



SUSTAINING
momentum

COTA SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

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MOVING FORWARD, *sustainably*



Sustainability is at the heart of creating an equitable and inclusive transit system and region for our diverse customers. As the regional public transit provider for greater Columbus and Central Ohio, the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) serves more than **1.2 MILLION RESIDENTS** with nearly **19 MILLION** passenger trips annually. COTA has more than **1,100 EMPLOYEES**, **41 FIXED-TRANSIT ROUTES** and more than **490 VEHICLES**. As an agency, COTA continues to improve the environment, economy and community quality of life by connecting people with the places they value and creating a safe, supportive workplace.

With the highest ridership in 31 years recorded in 2019, our robust transit system is connecting thousands of people to a better quality of life, providing access to jobs, health care, education, arts, entertainment and more. Creating a strong region with excellent transit is inherently sustainable. COTA strives for a connected system that allows people to move seamlessly.

Our mission is to move every life forward. This includes advancing sustainability practices that conserve resources, protect our workers and improve the experience of COTA's customers. Through dedication and teamwork, we are working with our business and community partners to integrate sustainability into every aspect of our agency.



Joanna M. Pinkerton
CEO/President

Our COMMITMENT

The most important role COTA can play in sustainability is to create a world-class transit system that our customers love. COTA strives to be a mobility solutions provider that is functional and reliable for our core customers, as well as a compelling mobility option for customers who do not rely exclusively on COTA to move throughout Central Ohio.



Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is the foundation on which we developed all of COTA's guiding principles. Our focus on EDI helps create an attractive and safe rider experience. Internally, our EDI commitment helps us foster a supportive, safe workplace and healthy environment. In pursuit of our core values, we seek to eliminate racial disparities in hiring and procurement. We also work to provide dignified service to disadvantaged groups in our region to employment, school, healthcare and other important destinations.



Definitions of sustainability terms used in this report can be found in the glossary



Measuring performance is important to us; we include metrics to measure our sustainability progress.



COTA sustainability includes not just environmental goals, but also diversity, safety, and the resiliency of the organization and the community



This report is a snapshot in time of where we stand today, and is focused on actions we will take to further our sustainability mission.

COTA'S GUIDING *Principles*

From current initiatives to future-forward goals, COTA plans to move forward with a series of major sustainability concepts.

- Support the overall regional economy through effective and efficient operations
- Promote economic opportunity, particularly for community residents with limited opportunity to fully participate in our region's growth and success
- Sustain the social fabric of our region by promoting opportunities for new connections among residents, which includes New Americans and newcomers to our community
- Enhance the natural environment by taking measures to improve public health, enhance the quality of life and become better stewards of our natural resources

These sustainability concepts will move COTA toward a brighter, more sustainable future. In the pages that follow, COTA outlines the tangible actions and metrics that we created to hold ourselves accountable. This Sustainability Report stands as a partner to and extension of COTA's Strategic Plan. As such, it is rooted in COTA's four guiding principles with equity, diversity and inclusion at the core.



COTA values its community, employees and the natural environment. Equity, diversity and inclusion are core principles at COTA. Guided by our values and these principles, we will introduce and pursue several goals in this report to improve the wellbeing of our employees, our community and our shared natural environment.



IMPROVE THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

COTA strives to provide the best experience for our customers. As we continue to grow, we want all Ohioans to share in the benefits of that growth. We maintain our facilities to keep riders comfortable and safe and we are upgrading rider amenities to provide better access for everyone. Service and performance improvements will continue to increase customer satisfaction, as well as enhance equity and accessibility outcomes.



PROVIDE ACCESS TO MOBILITY OPTIONS

As a mass transit system that serves over 1 million Ohioans, our policies and infrastructure support Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, low fares, building transit supportive communities and providing access to work and school. These improvements will work for everyone, including pedestrians and cyclists. We are excited to continue serving our customers and to expand access to our services for people who cannot currently use them in the way that they need.



ACHIEVE ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

COTA will continue to improve organizational outcomes. For the purposes of this report, we address our goals for operational excellence and environmental excellence. Like many large service providers and employers, our business relies on sustaining our operational effectiveness and efficiency. By reducing our environmental footprint, we are improving our business operations and sustaining our planet.



