

SOUTH KOREA DISPATCH

'It's a Godsend': 9-Cent Taxi Rides in Rural South Korea

One county's plan to help older, carless citizens stuck in remote villages proved wildly popular and has been copied across South Korea, revolutionizing public transportation in the countryside.



By Choe Sang-Hun

Sept. 11, 2021

SEOCHEON, South Korea — On a recent overcast morning, a village on South Korea's west coast showed no sign of human stirring until five older residents slowly emerged through the fog that shrouded lush, green rice paddies.

The group were waiting for what would once have been an unaffordable luxury in this rural corner of the country — a taxi to take them shopping and to doctors' appointments in the county seat 20 minutes away.

But even the poorest among them could easily afford this ride. Each passenger's share of the total fare would be measured not in dollars but in cents.

"It's a godsend," said one of the passengers, Na Jeong-soon, 85.

Their village is in Seocheon County, the birthplace of the Taxi of Hope, better known as "the 100-won taxi." A hundred won is about 9 cents.

Back in 2013, the county faced a crisis. As its population declined, so did the number of bus passengers, which led to unprofitable routes being canceled. Then bus drivers went on strike. Where once there had been three buses a day, suddenly none came at all, stranding those who did not own cars in remote hamlets.

A village in Seocheon, South Korea, the county that introduced the 100-won taxi concept. Jean Chung for The New York Times

The county's solution? Let people call taxis to isolated villages where so few lived that no bus company wanted to serve them. The taxis would charge passengers only 100 won for short trips, with the county government picking up the rest of the fare.

While the service is most popular with older, low-income residents, anyone whose hamlet is more than 700 meters (2,300 feet) from the nearest bus stop can call a 100-won taxi when they travel to markets in nearby towns.

The idea proved so successful that soon, with the backing from the national government in Seoul, Seocheon's solution spread to other counties, helping revolutionize public transportation in rural South Korea.





By The New York Times

“The taxi now drives me all the way to my doorstep,” Ms. Na said. “You can’t imagine what it was like in older days when I had to haul my shopping bag all the way from the bus stop to my place. It killed my legs, but there is no one around here to help old folks like me.”

For years, South Korea has reported one of the lowest birthrates in the world, creating a fast-aging population and causing strains in all aspects of society from its welfare budget to public transportation to schools.

The impact of the demographic shift is the most visible in thousands of rural villages whose young people, including Ms. Na’s children, have left for big cities for better-paying jobs. In Ms. Na’s village of Seondong, the number of households, once as many as 25, has declined to a dozen.

Ms. Na, left, Ms Cheon, second from left, and Ms. Hong, third from left, waiting for their taxi to arrive. Jean Chung for The New York Times

Government officials say supporting the 100-won taxi services is far more cost-effective than deploying subsidized buses to the tiny hamlets tucked between mountains where few people other than arthritic, retired farmers live — and building wider roads to accommodate those buses.

Park Kyong-su, 71, said going to the market once or twice a week by the 100-won taxi broke the tedium of living in Suranggol village in Seocheon. She sees her village of 12 houses, three of them empty, decay day by day.

“When it rained the other night, I heard part of an empty house next door caving in,” said Ms. Park, whose own home was well-kept, with farm gear hanging neatly on a wall and zinnias blossoming outside her gate. “We feel more isolated as the pandemic made it more difficult for our children to visit.”

Local taxi drivers have welcomed the program, too, because it brings extra income.

“I probably know more about these old folks than anyone else because I drive them two or three times a week,” said Lee Ki-yeop, 65, a 100-won taxi driver. “When one of them misses my taxi for a week or two, I know that there is something wrong with them.”

For Ms. Na and her friends, the taxi ride to Seocheon’s county seat, also known as Seocheon — and to another town where there is a farmers’ market every five days — is virtually the only time they venture out. In addition to picking up groceries and seeing their doctors, they exchange news with acquaintances from other villagers, like who was taken to a nursing home and who died.

Noh Pak-rae, the top government official in Seocheon, talking about the 100-won program in his office. Jean Chung for The New York Times

Seocheon boasts two UNESCO World Heritage attractions — a centuries-old practice of weaving fine fabric from ramie plants, and its tidal flats teeming with marine life. Part of South Chungcheong Province, the county is also home to sogokju, said to be the oldest type of rice wine in Korea.

During the bird-migrating seasons, tourists from across South Korea drive to Seocheon to watch flocks of longbills, mallards and honking swans feeding on its tidal flats before flying onto Siberia.

But the county didn't escape the upheaval that South Korea's rapid industrialization wrought on its rural towns. Its ramie fabric industry declined, with most of South Korea's clothes now imported or made of synthetic materials. People drink more imported wine and beer than sogokju.

The county's population shrank from 160,000 in the 1960s to 51,000 this year, nearly 38 percent of them 65 or older. In Ms. Na's village, the youngest residents were a couple in their 60s.

