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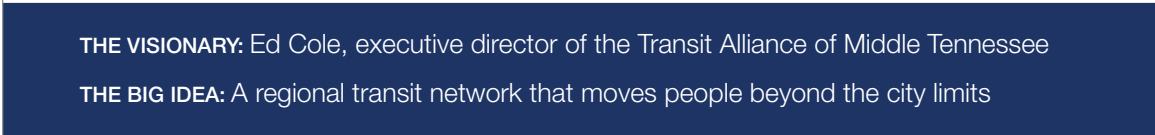
FAST TRACK

to the **BLUE SKY**

Five local visionaries sketch out their ideas for a transit system for the Music City of the future.

BY MARGARET LITTMAN

This is the future—our future—we’re talking about here. So we asked five locals with expertise in architecture, city planning, and transportation to think big. We told them to forget about budgets and permits and practicality and give us ideas that could address one part of Nashville’s growing transit problem. The conversations were inspiring and thought-provoking; the solutions ranged from imminently doable to *Jetsons*-esque. Their suggestions are not necessarily intended to be blueprints for progress. Instead, these are blue-sky launching points for conversation. Here’s what they propose, in words and pictures.



The key to any solution, Cole explains, should mimic the current infrastructure. Currently, to drive from Cool Springs to Lebanon, you don't crawl bumper-to-bumper to downtown Nashville first; you bypass the area by hopping on 840. An efficient transit system would have routes outside of the city center for that same reason. "It emulates the way the highways and the streets already work," he says.

“We do not want to replace the highway network,” Cole says. “But we also can’t expand it. We need transit options that are safe, affordable, and, most important, reliable.”



AKKA Technologies Group's Astute Car is one potential solution to road congestion and parking space constraints.



THE VISIONARY: David Plummer, AIA, LEED AP, managing partner at Centric Architecture

THE BIG IDEA: Cars on the road, but not one per driver

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: With 800 million cars in the world today and between two and a half and five times that projected by 2050, it is clear to Plummer that current city infrastructures will not be able function with double the number of cars, much less quintuple. (And you think traffic on I-24 is bad now...)

Plummer, who is a member of the multi-perspective Amp Citizens Advisory Committee, says any real solution needs to be multifaceted, with more walkable neighborhoods and diverse transit options. When pressed for one *Wall-E*-sounding idea, he sketches out a Music City that uses personal rapid transit. PRT features a network of shared cars, including current solutions such as Uber, Lyft, and taxis as well as more technologically advanced podcars and even shared driverless electric vehicles (Masdar City in Abu Dhabi, UAE, already has a fleet). Residents would pull up an app and access a car when needed—then wouldn't have to deal with it after arriving at their destination, meaning reduced road congestion and parking capacity problems. And the use of podcars would allow for smaller vehicle lanes and parking spaces, similarly helping the city deal with its finite space resources.

When necessary, technology would also be used to reserve parking spaces ahead of time—which, Plummer says, in addition to lowering blood pressure provides an environmental bonus, as the largest fuel consumption waste in urban centers comes from time spent driving around looking for parking.

THE VISIONARY: Gary Gaston, design director at Nashville Civic Design Center

THE BIG IDEA: Buffered bike lanes that make cycling an option for commuting



WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: Gaston, the author of several books on building healthy communities (including one to be published this fall), sees buffered/separated bike lanes as a tool that can transform cycling from a pleasurable activity to a regular mode of transport.

Metro already announced plans to install these lanes on Korean Veterans Boulevard, but Gaston is talking about a network throughout the city; here, Charlotte Avenue is reimagined. There would be stations, as there are in Chicago's Millennium Park, with lockers, showers, and bike locks for locals to use after hopping off.

Research shows that the lanes, which are designed to protect cyclists from motorized vehicular traffic, give people confidence. One study from Portland found that 5 percent of respondents said they felt comfortable biking in traffic—but with protected lanes, 60 percent said they did. Bike rapid transit, Gaston says, is one piece in a multi-modal transportation system, but it is a piece that has more impact than people may initially realize.