PRIORITIZE THE USE OF DATA & ANALYTICS

This report establishes the metrics and data sources on which we will rely to make COTA a more sustainable organization. As we move forward, reliable data collection practices will help us refine sustainability protocols to best meet the objectives outlined in our report, as well as effectively track our progress.

Sustainability IN MOTION

Sustainable systems meet the needs of the present without compromising the future. Typically, sustainability is represented by three pillars: **1**) economic viability, **2**) environmental protection and **3**) social equity. Our report addresses each pillar through the framework of COTA's guiding principles.

- We support economic sustainability in the Central Ohio region by achieving operational excellence, serving as good stewards of our financial resources and promoting opportunities for everyone to participate in the economy of our region.
- We support environmental protections by achieving environmental excellence. By creating a healthier environment for Central Ohioans, we provide equitable opportunities for all members of our community.
- We promote social sustainability by improving the customer experience and providing access to mobility options.

Equity, diversity and inclusion are the core of everything we do: it lies at the center of the sustainability of our organization and the future of our region. We are accountable for our progress, which is why we share our goals, actions and metrics so that the community can support our work. This report represents a snapshot of where we are today so that our community can follow our journey forward.



Improve THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE ADD AND MAINTAIN ATTRACTIVE AMENITIES

We are upgrading our stops and stations to better serve our community. We prioritize the most used stops, those stops with barriers to ADA access and stops that have safety concerns (like insufficient lighting).

Add and maintain transit stop amenities

COTA works to have attractive and accessible transit stops. We are consistently improving our stops by adding amenities.

Reduce light and noise pollution

We want our transit stops to fit their environment. We are switching our fleet to quieter compressed natural gas (CNG) vehicles and ensuring that the lighting at our stops does not extend into the surrounding neighborhood.

Improve safety

The safety and security of our customers is important to COTA. We strive to build and maintain transit facilities where people feel safe. Every COTA operator is trained to handle medical emergencies, traffic accidents and even house fires. We take loitering and suspicious activity seriously. We also responded proactively at the onset of the pandemic to implement policies that help prevent the spread of COVID-19 on our vehicles.



INCREASE RELIABLE SERVICE

We are improving the reliability of our service to get riders safely to their destinations, as well as to support our recovering economy.

Improve on-time performance and reliability

We are constantly innovating to get riders to their destinations on time. COTA relies on Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and works, locally and nationally, on collaborations to improve the transportation system in our region. COTA and 13 partner agencies received a \$1.7 million Integrated Mobility Innovation grant from the US Department of Transportation to pilot Waycare's connected mobility platform. The goal of the artificial intelligence (AI) platform is to improve traffic safety and reduce travel times.

Improve customer service

We are here for our customers. COTA has a 93% customer satisfaction rate. On top of this, we maintain high standards and continually improve the experience for our riders.



PROMOTE COTA TO NEW AMERICANS, NEW COLUMBUS RESIDENTS AND YOUTHS

New Americans from around the world have experience riding transit in their countries of origin and we want to help them adapt to riding with COTA. Multi-lingual communications improve the transit system for everyone. Our staff, operators, and leadership represent the diversity of Central Ohio. We engage our customers and stakeholders. New residents and visitors can rely on COTA to get them to their destinations on time and at a reasonable cost compared to car ownership.

Promote transit to young people and new residents

To ensure COTA is the mobility option of choice today and in the future, we communicate in multiple languages and include new ways of engaging young people. To serve our community, especially New Americans, we have bilingual customer service staff, operators and print materials.



Provide ACCESS TO MOBILITY OPTIONS

IMPROVE ADA CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Safe and equitable transit prioritizes ADA and stroller access at stops, stations and on vehicles. Low fares make transportation affordable, and efficient transit prioritizes reliable service.

Increase Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access for mobility, hearing and vision impaired citizens at stops and stations

All buses are ADA wheelchair accessible and have automated stop announcements. After a 2012 inventory of transit stops to determine ADA accessibility, COTA is upgrading stops every year for better ADA access.



