Proposed Los Angeles Metro Rail Map: Get Out of Your Car

My nominee for Greatest Article Title Of All Time is Don Pickrell's 1992 piece in the Journal of the American Planning Association. Pickrell argued that while planners and local governments poured money into light rail, it never got the hoped-for ridership. The title? "A Desire Named Streetcar."

Well, as it turns out now, Los Angeles is seeing its love requited, at least for the time being. Ridership on the new Expo Line from Santa Monica to downtown is orders of magnitude higher than anticipated, leading to a new problem: not enough rail cars.

More importantly, these riders are getting out of their cars to do it: according to a survey conducted by Metro, 70% of the riders on the new stations were new, and nearly half of them used to drive by themselves.

It's still Santa Monica: how did riders get to the new stations? About half said that they "walk/bike/roll." I'm going to go out on a limb and suggest that that might not be the case in, say, Cleveland. But that is actually better news that it looks like: for a long time, it has been an article of faith in the transit planning world that stops need to be within one-quarter of a mile if people will use them. If people are biking or "rolling," however, their radius is bigger.

I am highly skeptical that this will *reduce* traffic over the long run, because once traffic congestion exists, it hits a sort of equilibrium: if people get out of their cars, then traffic will improve, and people will pop back into them. But over the long run, it could help to ensure that Los Angeles and other American cities don't turn into places like Bombay or New Delhi. It will give people options. And despite the rather hysterical attacks on transit from the Right, options is about as American a philosophy as there is.