



SUBURBAN MOBILITY  
CASE STUDY



# Driving Economic Development with Microtransit

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# SUBURBAN MOBILITY

## Enabling a Car-Optional Community

Historically, a big city's suburbs have been driven by cars alone. With many high-paying jobs in a city or business office parks, nearby colleges and health care beyond walking distance, and restaurants and entertainment miles away from home, suburban residents require at least one vehicle to get where they need to go. And since suburban populations have grown 16 percent since 2000<sup>5</sup>, the result is a lot more cars, many with a single passenger, filling neighborhoods just outside American cities.

Greater traffic congestion not only demands more maintenance on a city's roads, bridges, and highways, but it also worsens a community's air quality and stress

levels. For suburban residents, the requirement of owning vehicles can eat up their income for car payments and upkeep, not to mention the frustration of sitting in traffic. A single vehicle can cost a household on average \$10,000 per year, and many times that vehicle is used for morning and evening commutes, sitting idle and unused for the bulk of the day.

What could a household do with those extra funds to boost the economy even further? The business community also suffers, as they must provide extensive parking infrastructure—and these costs fall especially hard on the startups that bring cities some of their most dynamic economic energy.

To address these challenges, **city transit leaders are adopting a distinctly suburban approach to mobility engineering.** This mobility strategy borrows transit innovations from urban communities and adapts them to the suburbs in three important ways:

- 1 Offer efficient, flexible, and safe choices for traveling to and from the suburbs.** Tom Gerend, Executive Director, Kansas City Streetcar Authority said, "In order to extend the reach, in order to be regional, we need to be connected to alternative service modes that can link people from all over the region to that service, where they can effectively utilize it, and they can make trips that not are just involving one mode, but two modes or three modes to get to their final destination." These options can also include community members' own micromobility options, private mobility providers, as well as public microtransit shuttles offered through local transit agencies. These choices offer citizens reliable mobility options, saving transit departments the cost of larger buses, which can be redeployed in densely populated areas for greater efficiency. The result is greater and more flexible mobility, while creating new efficiencies for public transit.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/05/22/demographic-and-economic-trends-in-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/>

- 2 Meet the high expectations of diverse residents by drawing on feedback and data.** The suburbs are home to citizens of all ages, with different levels of technology fluency. As a result, city transit must provide older citizens different ways to order rides than younger residents; some may prefer to request microtransit shuttles through a website or phone, and others may choose the ease of a smartphone app. “(We are) rethinking public transit to make sure we’re connected with the public so that we can become more useful,” said Rudy LaFlore, former Chief Project Consultant at Sunline Transit Agency. “Collecting more data, having more understanding of our customer base is something that could only be beneficial to the public transportation agency. Through data, through communications, through technology, we can get smarter about how we deploy our resources.”
- 3 Support the growth of more modern businesses with agile transportation options.** Countless surveys and research have confirmed that younger generations of workers in tech and health care want to reduce their automotive footprint and enjoy a car-optional lifestyle. At the same time, the colleges, hospitals, and businesses that offer suburban jobs do not want traffic or parking congestion slowing their workforce. As St. Louis’ Mefford-Miller said of this younger generation, “They want mobility options that allow them to move around seamlessly. They may not want to own a car. They may want to have fewer cars per worker and that’s really important, especially for younger people.”

**For a strong example of how suburban mobility can power economic development, consider how Plymouth, Minnesota, a suburb in the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul region, adapted its transit system to better empower suburban citizens.**

<sup>4</sup><https://www.plymouthmn.gov/about/our-community>



## HOW PLYMOUTH DROVE SUBURBAN MOBILITY WITH FLEXIBLE TRANSIT

“Residents have high expectations. When they have a need, they want to see it met. You’re not going to wait for a city to look at their transit system, pull out some maps, start looking at routes, how can we change this, how can we do that. They want flexibility, they want adaptability, and they want it now,” said former Plymouth Mayor Kelli Slavik.

As a major suburb of Minnesota’s Twin Cities, Plymouth is home to more than 80,000 people and has the fourth largest economy in the state<sup>6</sup>. With a well-educated population; many beautiful lakes, public spaces, and amenities; and more than 60,000 jobs, Plymouth has been one of the most prosperous small cities in the Midwest for years. However, this success did not happen by accident—flexible transit made it possible. Plymouth City Manager Dave Callister said, “It’s vital to our economic development efforts that we have a functioning transit system in our community. We’re flexible, able to get instant feedback and react accordingly to get to decision points very, very quickly, making it more efficient for our customers.”