305,000+
rides in 2019

Maintain low fares

We know that low fares are an important equity consideration for transit that is accessible to our community.

REGULAR FARE	RUSH HOUR FARE	DISCOUNTED FARE
\$2	\$2.75	\$1

SUPPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ACCESS TO WORK

We believe that making jobs, education, healthcare, shopping, entertainment and other needs accessible by transit supports economic development and strengthens our community.

Promote intercity travel and commerce

Serving Central Ohio means promoting connections between Columbus and its surrounding communities.



Ensure transit routes are reaching jobs, education and healthcare facilities. Provide university and employer-sponsored access to transit for more Central Ohioans.

Getting to the important places should be possible on transit. We map key destinations and evaluate our routes to ensure the COTA system increases access to essential services. COTA has programs for employees and students to make sure people can access work and school.



COLLEGE STUDENTS HAVE UNLIMITED TRANSIT ACCESS

paid for by a discounted partnership between their university and COTA.

Ohio State University
Capital University
Columbus College of Art and Design

Ohio State University students make up 7.6% of total ridership.

7.6%

58% participation rate amongst companies



Downtown employees have UNLIMITED TRANSIT ACCESS

paid for by a discounted partnership between their employer and COTA.

TRANSIT SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

We have great neighborhoods in Central Ohio. COTA works with urban planners to make our communities more accessible by transit. A transit supportive community is walkable with good pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Access for residents with disabilities and limited mobility are also important. Transit works best when shopping, public services and employment centers are located near transit facilities.

Promote transit-oriented development to reduce dependency on unsustainable single occupant vehicle trips

COTA encourages dense, mixed-use, walkable developments that can support transit. We work with municipalities to promote transit-supportive land use and good pedestrian and bicycle connections to transit.

Add and maintain access to popular destinations

We work hard to develop and maintain transit-supportive corridors with dense, mixed-use, walkable development, and we are always looking for opportunities to add stops to improve community access to destinations for public enjoyment and recreation.

Add more stops and amenities in more communities

We know that balancing access to transit with route performance is important. When we add stops, we sometimes add time to passenger trips. From 2020-2022, we will add 150 new shelters. At the end of this process, 70 percent of transit trips will begin at a stop with a shelter.



3,043 total stops



19.1 MILLION total rides in 2019



Achieve ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

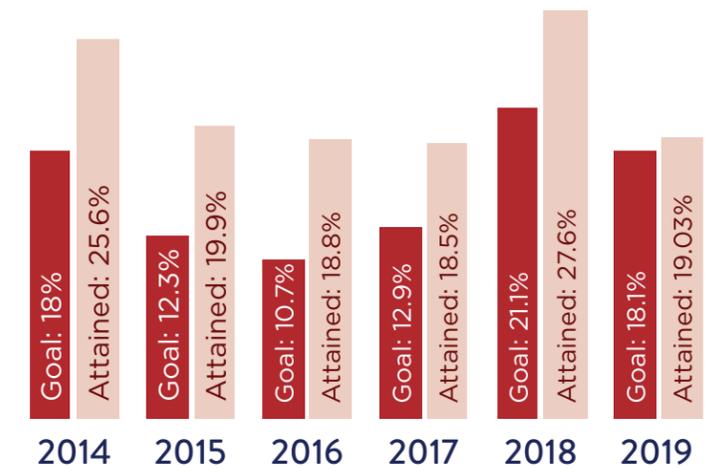
OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Eliminate Racial Disparities and Inequality in Hiring and Contracting

Diversity, inclusion and equity are core values at COTA. A diverse and inclusive group of employees and suppliers makes COTA stronger, bringing a diversity of perspectives and ideas.

Achieve or surpass non-discrimination and diversity goals in vendor contracting and subcontracting

COTA is committed to promoting diversity in our contracting and procurement. We have exceeded our goals for hiring and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) since we began setting goals in 2014.



CREATE A SAFE WORKPLACE FOR ALL COTA EMPLOYEES AND VENDORS

Our employees and vendors move COTA forward. We create a safe and welcoming workplace for employees of all races, genders, ages, abilities and religions. We encourage our vendors to make the same commitment.

