Benefits of and Limitations to Public Transit in American Cities

Sabina Eva Able-Thomas
*Cleveland State University*, S.ABLETHOMAS@csuohio.edu

Scott Carson
*Cleveland State University*, S.T.CARSON@csuohio.edu

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Benefits of and Limitations to Public Transit in American Cities

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
Economics Department

Student Researchers: Scott Carson; Sabina Able-Thomas

Faculty Advisor: Subhra B. Saha

Abstract

This project examines if public transit generates spillovers on private employment and if population density is a limitation to the viability of public transit in American cities. To estimate the spillover benefits of public transit on employment, we take data from 2000 Decennial Census and relate share of private employment to public transit usage in different cities. We find that public transit usage has little or no effect on private employment. However, it has a positive and significant association with the share of college graduates and high skill workers in a city. This association persists even when large cities are dropped from the estimation sample. To examine if population density is a limit to transit, we create a unique dataset of Greater Cleveland Regional Transportation Agency (GCRTA) bus service by census tracts of Cleveland in 2010. Surprisingly we find that public transit (in Cleveland, OH) depends more on share of minority population and availability of jobs in the different census tracts compared to their population density. The results stand in contrast to the estimates of population density from macro studies based on urban areas or counties but are in line with the motto of GCRTA.