Transit Oriented Summer Book Club
“Human Transit” by Jarrett Walker
Week 02 Discussion Questions 5/26/2021

Discussion Outline

The breakout room discussion will last 30 minutes, after which we will reconvene, hear from all
breakrooms, and conclude for the evening.

Below are the questions we would like you to discuss with your breakout group:

Chapter 3 Five Paths to Confusion:
Walker talks about the 5 points in transit debate that are often misconstrued.

1. Map reading errors
Transit maps show where it goes but not how often the frequency is which skews the reality of
good ridership. Maps are often perceived as the population of an area when not always true.

2. Motorist error
The mindset that transit works just like cars and roads. People make decisions based on their
primary mode of travel. Car drivers prefer speed over frequency thus forgetting about this
variable.

3. Box errors and dichotomies
It’s often that we box transit riders into two categories: captive (transit-dependent) or choice
neglects being able to empower people to achieve social and environmental good. This means
we are constantly competing for choice riders and transit dependent will ride no matter how bad
it gets.

Transit riders are described with common adjectives that are subjective/fuzzy and are on a
spectrum ie tall, poor, wealthy, failure. Describing transit as a failure sounds like a box that
you’re either in or out of. Associating buses with failure or poverty is a common attitude in
certain cities.”
“When a box error divides the spectrum into just two categories, it’s called a false dichotomy”

4. Polarization errors
The mindset of “you’re either with us or against us.” The polarization error is really an extreme
example of a box error or false dichotomy. The speaker insists that his way of dividing the world
into two boxes is the only one that’s meaningful and that everyone else must judge reality on
those terms.

5. Unfortunate Connotations
Many of the words that we use to talk about transit can carry troublesome connotations.” i.e. route vs line
A route can be ambiguous and not always followed. A line has a clear path even if curved. Words subconsciously influence people’s opinions on transit

Chapter questions:
- Have you experienced any of the errors mentioned in this chapter used in conversations around transit in metro Atlanta? How did it make you feel and what was the outcome?
- Have you ever made these errors when addressing the topic of transit in metro Atlanta? What was it and what was the reason behind the error?
- What false dichotomies or polarizations exist around transit in metro Atlanta?
- Are there words that are used to describe transit in metro Atlanta that you think carry unfortunate connotations? What are those words and what words would you use instead?

Further discussion
- Looking at a MARTA bus map, do you have a good understanding of where the route goes exactly, how to get from point A to B and how often it runs? What suggestions would you make the bus map experience easier to use?

Chapter 4 Lines Loops and Longing

Walker talks about the complexity that lines are 1D but cities are 2D. In order to best design a transit map, directness is key. Loops should rarely be considered, although loops appeal to our emotional decision making. Directness is conveyed thru signage using To and Via terminology. Directness works when it’s backed by right of way infrastructure. Walker also discusses the shapes of lines I, O, U, S and how to design around barriers and choke points. A barrier is an unavoidable obstacle i.e. a mountain or body of water. Choke points are where multiple parallel lines merge together such as a bridge or roadway construction that narrows down to one lane. Choke points are a good spot for a transit transfer and also increases the justification to have a bus only lane. The misconception is that transit should be designed in loops when in reality no one travels in circles; they want to start here and go there. Rarely do riders ride more than halfway on a loop, the problem with loops is that they cannot be expanded as the city grows without disrupting riders and while they feel like closure, they don’t meet the realistic needs of riders.

Chapter questions:
- When envisioning the future redesigned MARTA bus network, would you rather it be more direct but with more connections OR would you rather it be less direct but provide coverage to more areas?
- What are example MARTA bus routes that are I,U,S, O shaped (don’t have to give an example of every shape)? What is your experience and thoughts on their design?
- What’s an example MARTA bus route that currently deviates?
- What are example barriers and choke points in the MARTA service area?
- Do loops play a role in the redesign of the MARTA bus network? If so, where and why?