Reduce reportable incidents

We value the safety of our employees and work to create a safe workplace.

Reduce crime and harassment aimed at operators

Assaulting or harassing an operator is a crime. All COTA vehicles have cameras and emergency alarm systems to keep operators and customers safe.

Use non-toxic chemicals and agents

A safe workplace includes reducing exposure to toxic chemicals. Whenever possible, we purchase water-based paint and cleaners.

Prevent the spread of airborne disease

Keeping our employees and passengers safe is our top priority. We are sanitizing our buses more frequently and ensuring that all employees have proper PPE to keep themselves and others safe.



MAINTAIN COTA'S FISCAL RESOURCES

COTA works to maintain the fiscal resources to support a reliable, safe and efficient transit system. One of the ways we do this is by realizing savings through our sustainability efforts.

Realize savings from sustainability efforts

Sustainability is good for the environment, community and economy. Our sustainability initiatives save COTA money that we can reinvest to improve our transit system.



ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE

HEALTHY AIR

Clean air is a vital part of a thriving community. Transit can help reduce air pollution by reducing single occupant vehicle trips and using alternative fuel vehicles.

Reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips

Driving with only one person in the car is bad for the environment and it can be isolating for our residents. We make COTA a convenient and reliable option for our customers who want to meet their neighbors and take a stand for the environment.

Reduce emissions

We are intentional in our work to reduce our emissions and keep the air clean. In pursuit of that goal, COTA is switching our fleet from diesel to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) buses to conserve resources and support community health and welfare. Additionally, our journey to switching to electric vehicles begins in 2021.



65% of COTA's fleet are low-emissions vehicles

10 electric buses will be purchased in 2022

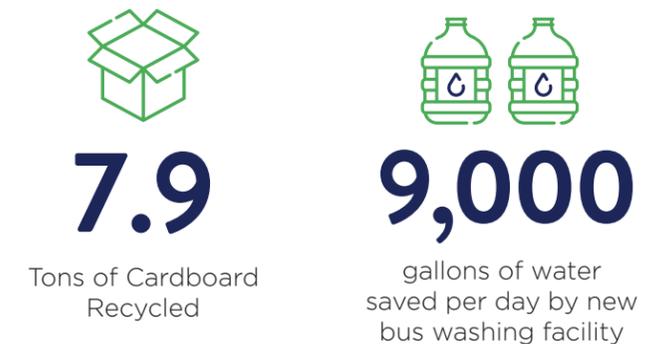
28 CNG buses per year to be diesel free by 2025

CLEAN WATER

Clean water is important to every Central Ohioan. We conserve water by collecting and reusing stormwater to clean buses.

Reduce water use and pollution & reduce stormwater runoff

Green stormwater infrastructure at COTA facilities conserves water. Collecting rainwater reduces stormwater runoff, reduces water use in our bus washing facilities and saves money.

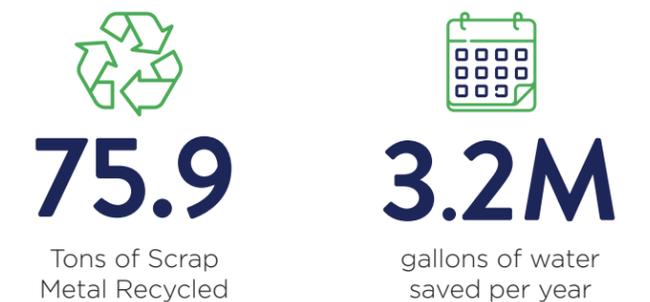


REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

We reduce waste, reuse where we can and we recycle as much as possible.

Increase recycling in facilities and construction. Purchase local and recycled goods.

COTA recycles water, fuel and other items like office paper and batteries. We purchase recycled and energy-efficient products when we can.





Prioritize DATA AND ANALYTICS

The fourth guiding principle from COTA's Strategic Plan is to prioritize data and analytics. COTA is already monitoring metrics and incorporating analytic data into our sustainability efforts. Through data collection and analysis of long-term trends, we hold ourselves accountable and stay on track with our goals. Data collection is a vital part for all projects and initiatives we do at COTA. We are excited to move forward with this Sustainability Report and measure our success along the way.



