

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

ARCH 5050/4050

Fall 2021 Syllabus

University of North Carolina at Charlotte, School of Architecture

Instructor: Thomas Forget, Associate Professor

3 Credit hours; Tuesdays, 2:30–4:45; Center City 1001



NYC Subway

And it is precisely for reasons of its consequentiality that we must cease simply to fit the city to existing paradigms of movement and try to re-imagine questions of circulation from first principles. — Michael Sorkin

PREMISE This seminar explores the history of public transportation in the United States from three primary perspectives: public policy, technology, and aesthetics.

- Policy issues include: the social justice (or lack thereof) of public investment; private/corporate investment and malfeasance; and grassroots initiatives in service of just transportation policy.
- Technological issues include: the degree of innovation in the history of public transportation infrastructure relative to that in the history of infrastructure serving private automobiles; the evolution of information technology in public infrastructural systems; and the ways in which technological developments both catalyzed new development and mediated existing problems.
- Aesthetic issues include: the extent to which the spaces of transportation infrastructure produce opportunities for community and social engagement, as opposed to alienation; the ways in which the material constructions of transportation infrastructure build civic identity and inspire design trends; and the ways in which reciprocities between natural and built geographies manifest the spatial logic of a region—its scales, proportions, hierarchies, and means of connectivity.

Overall, the course strives to examine public infrastructure as a vital participant in the social, political, and economic dynamics—as something that transcends the functions of a rote public utility and achieve a qualitative role in culture. What has mobility been, and what can it be?

OBJECTIVES The primary objective of this course is to develop a critical understanding of the role of public transportation in the development of the American city. Secondary objectives are:

- To discern how the history of that development informs the contemporary city
- To develop analytical and critical positions on public transportation
- To explore intersections between policy, technology, and aesthetics
- To integrate graphic analysis and writing to produce materials for publication

STRUCTURE The course begins with a two-week introductory survey of public transportation in the United States writ large. The rest of the semester is devoted to: 1) in-depth comparative case studies of systems in different cities; and 2) student presentations and workshops. In the case studies, particular is paid to the systems in New York City and Paris, other canonical systems in the U.S., aspirations for a rail network in Charlotte, and rapid transit rail-alternatives emerging in Asia. In the student presentations and workshops, the course strives to develop new ways of learning and critical thinking not typically associated with seminar and lecture instruction.

In addition to weekly exercises that demonstrate engagement in the readings and resources of the courses, students produce a midterm presentation and a final project. Students are actively involved in shaping the content of the course through the development of their semester-long research-based projects, which may involve any media or combination of media. The instructor is especially interested in videomaking, fiction writing, journalism, and data visualization, but students are invited to pursue their own media and methods.