Seocheon, the county seat, has all the looks of a fast-aging community. During a recent market day, its orthopedic and other medical clinics were jammed with elderly patients.

Ms. Na at a butcher shop on a shopping trip made possible by the 100-won taxi. Jean Chung for The New York Times

At the nearby bus and taxi stop, stooped, older passengers with shopping bundles sat under an awning like a row of birds, waiting for their buses or 100-won taxis to show up. A younger assistant in a yellow vest, deployed by the county administration, was busy helping them carry their bags on and off the taxis.

When Statistics Korea conducted a nationwide survey in 2010, a lack of public transportation was one of the biggest grievances for older villagers in rural South Korea who had neither cars nor children who could drive for them.

“It was especially difficult for old people to walk to the nearest bus stop when it snowed in winter or was scorching hot in summer,” said Noh Pak-rae, the top government official in Seocheon.

The 100-won taxis carried nearly 40,000 passengers from 40 villages in Seocheon last year. The program cost the county \$147,000.

Residents pay 100 won for shorter rides, and up to 1,500 won, about \$1.30, for longer trips within the county. Before the 100-won taxi was introduced, the same taxi rides cost between 10,000 to 25,000 won.

“I probably know more about these old folks than anyone else because I drive them two or three times a week,” said Lee Ki-yeop, left, a 100-won taxi driver. Jean Chung for The New York Times

More than 2.7 million passengers used similar taxi services in rural South Korea last year, according to government data, some deploying the service for pregnant women as well. Since the 100-won taxi was introduced, people in remote villages have traveled outside twice as often, according to a government survey.

One of Ms. Na's friends, Hong Seok-soon, 77, is a widow in Seondong village who lived alone after her three children moved away. On a recent day, she was all smiles as she carried a shopping bag full of fish and crabs from the market. She had even treated herself to a new pair of pants.

When asked what the shopping was for, she said, "My son is coming for a visit this weekend!"

Park Kyong-su, 71, said going to the market once or twice a week by the 100-won taxi broke the tedium of living in her village in Seocheon County. Jean Chung for The New York Times

Baltimore's "Big Jump" path aims to bridge highways and historic wrongs

BICYCLING By **Alex Holt** (Contributor) January 8, 2021  7



[People on the Big Jump](#) Image by Bikemore used with permission.

This article was first [published](#) on November 21, 2019. We thought this post was interesting and wanted to share it with you again.

A small trail running along some of Baltimore's most notoriously oversized roads has proven to be incredibly popular, and could change how the city's streets are shaped going forward. The multi-modal trail, called the Big Jump, provides people on foot, bicycle, and more with a way to cross over highways that have long served as a barrier between neighborhoods.

Last August, the Baltimore City Department of Transportation (BCDOT), working with a local bike advocacy group called Bikemore and a national group called PeopleForBikes, installed a rather unusual mobility path using only water-filled traffic barriers. It runs along a 1.4-mile stretch of Druid Park Lake Drive, 28th Street, and Sisson Street in North Baltimore, and crosses over part of I-83.





People using many modes are welcome on the Big Jump. Image by the author.

In the year since the Big Jump first opened, the neighborhood response has exceeded most expectations. Sure, there's been the occasional complaint from drivers annoyed at the loss of travel lanes. But those have largely been outnumbered by praise from cyclists and pedestrians. Many people use the path to travel to jobs in Remington at places like R. House, a popular local food hall, and people who use mobility devices like wheelchairs and strollers have been especially enthusiastic.

“It is the only accessible way to get across the economic/cultural divide that we have which is the Jones Falls Expressway,” said Graham Coreil-Allen, an artist who lives on Auchentoroly Terrace and as an active member of TAP-Druid Hill, helped contribute art to the Big Jump. “Previously, it was just this sidewalk, which people on rolling devices, no matter what you name them: stroller, wheelchair or bike, could not use. And now we have a way to do that, which is huge.”

To understand why the Big Jump is such a big deal, it helps to understand a bit about the past of the roads it adjoins and the neighborhoods they “connect.”

Big Jump Multi Use Path ☆

This map was made with Google My Maps. [Create your own.](#)



Terms 500 ft. This map was created by user. Learn how to create

Patching historic wounds

Up until the 1940s, Druid Hill Park and its surrounding area were highly accessible on foot. Neighboring roads like Auchentoroly Terrace and Greenspring Avenue were all two-lane residential streets, allowing residents to visit the park and easily cross over from Reservoir Hill to Remington.

That all changed in 1948 with the construction of what was known at the time as the Druid Hill Expressway, which cut off the surrounding predominantly working class Jewish and African American neighborhoods from the park—ostensibly to help suburban commuters reach their downtown jobs faster. The Expressway project also created Druid Park Lake Drive, converted Druid Hill Avenue and McCulloh Street into one-way routes, and dramatically widened Auchentoroly Terrace.

