

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM OTHERS?

Sue Carpenter  
KPCC-FM

Anyone who lives—and drives—in the Los Angeles metropolitan area already knows that traffic is bad. In fact, it is officially the worst in the world, according to the global transportation data company INRIX. With 84 percent of commuters either driving or carpooling to work and spending about 44 minutes per day in their vehicles, it's hardly a surprise that L.A. is just as well known for its gridlock as it is for the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

But with Los Angeles poised to host the Olympics in 2028, the city is embarking on multiple strategies to reduce its traffic problem, many of them lifted from other cities in the United States, as well as overseas, including congestion pricing, microtransit, dockless scooters and car sharing.

“Clearly the status quo is not serving people’s needs,” said Los Angeles Department of Transportation General Manager Seleta Reynolds at an event introducing the city’s first on-demand neighborhood shuttle service in March 2019. “Our goal is to try new things, evaluate them, get the data, see how they’re working, make adjustments, have partnerships with businesses and other folks and also be patient.”

### CONGESTION PRICING

Congestion pricing works by shifting purely discretionary rush hour travel to other transportation modes or to off-peak periods, according to the Federal Highway Administration. Often, that is done by imposing tolls or by charging drivers a fixed rate to drive into a particularly congested area. The idea is that drivers should literally pay for the additional congestion they create – that if driving a personal vehicle is more expensive when an area is also most congested, it will discourage use, thereby reducing traffic. Oftentimes, the money raised through congestion pricing is used to fund public transportation.

While congestion pricing has largely been a success in the places where it has been implemented, it also has its detractors, who say it favors the rich who can afford to pay more to drive and also harms retail businesses in the neighborhoods where it's in place because fewer cars means fewer customers.

London, Stockholm, Singapore and Milan are among the many cities that have implemented congestion pricing. In London, where a congestion charge was first introduced in 2003, the city charges drivers about \$15 to enter the central part of the city. More than \$4 billion has been raised, much of it used to build infrastructure, and traffic has been reduced by about 40 percent.

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority earlier this year voted to conduct a feasibility study on congestion pricing for the area, which spans 4,751 square miles and is home to 10.16 million people. LA Metro CEO Phil Washington says the revenue raised through a potential congestion pricing plan would help fund the building of additional public transit and also subsidize free fares on its buses and trains.

## MICROTRANSIT

Using minibuses and vans that operate on a flexible service schedule, rather than larger trains and buses that run on a fixed time table, microtransit marries the convenience of a ride-hailing service such as Uber with the lower cost of public transportation. The cost is usually just a couple dollars per trip.

This sort of mobility is often used for travel of 5 to 15 miles, which accounts for about 25 percent of all trips taken in the U.S.

In most cases, it works with a smart phone app that allows passengers to call for a ride and be picked up at a specific time. An individual's trip is then combined with other people's, who might be going to roughly the same place.

Multiple services have attempted operations in various cities through the U.S., but many of them have failed before most people even knew they existed. Leap Transit and Chariot, both operating in San Francisco, and Bridj, operating in Kansas City, have ceased operations. Most of the failures have been due to a lack of critical mass in ridership and regulatory hurdles.

The one success story so far seems to be the startup Via, which launched its service in New York City in 2014 and now operates its on-demand shuttles in dozens of cities, including Amsterdam and London overseas, and U.S. cities including Chicago, Washington, D.C. and, as of January 2019, Los Angeles, where the service is being piloted to shuttle passengers to three LA Metro train stations. By the end of 2019, Via expects to be operating in 200 cities worldwide.

While Uber and Lyft have each launched carpool versions of their popular ride-hailing services, their use remains low. Just 20-30 percent of these companies' trips are carpooled, according to rider surveys.

## DOCKLESS SCOOTERS

Since Bird introduced its on-demand mobility service in September 2017 by dropping off dozens of electric scooters in the city of Santa Monica without alerting officials, so-called e-scooters have proliferated throughout the country. Bird alone now operates in more than 100 cities, from Austin, Texas, to Paris, France.

And they've since been joined by almost a dozen other on-demand scooter companies, including Lime, Scoot, Skip, Ojo – even Uber and Lyft – all of which give riders the option of locating a scooter with an app, then renting it for a small fee per mile.

This type of micromobility is best used for short trips of up to five miles, which accounts for the majority of all trips taken in the U.S.—about 60 percent.

Representatives for these companies say they're not only helping commuters solve the notoriously difficult first- and last-mile problem, but also helping to ease traffic congestion, and transportation officials throughout the country seem to agree.

But safety issues have become a stumbling block. Because the scooters are dockless and are picked up and dropped off at riders' convenience, they are often left in the middle of sidewalks, streets and parking lots, creating a safety hazard that's prompted cities to regulate their use with specific rules.

And then there's the matter of injuries. A study from the Journal of the American Medical Assn., released in January 2019, looked at one year's worth of emergency room visits at two hospitals—in West L.A. and Santa Monica. About 250 people had gone to those hospitals for injuries related to stand-up scooter riding. Of those, 40% had suffered head injuries, another third had fractures.

## CAR SHARING

A form of car rental that allows people to rent cars by the minute, hour or day, car-sharing has been growing in popularity since it first began in 2000. That's when Zipcar introduced its service in Boston, charging drivers just a few dollars per hour to use a car compared with more traditional forms of car rental, which charged drivers by the day.

Today, car-sharing has expanded to the point that traditional car rental companies, including Hertz, Avis and Enterprise, all offer their own car-sharing services. The basic premise has also evolved, with companies like Car2Go, operating in ten cities including Austin and Chicago, and ReachNow, in Seattle and Portland, letting drivers pick up a car in one location, pay for the miles driven by the minute, and drop off the vehicle somewhere else.

And there are also peer-to-peer models, with individuals renting their own cars to other individuals through services such as Turo, Getaround and Maven. Turo is the largest player, with more than 350,000 vehicles listed and 10 million registered users globally.

According to Turo, car-sharing is most often used for trips of 15 miles or longer, which makes up about 15 percent of all trips in the U.S.

When General Motors introduced its Maven car-sharing service in Los Angeles in 2016, LADOT's Seleta Reynolds said the city had partnered with the company because Los Angeles simply could no longer sustain a one-person, one-car mentality, especially with more people moving to LA. The County of Los Angeles is expected to add 3.5 million people by 2050.

Last year, the city introduced yet another type of car sharing called BlueLA. Operated in partnership with the LADOT, it rents electric vehicles by the minute from 40 different locations, and also includes on-street parking, each space with a dedicated charger.

BlueLA has been operating in Paris since 2011. The service now has 200,000 members and has reduced the number of privately-operated vehicles by 40,000, according to company officials.