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Public transportation and transit-oriented development in Boston: How can we remain competitive?

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The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) revealed in March that 2013 had the highest number of Americans using public transportation since 1956. In Boston, however, the numbers have declined since 2012. What does this mean for development in Boston?

What's caused the national increase? Almost 60% of public transit use is work-related, so the improved economy may help. Housing trends show more people of all ages moving into urban centers. People are now less likely to have a driver's license or own a car, due to cost and environmental concerns.

Meanwhile, the APTA report showed an overall decrease in Boston ridership (mostly in trolleys and commuter rail). The aging infrastructure and reliability concerns may play a part, but improvements such as the new Yawkey Commuter Rail Station (Nitsch provided civil engineering), expanded service on the Worcester-Boston line, the expanded weekend service, the Green Line extension, and the South Coast Rail may help stem the flow.

Interest in multi-modal travel is changing Boston's cityscape. Bike lanes are expanding and the Hubway bike-sharing system is immensely popular. PeopleForBikes selected Boston for the Green Lane Project, which will implement protected bicycle routes, and the city's "Connect Historic Boston" project (Nitsch is providing surveying and transportation engineering) is creating pedestrian and bicycle connections between the MBTA and the city's historic sites.

As Fan Pier and Seaport Sq. (both Nitsch projects) have grown, vehicle traffic in the area has become a nightmare. The city must accommodate more vehicles while being careful not to compromise pedestrian and bicycle access. Integrating more options - Hubway stations, bike lanes, walkable routes, and improved MBTA connections - would help ease congestion and connect the area to downtown, making the area more appealing.

Encouraging employees, residents, and consumers to work, live, and shop within the city depends on both investment in public transit and transit-oriented development. Remaining competitive as a city necessitates innovation, and the potential benefits are difficult to pass over.

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