Recent months have seen numerous examples of transit systems taking advantage of federal, state and local funding opportunities and turning to new partners and new technologies to enhance mobility options for their riders. Here's a roundup of recent activities, articles and reports.

**State, Local and Regional Activities on Transit**

- **Arizona:** The Phoenix City Council has agreed to proceed with development of an extension of the South Central light rail, Cronkite News reported last month. The council also directed Valley Metro to evaluate the possibility of maintaining four lanes of surface roads along some portions of the project, an issue that has become a point of contention for some residents and business owners. Streetsblog USA reported that a last-minute effort to delay the project, which was approved by voters as part of a 2015 ballot measure, had the markings of the Koch Brothers-backed Americans for Prosperity group that opposed the original measure.

- **California:** A taxpayers’ association is challenging a bridge toll increase in state court that was approved by Marin County voters last month, The Marin Independent Journal reported. The $3 toll hike is expected to raise $5 billion over 10 years and help fund a new San Rafael Transit Center, Sonoma-Marin area train service and several road projects. See also here and here. ... The Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) is partnering with Los Angeles County to build a transportation boarding school to train students for jobs in the transportation industry that may need to be filled as the city expands transit offerings in the years ahead thanks to a 2016 voter-approved ballot measure called Measure M, The Los Angeles Times reported. See more here and here. Metro, by the way, recently released a new report detailing the lessons learned from the passage of Measure M. Among the key lessons, according to the report's author: finding opportunity in a setback, fostering bipartisanship, driving home local return/making it regional and personal, considering a longer time horizon and no sunset, elevating state of good repair, letting the public weigh in, finding common ground, recognizing that a bigger vision, a political champion and leadership matter, embracing partners, realizing that a real campaign in an expensive advertising market costs money, timing the campaign for a large turnout election, having a monumental problem that needs fixing, keeping it simple and creating good optics, being nimble, and countering the opposition.

- **Colorado:** The city of Denver is conducting a pilot to determine whether dockless electric scooters could be used to expand the effectiveness of the city’s growing transit system and help advance its mobility action plan, Curbed reported. Among the key lessons, mobility action plan, according to the report’s author: finding opportunity in a setback, fostering bipartisanship, driving home local return/making it regional and personal, considering a longer time horizon and no sunset, elevating state of good repair, letting the public weigh in, finding common ground, recognizing that a bigger vision, a political champion and leadership matter, embracing partners, realizing that a real campaign in an expensive advertising market costs money, timing the campaign for a large turnout election, having a monumental problem that needs fixing, keeping it simple and creating good optics, being nimble, and countering the opposition.

- **Connecticut:** State transportation officials say their vision for the state’s public transportation system involves bringing in many technology innovations in the years ahead, The Harford Courant reported. Among them: self-driving shuttles and buses on CTfastrak, the state’s bus rapid transit system. Also, smartphone apps for the rail system.

- **District of Columbia:** Metro has hired an engineering firm to conduct an analysis of the Metrobus system’s business model, The Washington Post reported. Aecom will study the development of a long-term strategic road map for Metrobus, efforts to establish regional coordination and cost controls to ensure the Metrobus budget falls within caps imposed by new legislation that established
dedicated funding for the system. Cities like Baltimore, Houston and Richmond have overhauled their bus networks in recent years to speed up service and better serve neighborhoods. ... Metro is pushing Congress to provide $2 billion over the next decade for critical capital maintenance and upgrades, according to WTOP [18]. The final installment of a 10-year promise of $1.5 billion is included in pending House and Senate appropriations bills.

- **Florida**: Ride-hailing company Lyft announced an exclusive partnership with the private rail company Brightline, which recently opened its Miami station, The Palm Beach Post noted [19]. The company will have designated pick-up and drop-off zones at each of Brightline’s three South Florida stations as part of the partnership.

