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2007 Public Transportation Ridership Highest in 50 Years

- Ridership rises 2.1 percent over 2006

By NED RACINE, Editor

(March 25, 2008) In a March report the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) announced that Americans took 10.3 billion trips on public transportation in 2007, the highest level in 50 years. This equates to a 2.1 increase over 2006.

In releasing the report, APTA noted that public transportation use has grown 32 percent since 1995, an increase double the growth rate of the population (15 percent). The use of public transportation has grown faster than the growth rate for the vehicle miles traveled on United States highways (24 percent) for that same period.

Light rail—including modern streetcars, trolleys and heritage trolleys—had the highest percentage of ridership increase among all transportation modes: a 6.1 percent increase in 2007.

Some light rail systems showed double digit percent increases, and these systems were spread throughout the U.S.: New Orleans (128.6); Denver (66.2); Saint Louis (27.0); Philadelphia (26.2); Kenosha (18.5); the state of New Jersey (14.7) and Memphis (11.3).

With an increase of 5.5 percent, commuter rail posted the second largest ridership increase. The five commuter rail systems with double digit percent ridership growth rate in 2007 were Nashville (257.9); Santa Fe (96.6); Harrisburg (41.3); Seattle (27.4); Oakland (14.2); Dallas/Fort Worth (12.1); Stockton (11.9); Portland, ME (11.8), and Pompano Beach, FL (10.3).

Heavy rail (subways) ridership increased by 3.1 percent. The heavy rail systems with double digit percent increases in ridership for 2007 were San Juan (13.2) and Atlanta (10.1).

Trailing the other transportation modes was bus service, which increased 1.0 percent. In communities with a population of less than 100,000, however, APTA reported that bus services saw an increase of 6.4 percent in 2007. Major percentage increases for large bus agencies occurred in Seattle (7.5), Denver (7.0) and Minneapolis (5.4).

The APTA report can be seen at www.apta.com.