"Cities where they have been installed have seen a hugely dramatic increase in cycling," Gaston explains. "It starts to improve people's health, reduce pollution. There are all kinds of benefits."



Above: Conceptual illustration of Charlotte Avenue with dedicated bike rapid transit infrastructure, including buffered lanes and flexible bollards for increased protection.

Below: A new bike center should provide lockers and showers so that morning commuters can change before continuing to work. Adjacency to transit would allow riders to rent cycles and then continue to destinations throughout downtown.



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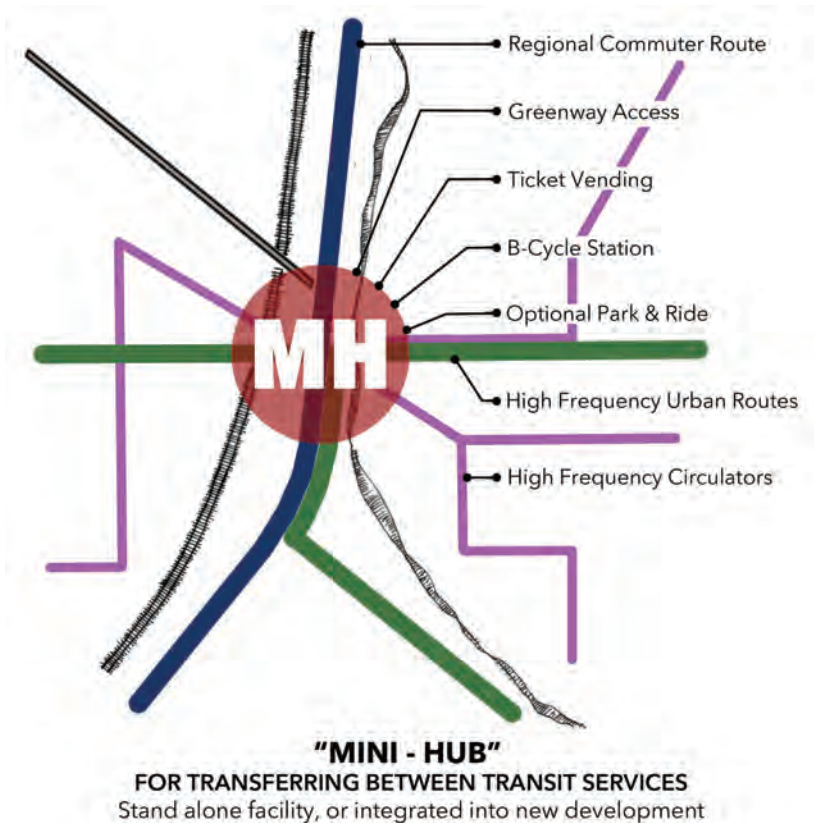


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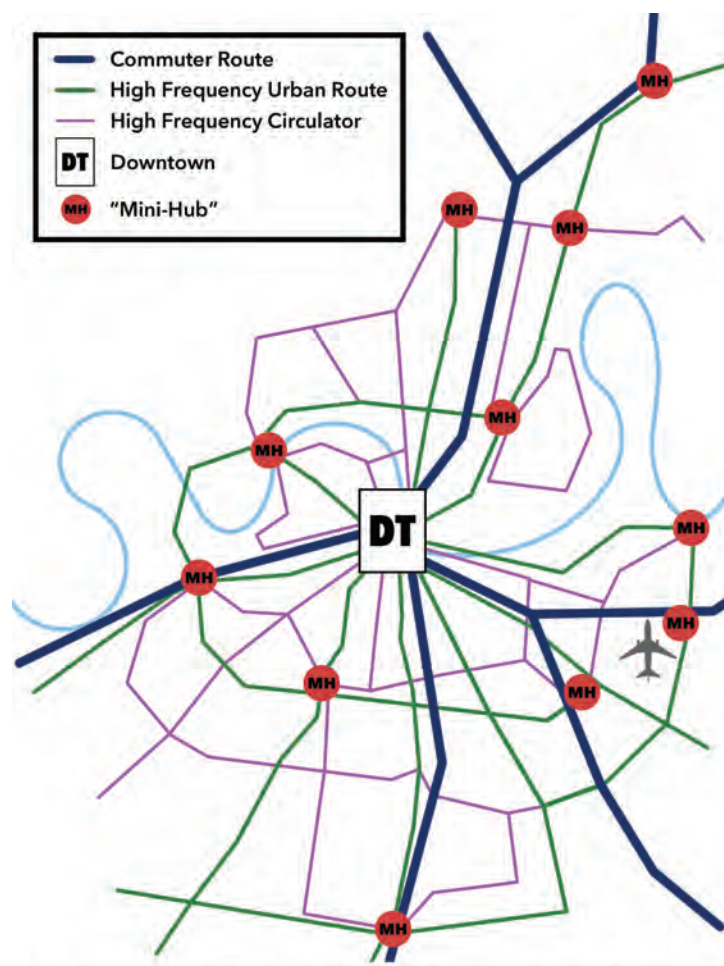


