

Report: Fresno metro decent in workforce transit

(Fresno) Business Journal, Thursday, July 11, 2012

The Fresno metro area was fairly adequate in providing transit to its workforce, according to a new report by the Brookings Institution, a Washington D.C. think tank.

Out of 100 of the nation's largest metropolitan areas, Fresno and its surrounding cities ranked 50 in terms of its transit coverage, with 70.3 percent of jobs in neighborhoods with public transit service, 99.1 percent within cities and 28.5 percent from suburbs only.

The region ranked 8 in terms of its labor access rate, with 45.8 percent of the working population able to get to the job site within 90 minutes via public transit, 47.1 percent within cities and 37.1 percent from the suburbs.

The area's finance, insurance and real estate industry led the way with transit coverage at 83.8 percent and labor access at 47 percent, while agriculture lagged at 40 percent and 46 percent respectively.

That compares with the national average of 75.5 percent of jobs in neighborhoods with fixed route transit service, 94.7 percent in the city and 64 percent from suburbs.

Western states were in a slightly better position at 86.6 percent, 95.3 percent and 80.1 percent respectively.

The typical job is accessible to only about 27 percent of its metropolitan workforce by public transit within 90 minutes.

The Bakersfield metro ranked 49 in terms of transit coverage at 70.3 percent while its 90-minute labor access rate ranked 19 at 35 percent.

The Modesto metro ranked 16 for transit coverage at 84.2 percent and 15 for labor access at 38.5 percent.

The report noted that the average distance to work jumped from 9.9 miles in 1983 to 13.3 miles in 2009 while the average number of hours wasted in traffic increased from 14 hours to 34 hours.

Congestion geographically limits business markets, raises business-related transportation costs and forces business to increase wages to compensate for the burden, the report said.

Public transit frees up a lot of that congestion by taking cars off the road, while metros that plan their transit systems to connect with the broadest labor pool fared the best in the report.

Public transportation survey shows flaws in local system

By Anna Burleson, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wed., July 11, 2012

A report released Wednesday has finally put a number to how effective -- or ineffective -- public transportation is in Kern County.

While 71.1 percent of the jobs in Kern County are in neighborhoods with public transportation services, only 35 percent of workers can reach those jobs in under 90 minutes.

These statistics come from the Brookings Report, a statistical analysis put together by a private nonprofit research facility in Washington, D.C.

The author of the report, Adie Tomer, said the results of the survey are similar across the country.

"We consistently find the same kind of results where transit does a good job serving employers, but it fails to connect that employer to large shares of the metropolitan labor force," he said.

Essentially, the bus is stopping in front of businesses, but not many people are on it.

Planner Linda Wilbanks of Kern Regional Transit said this is most likely because Kern County is a large area to cover.

"It takes awhile sometimes, even in a car, to get from one place to another," she said.

Kern Regional Transit serves all of Kern County and to compensate for long ride times, some buses run in the early hours of the morning so people can get to work on time.

Golden Empire Transit's fleet of 88 buses serves 473,348 people within the city limits of Bakersfield and some outlying areas. While GET's service area does not encompass all of what the Brookings Report refers to, spokeswoman Gina Hayden said GET is addressing service issues by changing bus routes in October.

"GET's current system is not as efficient as it could be," she said.

The new plan will have more direct routes with shorter ride times and fewer stops.

Tomer said he hoped the report would show people that all aspects of city planning should sit together at the proverbial table because if Bakersfield continues to grow and public transportation isn't taken into consideration, the consequences could be dire.

"We hope that this report can be used as a tool to better understand how transit interacts with other decisions at the local level," Tomer said.

Kern Council of Governments is in the process of working with the public, nonprofits and local officials on a plan to improve transportation in Kern County.

Robert Phipps, it's administrative services director, said road upkeep and developing quicker public transportation are the main focus right now.

"There is more of an emphasis on roads, but it's understandable," he said. "It's a large county."

As for public transportation, the long-term plan is to focus on refining routes, acquiring more buses and offering more express services, but that all depends on funding.

"There will be some trade-offs," Phipps said. "Instead of placing an emphasis that every resident is a quarter of a mile from a transit stop, we're going to speed up service."

Faster routes will hopefully take more people to jobs in under 90 minutes and therefore draw more customers.

"The bottom line is we're very aware of this situation and the concerns people have," Phipps said.

People interested in the regional transportation plan can visit directionsto2050.com for updates, meeting times and more.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Thursday, July 12, 2012:](#)

Breathing in Fresno

I can empathize with Dale Baird's reaction (letter July 7) to charcoal-burning barbecues, especially if too much lighter fluid is used. Actually, lighter fluid is not necessary when you use a "chimney" to start the coals, or better yet use a propane gas grill.

I would also think that a senior citizen complex would have committees to regulate for the health and safety of all residents regardless of any city law -- condo complexes do.

But so far, it is not a city law to prohibit the use of fireplaces in the winter, and that is also a health issue for many people.

Our beautiful Valley is being overloaded with man-made pollution; it's no wonder we have a high rate of allergies and asthma.

Diane Woody, Fresno