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Privatization of urban transit: The Los Angeles jitney experience

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Abstract

This paper reports on a recent attempt to provide private transit in the form of jitney service in downtown Los Angeles. It describes the process undertaken to initiate jitney service and the resultant organization's structure and operation. A survey of jitney passengers provided information on the users and their tripmaking characteristics. A group of loyal jitney riders emerged who patronized the service because of its lower travel times and more personalized atmosphere. This group formed the core of frequent users. The Los Angeles experience is analyzed in terms of the economic feasibility of jitney service and the impact on the financial status of public transit. The public transit agency experienced a slight negative financial impact as a result of the jitney service. Ridership during peak hours declined somewhat but the jitney service was not frequent enough to carry sufficient passengers to allow the transit agency to cut costly peak hour service. This analysis shows that the jitney service ultimately was not an economically

successful operation. The factors which would have increased the likelihood of success were increased frequency of service and higher fares, which would have been sustainable if not for unexpected developments in public transit financing. A labor pool willing to work for low wages, high transit use in the central city, relatively high transit fares and the availability of inexpensive vehicles appear to be prerequisites to a successful urban jitney operation.

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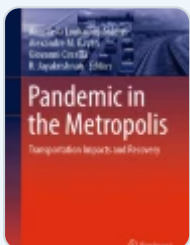
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