Reservoir Hill residents, including NAACP Labor Secretary Clarence Mitchell, Jr., opposed the plan from the beginning. However, since one of the city's most powerful political bosses, James Pollack, happened to live exactly where the expressway was slated to end, their protests were roundly ignored by Baltimore's City Council.

By the time construction finished on the nearby Jones Falls Expressway in 1963, Auchentoroly Terrace and Druid Park Lake Drive had been widened even further to serve as feeder roads for the highway. Sixteen pedestrian entrances to Druid Hill Park and hundreds of trees had been destroyed, and childhood asthma rates in the surrounding neighborhoods had skyrocketed.



Aerial view of the Big Jump. Image by Bikemore used with permission.





The white, water-filled plastic barriers mark out the Big Jump. [Image](#) by Bikemore used with permission.

Fast forward 53 years to 2016. Fresh off of completing the [Green Lane Project](#), a five-year mission to accelerate bike lane construction throughout the country (including in [Baltimore, Washington, DC, Montgomery County, and NoVa](#)), PeopleForBikes launched the Big Jump Project to help 10 cities [“radically reimagine their bicycling infrastructure.”](#)

Bikemore Executive Director Liz Cornish and Policy Director Jed Weeks saw an opportunity to not only improve bike access and demonstrate a more Complete Streets-minded approach to Baltimore’s roads, but also to bring a little more equity to a city sorely lacking in it.





Runners on the trail. [Image](#) by Bikemore used with permission.

How the project played out

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Baltimore City’s Department of Public Works (DPW) were already set to begin work on a [five-year, \\$140 million project](#) to install a pair of underground drinking water tanks in the Druid Hill Park Reservoir. It would cut off access to one of the park’s most popular features—the walking/biking loop surrounding the reservoir—and also require travel lanes on Druid Park Lake Drive to be closed for construction.

The proposal Weeks and Cornish came up with originally included a protected bike facility on Huntingdon Avenue, a bike boulevard on 27th Street, and a road diet on 25th Street, as well as a path between Remington and Reservoir Hill. They spent a year shepherding through a BCDOT still skittish from the sudden cancellation of the Red Line so that the department could submit it.

“None of that has been completed,” Weeks said. “So it’s kind of funny that all the projects designed to boost ridership in high-ridership areas are not the things that we actually achieved, but we achieved what was probably the biggest piece, which was the connection over to Reservoir Hill.”

Big Jump Baltimore



Watch on  YouTube

That connection was funded in 2017 with a grant and was installed in 2018. In the meantime, Bikemore built up support for the project by working with a variety of groups that weighed in on the design of the Big Jump and a matching BCDOT corridor study of Auchentoly Terrace and Druid Park Lake Drive. Many of those involved are part of The Access Project-Druid Hill, an organization convened by City Councilmember Leon Pinkett, whose district includes most of the Big Jump.





The Big Jump provides a way to cross over the highway. Image by the author.

What's up next for the Big Jump?

Much of Bikemore's initial proposal for the Big Jump grant is still unfinished, so Weeks said PeopleforBikes is currently leaving in place the grant for the project, which was originally supposed to be a one-year pilot. Now the task for Toole Design, the local engineering firm currently doing a short-term evaluation of the Big Jump, is to figure out how to replace the current water-filled traffic barriers with a more permanent structure.

That task is slightly more urgent than originally planned, according to Weeks, because DPW's original plan for installing water pipes in the Druid Hill Park Reservoir may be too expensive to pursue. That would force it to cut into Druid Park Lake Drive right in the middle of the Big Jump's path, possibly as soon as

February 2020. That in turn would force Bikemore and BCDOT to either reroute the Big Jump or create a side-path facility in the grass.

For many projects in Baltimore, that would mean game over. For the Big Jump, it just means the timeline has accelerated a little bit.

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Alex Holt is a New York state native, Maryland transplant, and freelance writer. He lives in Mt. Washington in Baltimore and enjoys geeking out about all things transit, sports, politics, and comics, not necessarily in that order. He was formerly GGWash's Maryland Correspondent.



Future NCDOT plans billions short after refiguring costs

Tags: [NC DOT](#), [road construction](#)

Posted September 21, 2021 10:24 a.m. EDT

Updated September 21, 2021 8:07 p.m. EDT

By Travis Fain, WRAL statehouse reporter

RALEIGH, N.C. — The state Department of Transportation planned billions of dollars more in road construction for the next decade than it can afford, according to recently reworked cost estimates.

The overrun forced a detour in the state's long-run planning process and sparked concerns that new projects won't be added in the coming years and that currently planned projects may be dropped.

There's always give and take in this process, which lays out plans for more than 1,000 projects in a document called [the State Transportation Improvement Program](#). That plan gets reworked every two years or so regardless of funding issues.