This new approach to transit was a response to two major municipal challenges: an aging population being underserved by public transit and transit shortfalls slowing down businesses. As current Mayor Jeffrey Wosje said, “Our 65 and older population was the biggest chunk in our 2010 census and 2015 data that we have in terms of a population shift. You get to a certain point and either you don’t feel as comfortable driving or you really maybe shouldn’t be driving. And some businesses here, they’re running three shifts around the clock. That’s how busy they are. They’re having trouble filling those shifts because it’s hard for people that they’re looking for in the communities to be able to get there.”

Here are four ways city leadership in Plymouth developed a leaner, smarter approach to suburban mobility:

- 1 Embrace microtransit to offer neighborhoods new options for getting around.** Using a new fleet of on-demand shuttle buses, Plymouth’s transit system allowed suburban residents to request group pickups at neighborhood landmarks, then get rides to busy areas inside Plymouth’s center. This combined the flexible nature of private mobility providers, like Uber, with the communal affordability that public transit could provide—without the cost of full-size city buses. And the city is thrilled about it, as Plymouth’s Administrative Services Director Laurie Hokkanen described, “When you start to explain what microtransit is and what it could do for the city, there’s a lot of immediate excitement. And I think that is what gets me really excited is it doesn’t just seem to resonate with transit geeks like me. It seems to make sense to everybody.”

- 2 Coordinate with the business community and their workforces to learn how best to support them with flexible and efficient transit.** By communicating with businesses struggling to fill all their shifts, as well as citizens interested in these jobs but without reliable transport, Plymouth created a new mobility strategy. The city deploys express service buses to the larger population centers to bring workers into the community. Then these vehicles disperse workers quickly and efficiently using flexible agency-owned microtransit services. This not only gave the business community a boost, but also provided more Plymouth citizens access to good-paying jobs that they were previously unable to obtain. As Mayor Wosje said, “We can create a win-win. So the employers can get access to the employees they need, and at the same time we can really leverage the transit system we have in Plymouth.”
- 3 Partner with TNCs to fill transit gaps for small groups of suburban residents or individuals.** Public-private partnerships with the likes of Uber and Lyft helped the city fill gaps in its transit networks while also reducing delays and costs to taxpayers. Complementing these services with agency-owned microtransit services provides a level of flexible mobility that was unheard of just a few years ago. Mayor Wosje described it this way: “We look for public-private partnerships because the private entity brings strengths to the table. The public entity, like our transit, brings really good strengths to the table. You can tie those together to really do something better than what we can do individually, that provides better service for our residents.”
- 4 Provide a diverse population with choices for how to access these transit options.** In order to serve both seniors and younger citizens with car-optional mobility, Plymouth city transit lets riders choose between an app, web form, or phone call to access its agency-owned microtransit services. This improved access across the population. According to former Mayor Slavik, “Oftentimes, we’ll see our seniors using the dial-a-ride system. Do they all use a smartphone or an app? Maybe, maybe not. But we need to have options so if that’s not what they’re comfortable doing, they can still use a telephone and talk to somebody.”

**The result? No citizen is left behind in Plymouth’s push for better suburban mobility, with car-optional lifestyles as a very real possibility. Thanks to this suburban city’s focus on partnerships and technology innovation, Plymouth is continuing its path toward greater economic growth and quality of life for everyone in and around its community. As Mayor Wosje said, “We can leverage technology to get a better solution for everybody. So that we have easier ways to order rides, rides that will be there on time, that will drop you off on time. This is probably one of the most exciting things that’s happened in public transit in my lifetime. We’re creating the future.”**



TransLoc is in the business of empowering cities and transit agencies to remain central to the future of transportation.

TransLoc is a part of Ford Mobility. Together, we are ushering in the future of mobility with agency-owned flexible microtransit solutions designed to deliver the ultimate rider experience.

We offer predictive models that simulate rider demand and fleet operations; the expertise to plan and deliver unique, future-proof transportation solutions; and the TransLoc OnDemand System, a premier, cloud-based, flexible-transit dispatching and monitoring system built for rapid deployment and stress-free operations.

For a closer look at how communities across the country are embracing new approaches to mobility to drive economic development, [please contact TransLoc here](#) or call **888.959.3120** to speak directly with a TransLoc Microtransit Expert working on the front lines of city transit innovation.

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