



Partnerships

While each piece of the complete public transportation puzzle is important in itself, there is one puzzle piece that is central to the whole concept and must precede the development of the others. This puzzle piece is a partnership approach to policy, planning, funding and service delivery. Without partnerships, an effective and seamless system that makes the maximum use of each mode is impossible.

A failure to develop and nurture partnerships has played a key role in the evolution of the current Southwestern Ontario public transportation system. Each mode, operating under scattered legislation, ownership and funding, has been developed largely in isolation and without regard for the others.

The result has been a disjointed system where the individual pieces rarely connect operationally, legislatively or institutionally. Each service provider – public or private – strives to maximize their own

piece of the puzzle, but none benefits from the full potential that is attainable by coordinating and connecting their services. The result has been a situation where publicly- and privately-funded operators overlap and compete for those travellers who use public transportation for their intra- and inter-regional trips.

This situation is not unique to Southwestern Ontario. The failure to link the policies, plans and funding of numerous service providers in regions across North America partially accounts for public transportation's generally low share of the travel market continent-wide. However, some progressive U.S. regions are now meeting this challenge – and with impressive ridership, revenue and cost-recovery results.

In re-envisioning Southwestern Ontario's public transportation system, a useful model could be the one employed on three rail corridors in California.



The partnership approach provides travellers with direct connections between intercity trains, inter-community buses and local transit in many California communities. Photo courtesy of Amtrak.

Using a joint powers authority approach, these corridors have been recast as jointly funded, managed and operated partnerships between the federal, state, regional and municipal governments, and the providers of the rail, inter-community bus and transit services.

Alternative partnership models have been applied to other rail-based corridors in regions as diverse as Northern New England, North Carolina and the Pacific Northwest.

In each case, the creation of these innovative multi-modal partnerships was driven by the realization by one or more of the affected governments that a "business as usual" approach was not acceptable. This leadership and the buy-in of the other partners produced the innovative governance, management and service delivery techniques that have cut across the self-imposed jurisdictional and modal boundaries of the past.

Only with leadership and partnerships that include the federal, provincial and municipal governments, Crown corporations and public agencies, and the service providers (including the freight railways) can Southwestern Ontario craft and connect the pieces required to create its own multi-modal public transportation puzzle.

In Southwestern Ontario, some of the pieces of the public transportation puzzle are already in place, but they require innovative development. Others are still absent.