

Mass transit needs to be part of the bridges solution

When I lived in Los Angeles, I worked at the RAND Corporation

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as a field interviewer. Imagine my territory as an area that would go from Louisville to Lexington, Bowling Green, Evansville, Ind., and Dayton, Ohio. If I had multiple scattered appointments, it wasn't unusual for me to drive 150 miles or more in a single day.

On our first day of training for the job, our supervisor said, "Traffic will never, ever, be an acceptable excuse for tardiness. We

live in L.A. You know how it is. Learn the surface streets."

That memory is one reason I was a bit taken aback when I read comments from University of Louisville's provost and from a Humana spokesperson in the C-J Sunday and Monday expressing patience should punctuality become problematic in light of the Sherman Minton Bridge closure.

The other reason is because university employees and students and Humana employees get an I.D. that allows them to ride TARC for free, and only about 28 percent of TARC routes use the interstates. Those routes, obviously, will need to be rerouted or removed for at least the next three weeks.

Advice from local government and from state transportation officials perplexed me, too. "Leave early. Be patient. Stay off interstates and away from the river. Stick to surface streets." Nope, no mention of TARC there.

All of that is good advice. Most days at RAND, I planned for one and a half to two hours travel time. I made phone calls. A Thompson's guide became my bible, and I thank God my field partner had lived in L.A. for 30 years and taught me the surface streets so well that I eventually knew where every pothole was.

The advice, nonetheless, is incomplete. There has been no encouragement for Louisville residents to take public trans-

portation. No, the brief, "Oh yeah, there's also TARC," note buried in the aforementioned article in Sunday's paper cannot be construed as encouragement.

Our public transit system isn't perfect. Sometimes, I can barely call it sufficient. But not even suggesting that people — some of whom can access it for free — try it during a time at which their alternative is to watch gasoline that costs nearly \$4 per gallon fill the air as they sit in a parking lot formerly known as an interstate says, "We city officials don't think public transportation is worth your time as it stands, nor do we think it's important for jobs or for citizens' quality of life in the future, and we plan to

do nothing to improve it."

I find that an odd statement for a city that wants and needs to attract more businesses and avoid brain drain to make.

Employers need to know their employees can get to work. Educated workers paying back student loans may want to avoid the expenses of car payments, vehicle maintenance and gasoline, as might people moving from a larger city who want to dramatically decrease their cost of living but still enjoy the arts, entertainment and restaurants of a city. Progressive and innovative thinkers who want to live in a city that's ready for their ideas would look for one whose leaders think out of the box when it comes to alternative routes

to work. A city's commitment to public transportation reflects its readiness.

The bridge closure is a great incentive for 21st Century businesses to examine flex time and telecommuting, but improving our public transit system is low-hanging fruit in terms of creating jobs. In terms of building a more livable, sustainable and attractive city, the topic deserves as much attention as the building of an East End bridge. But if we're not even thinking about using public transit, we're not ready for the people improvements to it would bring.

Mariam Williams is a writer who lives in Louisville. More of her writing can be found at RedboneAfropuff.com.