



## ***RAIL Magazine's* Priorities for Urban Rail**

**1**

**Heavy rail rapid transit systems are significant investments in a community.** Because of their need for entirely grade-separated rights-of-way, extensive power systems, large vehicle fleets, substantial stations and many other factors, subways and metros are costly endeavors. But they also provide a massive return on that investment. Not only do they attract high ridership volumes, but these systems also have a powerful ability to shape land use, housing patterns and rail-oriented development.

Unfortunately, some funding streams that support the construction of rail transit networks impose unnecessarily strict limitations on their design. For example, while a subway tunnel might not offer any savings in the amount of travel time over a corresponding elevated structure, a subway can offer a far more significant benefit the development of a neighborhood or community. As a result, many of these decisions result in being penny wise but pound foolish. It is simply inexcusable for policy makers to demand such an acute perspective when determining the worthiness of a rapid transit design.

**2**

Additionally, while the design of a subway or metro network is an important element in building its success, **the proper maintenance of a standard of operation is likewise vital.** As we argued on this page in the 17<sup>th</sup> Edition of RAIL, a focus on operations is not as glitzy as construction and expansion, but is just as essential. **A dedicated and long-term mechanism of investment to support operations is needed in every community with a rapid transit system.** As Gerald Francis of the Washington Metro notes, elevators and escalators need to keep moving, switches need to be replaced, railcars need refurbishment, along with scores of other concerns. To do so, the jurisdictions that benefit from subways and metros should be good stewards of their investment through its upkeep.

**3**

With the success that comes from deploying a useable rapid transit operation, it also yields a new challenge: the need to sufficiently move large scores of passengers. The same amenities required to attract riders from their cars are not necessarily the same ones needed to ensure their best travel through the system. **New practices, infrastructure and technologies should be combined to improve the functioning of a rail transit network to accommodate bustling ridership.** Elements such as enhanced train control and signaling, more spacious railcars and new information media all can increase the usability of rapid transit and ensure its continued progress.

**4**

Once a foundational subway or metro system has been established, **new expansions should be considered carefully.** While success usually breeds more success and communities not included in the original network demand service closer to them, the impact of additional rail traffic and passengers into the existing operation should be accounted for. Moreover, just because rapid transit proved appropriate for one corridor does not mean it should inherently be applied to another. Improvements in local transit services that interact with a subway or metro route may be just as effective – and likely less expensive – than adding a new rapid transit line. Meanwhile, new light rail, streetcars and commuter rail linkages can also offer better service. Ultimately, the goal of any transit network should be to offer the best mobility options to its community.