But the size of this expected overrun is noteworthy, amounting to at least \$7 billion from 2024 to 2033, according to [the latest DOT estimates](#).

Carolina's gasoline tax in 2015, allowing it to increase with inflation and the state's population.

But as more people shift to electric vehicles – and even more fuel-efficient vehicles – those revenues will wane, and the trend is only expected to increase.

“This is another symptom of the problem of our revenue streams being out of date,” said Sen. Mike Woodard, D-Durham, who follows transportation issues. “It makes it clear that we need to modernize the DOT’s revenue, and that’s going to be a heavy lift, but it’s past time to roll up our sleeves.”



Audit: DOT not following spending guidelines, lucky to be within budget

An appointed commission, co-chaired by former Raleigh Mayor Nancy McFarlane and Howard Nye, head of a large supplier of concrete and other road building materials, [issued a report in January](#) saying the state needs to increase its transportation spending by at least \$20 billion over the next 10 years.

Some of its recommendations:

- Increase the current 3 percent tax on vehicle sales to 5 percent
- Increase the state sales tax
- Tax transportation network companies like Uber and Lyft
- Increase the state's fee on electric vehicles and create one for hybrids
- Charge delivery fees on goods bought online
- Experiment with a pay-per-mile program that would track how far people drive
- Toll more roads

The project cost increases revealed over the last few months stem from a routine re-estimation that came during a global pandemic that upset supply chains, raising material costs, and roiled labor markets, raising those costs as well. Real estate prices in North Carolina are going up, too, boosting the costs DOT expects to pay in the coming years to buy property to build or widen roads.

"What we're dealing with now in our market ... the cost increases we're dealing with now are unprecedented," Hopkins said. "The

housing market, our right-of-way costs, sometimes seem to be going up daily.”



Auditor urges more oversight, better forecasting at DOT

Hopkins stressed that the department is solvent, with "almost \$2 billion in the bank." He said projects on DOT's 12- and 36-month let lists shouldn't be affected. Further out, hard decisions await, and the department is talking to local leaders around the state about scaling projects back to save money without eliminating projects.

A DOT working group will also put together a methodology to decide what planned items may get dropped.

“We want to have a transparent and fair process,” Hopkins said.

The StarNews in Wilmington [reported on the shortfall earlier this month](#) and quoted local leaders concerned they won't be able to add a major project, the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge replacement, to the plan for another decade.

DOT officials stressed these are early days. The [next transportation plan](#) isn't due, even in draft form, until December 2022.

It probably won't be approved by the State Board of Transportation until the summer of 2023, Hopkins said. It's possible some construction, material and labor costs will come down between now and then. Costs also vary depending on the route road projects take, which hasn't been decided for some of these projects, and their size.

"I just want to reiterate: We've got time to work this out," Hopkins said. "We need to have a document that people can believe in when they look at it."

Chris Lukasina, executive director of the Raleigh area's transportation planning group that works with DOT, the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, said the new numbers represent "a higher level of over-programmed than I'd say is normal."

"I don't know that we're at a point where there's a lot of discussion about losing projects," Lukasina said. "We certainly don't want to lose any projects."

'We're really looking at our projects," he said, "to make sure that we have good numbers and that those stay in there and continue to move towards completion."

How the pandemic and a renewed focus on equity could reshape transportation

Charles Brown, founder of Equitable Cities, says lessons from the pandemic may help planners develop safer systems for all

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By Lori Aratani

September 17, 2021 at 7:00 a.m. EDT



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The pandemic and racial justice protests in Washington and cities across the country have reshaped many aspects of life. For some travelers and commuters, shifts in travel patterns exposed vulnerabilities within the transportation network.

While many transportation systems have been geared to the 9-to-5 commuter, the pandemic highlighted the role public transit plays in getting essential workers to jobs. Meanwhile, despite fewer cars on U.S. roadways, statistics showed an increase in traffic fatalities, particularly among Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans, raising questions about how to ensure all Americans can safely move around their communities.

Charles Brown, founder, president and chief executive of [Equitable Cities](#), a firm focused on equity in urban planning and an adjunct faculty member at Rutgers University, spoke to The Washington Post about the lessons transportation planners might take from the pandemic and racial justice protests, and how those might be applied in the future.

The Post: How do you think the experience of the pandemic and racial justice protests will influence transportation going forward?

Brown: I think the impact of transportation is multifaceted, but what I think will be at the center of that will be a renewed focus on the importance of race, racism and racial equality, and how we plan and design and maintain our transportation networks. It reminds us that it's important for us to see the role that structural racism plays in creating disparities among the various populations in this country. When you combine the pandemic with the racial justice movement, what you end up with is, hopefully, a focus on centering racial equity in the design, planning and

The Post: Do you worry that streets are going to become more dangerous as people begin returning to their offices with more people out there on all different modes?

