

**STATEMENT OF GARY L. BROSCHE, NATIONAL BUS RAPID TRANSIT
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**Before the
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**Hearing on
BUS RAPID TRANSIT AND OTHER SERVICE INNOVATIONS**

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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I am here today on behalf of the National Bus Rapid Transit Institute (NBRTI), a collaborative effort between the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida and the Institute of Transportation Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. With me today are Dennis Hinebaugh, Director of the National Bus Rapid Transit Institute and senior researcher Michael Baltes. Thank you for this opportunity to share with you our enthusiasm for Bus Rapid Transit and the important role we expect it to have in increasing transit ridership with a cost-effective, faster, flexible, and high-quality mass transit service in many cities throughout America.

My testimony today will provide you with information on the National Bus Rapid Transit Institute, important lessons learned about BRT, and our suggestions for your consideration on Federal issues that need to be addressed related to BRT.

NBRTI

The National Bus Rapid Transit Institute was established in 2001 with the mission to **“facilitate the sharing of knowledge and innovation for increasing the speed, efficiency, and reliability of high capacity bus service through the implementation of Bus Rapid Transit systems in the United States.”**

Multiple partners currently fund the National Bus Rapid Transit Institute. The Federal Transit Administration, the Federal University Transportation Centers Program and match from State DOT research funds, has provided initial funding of program startup

and information sharing activities. The NBRTI also has smaller contracts to assist in the development of BRT programs in Minneapolis, Chicago, Riverside, and soon in Miami and Tampa. Continued and expanded funding for the NBRTI is being requested as a part of the TEA-21 reauthorization.

Current activities of the NBRTI program include:

- o Evaluating BRT projects in Orlando and Miami
- o Assisting in the administration of the 18 BRT Consortium member programs:
 - Boston; Charlotte; Cleveland; Dulles Corridor; Eugene-Springfield; Hartford-New Britain; Honolulu; Miami; San Juan; Santa Clara County; Alameda & Contra Costa County; Albany; Chicago; Los Angeles; Louisville; Pittsburg; Montgomery Co. Md.; Las Vegas
- o Developing and implementing a BRT Peer-to-Peer technology transfer program
- o Publishing the “BRT Quarterly” newsletter
- o Maintaining the “NBRTI.org” website
- o Presentations at workshops
- o Industry assistance
 - serving as the Chair of the TRB BRT Sub-Committee
 - member of the APTA BRT Taskforce
 - moderators/presenters at national and international BRT conferences.

Lessons Learned

The first lesson that we’ve learned about BRT is the difficulty in achieving consensus on its definition. The design and operation of BRT systems are vastly different from one another. The very nature of the flexibility in design and operations of BRT leads to the problem of creating a precise definition. While some BRT systems are similar, no two are alike. Los Angeles’ BRT system is a highly effective yet very low cost system with buses operating in mixed traffic (that is, without special exclusive bus lanes). The buses themselves are clean fuel, conventional transit vehicles branded with a bright red paint scheme to differentiate them from standard local bus service. With their intelligent traffic

signal system and high-frequency service (demand-based headways offering 1.5 minute service in the peak of the peak), they are able to significantly reduce overall trip time by as much as 30 percent on the Whittier-Wilshire and Ventura corridors. At the other end of the BRT spectrum is Las Vegas where they will be using a newly designed LRT-like vehicle which will travel using optical guidance on a fixed path to create a system that looks and functions much like a modern light rail system.

We believe flexibility is a key factor in the success of BRT and a flexible definition will lead to BRT systems being designed to best respond to the specific needs of a community rather than systems designed simply to qualify for federal funding.

Another lesson learned is that even in auto dominated Los Angeles, people will ride a bus system that is fast, efficient, and convenient. The old myth that people will ride trains but not buses is based on a paradigm of trains being clean and fast and buses being dirty and slow. BRT has changed that paradigm! Success stories in the United States and abroad have shown that BRT can be a highly praised and successful form of public transit. Fast, convenient, and frequent service are what transit users want and BRT systems provide all of these factors in a very cost-effective manner.

A surprising and important lesson we have learned is that non-users of transit respond positively to BRT systems. Let me tell you why this is the case and why it is important. Non-transit users like BRT systems because they are perceived as being cost-effective and highly utilized. No one likes to see near empty buses or trains. BRT systems operating with very frequent service, with mostly full buses, in a cost-effective manner are pleasing even to the non-user. Given the relatively low percentage of taxpayers riding transit, it is important that non-transit users perceive that their tax dollars are being used wisely. Without the support of non-users, local funding commitments would not be possible. With the support of BRT system users and non-users, local communities are finding BRT a truly win-win alternative.

Future Federal Role in BRT

Federal transportation policies and funding programs have played a tremendous role in shaping the form and content of America's transportation systems. From the creation of the Interstate System during the Eisenhower Administration, to the Federal New Start Program continued in current TEA-21 legislation, you, Members of Congress, provide direction to our transportation future. We believe the potential of BRT in America is so compelling as to warrant significant consideration in your deliberations on the reauthorization of TEA-21. Current federal law provides little stimulus for BRT systems and, as you have heard from others, current federal law with respect to New Starts actually inhibits development of lower-cost BRT systems.

As promising as BRT is, it cannot reach its full potential without your assistance in several areas.

- o **Research and technical assistance**
 - Market research, facilities/operations planning, routing alternatives, ITS/APTS, transit signal priority, vehicle design, vehicle propulsion, vehicle guidance, peer-to-peer assistance

- o **Evaluation of BRT systems**
 - Determine the effects and lessons learned of the various BRT demonstration projects through a detailed evaluation process.
 - Through this detailed evaluation process, the various BRT projects will serve as learning tools and models for other locales throughout the United States.
 - Characteristics to be examined include the degree to which ridership increases due to improved bus speeds, schedule adherence, and convenience; the effect on auto traffic; the effect of each of the components of BRT on bus speed and other traffic; the benefits of ITS/APTS applications to BRT projects; and the effect of BRT on land use and development.

- o **Consortium members**
 - BRT consortium members received modest funding (\$50,000) to assist their efforts to learn about the potential of BRT of their areas. This is an excellent program to further interest in BRT, which should be continued and expanded.

- o **Method of federal funding**
 - Three major options exist for enhanced federal funding of BRT systems. First, a new program can be created to fund BRT systems in a similar manner as specific programs targeted to new rail systems, bus systems, etc. Second, the current New Starts program can be modified to better incorporate eligibility of BRT systems. Third, the Bus Capital Program (§5309) can be expanded to provide funding for BRT systems.
 - Each of these options has strengths and weaknesses. Caution must be taken to avoid unintended consequences of the selected option. For example, including BRT in the bus program without additional funding could easily deplete funds needed for routine replacement. Alternatively, creation of a new program could result in local areas pursuing BRT systems simply because the funds are available.
 - If BRT is to be included in the New Starts program, a number of details need to be examined including the requirement for “fixed guideway,” the required local match (50/50 versus 80/20), and the MIS requirements. Clearly, the flexible definition of BRT will be an issue in any federal funding alternative.

In conclusion, Bus Rapid Transit offers tremendous potential to increase transit ridership in a cost-effective manner. Historically, Congress has provided leadership in shaping our transportation system. BRT is an idea whose time has come. We encourage Members of this Committee to continue to exert this leadership in stimulating additional research, planning, funding and implementation of BRT systems in the United States.