- **Georgia**: State lawmakers are hoping that a new law (HB 930 [20]) signed by Gov. Nathan Deal in May [21] will enable a reinvention of transit in the Atlanta region. One step in the process is a name change from the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) to The ATL, WABE reported [22]. The hope is to unite city and suburbs in a truly regional transit system. State government has committed $100 million to kickstart the revamp. Suburban voters will get to choose whether they want to raise county sales taxes and devote more to the effort.

- **Hawaii**: A Federal Transit Administration report found recently that the $8 billion construction budget for a Honolulu rail project is still short by $134 million, the Honolulu Civil Beat reported [23]. Over the last three years, state lawmakers have had to bail out the project with billions of added dollars in hopes of completing it. The latest $2.5 billion funding package, passed last year, includes increased state oversight of rail spending. The Civil Beat also reported recently [24] that the outcome of this year’s gubernatorial race may ultimately determine the fate of the project.

- **Idaho**: The interim executive director of the Utah Transit Authority Steve Meyer was in Boise recently to share with Idaho transit planners what they might be able to learn from the Salt Lake Valley’s transit system, according to the Idaho Statesman [25]. Meyer reportedly told Idaho transit enthusiasts that there is no transit without dependable funding, no dependable funding without local taxes and no local taxes without the blessing of the state legislature.

- **Indiana**: Construction began last month on Indianapolis’ long-planned bus rapid transit system, according to the Indy Channel [26]. The project recently received a $75 million grant to allow the project to move forward after being on hold for months despite the opposition of President Trump, The Indianapolis Star reported [27].

- **Maryland**: The Purple Line, a 16-mile light rail project through Montgomery and Prince George’s counties being built as a public-private partnership, has now been under construction for about a year, reported WTOP [28], but legal battles over the project’s right-of-way appear to have stalled. Meanwhile, The Washington Post reports [29] that the two counties have allotted funding to help some of the businesses along the Purple Line corridor whose owners are concerned about impacts to their livelihoods from construction, parking limitations and detours that could discourage their customers. ... At the same time Gov. Larry Hogan made the decision to move ahead with the Purple Line in 2015, he nixed a long-promised light rail project in Baltimore known as the Red Line. In its place he promised a “transformative” plan to redirect buses in the city. The Central Maryland Transportation Alliance is just out with an evaluation of how that’s working out since being launched last summer, The Baltimore Sun reported [30]. A recent Sun editorial [31] looked at whether a “Red Line light” could work that takes into account Hogan’s concerns about the cost of constructing a downtown tunnel and concerns of others about the rejected Red Line’s failure to create a proper intermodal connection with the Baltimore subway system.

- **Massachusetts**: U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao [32] was in the Boston area recently to announce $225 million in federal funds for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority’s Green Line light rail extension, Progressive Railroading reported [33]. The grant is the second installment of federal funding as part of a $996 million grant agreement signed in 2015. Chao also joined Gov. Charlie Baker and other officials for an official groundbreaking ceremony for the $2.3 billion extension.

- **Michigan**: An effort to have voters in metropolitan Detroit weigh in on a $5 billion transit plan
appears to be dead for this year as officials in Oakland and Macomb counties declined to support putting the measure on the November ballot, Bridge Michigan reported [34]. Meanwhile, the city of Ann Arbor, some 35 miles west of Detroit, appears to be having more success touting the benefits of transit and continuing funding for it, The Detroit Metro Times reported [35]. Grand Rapids, the state’s second largest city, will join Pittsburgh and Miami in partnering with Ford Motor Company on the “City of Tomorrow Challenge,” which aims to better understand transit obstacles and find solutions to increase accessibility, efficiency and safety, M Live noted [36].

• Nevada: A Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) advisory panel recently agreed to recommend construction of Las Vegas’ first light rail system, The Las Vegas Sun noted [37]. City officials hope the project will be transformative for Las Vegas, driving business development in the region and providing a quick and convenient link to McCarran International Airport and other key destinations. But as the Las Vegas Review-Journal pointed out last month, funding doesn’t yet exist for the project. RTC has said they plan to pursue a federal grant that could pay up to half the cost of a $750 million light rail line or a $335 million bus rapid transit route. Voters in Clark County might also be asked to approve a sales tax increase in November 2020 to provide additional funding.