SUSTAINABILITY *initiatives*

SAFETY

COTA's COVID-19 Response

To keep our customers safe, COTA disinfects vehicles daily and uses long-lasting antimicrobial coatings. We have also doubled our normal cleaning routine for transit shelters. For ensuring current and future safety on our vehicles and in our facilities, COTA earned the American Public Transit Association's (APTA) Health and Safety Certification, as well as the Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) STAR Accreditation.



FLEET

New vehicles allow COTA to meet EPA standards with little additional cost. In 2013, COTA committed to move our entire diesel fleet to compressed natural gas (CNG) within 12 years. As such, 30 new CNG buses were rolled out that same year and we continue to replace our diesel-powered coaches with new CNG buses. In April 2021, the first electric buses will join the fleet.



FACILITIES

COTA is committed to updating our maintenance facilities to be greener and more efficient. Our CNG fueling station at the McKinley Avenue Operations facility was completed in 2013. Our new CNG fueling station at the Fields Avenue Operations facility has been operational since December 2020. This station will allow us to complete the transition away from diesel buses. COTA also has several LEED certified facilities, including our offices and Customer Experience Center at 33 N. High St., the McKinley Avenue Operations facility, the Fields Avenue Operations facility and the Easton Transit Facility.



RESILIENCY AND CONTINUITY PLANNING

COTA is responding to today's challenges and preparing for what may lie ahead. We are listening to scientists who predict more severe weather conditions in the future. COTA will be ready to protect vital infrastructure and service for transit-dependent customers in extreme weather conditions, and we are ready to assist with incidents that might call for evacuation or relocation in an emergency.



CELEBRATE NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY CHARACTER

COTA appreciates and respects every household and neighborhood in the Central Ohio region. We engage with local communities and neighborhoods and we are involved in community events. Each community is special, and we are proud to serve and celebrate all of them.

We will continue to seek community benefits as we develop our facilities and routes. We continue to build and maintain collaboration with the Community Development Collaborative of Greater Columbus and local Community Development Corporations. We are building new collaborations with communities of interest around equity, inclusion and justice.



Engaging CENTRAL OHIO

PUBLIC MEETINGS

We value our customers, and we engage the community to ensure we provide Central Ohio with great service at a reasonable cost. Every year, COTA participates in more than 300 community outreach activities to learn about community needs, share information about our new initiatives and engage stakeholders in service planning.



DIVERSITY OUTREACH

COTA serves the diverse community of Central Ohio and it is important that our workforce is diverse and inclusive. To ensure equitable service, hiring and contracting, COTA constantly conducts diversity outreach. We work directly with the organizations that share our mission. The Columbus Urban League, Ohio Minority Supplier Development Council, the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials and the Central Ohio African American Chamber of Commerce are important partners in achieving our diversity goals.



COMMUNICATIONS & MESSAGING

We continue to expand our dialogue with communities, customers, industry partners and COTA team members to promote a sustainable Central Ohio. Communication is central to promoting transparency and accountability for achieving equitable economic growth, social mobility and a healthier environment. In 2019, COTA had nearly 100 non-profit partners. Working with the Columbus Foundation, we hosted two Big Table events about transportation and access to healthcare and jobs. In addition, public meetings, community events, social media moderation and customer service data are all aspects of how we connect with stakeholders. We will continue to find new ways for COTA to help move every life forward in Central Ohio.



OUR PATH *forward*

FUTURE FOCUSED

During the summer of 2017, Columbus Mayor Andrew Ginther signed on to a charter to work toward the objectives of the Paris Agreement for climate change and joined more than 400 other mayors in “efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions, create a clean energy economy and stand for environmental justice.” COTA echoes both the mayor’s commitment and the ambitious goals stated in the charter. At COTA, we will:

- Achieve 100% sustainable and renewable energy and alternative fuels by 2025
- Implement green procurement and purchasing
- Continue to emphasize diversity, equity and inclusion in contracting and hiring to reflect the diversity of our ridership
- Achieve net zero carbon by 2050
- Become a leader in promoting the health of Central Ohioans, including achieving the American Public Transportation Association’s (APTA) Safety and Health Seal and the Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) Accreditation
- Upgrade all COTA facilities to healthy building standards

