

My View: Mass transit can lead us again to new growth

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There continues to be a lot of talk about whether Central Indiana will support a rapid transit system as so many other metropolitan cities around the country have done for years.

While thousands of people, organizations and businesses have signed petitions showing their support of transit and efforts from the Central Indiana Regional Transit Authority, we remain at a standstill. It was surprising to see a recent Star editorial conclude that Indianapolis lacks enough density to support transit (we are a metro area of about 1.8 million), and that our city was developed with the idea that residents would only drive to-and-fro in **automobiles**. This simply is not true.

In fact, some of Indianapolis' most prosperous neighborhoods developed as a result of transit. According to the Polis Center's study on neighborhoods from the Project on Religion and Culture, Broad Ripple, Irvington, Beech Grove and even Lawrence provide an "interesting study in how transportation can shape and influence community development over time."

Take Broad Ripple, for example. Although

railroads first appeared in Indianapolis in 1847, it was 36 years before the Indianapolis, Delphi and Chicago Railroad built a line extending from Downtown through Broad Ripple. The arrival of the railroad spurred growth in and around Broad Ripple. Electric streetcars were introduced to Broad Ripple in 1894, offering 10-cent fares, and attracted even more people. I wonder whether there were people who argued that no one would pay a dime to take a streetcar, when a horse and buggy would suffice.

The city's intermodal system provided increased mobility for its residents, and **businesses** began springing up in Broad Ripple to help support the influx of urbanites who traveled by streetcar to visit the Broad Ripple Park, to shop, and even summer in cottages they built along the river.

In Irvington, early growth was due to the intermodal. Subdivisions were built near the artery of Washington Street corridor, which encouraged growth of secondary

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arteries such as 10th Street and Prospect Avenue. As streetcar lines expanded, so did the development of more commercial and residential developments. This encouraged additional residential growth as people could ride the intermodal to get to jobs in Downtown Indianapolis.

There is no question that the transit system was the impetus for commercial growth around the city. That can happen again if we'd consider the big picture, and consider transit's role in the context of the entire community.

In 2009, the American Institute of Architects' Sustainable Development Assessment Team came to Indianapolis to study a neighborhood on the Near Eastside near 22nd Street and the Monon Trail, which is plagued by abandoned buildings and tough times. Overwhelmingly, this national team of architects and urban planners agreed that a transit station would help spur neighborhood renewal efforts. It would provide mobility for current residents to get to jobs, it would encourage new residents to move in, and it would help lure [businessdevelopment](#).

In five months, we will play host to the Super Bowl. While Indianapolis gets rave reviews from sports fans for its walkability, we lack the necessary transit options to help connect our urban core with areas such as Mass Ave, Fountain Square, Broad Ripple and the surrounding communities.

We're not going to be able to implement a comprehensive mass transit plan in time for the big game, but isn't it time we

committed to leveraging a mass transit initiative to [fuel](#) Indianapolis' economic growth?

Transportation isn't just roads, sidewalks and skywalks. Transportation is about connecting people to places, whether it's to work or parks, or shops, libraries or doctors' [offices](#). Without a well-funded, transportation plan -- one that includes an improved bus system, rapid transit, biking and walking paths -- we're limiting the ability for people to connect. And that limits the economic opportunities we so desperately need.

Garner, president of A2SO4, is an architect who specializes in urban planning and development.

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