• New York: Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed legislation last month to advance a proposal to build an AirTrain connection to LaGuardia Airport, Progressive Railroading noted [39]. The project is expected to cost $1.5 billion. Cuomo has called [40] the airport’s lack of rail access “inexcusable.” Also last month, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority approved reduced fares for low-income riders, a decision that some believe [41] could have unintended consequences. Planetizen had more [42] on the merits of means-based, transit fare discounts. And MTA announced last month they’ll begin a staggered rollout of new fare payment technology in subways along the Lexington Avenue line and on Staten Island buses in anticipation of retiring MetroCards in May of next year, AM New York reported [43].

• North Carolina: A Durham-Orange light rail project looked to be on life support a couple of months back when lawmakers inserted language into the state budget that would have required funding from the federal government before it could acquire state funding, which would not have been possible because the federal grant program requires state and local funding to be acquired first. The Daily Tar Heel reported [44] the project now has a better chance thanks to a bill passed June 13. But the project still will have to seek $100 million in private funding by next April and then $1.2 billion in federal funding by November 2019. If all goes well, project construction could begin in 2020 with a completion date of 2028. Read more here [45], here [46] and here [47]. Lawmakers did cut state funding for public transportation by 26 percent in the budget, shrinking the size of the State Maintenance Assistance Program, which helps local bus and transit systems pay for driver salaries, fuel, insurance and vehicle maintenance, WFAE reported [48].

• Oregon: A new statewide payroll tax went into effect on July 1 that is expected to pump $110 million a year into the operating budgets of public transportation agencies across the state, The Register Guard reported [49]. The payroll tax was included as part of an infrastructure spending package passed by the Oregon legislature last year.

• Pennsylvania: SEPTA, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, last month issued a plan to revitalize its bus network in Philadelphia, which has faced service slowdowns, shrinking ridership and increasing competition from ride-hailing companies, The Inquirer reported [50]. Portland, Oregon-based transit expert Jarrett Walker, who helped shape Houston’s bus service redesign, issued his recommendations for Philly in a 100-page report [51]. Among them: elimination of transfer fees, all-door boarding, stopping every other block rather than at every intersection, beefing up bus service to transportation centers and regional rail stations and more direct, easier-to-understand routes. Separately SEPTA is also working with the Port Authority and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission to plan the future of public transit and how to pay for it when the turnpike quits contributing $400 million annually to the system in 2022, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported. [52]
• **Rhode Island:** The Rhode Island Department of Transportation is seeking proposals from companies that can test and eventually deliver an automated vehicle service between downtown Providence and Olneyville to fill a transit gap, the AASHTO Journal noted [53] in May. A contract award is expected in the fall with initial testing beginning as soon as the end of the year. The Rhode Island Transportation Innovation Partnership will involve the formation of a public-private partnership.

• **Tennessee:** The post-mortems have continued since Nashville voters rejected [54] a major transit package in May. Nashville Public Radio reported [55] that city officials could revisit previous transit plans in the wake of the defeat. The city might have to wait until 2022 [56] to gear up another transit referendum. But Nashville Mayor David Briley and others have said [57] they’re already working on next steps.

• **Texas:** Government Technology’s Future Structure reports [58] that transit riders in Dallas can now use the region’s GoPass app not only to purchase bus or train tickets but to book a ride with Uber or Lyft as well. Officials with Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) say they are looking to provide mobility choices to customers, make transit use easier and more convenient, reverse a declining ridership trend and fill general service gaps. ... The Texas Department of Transportation recently announced [59] $82 million in state and federal grants to public transportation providers in the state that are designed to help pay for vehicle and facility maintenance and improvements and regionally coordinated public transportation planning efforts. ... Meanwhile, a grassroots campaign to expand transit funding across the state kicked off in Austin last month, the Austin Monitor reported [60]. Group leaders said they want to push the Texas legislature to enable more local funding options for transit agencies and projects as Austin Mayor Steve Adler has proposed.