Brown: I think what we'll see is a return to normal. I think it's going to be just as dangerous as it has been, but I don't think it will be more dangerous because, with more vehicles, you will see less speed. You'll probably see increased enforcement. But I would like to see more people on the roadways be safer in their driving behaviors. So I think things will return to normal, but normal has never been acceptable for minorities in this country because they were dying.

The Post: Do you think public transportation systems will start to, given some of the lessons that have come out of this, rethink the hours they run or the type of service they offer?

Brown: I do think there will be changes in public transportation, but I think the changes will be more geared toward busing than rail because, [with] rail, the corridor is so fixed. So it's not about redesigning the rail network, it's changes in fares, changes in hours of operation and so on. On the bus side, I think there's a huge opportunity to design a system that serves these minority populations who use buses at a much higher rate than their White counterparts. We cannot ignore the impact that race and class has on these two public transportation modes. What is simply an option for one community is a necessity for another.

The Post: Do you think the pandemic has had an influence on how the general public views these systems or views traffic safety?

Brown: Yes — I would say yes in part due to the attention ... by the media. The pandemic has shown us who needs these transportation systems the most. Unfortunately, it's the same people who are dying. There needs to be a moral or a spiritual awakening to really see they deserve the attention.

The Post: Do you think the pandemic will change how planners and city officials think about street design?

Brown: For those who understand the connection between institutional inequities and social inequities and how those influence our built environment, they will see there is a need to design and maintain our roadways in the communities that have been affected the most. Historically, those are Black, Hispanic and Native American. So as a result of that, I think they'll be vigilant in asking local, county, regional and state and federal governments to prioritize funding and maintenance in these communities because they know, historically, these communities have been overlooked, and this has led to the unfortunate death, injury and incarceration of these individuals. And it's all preventable.

The Post: Can you give me an example of how the built environment might influence behavior, how a street design might prompt people to jaywalk or make drivers more likely to speed?

Brown: Let's start with an obvious one: the ways in which, historically, we have not designed streets that are safe for people with disabilities. There are oftentimes intersections where the crosswalk leads people with disabilities directly into the lane of travel. So that's one way in which there's a flaw in design. The other way is the fact that we have not placed or designed roads that are consistent with the normal behavior of pedestrians. For instance, we call it jaywalking because we prioritize cars. If we were to have midblock crossings, perhaps we would not see the level of what we call jaywalking. What we've done is forced pedestrians to walk upward of a quarter of a mile in one direction to cross the street when what we should have [are additional crossings] that [allow] them to do the same. When you are putting pedestrians in a situation where they have to choose to walk a quarter-mile to cross the street, I think you are influencing their behavior in a negative fashion. In addition to that, we have not maintained the bicycle infrastructure and we allow automobiles to park in that infrastructure, forcing cyclists [into the roadway].

The Post: Can you explain the concept of "complete streets?"

Brown: Complete streets are streets that are designed, operated and maintained with all users in mind. And that, by the way, is biking, walking, driving, taking public transit or delivering freight. It is a contextually and culturally sensitive approach to street design that takes into account the need to center diversity, equity and inclusion into its design, orientation and programming. It has trees and sufficient space for people to enjoy being themselves.

The Post: What changes do you hope to see coming out of the pandemic?

Brown: I am very optimistic about the future. I wake up every day and work from sunup to sundown to ensure that the future of transportation — everyone has equal access. I am not blindly optimistic. I am able to be optimistic while wrestling with the reality that there is so much more to be done. I do believe that it will happen. I won't stop until it happens.

Updated September 20, 2021

Transportation, infrastructure and the pandemic

How we travel

Roads: Protest over road widening through Black community stirs memories of a similar fight in 1967

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Metro: Metro commits to more stringent safety standards to protect track workers

Road enforcement: D.C. has collected \$36 million through ticket amnesty program that ends this month

MARTA may scrap plans for Clayton County rail line



< Caption

POLITICS

By [David Wickert](#) - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
[Leon Stafford](#) - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

17 hours ago

MARTA and Clayton County may scrap plans for a commuter rail line through the county because a freight railroad won't allow passenger trains in its right of way.

MARTA had hoped to build a [passenger rail line](#) connecting its East Point Station to Jonesboro and Lovejoy. The agency planned to construct the line on existing Norfolk Southern railroad right of way, but MARTA CEO Jeffrey Parker told county commissioners Tuesday the freight giant will not permit the passenger trains on its corridor.

That means MARTA would have to acquire nearly 300 business and residential parcels, most of them in Clayton County for the commuter line. That would escalate the price of a project expected to cost \$1.7 billion to \$2.3 billion to build.

“Without the ability to share the existing rail corridor with the railroad, the impacts of that project are immense and will make the project difficult to deliver,” he told commissioners.

