



Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Bus Rapid Transit

EMILY BADGER | APR 02, 2012



BRTdata.org

If you're a Bus Rapid Transit believer, here's the dream - a commute around town that is as efficient as a train without the cost of finding the land, laying the tracks, acquiring the train cars and building the stations, the park-and-ride lots and the highway overpasses to get to them (a process, as many discouraged commuters know, that takes years and years *and years*).

Creating train-like bus routes just sounds so much easier. Since 2008, Phoenix, Kansas City, New York, and Cleveland have all implemented BRT systems. Chicago is [mulling one now](#). Worldwide, the concept is taking off, too. 134 cities – half of them in Latin America – now have such corridors, spanning more than 3,000 kilometers of urban bus routes from [Zaozhuang](#), China to [Guadalajara](#), Mexico.

All of them, though, are trying slightly different riffs on the idea. BRT implies some kind of hybrid bus-train service, but there's no single blueprint for how to make one work. Buses move faster when riders pay their fare curbside instead of making change on-board (with the driver, of all people!). They move faster when they're given dedicated lanes on a busy street. And they *really* move faster when they have the ability to [communicate with approaching intersections](#). [PDF]

Until now, though, there's been no way to compare all these tactics in cities across the world attempting to move commuters more efficiently with the infrastructure already at hand.

"A lot of the data we wanted to have access to to do the analysis researchers have been talking about didn't exist," says Aileen Carrigan, a senior associate at [EMBARQ](#), the World Resource Institute's center for

sustainable transport. Researchers and transit advocates would love to know which types of BRT systems move the most people, which ones operate with the best fuel efficiency, which ones actually come the closest to rail-like speed.

As it turns out, the answer to this last question is [Adelaide, Australia](#), where the BRT system moves on average at 80 kilometers an hour (including dwell time in stations). This number comes out of a new [web database](#) EMBARQ is unveiling today, alongside the [International Energy Agency](#) and the [Bus Rapid Transit Centre of Excellence](#).

The site has information from all 134 international cities, on 95 individual metrics ranging from the length of BRT corridors to the mode of buses used on them, and even the fuel type in their gas tanks.

“The objective of the data set isn’t to say that BRT is a superior mode to other public transit modes,” Carrigan says. “But we do think that the 134 cities in the data set have found a reason for BRT in their particular city, and I think some of the data can help people thinking about implementing a BRT to understand what role it could play in the public transit services in that particular city.”

Did you hear that, Chicago? The next generation of BRT systems now has the opportunity to mash up everything that’s been learned by these 134 predecessors.



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