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Demand for Public Transport in Germany and the USA: An Analysis of Rider Characteristics

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Abstract

This paper first provides a brief review of trends in public transport demand from 1980 to 2010 in 16 countries in Europe, North America, and Australia. The focus, however, is on a detailed analysis of public transport demand in Germany and the USA, using uniquely comparable national travel surveys from 2001/2002 and 2008/2009 for both countries. Public transport has been far more successful in Germany than in the USA, with much greater growth in overall passenger volumes and trips per capita. Even controlling for differences between the countries in demographics, socio-economics, and land use, logistic regressions show that Germans are five times as likely as Americans to use public transport. Moreover, public transport in Germany attracts a much broader cross-section of society and for a greater diversity of trip purposes. The success of German public transport is due to a coordinated package of mutually

supportive policies that include the following: (1) more and better service, (2) attractive fares and convenient ticketing, (3) full multimodal and regional integration, (4) high taxes and restrictions on car use, and (5) land-use policies that promote compact, mixed-use developments. It is the integrated package of complementary policies that explains why public transport in Germany can compete so well with the private car, even among affluent households. Conversely, it is the lack of complementary policies that explains the continuing struggle of public transport in the USA.

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