

Concerns about Rapid Transit

Ron Johnson

I'm not against LRT or public transit, but I am against any sort of government spending that does not meet its goals. Hamilton's transit proposal has many flaws when compared to comparable systems. I have ridden on the following LRT's, and each has its own approach to the design challenges.

**Cincinnati
Scarborough**

**Portland
Cleveland**

**St. Louis
Buffalo**

**Sacramento
Bordeaux Milan**

Hamilton does not succeed in its attempt to be high speed because the terrain does not permit it. The streets which effectively move auto and truck traffic have been co-opted by the LRT forces, leaving future drivers to fend for themselves. In St. Louis, planners managed to achieve a high velocity train service with no interference to vehicle traffic whatsoever.

The 46 mile line leaves the airport (260 flights/day) on concrete pillars, continues on the boundary of an expressway, runs through an open trench and back alleys, along an abandoned railroad, under a hospital, along another railroad, through a downtown tunnel and across a Mississippi River bridge dating from 1874. At no point does it ever run on the same path as auto traffic except when crossing roads with the typical railroad warning signal.

Besides the airport, the St. Louis Metrolink, serves 4 universities, 2 large malls, the 1293 acre Forest Park, the 1252 bed Barnes-Jewish Hospital, the bus/train station, the Cardinals baseball field, the iconic St. Louis Arch, and ends finally at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois (25,000 employees). Discounting the size of the community, it would be impossible to design a system that would efficiently connect a similar list of Hamilton destinations in a single line, especially considering the problems of trains ascending the mountain.

The Portland LRT also parallels an interstate and runs at highway speed. When it reaches downtown, it changes roles and becomes a streetcar service, stopping every few blocks. A single track hugs the right curb and the rails are embedded flat in the concrete road surface, allowing buses, delivery vehicles, and autos to use the lane or make a right turn. Boarding areas are simply a slightly raised portion of the curb. The tracks in the opposite direction are one block over. The newly completed Cincinnati LRT uses the same design.

The Hamilton proposal offers few opportunities to be "rapid." Traffic moves faster with private vehicles on the current one-way street system. Hamilton's intensification and traffic patterns are much better suited to

building a street car line providing local service. However, the planners have made several choices in ineffective attempts to earn the designation of an LRT.

One ploy is to eliminate 2 out of every 3 stops to somehow offer faster service to fewer people. The proposed distance between pick-up points is not long enough to actually become speedy but does seriously inconvenience the members of the travelling public, especially those with some sort of age issue or disability who should be among the prime candidates of this type of service. To compensate, retention of a bus system on parallel streets is now recommended. Surely the LRT is cost effective ONLY if it replaces the buses. If the plan retains a redundant system, something is seriously wrong.

Rather than a street friendly trolley network, the passengers of the Hamilton LRT must access the train on a center island that rises above the street level on its own ramped island. This design blocks any other vehicles accessing the street, which is justified by its promoters because of the need to be rapid, which it does not achieve. Instead all Hamiltonians not on the LRT must struggle with left turns and many other traffic impediments. Portlanders are much luckier.

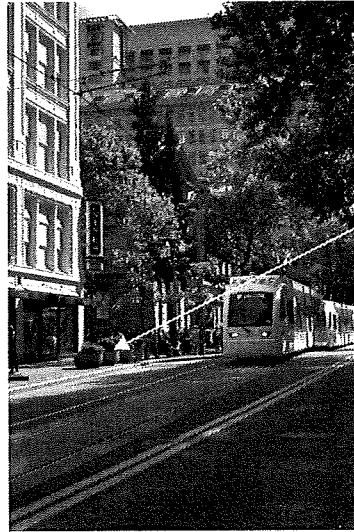
The recent experiment with a dedicated bus lane served to demonstrate to local residents the difficulty of this arrangement, namely that a lane that holds a bus every six minutes is sitting empty for five minutes thirty seconds.

Local planners seem to be oblivious to the deterioration of auto and truck traffic and the reduction of transportation levels that the present LRT proposal contains, especially considering the high cost of the proposal.

Here is a modest proposal to renew the bus lane experiment: Arrange some plastic cones on King Street to divert traffic on to Victoria and then Cannon. Wait six months...if necessary...to learn the impact on the average motorists. It could cost a few bucks...but it might save a billion.

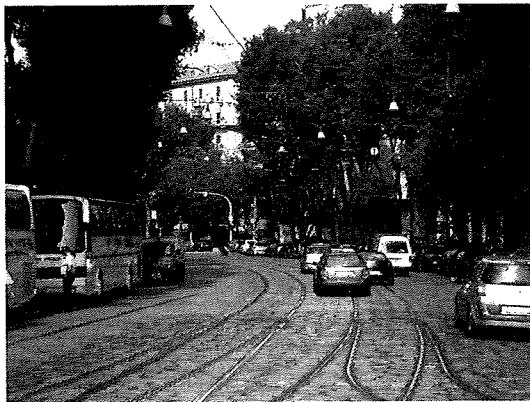
Contact Ron Johnson

MetroLink (reporting mark BSDA) is the light rail transit system in the Greater St. Louis area of Missouri and the Metro East area of Illinois. The system consists of two lines (Red Line and Blue Line) connecting Lambert-St. Louis International Airport and Shrewsbury, Missouri with Scott Air Force Base near Shiloh, Illinois through downtown St. Louis. The system features 37 stations and carries an average of 53,123 people each weekday. As of the first quarter of 2015, it is second only to Minneapolis Metro Transit's Blue and Green lines in the Midwestern United States in terms of ridership, and is the 11th-largest light rail system in the country.



Portland LRT does not
interfere with traffic

Opposite sidewalk



← tracks in traffic in Milan

Older style Buffalo LRT's require
Narrow steps or high level platform



2006 Milano LRT ↑



Camouflaged Bilbao LRT requires only
Slight platform rise