



**Jim Kershner, Staff of HistoryLink.** *Transit: The Story of Public Transportation in the Puget Sound Region.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019. Illustrations. 144 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-933245-55-3.

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In *Transit*, author and journalist Jim Kershner follows the construction, dissolution, and reconstruction of greater Seattle's mass-transit networks between the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries, showing how and why mass transit is often central to the regional politics of urban development. In doing so, Kershner tracks the region's many missed opportunities to develop a regional mass-transit network, leading up to a previously untold story: the creation and growth of Sound Transit, the regional transit agency whose routes now span from Tacoma to Everett.

Like many publications from HistoryLink, the nonprofit that runs Washington State's digital history encyclopedia, *Transit* is more documentary than argumentative. Kershner both smoothly summarizes earlier scholarship and updates it by using original research to carry this story into the present day. Kershner's focus is terrestrial mass transit rather than transportation more generally, which means *Transit* pays little attention to freeways (except as a source of congestion, a problem for mass transit to solve) or to the Puget Sound region's extensive maritime transportation networks. Although not officially an institutional history, the book is nonetheless the result of close collaboration with Sound Transit (which is listed as a

financial sponsor) and celebrates the agency's hard-won triumphs.

The book's ten chapters cover three main periods. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 detail the emergence of Seattle's streetcar network between the 1880s and 1930s. After competing private companies built a tangled skein of urban and suburban rail lines, Stone & Webster, the East Coast transportation conglomerate, consolidated them into a single system, forming a monopoly protected by an exclusive franchise from Seattle's city council. In 1911, civil engineer Virgil Bogue proposed a Seattle master plan that would have more than doubled the city's rail mileage, but voters rejected it—the region's first major missed opportunity. Instead, Seattle took on significant debt to buy back its street railway system from Stone & Webster, which sold at a profit. Twenty years later, with Seattle's streetcar system still in debt, beset by maintenance problems, and under heavy competition from automobiles, the city used New Deal funding to turn the page. Buses replaced streetcars.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 describe the bus boom between World War II and the 1980s. While the new buses served the region well during World War II, rising car ownership and suburban growth brought postwar congestion and gridlock. The region's second major missed opportunity came

when voters twice rejected a two-billion-dollar regional mass-transit proposal called Forward Thrust. (Federal funds earmarked for Seattle instead went to Atlanta's MARTA system.) Local politicians aimed smaller. They created a local sales tax district covering King County, home to Seattle and many of its suburbs, in order to revitalize the region's bus service. Metro, the resulting transit agency, coupled this dedicated funding with a willingness to experiment. New ideas—high-capacity articulated buses, a downtown free-ride zone, part-time drivers for peak hours—brought about the “Metro miracle.” More important, Metro's success demonstrated that regional problems required regional solutions. In 1992, Washington State passed legislation creating a legal framework for a new regional mass-transit system.

The book hits its stride in the third section. Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10 recount Sound Transit's birth—the politics that led to its creation and the transit network it is presently building. Sound Transit started from the premise that transit problems crossed county lines. Accordingly, it built its operational network by coordinating bus service through county transit agencies, launching regional commuter-rail service, and starting construction on a new light-rail network centered on Seattle. Voters have enthusiastically supported Sound Transit by approving three funding packages (in 1996, 2008, and 2018) collectively worth more than seventy-five billion dollars. While Kershner draws heavily on secondary sources earlier in the book, these chapters use his oral history interviews with key political and transit figures directly involved in Sound Transit's creation and operations. These chapters communicate a vivid sense of the people behind Sound Transit, as well as their willingness to compromise, learn, and change in order to build a mass transit useful to the region's residents. In looking ahead to the future, chapter 10 also hints at mobility's social benefits in expanding economic opportunities.

Throughout the book, Kershner emphasizes the entangled relationships between regional politics, transit, and land use, with each shaping the others. In this, the book resonates with work on urban and suburban transit by scholars like John Stilgoe (*Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939* [1988]), Dolores Hayden (*Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* [2003]), and Sam Bass Warner (*Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* [1962]). But unlike recent, more critical mobility scholarship from authors like Eric Avila (*Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* [2004] and *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* [2014]) and Genevieve Carpio (*Collisions at the Crossroads: How Place and Mobility Make Race* [2019]), questions of social difference and environmental justice sit mostly in the background. This is more a history of a transit system than of the people who rely on it. While *Transit* discusses the planning and construction problems associated with the region's hilly topography—tunnels are a recurring obstacle—the book does not explore deeper links between transit, infrastructure, and the environment.

Even so, in thoroughly detailing the Everett–Seattle–Tacoma region's mass-transit history, *Transit* lays a foundation for future scholarly work. It combines existing scholarship with newspaper research and a new trove of oral histories. The book itself is beautifully designed, sturdily constructed, and lavishly illustrated, with a wealth of diverse, relevant full-color images on nearly every page. Throughout the text, capsule summaries of key people and events provide additional context.

This book will be especially useful to historians of mobility, urban development, urban/suburban/rural connections, state and local politics, and the Pacific Northwest. *Transit* tells a complicated story clearly and offers numerous points of departure for future research.

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