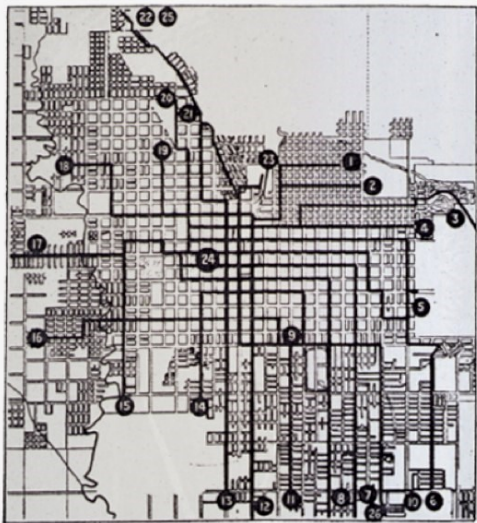




2022 Summer Newsletter



MAP OF SALT LAKE CITY SHOWING STREET CAR ROUTES
Key numbers show patrons the route to take to a desired destination.
Electric Railway Journal - Sept. 3, 1921

We here at UTRU hope that you are having a fantastic summer and that your buses and trains blow only the coolest air!

A lot has happened since we last checked in with you back in March here at UTRU: We have filled in our board, membership is growing, and we have increased our presence online through increased engagements and, yes, dumb memes (in fact, if you aren't following us on Twitter, you probably should, just head on over to @rideutru).

And, speaking of digital platforms, UTRU also has a YouTube channel, where we will be posting information that can't fit in 280 characters. We also have a TikTok page, though don't expect to see anyone dancing to the latest craze just yet.

During these summer months, UTRU will be working on increasing our membership by reaching out to likeminded organizations and increasing our media engagement. We continue to build relationships with transit organizations to ensure that we remain "Adversarial Allies" with the transit districts that serve our members; ensuring open dialogue and healthy discussion.

Since we have now officially filled in our board, we have been able to start assigning them tasks to help expand UTRU and build coalitions. Board members are looking to find donors, are talking to groups, and generally spreading the word about UTRU to ensure that all transit riders have a voice when decisions are made that affect you, the rider.

Oh, did we mention fundraising? We did?! Well then we should probably mention that UTRU is able to take donations. Please consider making a donation to UTRU so that we can continue to amplify the voice of transit riders across the state. As hokey as it may seem, a donation of even \$5 can go a long way towards strengthening our voice. And donating is easy, just visit bit.ly/UTRU-Donate today!

We have also introduced a number of additional items to our website to help ensure that we stay in touch with riders and the general public. As simple as it may seem, we lacked a blog and calendar section until recently, but have since incorporated both on to our platform.

So, tell your friends about UTRU, and be sure to engage with us both online and in public! We will be having our next membership meeting in September, so keep an eye out for details on our website or through social media!

UTRU Board

Randy Atkin | Mike Christensen | John Pearson | Chris Stout | Austin Whitehead

UTRU Staff

Curtis Haring - Executive Director | Stephanie Gallegos - IT

Meet Your UTRU Board

On June 16, The newly appointed UTRU board met for the first time, and we are very excited to introduce you to them!

Randy Atkin – Randy is a commercial real estate agent for nearly 40 years and has worked with UTA on various projects over the years to help coordinate transit and transportation planning as new developments are being created. Randy wants to ensure that we create a system that helps people effectively access transit in order to access jobs and the community.

Mike Christensen – Mike is a founding member of UTRU and has a background in urban planning where his senior project was on the feasibility of converting existing but unused Amtrak rail to establish a cohesive statewide rail network. From this, Mike founded the Utah Rail Passengers Association, which advocates for the expansion of heavy rail across the state, with a particular emphasis on making sure that rural Utah has access to transit.

John Pearson – John went to school on the east coast, living in Boston and New York, where he became very familiar with what good transit can look like. He since moved to Utah, living in the Avenues, and takes transit to the University of Utah where he is a practicing anesthesiologist. John's interest lies in addressing the equity and health issues related to good and poor transit in communities.

Chris Stout – Chris is a founding member of UTRU and an accountant by trade. Chris lives in the Millcreek area and used to frequently use the bus to access shops, dining, and entertainment due to high frequency, but now such travel has been restricted due to schedule changes. Chris is a strong advocate for increased service frequency so that people can have dependable and reliable transit.

Austin Whitehead – Austin is currently setting down roots in Salt Lake City, living in the Central City neighborhood. Having worked in Park City, he understands how difficult transit can be in Utah's urban core. Austin would like to make sure that we have a transit system that allows people to go car-light or, ideally, car-free.

Due to UTRU's bylaws, this board was nominated and will only be in place until the annual membership meeting in October when members will be able to elect/reelect board members for the following year. If you are interested in being involved on UTRU's board, we welcome you to sit in and participate in our monthly board meetings, which take place on the third Thursday of every month at 5:30. Agendas and locations will be published at least 24 hours prior, so keep an eye out on our website and Twitter account.

