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## Business + Economics

### Transit Use Increases in Tucson 2005-10

Story by Andrea Kelly

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Those in the Millennial Generation are leading a shift in Tucson, and the rest of the country, toward more transit use, and less personal vehicle use, according to Arizona Public Interest Research Group.

As in other Arizona and U.S. cities, Tucson saw an increase in transit use before, during and after the recession, said Diane Brown, executive director of [Arizona PIRG](#). The time period studied, 2005 to 2012, shows the increase was not just due to economic factors, she said.

In Tucson, transit use went up 24.5 percent from 2005 to 2010, said Mayor Jonathan Rothschild.

But as people drive less, they purchase less gasoline. The report also showed the number of cars registered to drive on Arizona roads decreased even as population increased during the time frame of the study.

Gasoline taxes and vehicle registration and licensing fees are sources of revenue for road work. If they are going down, local, state and federal government officials are going to have to find other ways to pay for road work, Rothschild said.

"I think we do have to be mindful of these trends. I think one of the things you're going to see a conversation begin very shortly about is the reauthorization of the Regional Transportation Authority and how we then reallocate our projects looking at these trends," he said.

The [Regional Transportation Plan](#) is a 20-year schedule of road work paid for in part by a Pima County sales tax. The tax, and the plan, expire in 2026. Rothschild said he would like to start talking about extending it beyond its 20-year life span, and looking at more transit projects for future funding.

Pima County voters approved the RTA sales tax in 2026. In 2012, Tucson voters approved a [property tax](#) to pay for \$20 million worth of maintenance on roads in the city for five years. Those taxes are potentially a model for future transportation funding, Rothschild said.

"So you may have to see more property tax allocated to road maintenance, more sales tax allocated as a dedicated source to transit, because that's what our community wants," he said.

Rather than starting new taxes, Rothschild said he supports keeping the RTA sales tax and the city property tax for roads beyond their expiration date.

The trend in less driving and more transit use is led by the Millennial Generation, said Brown, of Arizona PIRG. It also indicates a healthier lifestyle, said Josh Ford, a spokesman for [St. Luke's Health Initiatives](#), which funded the study.

In North Carolina, people who used transit lost weight, he said. Transit is also cheaper than driving in most cases after factoring in the cost of car insurance and maintenance, Brown said.

The report suggests cities consider shifting more funding toward transit projects to respond to demand. That's not to say road maintenance should be ignored, Brown said.

"We don't see public transportation and roads as competitors. We see the need to reprioritize where the trends are going in terms of how we allocate our resources," she said.

But local governments such as Tucson and Pima County say they are already lacking enough road funding to keep up with routine maintenance, in part because they are behind schedule on that kind of

work, and in part because the funds have been reduced in recent years. For more than a decade, state lawmakers have moved some local transportation funding to boost other areas of the state budget.

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