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## 10 Best Cities for Public Transportation

### Obama announced more funding for high speed rail, but these cities are already excelling

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President Obama is calling for \$8 billion to go towards high-speed rail, as part of a six-year, \$53-billion plan. The administration is hoping that the [program](#) will create jobs and boost American competitiveness in the long run. But on a smaller scale, an effective public transportation system can simply increase the quality of life in a city. By transporting people to work, school, local attractions, and healthcare facilities, public transit can reach into nearly every area of city life, from public health to tourism. Statistics show that public transit has experienced rapid growth, providing economic benefits to individuals and municipalities alike.

[\[See a slide show of the 10 Best Cities for Public Transportation.\]](#)

Public transit systems have become a part of daily life in many U.S. cities; the number of public transportation systems in the [United States](#) has increased more than sevenfold in the last 30 years, from 1,044 in 1980 to 7,700 in 2009. According to the American Public Transportation Association, a nonpartisan organization that advocates for public transit improvement, that increase in transit has spurred an increase in economic activity. The association estimates that for every one dollar invested in public transportation, four dollars are generated in economic returns. APTA also reported in January that in major urban areas, individuals on average save \$9,656 annually by using public transportation instead of driving.

Analysis of data from the Federal Transit Administration and APTA shows which cities are among the best in the country for public transportation. All of these cities' systems have unique features that set them apart. Portland's public transit provides riders with a variety of travel options, including [buses](#), light rail, commuter rail, streetcars, and an aerial tram. New York is unique simply by virtue of high ridership: in 2008, 4.2 billion trips were taken on New York metro area subway lines, buses, and railroads, six times the number of trips taken in Los Angeles, the No. 2 city. Minneapolis and Portland both feature fare-free transit routes in their downtown areas. And the Salt Lake City area's Utah Transit Authority runs ski transit lines in the winter, in addition to its usual rail and bus services, and also features wireless [Internet](#) on its buses.

Additionally, many of the top cities for public transportation are improving their already high-quality systems. The FTA in January approved a 20-mile elevated electric passenger rail system to connect Honolulu with its suburban areas. Minneapolis and Austin have also both opened commuter rail systems in the last two years. Commuter rail systems generally serve to connect outlying communities and suburbs with central cities downtown areas, as opposed to light rail systems, which tend to operate more locally and with more frequent stops.

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According to a *U.S. News* analysis, the 10 U.S. cities with the best combination of public transportation investment, ridership, and safety are:

1. [Portland, OR](#)
2. [Salt Lake City](#)
3. [New York](#)
4. [Boston](#)
5. [Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN](#)
6. [San Francisco](#)
7. [Los Angeles](#)
8. [Honolulu](#)
- 9 (tie). [Denver](#)
- 9 (tie). [Austin](#)

Other major cities that came close to making the cut were the Washington, D.C., metro area and Seattle, Washington, both at No. 11, and Chicago, Illinois, at No. 13. Though all three of these systems had relatively high ridership and public investment, they all also experienced far more safety incidents--such as collisions, derailments, and fires--per million trips than the cities in the top 10.

The rankings take into account per capita spending on public transportation, number of safety incidents per million trips, and the number of trips taken per capita. The cities that made the top 10 list excelled in different ways. The greater Minneapolis-St. Paul and Salt Lake City areas, for example, had the best safety records of the top 10 cities. These high marks helped them rank well overall, despite their

comparatively lower per-capita ridership. New York and San Francisco-Oakland, conversely, ranked very high on ridership and public investment, but ranked lower in terms of safety.

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The rankings also take into account cities' surrounding areas. For example, Boston data includes ridership and population in the metro area that extends into New Hampshire and Rhode Island. Only metropolitan areas where more than 20 million trips were taken in 2008 (according to APTA) were included in the rankings.

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