



Transport for NOLA: Streetcar-based Reurbanization in the Crescent City

Transport for NOLA is a vision for a revitalized New Orleans that emulates its former patterns of urbanization. As a state-of-the-art light-rail system, Transport for NOLA will resurrect New Orleans' densely-knit urban fabric while promoting energy efficiency and mitigating risk. Transport for NOLA invents a new New Orleans by reimagining the old.

Transportation accounts for a third of world energy use; because public transportation is two times more fuel-efficient than private automobiles, it will dramatically reduce both energy use and greenhouse gas emissions generated by car commuting⁴. Moreover, transit is an integral part of good land use planning and promoting community development.

New Orleans is a city on the front line of climate change, so energy efficient public transportation that reduces greenhouse gas emissions is critical to the future vitality and sustainability of the Crescent City. More importantly, public transportation is integral to supporting New Orleans' urban culture.

Transit creates equitable access to opportunities and amenities for all New Orleanians. By providing more options for residents, promoting walkable neighborhoods, and creating new connections throughout the city, Transport for NOLA brings benefits that translate into a higher quality of life for residents. Almost 28% of the population in New Orleans does not own an automobile,¹ making New Orleans the largest city in the country with such low ownership without a fixed-guideway transit system. Public transportation is therefore critical to supporting the culture of the city.

Beyond environmental sustainability, public transportation will also promote municipal financial stability. Light rail has the lowest cost-per-passenger mile of any form of transportation. In New Orleans, transport dramatically reduces the wear-and-tear on streets, which will help the city to reduce capital costs and attain financial sustainability. Transit also creates economies of scale and has well-documented multiplier effects for the neighborhoods, businesses, and institutions around transit nodes.² By one measure, every \$1 invested in public transit generates \$6 in economic activity.³ In this vision, development will occur along transit corridors and at transit nodes. Depending on its size, every transit stop will become a center for neighborhood, citywide, or regional commerce.

Transit promotes walkable urban environments that will help New Orleans address chronic public health issues such as obesity, asthma, and diabetes. Transit is also an integral part of ensuring safe, effective, and affordable evacuations for all New Orleanians. Rather than the busing system that relies on private contractors to ferry New Orleanians to shelters across the state— an arrangement which is not only inadequate, but still unsettled— a light rail

system will efficiently convey residents and visitors to designated locations, where they can then move by train to any location on higher ground.

Transit promotes greater cultural, economic, and political ties in an area suffering from in-fighting and lack of regional cohesion and planning. While the name of the RTA suggests a connection to regional transit, transportation in New Orleans is divided by parish lines, most famously by the fact that only a single Jefferson Transit (JET) bus connects Louis Armstrong International Airport to the downtown. Transport for NOLA will be the first real regional transit system for the Greater New Orleans metropolitan area.

Transit is a sign that New Orleans is moving forward and investing in a brighter future. Other forward-thinking cities use transit to create an image of enlightenment and progressivism. As the former chairman of New York's MTA recently stated in his 5-year, \$14B capital development program announcement,⁶ "the growth and prosperity of [a] city needs above all a healthy and growing and vibrant transportation system."⁷ A city cannot be great without great transit; New Orleans needs Transport for NOLA.

City Maps

Before WWII, every neighborhood in New Orleans— black and white, rich and poor— was connected by the city's streetcar system. The NOLA Overground is a vision for revitalizing New Orleans based on a renewed commitment to transit in all of New Orleans' neighborhoods. New Orleans needs to reinvest in the connectivity, accessibility, and vibrancy of its communities by plugging those communities into public transportation.

Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods are one of New Orleans' most important assets, yet many of these communities have limited access to the cultural and economic centers of the city. Transit is a critical tool for leveling the economic playing-field, and the NOLA Overground will both strengthen the traditional, neighborhood-based social and economic centers and allow for greater interconnectivity between neighborhoods.

Amenities + Institutions

All of New Orleans' major assets will be linked with speedy, efficient transit. Vibrant neighborhoods, world-class universities, parks and green spaces will become more accessible. The Mississippi Riverfront, which has long been isolated from most residents, will be reconnected to the city through the *Reinventing the Crescent* redevelopment. Finally, the cultural institutions that distinguish New Orleans- the second line parades and corner bars, galleries, venues, and museums- will be fortified by this streetcar access.

Economic Development

Transport for NOLA will support New Orleans' fine-grained urban fabric of small businesses, as well as the region's major employment centers, such as the aerospace industry¹ at the NASA/Michoud complex; the maritime technologies on the River and Industrial Canal; the armed forces in Federal City; the doctors, students, and researchers in the biosciences district; the legal, financial, and technology industries downtown and at the UNO

Technology Park; the Arts and Museum District in the Warehouse District; the professors, students, and researchers in the four major universities; and the musicians, artists, chefs, and designers that support culture in this city.

