

Understanding the Impacts of Transitways

Assessing Neighborhood and Social Influences of Transit Corridors

A Transitway Impacts Research Program (TIRP) Research Brief



Research Question

How do residents and businesses along transit corridors perceive neighborhood changes caused by transitways?

Transit investments such as new light-rail transit (LRT) or bus rapid transit (BRT) lines often significantly improve mobility and accessibility to surrounding neighborhoods and lead to the physical upgrading of those neighborhoods. Other effects may be less desirable, such as neighborhood transformation, demographic changes, housing conversions, and shifts in the social prestige of a neighborhood.

Though researchers have measured these neighborhood changes using objective data, few have examined neighborhood residents' self-reported perceptions of transit-induced change. To fill this knowledge gap and gain a better understanding of individual perceptions regarding changes caused by transitway development, University of Minnesota researchers surveyed residents and businesses along four Twin Cities transitway corridors.

Through this study, researchers aim to help policymakers by identifying groups with positive or negative expectations for transit-induced neighborhood change and proposing population-specific solutions for improving social equity.

“Overall, the perception of transitways’ impacts on neighborhoods is positive, but there are specific groups that have largely negative perceptions of transit-induced change.”

—Yingling Fan, Principal Investigator

Project Fast Facts

- The majority of residents and businesses in transitway corridors have a positive view of transit-induced neighborhood change.
- The extent of positive neighborhood change that transitway corridor residents and businesses anticipate varies widely from corridor to corridor.
- People with any experience using light-rail transit, frequent transit users, and transit-dependent riders all have overwhelmingly positive attitudes regarding transit-induced neighborhood change.
- Racial differences in perceptions of transit-induced neighborhood change do exist, with specific groups on certain corridors having markedly more negative or positive views than others.
- Five key strategies may help address negative perceptions and possible negative impacts of transit-induced neighborhood change: address misperceptions, engage the neutrals, play to the strengths, include transit users, and conduct community-sensitive planning.

About the Survey

Researchers randomly surveyed 750 households in 16 neighborhoods along four Twin Cities transitways: the existing Hiawatha LRT line, the existing Northstar commuter rail line, the planned Cedar Avenue BRT line, and the planned Central Corridor LRT line. The questionnaire sorted respondents into two groups—those with positive perceptions of transit-induced change and those with negative perceptions of transit-induced change—based on their responses to four key questions:

- **Question 1:** Overall, has this neighborhood become a better or worse place to live over the PAST five years—or since you moved in—or has it stayed about the same?
- **Question 2:** Overall, what is your opinion of any effects the [transitway] has had on the neighborhood so far?
- **Question 3:** Overall, will this neighborhood become a better or worse place to live over the NEXT five years, or will it stay about the same?
- **Question 4:** Overall, what is your opinion of how the [transitway] will affect this neighborhood in the future?

In addition, researchers surveyed 160 businesses along the same corridors and asked a comparable set of four questions, focusing on the impacts of transitways on their businesses.

The survey also explored how respondent characteristics shape their perception of neighborhood change and specific transit impacts.

Key Findings

How do residents perceive transit-induced neighborhood change?

- Both urban and suburban corridor residents expect positive changes from transitways—however, significant differences appear in the extent of the positive change from corridor to corridor (see Figure 1).
- People who have any experience with fixed-guideway transit corridors had overwhelmingly positive attitudes.
- Frequent transit users and transit-dependent residents see themselves and their neighborhoods gaining from transitway development.
- Perceptions can vary by race and by corridor. For example:
 - Asians along the Central Corridor LRT view the future impacts of light rail less positively than other Central Corridor resident groups.
 - African-Americans perceive future neighborhood change along the Hiawatha corridor more positively than whites do in that corridor.
 - Contrary to media coverage centering on the African-American community’s concerns about the Central Corridor project, Central Corridor African-American respondents do not vary from others in their perception of transitway impacts.

