

Transit Ridership Outstrips U.S. Pace

Area's Increased Use of Trains and Buses Attributed to New Stations, Fare Subsidies, Immigrants

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Transit ridership is experiencing the longest sustained growth in the nation's history, and new riders are boarding the Washington region's subway, commuter trains and buses at a rate three times the national average, according to new figures released yesterday.

Last year was the fifth year in a row that transit ridership grew faster than highway use, according to statistics

compiled by the American Public Transportation Association. Transit advocates celebrated the statistics and said they prove that Americans are not merely flirting with alternatives to the car but are embracing mass transit as part of daily life.

"What we're seeing is solid evidence of a long-term trend," said Barbara McCann of the Surface Transportation Policy Project, which represents community, planning and public-interest groups.

Americans made a record 9.5 billion trips on mass

transit last year, 2 percent more than in 2000. Highway use grew 1 percent, with Americans driving 2.8 trillion miles.

Cars still remain the transportation choice for an overwhelming majority of Americans, and any obituary of the automobile is premature, said William D. Fay of the American Highway Users Alliance.

"I don't want to sound like the naysayer; I'm happy

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