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A Snap Shot of Recent Light Rail Statistics

The Port Authority (PAT) will introduce important changes in January 2017 related to its fares. These changes will have a significant impact on all modes of transportation, including the light rail system. So it is a good idea to take a look at the years prior to the change going into effect to establish a base against which to compare the years following the change. Among the fare modifications are the elimination of zone pricing that varies with distance of the trip and the peak period add on charge currently in effect. We will soon be producing a *Policy Brief* that examines the fare changes and possible impacts in detail.

This report presents and comments briefly on four years of data, 2011 to 2014—the most recent available as reported by PAT to the National Transit Database (NTD). As the 2015 and 2016 data become available this *Brief* will be updated. Still, these four years of statistics offer considerable insight into what has happened to light rail operations from just before service using the North Shore Connector commenced. And they provide the basis for determining trends in light rail usage and operating statistics.

Measurements	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY 14	% Change, FY13 to FY14
Total Unlinked Trips (000s)	6,918	7,130	8,032	7,937	-1.2
Total Fare Revenue (000s)	\$8,670	\$8,711	\$9,786	\$11,385	16.3
Total Operating Expense (000s)	\$48,143	\$52,043	\$51,528	\$53,118	3.1
Fixed Directional Route Miles	47.4	49.6	49.6	49.6	0.0
Vehicles Available for Maximum Service	79	83	83	83	0.0
Vehicles Operated in Maximum Service	48	56	56	56	0.0

Ridership, (total unlinked trips), moved higher from FY11 to FY12 and made a sizable jump from FY12 to FY13 as the North Shore Connector had its first full year of service. Then it seemed to have peaked and possibly dropped back a bit in 2014. Operating expenses rose three percent. The statistics on the physical characteristics of the light rail system—route miles and vehicles on the system—have not changed since the opening of the Connector.

Meanwhile, revenue rose 16 percent from FY13 to FY14 with a small decline in ridership and no fare increase. So how did that happen? According to PAT staff the Authority began to allocate revenue on a modal basis (bus, light rail, incline) rather than by originating trips. Thus monthly passes, transfers, and senior rides are being allocated by mode going forward. It should be noted that the NTD profile pages for 2013 and 2014 show that total fare revenue system wide was down \$468,000 year over year (from \$100.5 million to \$100.0 million). Fare revenue for the inclines

was also up hence bus revenue had to be significantly lower to cause the total system revenue to fall. It is assumed that these changes resulted from the modal versus originating ride method of allocating fare revenue.

The change in fare revenue allocation by PAT along modal lines for FY14 and the slight drop in ridership lead to a bump in fare revenue per rider, a near 18 percent increase from FY13 to FY14. However, this increase is an accounting artifact owing to the change in how revenues are allocated as opposed to an actual rise at the fare box on the light rail cars.

Indicators	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY 14	% Change, FY13 to FY14
Fare per Trip	\$1.25	\$1.22	\$1.22	\$1.43	17.7
Expense per Trip	\$6.96	\$7.30	\$6.42	\$6.69	4.3
Subsidy per Trip	\$5.71	\$6.08	\$5.20	\$5.26	1.2

Moving fare revenue to a modal basis raised the fare per trip by \$0.21 cents, which then resulted in a smaller subsidy per trip than had fare per trip remained at \$1.22 or even rose slightly but not as significantly to \$1.43.

The change to fare policy could have significant impacts on light rail ridership, revenue, and expense in the years to come. The new policy in addition to eliminating fare zones and peak fare premiums will keep the free light rail rides between the North Shore stations to the PNC stop—six stations in all. One of the big questions we will discuss in an upcoming *Policy Brief* is how the free ride provision will work along with the requirement to pay “on enter” that will be in place for light rail and buses. Monitoring and verification could be complicated for passengers boarding in the free zone but traveling beyond the free zone riding because there will no longer be “pay on exiting”. Other related issues to the changes in fare policy will also be discussed.

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