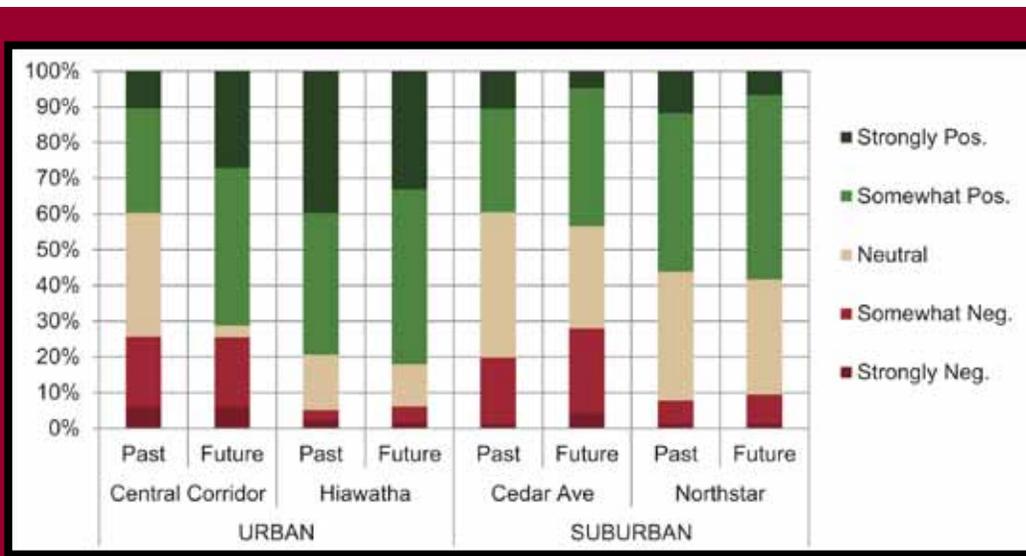


Figure 1: Residents' Perception of Transitway Impacts, by Corridor

Figure 1 shows residents' perceptions of the specific effects they have seen and expect to see on their neighborhoods from the transitway. While residents along transitway corridors anticipated positive neighborhood impacts in the next five years, the extent of positive impact they expected varied significantly by corridor.

How do businesses perceive transit-induced neighborhood change?

- Businesses are generally more positive about the future than the past (see Figure 2).
- Significant concerns about construction impacts are present in incomplete corridors.
- Positive perceptions of future impacts outnumber negatives for all corridors, but significant corridor-to-corridor differences appear.
- Some businesses may feel they're being "planned out" of transitway areas based on sector, size, and/or age.
- The belief that customers ride or will ride has a major, positive impact on perceptions.

