

Abstract

U.S. Metro Systems: Challenges and Chances for Rapid Transit in Urban America

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Mobility is one of the most politicized and controversial issues in American politics and surfaces especially in urban spaces. The United States is exceedingly dependent on individual car ownership, but in compact American metropolises, the access to mobility cannot be burdened unlimitedly with the individual, because it comes along with a number of hardships for urban communities, like the finite usage of available spaces that has led in many cases to a gridlock, or noise and air pollution, which leads to a deterioration of the livability.

Public rapid transit has served as an outlet for these difficulties in the past. With a growing urban population, its importance will equally grow in the future. But the urban environment is subject to greater societal changes. Increasingly, people ask for ecofriendly or shared mobility, which will likely reduce the usage of individual automobiles in dense cities. The comprehensive trend of the Smart City will override economic and urban location requirements by creating an interconnected digitized urban development, that satisfies the demands of involved actors and promises thereby a greater living standard. It also spurs the relocation of site-independent services and creates outsourced digitized centers, what in turn changes the mobility behavior of the city's inhabitants. But the Smart City delivers simultaneously new promises for mobility, concerning environmentalism, sustainability and the usage of the urban spaces. Public rapid transit faces the intricate task to adapt to these changes, although it is by its very nature an almost fixed supply. However, any infrastructural change should consider Urban Ethics, which try to determine the actors of city-evolution and their motivation for change and the arising micro- to meso-social implications. Urban Ethics do also look at varying expectations on urban living, which in turn are incorporated by city planning, but considers especially the resulting conflicts of interest, like accelerated gentrification.

The dissertation will foremost look at political decisions on rapid transit in urban America and aims at determining actors and motivations on all levels of government from communes to the White House. Going out from the individual histories of the rail-based rapid transit systems of New York, Washington D.C., Los Angeles and others, the thesis will identify societal shifts as exemplary mentioned above and their effects on transportation politics and antagonizing factors, like lobbyism, economic adaption or opposing political movements. With these considerations, the current state of the systems will be portrayed and the various challenges that will come to them in differing intensity, as well as the emanating chances resulting from it. American cities will change their mobility behavior in the near future for they cannot disregard the ongoing changes in society. The object of study of the thesis is, how and for what reasons American politics will deal with this transition and what will be the outcomes for America's rapid transit systems and its riders, the urban communities, who have launched the diversification.