Transit-oriented development:

Transit will promote residential development, support neighborhood and regional commercial centers throughout the city, and reemphasize the city's major thoroughfares along Canal, Claiborne, Carrollton, Tulane, St. Claude, Tchoupitoulas, and Napoleon streets. Transit nodes will also create new centers of activity, from neighborhood commerce around smaller transit stops, to the Union Passenger Terminal, which will become the central rail hub on the Gulf Coast, connecting the future high speed rail lines along the Gulf and up the Illinois-Central corridor. Tulane and Almonaster Stations will become the eastern and western gates to the heart of the city. The intermodal facilities and airports will be accessible to the heart of the city.

Plan

Transport for NOLA is a long-term vision for building 45 miles of light rail and another 50 miles of commuter rail in New Orleans over the next two decades. Its most immediate task will foster public conversation and galvanize action about creating a world-class transit system for the Crescent City.

Bringing Transport for NOLA to life will be a cooperative endeavor between the Regional Transit Authority (RTA)¹, the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad (NOPB)², the City Planning Commission (CPC)³, the Regional Planning Commission (RPC)⁴, the state and federal Departments of Transportation (DOT)⁵, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)⁶, Amtrak⁷, the New Orleans Building Corporation (NOBC)⁸. Coordinating this effort, Transport for NOLA will act as a non-profit transportation advocacy group, which will include research, advising and ultimately the development of a new streetcar culture in New Orleans.

With the master-planning process currently underway, the time is right to integrate transit into a long-term vision for all New Orleanians. Transport for NOLA will help to leverage transit-oriented land-use planning as a means for securing FTA New Start funding, while also leading the design effort for this new infrastructure. Because of the city's neutral grounds and the NOPB, almost all of the rights-of-way conducive to reintroducing transit remain in the public domain. reducing environmental impacts, project costs and implementation time. Over 40% of the 45 new miles of

¹ responsible for providing bus, shuttle, and streetcar service to Orleans Parish.

² one of the nine unattached boards and commissions created under the Charter of the City of New Orleans.¹² It is an autonomous juridical entity and the only publicly owned and operated terminal switching railroad in the US. By city and state law, the NOPB owns and operates most of the railroad right-of-way in New Orleans in perpetuity, and therefore most of the grade-separated rail rights-of-way in New Orleans are publicly-owned. Light rail infrastructure can be built aside NOPB lines without supplanting the NOPB's freight operations.

³ the city of New Orleans' planning agency, one of the nine unattached boards and commissions created by the City Charter and the entity responsible for all public planning matters. The CPC is currently conducting the Master Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance process along with the planning firm Goody-Clancy, and will play a critical role in bringing transport to New Orleans.

⁴ the Greater New Orleans regional planning agency, responsible for comprehensive and economic development planning for Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany Parishes. All federal funding for transportation and planning for the Greater New Orleans region must be coordinated through the RPC, and, along with the other entities involved in this cooperative endeavor, the RPC must take a leading role in bringing transport to New Orleans.

⁵ will be critical partners in planning and financing transport for New Orleans.

⁶ particularly through its New Starts program—plays an essential role in funding transit capital improvements.

⁷ Amtrak owns important rail right-of-way in the city and region, and is an important public transport partner, particularly in bringing high speed passenger rail to the Gulf Coast.

⁸ which is the lead agency on 'Reinventing the Crescent' and which manages the Union Passenger Terminal (UPT)

transit lines in the city will be grade-separated, and another five percent will have limited surface street interaction- the system will operate like state-of-the-art urban light rail.

Transport for NOLA is more than just a plan for light rail; it will also create connections so that New Orleanians have transit options and genuine mobility. New light rail lines will be constructed in phases to encourage high levels of ridership, and existing streetcar lines will be made more efficient by minimizing surface street interaction, calibrating the number of transit stops, and increasing the current 'heritage' speeds.

Light rail in New Orleans will cost between \$10M and \$40M per mile, and due to existing rights-of-way, Transport for NOLA will be cheaper to build than any comparable system in the country.⁹ The brunt of the financing will be carried out by the FTA's New Starts program, which covers nearly 50% of the costs of developing a new light rail system. Transport for NOLA will work with developers to create amenities and leverage public investment, at key nodes as well as along transport routes.

Transit is vital to a city; it really is what connects us. Transport for NOLA will encourage the city and its regional partners, planners, and state and local representatives to prioritize this 21st century vision for the city. New Orleans has much to gain from promoting sustainable modes of living and moving within an urban environment, and Transport for NOLA will move this city forward.

⁹ Recent light rail lines (and cost-per-mile) include Denver (\$46M),³ Phoenix (\$70M),⁴ and Seattle (\$150M).⁵