

# CITIZEN TRAIN

## How Direct Democracy, Participatory Design, and Pacific Rim Businesses are Creating a New Seattle Monorail

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and operations. I also present issues related to transit in the Pacific Rim, where national trends seem to heavily influence the type of transit technology that is selected in those countries. Seattle's transit choices reflect the mixed influences of the light rail industry in the US, particularly in its neighboring city, Portland, Oregon; the Canadian approach to transit used in Vancouver, BC; and the availability of Japanese urban transit examples, in ways that may be unique to the Pacific Rim. The citizen-driven nature of this transit effort seems to be unique to Seattle, and may offer useful lessons to its neighbors.

### ABSTRACT

This case study presents a story of how local citizen organizers challenged institutional authority to create a 14-mile transit line using the initiative process, otherwise known as direct democracy. Second, it reviews the recent history of a single-purpose municipal government that was created by those citizens, which tried to stay "true to its grass-roots" using participatory techniques in planning and design. Construction on the monorail line is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2004. I will present the controversies and innovations that drove decisions during the last six years of this movement as lessons learned. The monorail movement in Seattle began in earnest in 1997, when a cab driver succeeded in getting an initiative on the city-wide ballot by collecting petition signatures outside coffeehouses. I have been a participant observer in this movement, as an appointed member of the monorail Board, which was once a "public development authority" within the City of Seattle's government, and is now a separate municipal authority known as the Seattle Popular Monorail Authority. A total of three successful citizen initiatives was required to create this Authority, and provide it with a budget of \$1.6 billion USD funded solely through local taxes. Throughout this process of citizen initiatives, different methods were used to engage both supporters and affected residents to give input on design and planning decisions. Now that the monorail government authority exists, different methods are being used to maintain public involvement, while continuing some of the techniques that have worked well in the past. Websites and email have played important roles in this citizen movement as communication tools, as have sandwich signs, neighborhood-based meetings, and "publicity-stunt" events. I examine the three different phases of this movement to see which strategies were used during each, and to assess the different effects each of these had on helping the project advance towards construction