THE VISIONARY: Jim McAteer, owner of Transit Insight

THE BIG IDEA: A web of mini-hubs with a focus on frequency

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: Any discussion of rail versus bus is shortsighted, says McAteer, who served as the director of planning and grants at the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority before opening the consultancy Transit Insight this year. When he thinks about a system of mini-hubs to help locals hop from their neighborhood to downtown to a suburb, he focuses not on the mode of transport but rather on the routes.

This network of mini-hubs has three main requirements: It needs to be fast and frequent, meaning service at least every five minutes; it needs to be unconstrained by congestion; and it needs to have room to grow with the city and population, so that people can get cross-town as easily as they can get across their neighborhood. To make that happen, the mini-hubs must be connected into the regional commuter lines, which may be rail, BRT, BRT Lite, or other modes. Just as developers today design parking garages as part of new buildings, McAteer sees these transit stations/mini-hubs becoming part of the built environment.



THE VISIONARY: Manuel Zeitlin, AIA, LEED AP, principal at Manuel Zeitlin Architects

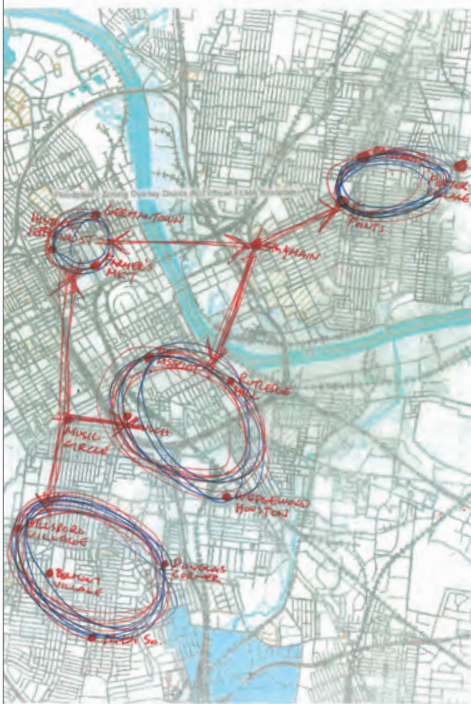
THE BIG IDEA: A free network of neighborhood-centric buses

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: Architect Zeitlin is known for building walkable neighborhoods (see the June 2014 issue for more on his work). So it makes sense that his vision is all about making each neighborhood accessible to its locals with a free

hyper-local circulator bus—not unlike the Music City Circuit buses that now serve The Gulch and downtown. These systems would help locals get to school and the post office and wherever else they need to go nearby, but each neighborhood circulator center would be connected to a larger network and then again to the next neighborhood center.

“All of a sudden, you could hop on a bus in The Gulch and go to 12 South, to Five Points, to Germantown, to Jefferson Street, to Charlotte West for lunchtime, or to go shopping,” Zeitlin explains. “And it would be free and regular and dependable.”

Developers in neighborhoods would help support and fund the circulator in their network, with the idea that it would spur both residential and commercial business in an area available to a wide audience. “I think creating something like a free circulator to these neighborhood centers would have a huge impact,” Zeitlin says.



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