MARTA now will reconsider its options for the East Point to Lovejoy line, which could include a bus rapid transit line.

In a written statement, Norfolk Southern cited a 2016 study that found MARTA could acquire a path for a commuter rail line that is “parallel, independent and physically separated” from its tracks. It said that approach would allow commuter rail and “serve the growing needs of freight customers.”

“We remain open to working toward this approach so we may collectively serve the needs of all stakeholders,” Norfolk Southern said.

Clayton officials said they remain hopeful that something can be worked out to keep their commuter rail dreams alive, even if the chances are slim.

“The update wasn’t encouraging,” Clayton County Commission Chairman Jeff Turner said of Parker’s presentation before the board, “but at the same time we’re still looking at it.”

Turner said he hopes that federal officials can still be persuaded to fund the project, even if it comes later than the county had hoped.

Jonesboro Mayor Joy Day said she also is hopeful that something can be done to salvage the project. She once lived in Germany and said travel between communities was much easier than in the U.S. because of the network of trains.

“Not only do we need the rail, the whole metropolitan area needs a rail system that is connecting all of us,” she said.

The apparent demise of MARTA’s plans for commuter rail is a major setback for its Clayton expansion, made possible when county voters approved a new 1-cent transit sales tax in 2014.

With half the proceeds from the tax, MARTA launched [local bus service](#) in Clayton County the following year. It’s setting aside the other half for future high-capacity transit services and has about \$148 million in reserves from proceeds from the Clayton tax.

In 2018, [MARTA approved plans](#) for two new lines. It proposed a [bus rapid transit](#) line from Southlake Mall to College Park station. That line is expected to begin service in 2026.

And it identified commuter rail as its preferred alternative for the 22-mile route from East Point station to Lovejoy. The line was tentatively set to begin construction in 2023, with service starting in 2027.

But MARTA was counting on Norfolk Southern to let it run passenger trains on its freight right of way.

“They say they want to maintain the full capacity of their freight corridor,” Parker told commissioners. “All of these impacts come out of that fact.”

Building its own tracks would require MARTA to acquire miles of right of way, condemn hundreds of business and residential parcels and construct new bridges, the transportation agency said in a meeting with reporters Wednesday. It would also require three to four years of environmental impact studies and could run into legal battles between homeowners and jurisdictions.

“We don’t see a path forward because of the cost,” MARTA Senior Director Government and Community Affairs Colleen Kiernan said.

With commuter rail seemingly out of the question, MARTA must now decide what kind of transit makes sense for the East Point to Lovejoy line. Bus rapid transit is one option, though the specific type of transit will be determined through a new analysis of alternatives. Parker said that will take 12 to 18 months.

The MARTA Board will make the ultimate decision about whether to proceed with commuter rail or try a different transit mode.

“Either way, if it’s going to be commuter rail or the BRT, it’s going to be a good thing for the residents of Clayton County,” Forest Park City Manager Marc-Antonie Cooper said.

Trams, Cable Cars, Electric Ferries: How Cities Are Rethinking Transit

Urban transportation is central to the effort to slow climate change. It can't be done by just switching to electric cars. Several cities are starting to electrify mass transit.



By Somini Sengupta

Ms. Sengupta and a team of journalists from The Times reported from Colombia, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom.

Oct. 3, 2021

The roar of engines has long been part of the soundscape of a city.

For a century, for billions of urban people worldwide, getting around has meant boarding a bus powered by diesel or an auto rickshaw that runs on gasoline, or among the affluent, a car.

Today, a quiet transformation is underway. Berlin, Bogotá and several other cities are taking creative steps to cut gas and diesel from their public transit systems. They are doing so despite striking differences in geography, politics and economics that complicate the transformation.

Berlin is reviving electric tram lines that were ripped out when the Berlin Wall went up. Bogotá is building cable cars that cut through the clouds to connect working-class communities perched on faraway hills. Bergen, a city by the fjords in western Norway, is moving its public ferries away from diesel and onto batteries — a remarkable shift in a petrostate that has for decades enriched itself from the sale of oil and gas and that now wants to be a leader in marine vessels for the electric age.

Bergen's buses, too, are now electric, supplied by Chinese bus makers that have seized on the market in cities as far afield as Los Angeles and Santiago, Chile. The change is audible. "You can hear voices again in the streets," said Jon Askeland, the mayor of the county that includes Bergen.

Urban transportation is central to the effort to slow climate change. Home to more than half the world's population, cities account for more than two-thirds of global carbon dioxide emissions. And transportation is often the largest, and fastest growing, source, making it imperative to not only encourage more people to get out of their cars and into mass transit, but also to make transit itself less polluting and more efficient.

According to C40, a coalition of around 100 urban governments trying to address climate change, transportation accounts for a third of a city's carbon dioxide emissions, on average, outstripping other sources like heating, industry and waste.