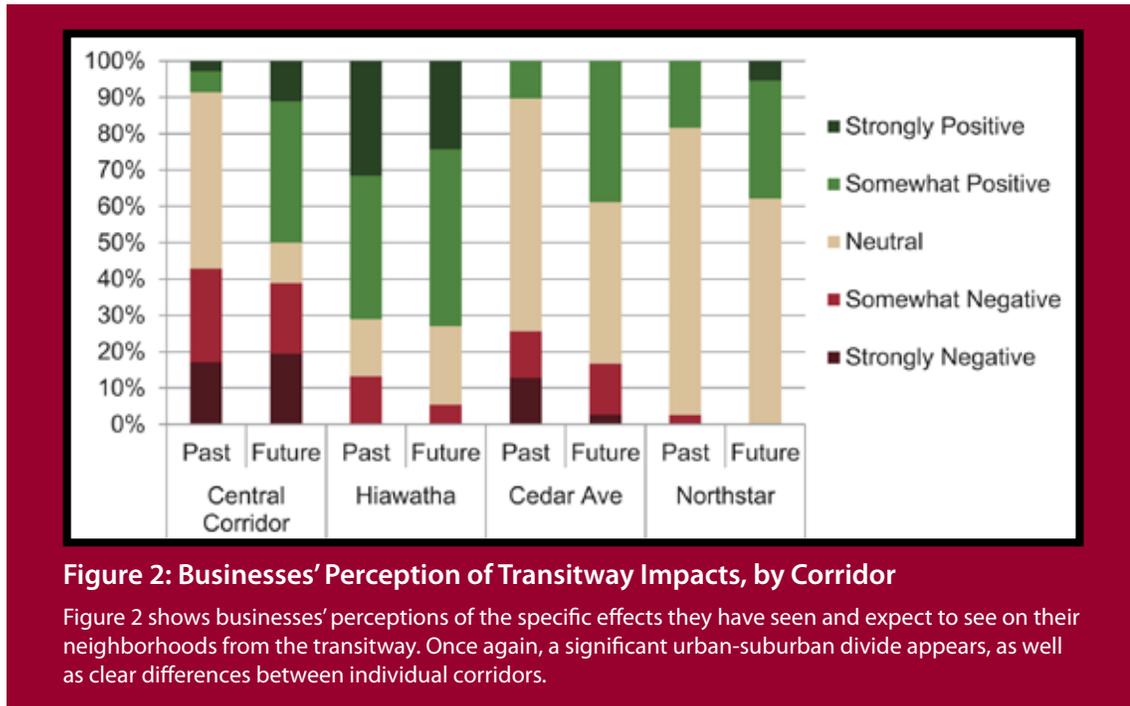


Figure 2: Businesses' Perception of Transitway Impacts, by Corridor

Figure 2 shows businesses' perceptions of the specific effects they have seen and expect to see on their neighborhoods from the transitway. Once again, a significant urban-suburban divide appears, as well as clear differences between individual corridors.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Overall, the perception of the impacts of transitways on neighborhoods is positive; however, there are specific groups that have largely negative perceptions of transit-induced change. This research provides several important insights and policy recommendations for addressing negative perceptions and possible negative impacts of transit-induced neighborhood change.

Strategy #1: Address Misperceptions

Outreach to individuals and groups with negative perceptions may address concerns about transitway projects—in particular regarding these common concerns:

- **Crime**—While concern that transitways increase neighborhood crime rates is common, this is seldom the case. Public education efforts explaining the facts and demonstrating secure design features of transit stations may alleviate these concerns.
- **Continued automotive access**—The expectation that automotive access will worsen as a result of transitways is another common concern. However, transitway projects invariably include significant traffic mitigation strategies to preserve automotive access. Improving communication of these mitigations may be helpful.
- **Pedestrian safety**—Concerns about transitways creating a less-safe environment for pedestrians persist, despite the fact that all four corridors include major pedestrian-safety-oriented design features. Researchers suggest improving communication of pedestrian improvements.

Program Supporters:

- Anoka County
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- Central Corridor Funders Collaborative
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- City of Minneapolis
- City of Saint Paul
- Dakota County
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- Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Ramsey County
- Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce
- State and Local Policy Program, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota
- University Metropolitan Consortium, University of Minnesota
- Washington County

Strategy #2: Engage the Neutrals

Although nearly all respondents along the urban Central Corridor and Hiawatha lines expected transitways to have impacts on their neighborhoods, large percentages of respondents from Cedar Avenue and Northstar neighborhoods did not expect any impacts—positive or negative. The fact that many suburban corridor residents do not see transitways as relevant is a cause for concern; highlighting relevant “success stories” from suburban portions of the Hiawatha corridor may help increase community buy-in.

Strategy #3: Play to the Strengths

Community members who expect positive impacts from transitways may offer a valuable base of grass-roots support but may not be as strongly motivated to participate in public involvement efforts as those with concerns. If these individuals can be actively engaged early in the transitway planning process, they may provide a strong anchor of local support and a way to open dialogue with more skeptical community members.

Strategy #4: Include Transit Users

Residents who use transit frequently and business owners who believe their customers use transit frequently are much more likely than others to expect positive future change in their neighborhoods from transitways. As a result, these groups should be key targets for outreach efforts in the planning process for future transitways.

Strategy #5: Conduct Community-Sensitive Planning

Both the business and residential surveys demonstrate a need for local community-sensitive planning of transitways. In addition, the results demonstrate that local communities can be defined in multiple ways, including:

- **Geography**—In addition to the basic concept of station areas, both surveys show many differences between the way urban and suburban residents and businesses perceive transitways.
- **Cultural identity**—Both surveys reveal powerful, complex differences in the perceptions of transitways based on race, ethnicity, and/or nativity status. This demonstrates the importance of reaching out to the many communities of culture and identity that often exist within a single community of geography.
- **Time in neighborhood**—The more recently a resident or business has moved into the neighborhood, the more likely they are to perceive transitways as having positive impacts. These findings demonstrate the importance of considering the present while planning for the future.

About the Research

Assessing Neighborhood and Social Influences of Transit Corridors was authored by Assistant Professor Yingling Fan and Research Fellow Andrew Guthrie of the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

“Yingling Fan’s work is encouraging because it shows us that the public perceives the project positively and looks forward to the benefits of transitway projects. The results also reinforce the lessons we’ve learned about public engagement.”

—Robin Cauffman, Metro Transit

cts.umn.edu/Research/Featured/Transitways

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