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Indy is ready (and waiting) for rapid transit

A new survey demonstrates yet again that community leaders recognize it is time to fix traffic congestion, improve air quality, reduce aggregate fuel use and enhance area accessibility.



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Commentary

The study was taken last summer of 377 members of the Lacy Leadership Association, a group of local opinion leaders, by Walker Information, a local market research firm. More than 90 percent of survey respondents indicated that rapid transit is an important component of the solution to these problems. In addition, respondents stated that their commutes are too long, that they expect their commutes to get worse, and that they do not expect road projects to improve or solve the problem.

More than five years ago, the Metropolitan Planning Organization began to assess and identify mass-transit solutions to the region's deteriorating air quality and congested transportation infrastructure. The challenges of more vehicles—coupled with increasing commute times, rising gas prices and higher levels of emissions—are all symptomatic

of a region that lacks an efficient transit system.

For example, counties in our metro area have violated Environmental Protection Agency air-quality standards in the past two years. That means central Indiana is harming the health of its citizens. Businesses looking to move and expand in central Indiana want to ensure their work force can get to and from the office safely and on time.

Rapid transit is about safely making the connections that facilitate the free flow of ideas, commerce and capital. For individuals, efficient, environmentally sensitive transportation helps create a healthy environment where the focus can be on creating enterprise value. Companies seldom prosper when their human capital is degraded by the diseases associated with poor air quality.

Indianapolis is a world-class city when it comes to arts and sports. It's time we had a world-class transportation system to get us where we want to go.

Interestingly, the Lacy group's survey found that more respondents would use rapid transit to attend a sporting event or see an attraction than to get to the office. Others said they would use rapid transit to go downtown to shop or dine. Give them a free cup of coffee and wireless access, and even more people said they would leave the car behind in favor of

rapid transit.

So, why don't we have a rapid transit system? Maybe it is sticker shock. A rapid transit system—specifically the “guideway” or “peplemover” transit favored by LLA opinion leaders—comes with a price tag of about \$50 million a mile.

Rail is economical to build and it is more energy-efficient than planes and automobiles. Multiple studies have demonstrated that every dollar invested in public transportation generates a return of about \$1.40.

Lacy Leadership Association is the latest organization to weigh in on the merits of regional rapid transit. Its considered point of view is a welcome addition to the debate about central Indiana's transportation future. The Indianapolis Regional Transportation Council, with coordination by the Metropolitan Planning Organization, has been immersed in this issue for some time. The Council and MPO have helped identify transportation solutions, community support for those solutions and funding alternatives.

Are we as a community ready to move to the next phase of rapid transit planning?•

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