Waiting for the tram in Berlin. Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

Construction of a tram tunnel through a hill in Bergen, Norway. Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

Electric buses scooped up passengers in Bogotá, where the mayor is seeking to clean up public transit networks. Federico Rios for The New York Times

It hasn't all been smooth sailing. In Costa Rica, for instance, private bus operators are divided on the national efforts to electrify mass transit. In Chinese cities, like Shenzhen, which has a fully electric bus fleet, the electricity itself still comes mostly from coal, the dirtiest fossil fuel. And everywhere it's expensive to make the shift.

At the moment, only 16 percent of city buses worldwide are electric. The electric switch will need to accelerate, and cities will have to make mass transit more attractive, so fewer people rely on automobiles.

“It has become a reasonable position to advocate for less space for cars,” said Felix Creutzig, a transportation specialist at the Mercator Research Center in Berlin. “Ten years ago, it was not even allowed to be said. But now you can say it.”

The biggest challenge has been faced by cities that most need to make the shift: the most crowded and polluted metropolises of Asia and Africa, where people rely on informal mass transit such as diesel minivans or motorcycle taxis.

But where cities are succeeding, they’re finding that electrifying public transit can solve more than just climate problems. It can clean the air, reduce traffic jams and, ideally, make getting around town easier for ordinary people, which is why some politicians have staked their reputations on revamping transit. In many cases, city governments have been able to take climate action faster than their national governments.

“It requires political clout,” Claudia López, mayor of Bogotá, said in an interview. “For the last 25 years, Bogotá has been condemned to depend on diesel buses. That’s irrational in the 21st century.”

Bringing back the trams

During the Berlin Wall era, many of the city’s trams were ripped out. Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

Ingmar Streese called it “a historical mistake.”

When the Berlin Wall went up, half of Berlin's electric tram lines came down.

By 1967, when Mr. Streese was three years old, West Berlin had ripped out nearly all the tracks of die Elektrische — The Electric, in German. Cars took over the roads.

Now, 30 years after the fall of the wall, as Germans confront the perils of climate change, there are growing demands to reclaim the roads from cars for walkers, bicyclists and users of public transit.

Enter die Elektrische. Again.

The mistake of the 1960s “is now being corrected,” said Mr. Streese, a Green party politician and Berlin's permanent secretary for the environment and transport.

Berlin, along with several European cities, including Lisbon and Dublin, are reviving trams not only to clean the air but to curb emissions to meet the European Union's legally binding climate goals. Those goals require a 55 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

Pedestrians, bikers, and cars share the Oberbaum Bridge in Berlin. There is disagreement about how to add a tram as well. Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

Construction on a new tram line in Adlershof in Berlin. Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

Felix Creutzig, a transportation specialist at the Mercator Research Center. “It has become a reasonable position to advocate for less space for cars,” he said. Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

Still, the politics of taking space away from cars is tricky. Berlin, with 1.2 million cars, has enacted a congestion tax, but it applies only to a tiny slice of the city. It’s all part of a broader effort to improve public transit, including by electrifying all buses by 2030, expanding metro and suburban trains, adding bike lanes and building almost 50 miles of tram lines by 2035.

The trams are not universally liked. Critics point out they are noisy, rattling along crowded streets day and night. They’re slower than subways, and in the era of car-shares and electric scooters, old-fashioned.

Tram fans point out that they are cheaper and faster to build than subways.

Like so much else in Berlin, the story of Berlin’s trams is a story of a partitioned city. As die Elektrische dwindled in the West, they kept running in the poorer, Communist-run East.

Today, one of the trickiest tram projects involves extending a line, called the M-10,

across the historic Oberbaum bridge that linked the former East and West Berlin.

Inga Kayademir, 41, riding a packed M-10 late one Wednesday, welcomed an extension to the west. “Everything that reduces cars in the city is useful,” she said. “If it connects to the west, that’s a nice idea. It would add a second meaning to it.”

But building a new tram line on the bridge would mean taking lanes away from cars or bikes. Or, the city would have to build another bridge altogether.

Mr. Streese was not ready to say how the tram might be accommodated. But one way or another, he said, a tram would cross the Oberbaum no later than 2027. “It’s not going to happen very soon,” he said. “But it’s going to happen.”

Electric ferries in the fjords

Arild Alvsaker, chief engineer of the Hjellestad electric ferry in Bergen, Norway. Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

Heidi Wolden spent 30 years working for Norway’s oil and gas industry. Today, she is working to put oil and gas out of business in her country’s waterways.

Ms. Wolden is the chief executive of Norled, a company that operates public ferries increasingly on batteries instead of diesel.

Ultimately, Ms. Wolden hopes to take her ferries well beyond the fjords. She wants to make Norled a leader in electrifying marine transport.

It is part of Norway's ambitious effort to electrify all kinds of public transit. A plan all the more remarkable because Norway is a very small, very rich petrostate.

