

Streetcar Service Revitalizes a Route

Sun Link Could Help Drive Greater Downtown Growth

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the streetcar line has been good for business. The Hub recently opened a separate ice cream shop across the street, hoping to attract more customers from the growing number of visitors.

Mr. Avella said the streetcar showed that downtown Tucson was finally getting its act together.

"It's almost more symbolic of 'Hey, we're actually doing that,'" he said. "We're actually turning into a real downtown city."

State Senator Steve Farley, a Tucson Democrat who had pushed for the streetcar for more than a decade, said even skeptics would realize that the project would pay economic dividends.

"The streetcar isn't just about being a transportation mode," he said. "It's also an economic development tool that's incredibly powerful when you do it right, and I think we, in Tucson, really did it right."

As of this January, the private sector had invested \$380 million in the downtown area, according to the Downtown Tucson Partnership. That doesn't include millions of dollars more in projects on the drawing board, like the Marriott.

Scott Stiteler, the developer working with the Marriott, said that when construction started on the streetcar in 2012, Marriott and several other hotel chains made the unusual step of reaching out to him to express interest in building a hotel here.

"The hotel companies, before the streetcar, they did not have downtown Tucson on their radar screen," Mr. Stiteler said. "Post streetcar, they started calling me saying, 'Let's get it together.'"

The revitalized downtown and west side might have happened without the streetcar, but it encouraged developers to invest at a much quicker pace, business owners said. Jerry Dixon, whose Gadsden Company owns several west side residential and commercial developments, said the streetcar was "the reason we made the investment."

Voters in Pima County approved the streetcar in 2006 as part of a broader regional transportation plan. But construction on the \$197 million project didn't start until 2012, helped by \$69 million in grants from the United States Department of Transportation.

The success of streetcars nationwide has been generally mixed, with some streetcars bringing more economic benefits than others, a Congressional Research Service report pointed out last year. A 2013 study, for example, found several cities were able to revamp their bus systems or establish bus rapid transit systems for less than \$10 million per mile. Bus rapid transit systems often dedicate a street lane that only buses can use.

Tucson's streetcar — with roughly \$200 million paying for

almost four miles — cost \$50 million per mile.

But Arthur C. Nelson, a University of Arizona urban planning professor who researches transit systems' impact on economic development, said Tucson's streetcar was likely the best option for the city.

Sun Link, Mr. Nelson said, connects an unusual amount of "high-activity nodes in short distances," from the medical center to the campus to downtown to the Fourth Avenue shopping district. As those spots are close together, a streetcar would probably be more effective than a bus rapid transit system, he said.

"I would say once the numbers are finally out in the way that I use them, we'll find that the Tucson streetcar is probably among the nation's most successful," Mr. Nelson said.

But there are concerns and some drawbacks.

Steve Kozachik, a Tucson city councilman and a longtime skeptic of the streetcar, acknowledged that the streetcar had been a catalyst for development along its route, but he offered a "dose of reality," saying the costs of operating and maintaining the streetcar in the future were unclear. He also said that the company that built Tucson's streetcars, Oregon Iron Works, was no longer in the streetcar business and noted delays from the company in building the streetcars.

Mr. Kozachik said that he was concerned about the difficulty of maintaining the streetcar without a "consistent and reliable" manufacturer.

And while downtown business growth has led to increased property values along the route, those increased values have led landlords to raise rents, putting pressure on some business owners and even forcing some to leave.

Eleonora León, the owner of the clothing and accessory store La Fashionista, said her monthly rent increased by 64 percent. She said she was unsure whether she would be able to keep her shop.

"When you raise our rents, there's nowhere for us to go but to close down," Ms. León said.

Still, more and more people are stepping off the streetcar to explore the streets, perhaps stopping for a slice at Empire Pizza in downtown Tucson, said Ryan Gaines, the general manager there.

Mr. Gaines, 35, a University of Arizona graduate, said he rarely visited downtown when he was in college. He was living in Phoenix last year when he was offered the job at Empire Pizza, but he hesitated at first, thinking "there's nothing going on" in downtown Tucson. His reaction changed when he returned to Tucson to meet with the restaurant's owners.

"I spent a few days down here and saw the dramatic facelift that had happened," Mr. Gaines said. "I changed my mind immediately."