All are welcome, but we do want to particularly encourage women, those from minority populations, and people under 35 to participate since we want to make sure that these voices are represented as well as part of the overall work of the Union.



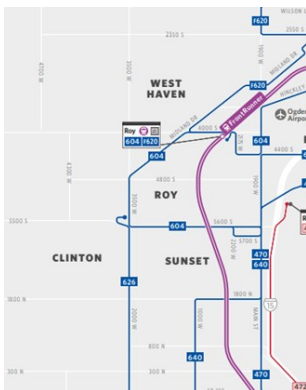
“THERE’S NOT MUCH SUPPORT FOR FREE OR REDUCED FARES ON MASS TRANSIT” OR: “HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BUS”

As the nation was starting to feel the pain many drivers were experiencing at the pump, Utah Governor Spencer Cox proposed reinstating the popular and successful Free Fare February program to encourage people to get out of their cars and into transit. This plan would save people money, reduce congestion, and better utilize existing services. In short, Governor Cox appears to view transit for what it is: a public good.

But, enthusiasm for the idea was short lived. House Majority Leader, Mike Shultz (Republican – Hooper) told the Salt Lake Tribune that “There’s not much support for free or reduced fares on mass transit” and “that [free fares] would only benefit a handful of people.”

Though disappointing, Shultz’s views are not surprising. Shultz represents Roy, Hooper, and sections of West Point, straddling Southern Weber and North-West Davis County:

Now take a look at UTA’s service coverage for Shultz’s area:



Hooper doesn’t even show up on the map, and the closest

bus route to Representative Shultz is the 626, which runs every 30 minutes on weekdays, every hour on Saturdays, and doesn’t run at all on Sundays. His home (who’s address is publicly available through the legislative website) is 1.75 miles away from the nearest stop as the crow flies and, in reality, closer to 2.75 miles if he actually wanted to walk to his stop.

So, can we really blame Representative Shultz for his views on transit? He doesn’t think transit benefits people because transit doesn’t benefit him or the people he serves. For Shultz, “inconvenient” doesn’t even start to describe transit use for him or his community and would not even enter his mind as a viable option to do much of anything.

But, here in lies the problem: the people making decisions about transit don’t use transit.

Utah, for the most part, grew up after the car was firmly engrained in the culture. When the Federal Highway Act was signed into law in 1956, Utah’s population was about 789,000. When the final mile of I-215 was paved in 1989, the last major freeway built in Utah, her population had grown to 1.7 million. Today, 3.3 million call Utah home, and roughly 8 out of 10 of them live within 5 miles of a freeway.

This isn’t unique to Utah, of course, but development around the car begets development around the car

and it has become so ingrained that it is hard for people, let alone policymakers, to imagine any other alternatives. Indeed, lawmakers don’t bat an eye to use state funds to expand sections of road in rural Utah even though the vast majority of Utahns well never actually use the stretch of road in question, but suggest that state funds be use to fund transit in Utah’s urban core of 2.6 million and pearls are clutched tight.

“Why should St. George pay for a train in Salt Lake it will never use!” “Why should the good people of Cedar City pay for a bus in Logan?!” or “why should Hooper pay for a FrontRunner stop in Provo?” All while passing a \$4.2 Billion budget for transportation, the vast majority of which goes to roads.

Now, it is fair to say that several areas of Utah could only be serviced by roads, and that buses need roads just as much as cars do, but it is also fair to say lawmakers are addicted to building roads and rarely consider (or give) funding for transit – when they do, it tends to be one-time funding for “ribbon cutting” infrastructure like train stations. You would be hard pressed to find a state budget that expands service or increases frequency.

Utah’s 5 municipal transit services currently have a total operating budget of just under \$650 million (though more than \$100 million of this in 2022 is in one time stimulus funds).

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- UTA: \$635 million (includes \$100 million in stimulus funds)
- Park City: \$7 million
- Cache Valley Transit: \$4 million
- SunTran: \$3.6 million
- Cedar Area Transportation Service \$364,000

Utah has a very average gas tax, ranking 24th among the states and sits at \$31.9 per gallon. An \$0.003 increase to the gas tax dedicated to transit could generate an estimated \$3.6 million. If vehicle registrations had a \$5 transit fee attached to it, it could generate an \$11.5 million, and if the state were to dedicate 5% of the 2023 transportation budget specifically to mass transit, it would add an additional \$79.1 million to fund transit in Utah. With these three changes, we have suddenly generated \$94.2 million for transit that otherwise did not exist and would increase budgets by almost 15%.

Imagine the new bus routes, imagine the rail lines, imagine the covered bus stops that could be built with an additional \$94 million dedicated to transit each year to both bright, shiny capital projects AND boring things such as driver pay and maintenance!

