where costly new rail systems have been built. Nationwide, the share of commuters taking transit fell from 5.3 percent in 1990 to 4.7 percent in 2000, continuing the decline in transit use that has been evident in census data since 1960. In 1990, there were five metropolitan areas where transit held more than a 10 percent share; by 2000, there were only two.

Considering that the number of employed Americans increased by 13.2 million over the same decade, and given the half-trillion dollars that government has invested in transit upgrades and new service since 1970, the 1,900-person decline in riders between 1990 and 2000 reflects a public policy failure of staggering dimensions. A failure of this magnitude should encourage Washington to re-examine the federal role in transit and determine whether the billions of dollars it takes from fuel taxes paid by motorists to subsidize transit is an effective use of federal money.

Under current law, about 18 percent of these federal fuel tax revenues paid by motorists throughout the country is devoted to transit, thereby providing less than 5 percent of commuters with almost 20 percent of the money. Compounding this inequity, transit ridership is concentrated in just a handful of metropolitan areas. In 2000, fully 75 percent of transit ridership occurred in just seven metropolitan areas: Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington/Baltimore.

One way to rectify such inequities is to allow state officials more discretion over how federal fuel tax revenues raised in their state are spent, and to reform the federal law to let states keep what they raise. With the federal highway law expiring in 2003, Congress will have an opportunity to make some much-needed improvements.

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Metropolitan Area	1990 Transit Market Share	2000 Transit Market Share	Transit Market Share Change	Change in the Number of Transit Work Trips
Atlanta, GA MSA	4.71%	3.65%	-22.5%	5,450
Austin-San Marcos, TX MSA	3.37%	2.57%	-23.8%	3,076
Boston-Worcester-Lawrence, MA-NH-ME-CT CMSA	10.64%	9.03%	-15.1%	33,914
Buffalo-Niagara Falls, NY MSA	4.70%	3.51%	-25.2%	-6,665
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC MSA	1.85%	1.39%	-24.9%	-753
Chicago-Gary-Kenosha, IL-IN-WI CMSA	13.66%	11.49%	-15.9%	-39,921
Cincinnati-Hamilton, OH-KY-IN CMSA	3.66%	2.93%	-19.9%	-1,830
Cleveland-Akron, OH CMSA	4.56%	3.42%	-25.0%	-9,564
Columbus, OH MSA	2.74%	2.31%	-15.8%	-629
Dallas-Fort Worth, TX CMSA	2.35%	1.81%	-23.0%	-739
Denver-Boulder-Greeley, CO CMSA	4.25%	4.34%	2.3%	17,510
Detroit-Ann Arbor-Flint, MI CMSA	2.43%	1.82%	-25.2%	-5,449
Grand Rapids-Muskegon-Holland, MI MSA	1.21%	0.84%	-30.8%	375
Greensboro-Winston-Salem-High Point, NC MSA	1.16%	0.86%	-25.6%	-387
Hartford, CT MSA	3.66%	2.81%	-23.2%	-4,460
Houston-Galveston-Brazoria, TX CMSA	3.78%	3.28%	-13.3%	1,709
Indianapolis, IN MSA	2.08%	1.32%	-36.4%	-2,469
Jacksonville, FL MSA	2.13%	1.52%	-28.5%	-1,416
Kansas City, MO-KS MSA	2.14%	1.28%	-40.0%	-5,199
Las Vegas, NV-AZ MSA	2.03%	4.06%	100.1%	20,996
Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange County, CA CMSA	4.56%	4.66%	2.2%	4,981
Louisville, KY-IN MSA	3.21%	2.21%	-31.0%	-3,425
Memphis, TN-AR-MS MSA	2.82%	1.95%	-30.9%	-4,111
Miami-Fort Lauderdale, FL CMSA	4.35%	3.90%	-10.3%	-1,05
Milwaukee-Racine, WI CMSA	4.88%	4.02%	-17.7%	-4,896
Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN-WI MSA	5.29%	4.46%	-15.7%	2,021
Nashville, TN MSA	1.73%	0.96%	-44.9%	-2,660
New Orleans, LA MSA	7.25%	5.60%	-22.8%	-5,391
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-CT-PA CMSA	26.57%	24.90%	-6.3%	48,206
Norfolk-Virginia Beach-Newport News, VA-NC MSA	2.19%	1.87%	-14.5%	-1,079
Oklahoma City, OK MSA	0.68%	0.60%	-11.0%	22
Orlando, FL MSA	1.55%	1.69%	9.6%	4,706
Philadelphia-Wilmington-Atlantic City, PA-NJ-DE-MD CMSA	10.18%	8.73%	-14.2%	-38,670
Phoenix-Mesa, AZ MSA	2.13%	2.02%	-5.1%	8,397
Pittsburgh, PA MSA	7.95%	6.18%	-22.2%	-10,650
Portland-Salem, OR-WA CMSA	5.42%	5.71%	5.4%	23,867
Providence-Fall River-Warwick, RI-MA MSA	3.17%	2.48%	-21.8%	9,790
Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC MSA	2.00%	1.69%	-15.6%	2,430
Rochester, NY MSA	3.19%	2.00%	-37.4%	-5,043
Sacramento-Yolo, CA CMSA	2.40%	2.72%	13.4%	5,301
Salt Lake City-Ogden, UT MSA	2.98%	2.98%	0.0%	4,860
San Antonio, TX MSA	3.67%	2.89%	-21.1%	-657
San Diego, CA MSA	3.28%	3.37%	2.6%	3,379
San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, CA CMSA	9.29%	9.48%	2.0%	27,849
Seattle-Tacoma-Bremerton, WA CMSA	6.31%	6.75%	6.9%	37,300
St. Louis, MO-IL MSA	2.97%	2.41%	-18.7%	-4,079
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL MSA	1.46%	1.40%	-3.9%	1,573
Washington-Baltimore, DC-MD-VA-WV CMSA	11.55%	9.43%	-18.4%	-31,650
West Palm Beach-Boca Raton, FL MSA	1.35%	1.40%	4.2%	1,553
Metropolitan Areas Over 1,000,000 Population	8.50%	7.41%	-12.9%	77,368
Outside Metropolitan Areas Over 1,000,000 Population	1.17%	0.96%	-17.7%	-79,254
United States	5.27%	4.73%	-10.3%	-1,886

Source: U.S. Census 2000 & 1990; for a more detailed version of this table, see www.publicpurpose.com/ut-jtw2000metro.htm