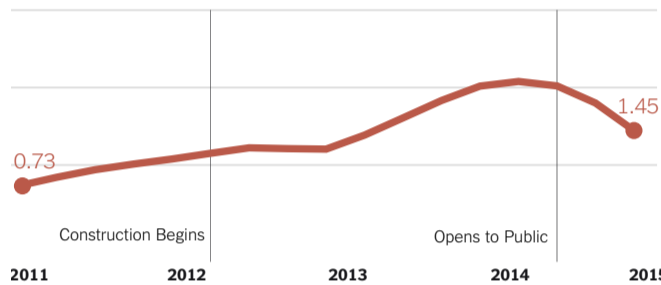
PINAR ISTEK/NYT INSTITUTE

Next Step: Licensing Trends Will Demonstrate Sun Link's Economic Impact in Coming Years

Sun Link, the streetcar line that began operation 10 months ago, is starting to have an economic impact on downtown Tucson. The following charts show the smoothed number of licenses, by category, issued to businesses within walking distance of a stop along the line. Licensing trends within walking distance roughly reflected those of the rest of the city. As the effect of the streetcar on business along the line becomes clearer in the coming years, licensing rates will be one way to evaluate the impact on the local economy. In 2010, before licensing data was available, a federal stimulus grant made Sun Link possible. Construction began in May 2012, and the line opened to the public in July 2014.

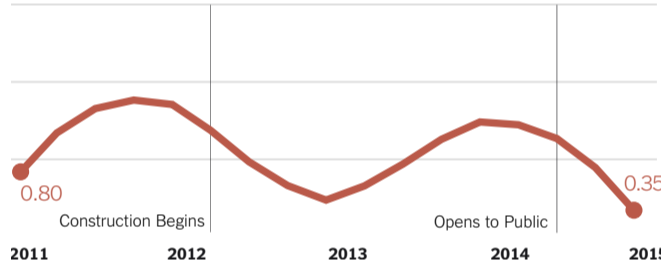
Real Property Rentals

Licenses have been issued for several developers whose rental properties have lured new businesses. A notable example is Mercado San Agustín, a plaza with several restaurants and shops.



Restaurants

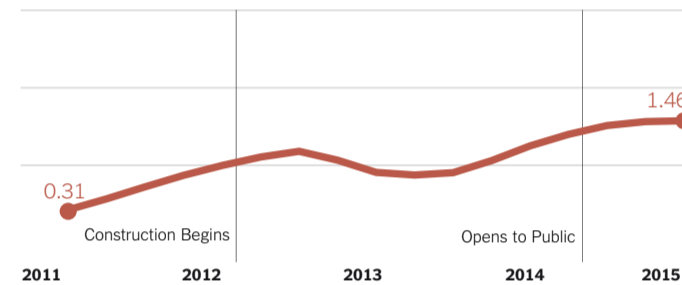
The pace of restaurant growth has slowed over time. Sparkroot (July 2011) and The Fix (February 2013) are popular examples of restaurants that have opened along the streetcar line over the last several years.



Sources: City of Tucson Finance Department

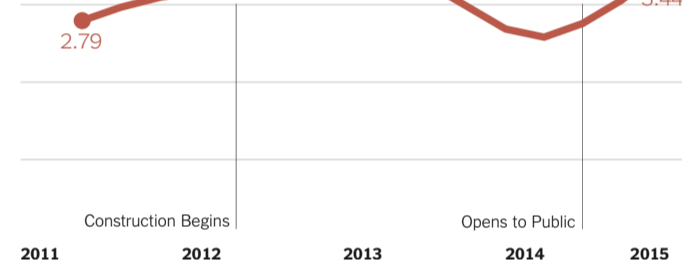
Construction Contracting

Several offices for construction contractors have opened in recent years. They provide services that can help establish and expand other businesses in the area.



Retail Sales

Retail sales have fluctuated only slightly. These businesses include several artists' studios, shops and salons, as well as a brewery and a distillery.



JONAH SMITH/NYT INSTITUTE

Shopping, Dining and Catering Spots at End of the Streetcar Line



AGUSTIN KITCHEN

(520) 398-5382
agustinkitchen.com
Nibble on goat cheese or crispy calamari while enjoying Agustin's selection of wine and local beer. The restaurant blends new American food and classic French cuisine.

SEIS KITCHEN AND CATERING

(520) 622-2002
seiskitchen.com
Seis draws on six culinary regions of Mexico — Northern Mexico, Oaxaca, Mexico City, Baja, Yucatán and western Mexico. Popular dishes include carnitas with crispy chile tarte and avocado tacos.

LA CABAÑA

(520) 404-9008
La Cabana, a fine arts store, offers contemporary clothing and traditional seraphic blankets from Mexico, as well as vintage Talavera pottery and local fine art.

Visitors and residents alike might find that Sun Link, Tucson's almost year-old streetcar line, provides efficient access to newly thriving parts of the city. It is at the end of the line, though, where riders will find the Mercado District, a charming village west of downtown, home to a crop of restaurants and shops.

For families looking for a change of scenery or couples on a date, the district's courtyard is dressed with short, thin trees in wooden vases and lemon trees under beige canopies. For maximum relaxation, there is also a spa.