SUSTAINING MOMENTUM

COTA’s 2020 Sustainability Report is just the first step. In order to accomplish our most ambitious goals, we intend to:

- Develop an environmental management system to catalogue metrics associated with our progress
- Devote personnel and financial resources (including grant funds) to implement the actions outlined in this report
- Adopt a green procurement program to reduce our impact on the environment and strengthen the green economy
- Create a policy commitment that can help us integrate sustainability into the organization so that it is considered in all decisions
- Develop high-capacity transit corridors to spur sustainable development
- Develop a detailed Sustainability Plan in 2021 with clear goals and how we plan to achieve them
- Increase our use of renewable energy and natural gas through renewable energy credits
- Aggressively explore green generation opportunities, including electrifying the non-revenue fleet
- Prepare for a more resilient Central Ohio where COTA is prepared to respond and assist in any crisis that might arise
- Continue to drive equity, diversity and inclusion in our business and in the communities we serve
- Prepare implementation plans to set the course for a more sustainable future
- Engage in robust communications so that our riders know about what we are doing to build a more sustainable region

GLOSSARY OF TERMS ACRONYMS

COTA Strategic Plan

Published in 2018, which established overarching goals and guiding principles for COTA's operation from 2019-2024.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Act passed in 1990 that includes requirements for making public spaces accessible to people with disabilities.

American Public Transit Association (APTA)

APTA is a non-profit association representing all forms of public transportation. They share research, technical expertise and best practices, as well as advocate for federal funding for public transportation. Transit agencies that sign onto their Health and Safety Commitments Program make a pledge to customers that public transportation is operating safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)

CNG is an alternative fuel to gasoline or diesel. It produces fewer greenhouse gas and particulate emissions than gasoline and diesel. Particulates are very small particles that are bad for your health, especially your lungs. Using CNG in buses helps keep Central Ohio's air cleaner and helps the buses run more quietly.

Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)

A small business owned or controlled by groups who face and have historically faced discrimination. This usually includes women and minorities but may also include people with disabilities or veterans. Setting goals for DBE inclusion on contracts helps to create a more equal playing field for businesses to succeed.

Extreme Weather Conditions

The US Center for Disease Control (CDC) describes the public health dangers of extreme heat as summer temperatures rise above previously recorded averages. Extreme heat conditions are associated with exhaustion, heat stroke and other health conditions associated with chronic illnesses.

Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) STAR Accreditation

The GBAC STAR Accreditation indicates that a facility has strong cleaning and disinfection standards in place to minimize the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19.

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)

Technology that allows the transportation system to work better. This includes things like traffic signal priority for buses and emergency vehicles, real-time traffic information and autonomous and connected vehicles.

LEED Certification

LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), is an internationally-recognized green building certification system, providing third-party verification that a building or community was designed and built using strategies aimed at improving performance across environmental metrics, including: energy savings, water efficiency, emissions reduction, improved indoor environmental quality and resource conservation.

Mixed-Use Development

A block with a mix of land uses like houses and stores. Mixed-use development is often walkable and supports transit.

New Americans

The Ohio Development Services Agency cites that "many cities across the state have been significantly shaped by the hard work and ingenuity of diverse communities of immigrants who settled here." The Ohio Opportunities for New Americans programs promote economic and community development that can result from immigration.

Nitrogen Oxide (NOx)

Pollution released from vehicles and other sources that can cause irritation in the respiratory system.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Clothing someone wears to stay safe. Gloves and masks at the doctor's office and hard hats and goggles at a construction site are examples of PPE that keep workers safe.

Single Occupancy Vehicles

Single occupancy vehicles are privately operated by one person, the driver. These vehicles are the most environmentally harmful mode of ground transportation.

Traffic Signal Priority

Giving transit priority at traffic lights. This might mean timing the light cycle to the average transit speed or using technology to detect buses and adjust to allow them to continue through intersections.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD)

Dense development of apartments and stores around a transit station with good sidewalks and biking infrastructure. This lets people walk to transit and stores.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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