"Personally I am extremely happy that we are moving in the right direction," Ms. Wolden said one brisk Friday morning, as the Hjellestad, a car ferry that Norled operates, set off from a quay near Bergen.

Norway has set ambitious targets to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by half by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. Almost all of Norway's own electricity comes from hydropower. But what to do about its own oil and gas industry is at the center of a robust national political debate. Elections in September brought a center-left coalition to power, including small parties pushing for an end to oil and gas exploration in the North Sea.

Bergen is keen to fast-track its transition away from fossil fuels. Its city buses and trams run on electricity. Taxi operators have been told they must switch to all-electric vehicles by 2024, with subsidies for drivers to install chargers at home. Ferry operators have been offered longer, more profitable contracts to offset the cost of conversion.

Heidi Wolden, the Norled chief executive, with a wall of batteries at a ferry hub. Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

Bergen, Norway, where many of the ferries on the fjords now run on electricity. Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

Pulling into a fjord outside Bergen on the Hjellestad ferry. Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

Unlike in some other countries, including the United States, where climate policies are deeply polarizing, in Bergen there wasn't much pushback. Mr. Askeland said politicians on the left and right agreed to trim the budget for other expenses to pay for the costlier electric-ferry contracts.

After all, the mayor said, voters in the area are conscious about addressing climate change. "That influences us politicians, of course," he said.

Ferry operators aren't the only private companies cashing in on the electric transformation.

Corvus Energy, which makes batteries for all sorts of marine vehicles, including, mind-bendingly, for oil tankers in Norway, is busy producing batteries for electric ferries. “The government, using purchasing power to change the world, is also very important for us,” said Geir Bjorkeli, the chief executive of Corvus. The company now has its eye on electrifying ferries in the United States.

Corvus batteries sat snugly under the deck of the Hjellestad.

On shore, cables dangled from two tall poles that a passer-by might have mistaken for lamp posts. The ship’s chief engineer, Arild Alvsaker, grabbed the cables with both hands and plugged them into the ship’s battery pack. The 10 minutes it took for cars to pull into the ferry was enough to load up with enough power for its roughly 45-minute voyage up the fjord and back.

Mr. Alvsaker was at first dubious about running a battery-powered ship. It took less than a week for him to change his mind. “I was dirty up to here before breakfast,” he said, pointing to his upper arm. “I don’t want to go back to diesel.”

He has since bought an electric car.

The water was calm that morning as the ship left the quay, almost soundlessly. On an electric ferry, there’s no roaring engine.

Gondolas with Wi-Fi in the sky

TransMiCable gondolas in motion over southern Bogotá. Federico Rios for The New York Times

The TransMiCable is a loop of firehouse-red gondolas that glide up from the valley to the neighborhoods stacked along the hills that surround Bogotá.

There are plans to build seven lines as part of the city's efforts to clean up its public transport. Nearly 500 Chinese-made electric buses are on the roads, and contracts are out to buy another 1,000 by 2022, making Bogotá's electric bus fleet one of the largest of any city outside China. The mayor, Ms. López, a cyclist, wants to add roughly 175 miles of bike lanes.

But for Fredy Cuesta Valencia, a Bogotá schoolteacher, what really matters is that the TransMiCable has given him back his time.

He used to spend two hours, on two slow buses, crawling through the hills to reach the school where he teaches. Once, he said, traffic was so backed up none of the teachers could arrive on time. Students waited outside for hours.

Now, it takes him 40 minutes to get to work, an hour at worst. There's Wi-Fi. Clouds. Rooftops below.

"It's a lot less stress," said Mr. Cuesta, 60, a folk dance teacher. "I check my phone, I look at the city, I relax."

Fredy Cuesta Valencia, a dance teacher in Bogotá, on his way to school. "It's a lot less stress," he said. Federico Rios for The New York Times

Nearly 500 Chinese-made electric buses are on Bogotá's roads now. Federico Rios for The New York Times

Travelers lined up for the TransMiCable. Federico Rios for The New York Times

For politicians like Ms. López, electrifying public transit helps her make the case that the city is aggressively cutting its emissions. But if she can also make transit better, not just make it electric, it can attract voters, particularly working people who make up most of the electorate.

But overhauling transportation is expensive. For Ms. López, who belongs to a center-left political party, it requires negotiating for money from the national president, Iván Duque, who belongs to a rival conservative party.

Yet their parties have managed to find some common ground. Mr. Duque is helping Ms. López build Bogotá's first metro, something mayors have been trying for decades.

The case she made to him: What's good for the city is good for the country.

If Bogotá can't change its transportation system, she said, Colombia can't achieve its climate goals. "You're interested in having a more competitive city. It's in our common interest to achieve Colombia's climate change goals," she said.

Sofia Villamil contributed reporting from Bogotá, and Geneva Abdul from London.