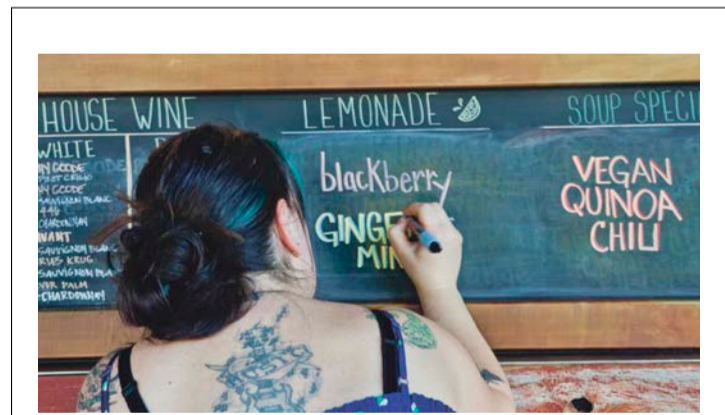
Shoppers can leisurely browse antiques and accessories at La Cabaña and Mast. Transit Cycles is a nod to Tucson's growing bike scene, where both cycling enthusiasts and casual riders can pick up parts or accessories.

"We change our menu five times a year," said Ryan Clark, the chef at Agustin Kitchen. Mr. Clark, who opened the restaurant two years ago, says their offerings reflect his support of local farmers.

Décor in the Agustin Kitchen dining room is modern with dark wooden tables.

Streetcar tickets, which can be bought at any stop, are \$4 for a day pass, \$1.50 for one-way fare and free for children five years old and younger who ride with an adult. For more must-visit haunts along the Sun Link route, from University Boulevard to the Mercado District, visit bit.ly/tucsonstreetcar.

— LUCIA HOFFMAN



Entrepreneurship Right Out of School

Local investors want to offer incentives for recent graduates to stay in town and build start-ups to help the economy. Video at: vimeo.com/nytinsttute/downtown

Tucson's Streets to Become More Bike-Friendly Through City Support

By SANDRA LÓPEZ-MONSALVE and ANA M. RODRIGUEZ

Kristin McRay had just moved to Tucson, her bike her only means of transportation, when somebody stole her rear wheel.

She called bike shops in town who said it would be \$100 for a new one.

"I didn't have that kind of money," she said. "That sounded really expensive."

Ms. McRay found her way to Bicycle Inter-Community Art and Salvage, a non-profit bike repair and recycling collector located in downtown Tucson, where people can work in the shop to pay off used bikes. Or they can build their own bike from used parts available in the shop.

Every day people of all ages visit Bicas because it offers an affordable way to repair their bikes as more and more people need them.

"I found a used wheel for 5 dollars. I picked up all of the parts that I needed to fix my bike for under 20 bucks," Ms. McRay said. "And I was hooked."

She now works at Bicas, teaching workshops aimed at Tucson's growing biking community.

A county study conducted last year showed a slight increase in ridership. But biking advocates said that the city needs to do more to accommodate the growing numbers, particularly with more low-income immigrants without access to automobiles sharing the streets. Civic organizations and

government agencies are working together to educate and organize events designed to promote bicycle use and safety.

"We know that compared to other cities, Tucson has a very high bike ridership," said Ann Chanecka, a coordinator at Tucson Bicycle and Pedestrian Program. "A lot of that are people that must rely on biking to get around, and we also have a high amount of folks that choose biking as their transportation mode for all the benefits that it brings."

On any given day, children, college students, homeless people, delivery people, retirees, families with cargo bikes all ride alongside recreational cyclists.

"These are people who wear

spandex and have bicycles that are worth more than my car," said Kylie Walzak, program manager at Living Streets Alliance, an organization that promotes walking and biking.

Ms. Walzak has been meeting with city leaders and officials who design the streets to discuss how to better accommodate riders. She is concerned about the growing numbers of immigrants and refugees from Latin America and Africa who do not have driver's licenses and need to use a bicycle.

"We are advocating to recognize that we have this large population that can't drive and to tell our decision-makers we really need to be thinking about them when we design the city," said Ms. Walzak,

who is seven months pregnant and rides her bike to work everyday.

The city has been expanding and improving its infrastructure, Ms. Chanecka said.

In the last few years, it has installed roadway markings to improve safety and to deliver information. It has added protective barriers to better separate bicyclists from motor vehicles, according to the 2015 City of Tucson and Bicycle Pedestrian Program report.

But Tucson is a city designed around cars. It has a lack of sidewalks but it has really wide roads with enormous intersections. "People are expected to walk across them, and people get killed," Ms. Walzak said.

At least two fatalities have been reported this year, according to Arizona Bike Law, a bicycle advocacy blog.

Ms. Walzak's organization, Living Streets Alliance, also promotes cycling education.

Collaborations between the City of Tucson Bicycle and Pedestrian Program and the non-profit organizations have led to projects like Safe Routes to School Tucson, where Ms. McRay teaches children how to fix bicycles.

"Before, I couldn't even ride a trike," said Xochitl A. Villanueva, a 9-year-old who attends the Ochoa Community Magnet Elementary School. "Now I feel great, because sometimes I go fast, and I love the speed."