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Mobility Hubs: Connecting Communities, Expanding Access



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Issue

Mobility hubs are physical locations where shared mobility services — like public transit, ride-hailing, and bike- and scootershare — converge in a centralized location. Mobility hubs range from a transit stop with a bikeshare station and information kiosk to a destination in its own right. Featuring infrastructure designed for all ages and abilities, these hubs also serve as anchors for commercial activity and social gathering in safe and accessible spaces for vulnerable traveler populations, including women, children, people with disabilities, and Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

In 2010, the Federal Transit Administration awarded \$8.3 million to LA Metro to support mobility hub development in the cities of Los Angeles and Long Beach. However, city officials have yet to implement their hub programs. In the years since, multiple mobility options emerged in Los Angeles County and across the country, including micromobility, carshare, and microtransit providers. Many cities are aggressively pursuing the mobility hub concept to manage these “Mobility-as-a-Service” modes.

To guide mobility hub development in Los Angeles County, the researcher sought lessons learned from four national and international mobility hub programs.

Study Approach

This research project is based on interviews and a review of program documentation available through March 2022. Each program was analyzed along six themes: accessibility, community engagement, equity, funding, partnerships, and safety.

The four mobility hub pilot projects/programs studied were located in Minneapolis, Columbus, Ohio, San Diego County, and Hamburg, Germany. These programs were selected as relevant cases to LA County based upon:

- Their unique governance models and the program priorities of the agencies leading mobility hub development.
- The commitment of government officials to the long-term operation of mobility hubs and expansion to a multi-hub network (rather than one-time pilots or demonstration projects).
- Their similarities to LA County in land use patterns and ethnic diversity.

While city staff lead the Columbus and Minneapolis programs, Hamburg’s transit agency Hamburger Hochbahn leads the German hub program and the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) spearheads hub design in San Diego County.

Research Findings

- **Design:** Agencies engaged stakeholders throughout siting and operation, including current shared mobility users, transit agencies, private mobility providers, academia, nonprofits, businesses and technology consultants. The Minneapolis team used hubs to “create a platform for interactive community engagement,” including pop-up tabling with providers, surveys, and an ambassador program.
- **Siting:** Project teams were divided on whether to prioritize busy activity centers with existing multimodal



Figure 1. A Mobility Hub Concept in San Diego County
Source: SANDAG

connections or to develop hubs around neighborhood-serving retailers, health care centers, and community gathering spaces.

- **Features:** Agencies prioritized infrastructure that support transit and active transportation, such as seating, signage, well-maintained sidewalks, and safe street crossings. However, they differed on their approach to ridesharing and parking. The teams in Columbus and San Diego County incorporated passenger pick-up and drop-off zones, while the Hamburg team centered carshare parking. Minneapolis, on the other hand, transitioned on-street car parking into scooter corrals.
- **Partnerships:** Program managers stressed that relationships with mobility providers determine whether hubs are successful. Public transit, micromobility, and locally owned mobility providers were the most enthusiastic partners, while national ride-hailing companies like Lyft and Uber showed inconsistent support.
- **Technology:** Program managers espoused the benefits of digital tools. The teams in Hamburg and Columbus integrated their mobile application with their hub experience. Digital signage and emergency call buttons were high-demand technology-based physical features.



Arseneault, D. (2022). Mobility hubs: Lessons learned from early adopters (Master’s capstone, UCLA). Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0np6b5sn>.

- **Funding:** The hub programs were sparked by grant funding, but reliance on grants undercut program sustainability and evolution, according to the project teams.

Conclusions

Based on these lessons learned, public and private hub developers in Los Angeles should:

- Collaborate with mobility providers, community partners, and users to align priorities and develop hub designs and operational practices.
- Prioritize micromobility parking and accessible ride-hail pick-up/drop-off areas, while allocating flexible space for emerging first/last-mile modes.
- Think beyond the hub by investing in safe pedestrian and walking/riding paths to hubs.
- Create safe and welcoming environments, with particular attention to women, BIPOC, and people with limited mobility. Prioritize lighting, emergency call buttons and signage, as well as ambassadors or security personnel to provide eyes on the street.
- Layer digital infrastructure — mobile applications, interactive kiosks, and Wi-Fi hotspots — on top of high-quality physical amenities.
- Identify and support champions to advocate for inclusion of hub features in public infrastructure projects and private development.
- Pilot multiple hub design types, then scale to create a network. Identify which model suits individual goals, capacity, and resources: a single site (Hamburg), a single corridor (Columbus), multiple corridors (Minneapolis), or an entire community (SANDAG).
- Seek planning grants, but dedicate local funding for operation and expansion such as development impact fees, Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts (EIFD), and revenue from parking benefit districts and Metro ExpressLanes.