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Hate to Wait: Effects of Wait Time on Public Transit Travelers' Perceptions

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HATE TO WAIT

Effects of Wait Time on Public Transit Travelers' Perceptions

Allison Yoh, Hiroyuki Iseki, Michael Smart, Brian Taylor - 2012

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RESEARCH TOPIC

Prior research shows that the waiting experience at stations and stops is a significant burden to transit users, and that riders tend to experience waits as being longer than they actually are. Many argue that improving amenities at transit stops will make waits less burdensome, but given limited funding, transit managers need to know whether spending on amenities is wise policy. This paper delves further into this issue by looking into two specific questions:

- What is the relative importance of amenities (seating, cleanliness, restroom access) in comparison with core service attributes such as safety and frequency of service?
- How does the length of time a rider spends waiting at a stop or station influence his/her desire for particular amenities?

RECOMMENDATION

When transit managers have a choice, they would be well-advised to favor service frequency and reliability over station improvements. Investing resources into service frequency and reliability decreases the need for station amenities in the first place.

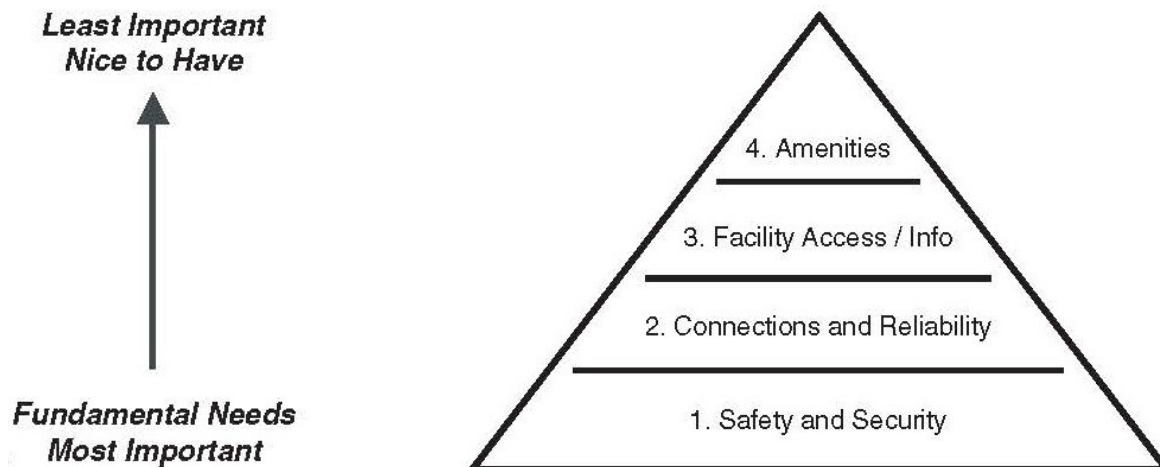


STUDY

Between December 2006 and August 2009 we surveyed 2,247 transit users in 13 different CA transit systems. We looked at 36 stops and stations of varying characteristics and asked riders to rate the importance of amenities (either existing or potential). We then looked at how rider preferences for amenities interacted with average wait times to see how the length of the wait influenced preferences.

MAIN FINDINGS

- **Transit users have hierarchical needs:** once basic needs regarding safety and security are met, then other needs come into play. When riders feel safe, transit managers should favor service improvements over amenities because riders prefer reduced wait times over other amenities.
- **Amenities such as lighting, cleanliness, information, shelter, and security guards become more important as wait times increase.** Long wait times especially increase the need for restroom and food/drink options, yet at present restrooms and food/drink are usually located where they are least needed: at stations with high-frequency service and high ridership.
- **Survey results indicate that with limited funding money would still be better spent on improved service.** Even though amenities at stations with long waits are more useful relative to stations with shorter waits, the presence of amenities does not alleviate the inconvenience of lengthy waiting periods.
- **One caveat: real-time information is an out-of-vehicle improvement that could reduce the burden of waiting** by reducing anxiety and increasing feelings of safety. This leads to the possibility that in some circumstances it would be cheaper to use money on real-time information instead of service increases.



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