So, when lawmakers such as Representative Shultz say that transit only serves a handful of people, remember that he is right – but remind them that it doesn't have to be that way. UTRU is

here to advocate for both the current and future transit rider, and a big part of advocacy is telling policymakers that change is possible if we just start thinking differently about transit.

The key is to focus on your community and its needs. Show up to community council meetings, ask people running for office if they support transit funding and, if they do, volunteer for their campaigns. Talk to those who fight transit, not just those who support it, and tell them how expanded transit benefits them too.

The math is clear and the benefits are obvious to those who use transit. But we as transit riders have to remember that many grew up only knowing cars as a way to get around and that change can be a scary thing. Don't chuckle when someone says that they are afraid of the bus: educate! Don't shun those who say that trains are dangerous for kids while ignoring 2 tons of steel rumbling past: be an ambassador!

UTRU is here to help provide a voice for the transit we deserve, but we can't be everywhere always. That is why we want to provide you the tools you need to be a better advocate.

Keep an eye out for trainings on how to advocate in the near future and, in the mean time, make sure you don't just preach to the choir. Talk, explain, be kind, and be loud! UTRU is here to help you amplify your voice so that more people learn to stop worrying and love the bus.

Studies Begin on “Free Fare Forever” for UTA



Following the success of Free Fare February, the Wasatch Front Regional Council, UDOT, and UTA are launching studies to determine the effects “Free Fare Forever” would have on ridership, traffic, pollution, and the economy.

The announcement came from UTA CEO, Jay Fox, during June's Interim meeting of the Utah State Legislature's Transportation Committee. Fox noted that the study is intended to study if all Utahns “get a return on investment for moving the operational costs that are covered by fares to the [general] public.”

Though some lawmakers didn't seem to even know that UTA operates a limited free fare zone currently in downtown Salt Lake City, they did seem interested in the possibility of making the system free either during times when air quality is particularly bad or permanently. Other lawmakers, such as Representatives Candice Pierucci (Republican—Herriman) and Kay Christofferson (Republican—Lehi) expressed that they would prefer to see increased service frequency and coverage for Utah's largest transit system.

UTRU will keep an eye out for the study, which could take months, and let you know their findings!

LET'S GET ORGANIZED!

- By UTRU Board Member, John Pearson

A modern mass-transit system has two important qualities: transit stops are within a 15 minute walk of the riders home and destination, and that the stop has service every 5 minutes. By this definition, we (along with nearly every American city) have an antiquated mass-transit system that does not meet modern needs.

But, to get a modern system we face a Catch-22: low demand makes policymakers hesitant to fund service more to improve quality, but lack of quality service prevents demand from materializing in the first place. Even essential, multi-decade projects designed to improve service, such as extending Trax and double-tracking FrontRunner, costing hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars, won't move the needle much in terms of getting people out of their cars, nor will they significantly reduce the pollution that come with a single person in their own car using that as their only mode of transportation to go to work, shops, schools, hospitals, and recreational facilities.

And the truth is, we know we could improve our air quality and reduce our carbon footprint dramatically, and quickly, if we had a modernized Wasatch Front transit system.

But the question is: how do we get there?

We must get organized! We learn from those who have successfully increased funding for their systems. Groups like the Spokane Alliance, which organized a ballot initiative and discovered from interviewing riders found that many were not registered to vote, partnered with a local non-profit to increase rider voter registration and voter support for their movement. We learn from groups like the Metropolitan Congregations United in St. Louis, an inter-denominational coalition of religious congregations that turned the question of transit into one of access to churches for vulnerable members. We learn from groups like the NYC Straphangers Campaign, which used lawsuits charging that fare hikes violated civil rights laws which resulted in unlimited monthly passes being offered by the MTA. And all these movements found ways to make it fun, like giving the slowest buses "Pokey Awards".

Learning from others means understanding the time and costs. Surprisingly it takes only a modest investment in organizing to turn the tide of public opinion with successful campaigns running working with as few as three paid staffers. Groups like UTRU can be the touchstone of these movements.

The methods vary, but success is possible! Bloomberg news surveyed transit systems around asking why other systems work so much better than the United States' and they concluded that "fortunately, improving American transit doesn't necessarily demand multi-decade, hundred-billion-dollar infrastructure projects: It can be done by better advantage of existing space and existing vehicles, and then deploying them in ways that encourage people to actually use them."

With our wide streets and well-laid grid system, this type of quick transformation is entirely possible in Utah.

So put your money where your mouth is, or if all you have to give is time, we want that too - join us at UTRU today and help clean our air for tomorrow with a transit system that works for all!

"Jim, I wouldn't have told you this before tonight: No, I don't think we have a chance to win it. This valley's organized. They'll start shooting, and they'll get away with it. We haven't a chance...But you don't want to worry about that, Jim. The thing will carry on and on. It'll spread, and some day — it'll work. Some day we'll win. We've got to believe that."

- John Steinbeck
In Dubious Battle