



## SIR's Guiding Principles of Successful Regional Transit Systems

June 27, 2018

This document presents SIR's guiding principles behind the design, operation and expansion of successful regional transit systems that involve multiple jurisdictions and integrate the services of multiple operators.

### **Transit Defined:**

For purposes of this document, transit is defined as:

- A shared passenger transportation service – private for profit, non-profit and public that is available for the public.
- Transit modes include buses, trolleys, trains, fixed guideway systems, and vans.
- Transit is viewed as a separate mode from taxis, transportation network companies (Uber), carpools, vanpools, limousines or other services provided by private arrangement. However, transit and transit systems may benefit from and include many of these services.

### **Guiding Principles:**

The 10 guiding principles behind the design, operation and expansion of successful regional transit systems include:

#### **1. A Shared Vision Is Established:**

All successful regional transit systems have a shared vision of what's possible – what a true regional transit network could look like, and who it could serve. This vision is most often based on residents' perspectives - a values-based vision that residents have for their community 10 to 20 years from now.

#### **2. Clear Priorities Guide Planning:**

While many societal needs are interdependent, establishing a hierarchy of priorities is a critical guiding tenet for successful regional transit systems. This step helps partners (decision makers), planners and stakeholders make tradeoff decisions when needed. The list of competing priorities varies, but most often includes a standard set.

### Competing Priorities for Regional Transit System Planning:

- **Jobs:** Ensure the greatest access to jobs. This includes the needed frequency to make transit service work for workers.
- **Access:** Ensure everyone is provided reasonable access to other people, places, goods and services.
- **Health and Safety:** Protect the health (physical, mental, environmental, and social well-being) and safety of all people.
- **Equity:** Ensure the most impact on social equity, meeting the basic transportation-related needs of all people including women, the poor, the rural, and the disabled.
- **Congestion Mitigation:** Concentrate urban growth, limit sprawl, and provide for more mixed and efficient land use.

Recognizing that the benefits of high-quality transit service do not always accrue equally to everyone, tradeoffs must be made.

Most successful regional transit systems prioritize service decisions that support regional economic growth and development. Access to jobs is most often prioritized over other needs that can be served by transit.

### 3. A “Borderless” Perspective Is The Optimal View:

Members of a successful regional transit systems work together to serve a “borderless region,” viewing and serving the mobility needs of residents across the region, not just in any one locality. This is a “customer” perspective as most residents don’t see jurisdictional borders when it comes to mobility services.

### 4. Crawl, Walk, Run Approach Builds Trust and Partners:

Members of successful regional transit systems grow into successful partnerships between jurisdictions and operators. This is most often accomplished through a crawl, walk, run approach where initial and successful local system connections to a larger network lead to expanded new services which, ultimately, lead to a comprehensive regional plan.

The first step is most often working together to link existing networks of local and regional transportation services, meeting the mobility needs of the multimodal transportation system. This partnership evolves over time to expanded services that meet the mobility needs of residents in the region, especially linking workers to jobs. Ultimately, successful regional transit systems reach a point where all of the operators and jurisdictions fund a long-term regional transit development plan that is embraced and supported by all parties.

## 5. A “Pay To Play” Understanding Supports Partnering:

Transit organizations and their respective local funders fully appreciate that their service is constrained by available funding and local service expectations. Existing local service, even poorly supported service, is hard to stop in order to fund a new service(s) route into another nearby jurisdiction.

The operating expenses related to a new service must be covered in some manner by the jurisdiction receiving expanded system access.

## 6. Frequency Is Prioritized Over Reach:

With all transit planning from the local to regional level there is a fundamental planning tradeoff between “reach” or coverage and “frequency” of service.

Coverage is what percent of the market has access to transit service. Frequency is how often a transit service runs – the time between each bus on a particular route. In the transit industry, this is most often expressed as the “headway.”

Great market coverage usually comes with poor quality transit service – headways aren’t frequent enough to be a reliable transportation option. Conversely, great frequency cost money and this most often limits the amount of market coverage that can be provided by a transit operator.

Addressing and managing the tradeoff between coverage and frequency gets to the heart of building an effective regional transit system. Agreeing on what’s important here - coverage versus frequency - is one of the most important planning tenets when designing and operating a successful regional transit system.

In the transit industry, it is commonly accepted that in order for transit to be a reliable transportation option, especially for workers, headways should be 15 minutes or less.

## 7. The Region’s Largest Employers Are Involved:

More and more employers, especially larger employers, are appreciating the role transit plays in attracting and retaining their workers, bringing customers to their locations, and making their region a more attractive and sustainable place.

SIR’s research suggests that an employer’s active participation in a transit system and other transportation demand management services lifts employee participation by as much as 300% over companies that are not engaged.

Transit organizations of successful regional transit systems have a unified approach to calling on, engaging and supporting local employers and local business associations.

## 8. Regional Teamwork Guides Requests For Dedicated Funding:

Members of successful regional transit systems work together to advocate for and request dedicated, stable and reliable funding sources for transit. This includes going after state and federal support of transit in a seamless and unified team approach.

Approaching state and federal support of transit funding as separate entities never works. State and federal transit funding is very limited. Every jurisdiction is seeking new dollars for transit expansion. The last thing state and federal funding sources want to do is divide a local community. Consequently, they typically avoid what is viewed as competing local interest, at best, and local planning dysfunction, at worst. What most appeals to state and federal transit funders is when multiple jurisdictions within a region and local operators come together with a plan to leverage scarce funding resources and do so with a plan that results in a more robust regional multimodal transportation system.

## 9. Transparency Is The Rule, Not The Exception:

Transit planning and collaborative partnerships between governments, local agencies and transit providers, and other stakeholders must be orchestrated through an open and transparent processes. This can be messy at times, however, it's the only way to build and maintain the needed trust to advance a truly multimodal system that serves a multi-jurisdictional network.

## 10. Real Time Implementation Constraints Are Appreciated By All:

Changes to transit systems, regardless of the scope of the change or size of system, take time, more time than most people would expect or speculate. Transit systems are bound by Federal rules, local considerations, and board policies. Almost any change to an existing route must be approved by local elected leaders and posted for public comment. Stakeholders often weigh in and this stretches out the process. Then for every change in the current system, there are other planning considerations that must be addressed with an expanded or new route. This includes infrastructure planning - bus stops, bus equipment, maintenance planning, etc. and network integration planning - tying into other routes.

Closing down and starting just a small part of one route and expanding another route can take more than year. *Everyone* in a regional transit system - the operators, stakeholders, elected officials, riders and prospective riders - must appreciate these real-time planning and implementation constraints that are part of the transit world.

These 10 guiding principles represent the optimal approach in designing, operating and expanding a successful regional transit system that involves multiple jurisdictions and integrates the services of multiple operators. No question, there is no one regional system that can claim they fully and effortlessly embrace and practice all 10 principals. They are presented in this document as the ideal approach - a collection of best practices that keep everyone focused on maximizing the full potential of a robust and growing regional transit system.