

Traditional public transit competes with sharing community

By: Teya Vitu March 3, 2017



Valley Regional Transit in October opened its downtown Boise Main Street Station bus terminal, but new forms of transit are emerging such as Uber, carsharing and bikesharing. Photo by Pete Grady.

Cities are still committed to massive investments in traditional forms of public transit dating back more than a century: buses, streetcars, subways, light rail, commuter rail. But how much will they fit in the future?

“Transportation itself is changing really fast, faster than since the invention of the automobile,” said James Corless, director of Transportation for America, in a Boise visit in September.

The peer-to-peer ridesharing services Uber and Lyft, automated vehicles, car sharing, bike sharing, even not leaving home at all with [telecommuting](#) have all gained traction in just the last few years.

“The transit ridership is going to have tremendous competition in the future,” said John W. Martin, CEO of the Southeastern Institute of Research, a marketing research firm in Richmond, Va.



John Martin

Martin still sees a role for traditional transit modes in connecting population centers. Local transit, he believes, will yield to individualized transit. Martin spoke at an education series sponsored by Ada County Highway District and Comprehensive Planning Association of Southwest Idaho.

"As we plan transit now, they want it to go everywhere," Martin said. "Around the world, bike sharing is huge. Car sharing is taking off. Transportation network company Lyft is rocketing."

Martin said in Virginia employers with formal telenetworking programs to allow people to work at home increased from 12 percent in 2007 to 20 percent in 2015.

Wayne Hoffman, president of the Idaho Freedom Foundation, believes transit should be private, without public subsidy.

"The best modern iteration of (profit-driven private sector transit) is Uber and Lyft," he said. "It's safe, affordable, comfortable and available. I've used public transit and don't find it to be convenient or reliable. I can hit an app on the phone and summon an Uber."

Even the boss of Boise's bus system acknowledges that Boise public transit has evolved beyond Valley Regional Transit.

"It's not just a bus, not just trains, not just vanpools, it's an integrated system," said Kelli Badesheim, VRT's executive director. "What people really want are options."

Badesheim points to public transit's big dilemma: what is called the last mile, first mile – or getting the passenger from the stop to final destination.

"The last mile, first mile is the new sharing community: Car sharing, bike sharing, Uber, carpool, vanpool," Badesheim said.

The last mile, first mile is perhaps most about walking – and having a tightknit transit network to enable an easy walk, according to TransitCenter, a New York City foundation dedicated to improving urban mobility.

"The majority of transit riders, including 80 percent of all-purpose riders, typically walk to transit," TransitCenter wrote in its [Who's on Board 2016](#) report. "This finding underscores the importance of putting transit stations in busy, walkable neighborhoods; building offices and housing within walking distance of transit; and providing more and safer pedestrian routes to transit."

Idaho Business Review staff writer Teya Vitu has ridden on at least 14 streetcar systems and at least 16 subway systems across the U.S., Canada and Europe.