• **Utah:** As part of a new law enacted by the Legislature this year to restructure the Utah Transit Authority (UTA), the agency’s leaders are required to review whether discounts offered to transit users are fair and reasonable for all residents, the Salt Lake Tribune reported [61]. UTA estimates that two of every 5 passengers on its buses and trains use discount passes and can save more than $1,000 annually compared with commuters who pay full fares. As a result, fares account for just 14 percent of the UTA’s overall revenues, with the bulk of the rest coming from local sales tax and federal funding. A new three-member commission that will assume oversight of the transit agency by November 1 will be tasked with determining the future of the discounts.

• **Virginia:** The jury is still out on whether tolls on Interstate 66 have convinced more Virginians to take transit, WTOP reported last month [62]. Better data that could provide a clearer picture is expected to be available toward the end of the year.

• **Washington:** A $54 billion transit package approved by Seattle area voters in 2015 is the subject of a class-action lawsuit filed in June, KING 5 News reported [63]. The suit hinges on the legislation signed by Gov. Jay Inslee that allowed the Sound Transit agency to seek voter approval for additional funding for the package, known as Sound Transit 3. It claims the legislation was unconstitutional because it referenced a motor vehicle excise tax (MVET) and valuation schedule that the state legislature repealed more than a decade ago. Sound Transit said in a statement that “Any reduction of MVET revenues would delay or kill voter-approved transit alternatives.”

• **Wisconsin:** Next City recently questioned [64] whether the state really has a workforce gap or whether it’s just that Wisconsinites can’t get to where the state’s new jobs are increasingly located due to transit gaps. Wisconsin has had an ongoing advertising campaign that seeks to lure millennials from Chicago and other Midwest cities, ostensibly to fill a workforce gap.

**Further Reading**

• “What if you could plan and pay for your trip around the DC area with one click?” [65] WTOP, July 9, 2018.


• “The Most Successful ‘Micro Transit’ Pilots Are Performing Like Decent Dial-a-Ride Services.” [67]
Streetsblog USA, July 3, 2018.


“There’s a Bus Driver Shortage. And No Wonder.” [70] City Lab, June 28, 2018.


“Bay Area subway and rail costs: Why are they among the highest in the world?” [75] Curbed San Francisco, June 18, 2018.


“Can Andy Byford Save the Subways? The new president of the New York City Transit Authority wants to make the trains (and buses) run on time. It won’t be easy.” [83] The New Yorker, July 9 & 16, 2018.


“Where new mobility and traditional transit are actually getting along: Pinellas County, Florida is home to perhaps the most advanced ‘micro-transit’ system in action: a fleet of ride-hail vehicles that feeds into the bus system while reducing costs and expanding job access.” [85] Side Walk Talk, June 8, 2018.

“Washington, DC’s ‘textbook example’ of value capture.” [86] (podcast), Smart Growth America, June 8, 2018.

“Senate appropriators reject administration proposals to eliminate transit investment.” [87] Transportation for America, June 7, 2018.


“We can’t forget about mass transit when we talk about the ‘future of transportation.’” [98] The
Recent Reports

- "New York City Mobility Report," NYC Department of Transportation, June 2018.
- "Fast Forward: The Plan to Modernize New York City Transit," Metropolitan Transportation Authority.
- "U.S. transit systems are shedding riders. Are they under threat?" The Transport Politic, May 18, 2018.
- "Light rail, transit to Emory, buses galore: This is MARTA and the city’s ideal scenario for expansion in Atlanta," Atlanta magazine, May 4, 2018.
- "How to Pass a Mega Transportation Measure: LA County’s Measure M Lessons Learned," Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority.