



The Businesses of Light Rail: A Compilation of Local Business Interviews

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Arizona PIRG Education Fund**

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Cover photos (top to bottom): Michael Monti of Monti's La Casa Vieja Steakhouse; Cynthia 'Cindy' Gentry of Phoenix Public Market/ Community Food Connections; Raveen Arora of India Plaza; Pat Cook of AMF Christown Lanes; Tom Lapenna of The Marquee Theatre/Lucky Man Concerts; Jane Reddin of Practical Art. Reddin photo courtesy of Lisa Olson. Transit map image courtesy of www.valleymetro.org.

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Introduction: Providing an On-the-Ground Perspective

Arizonans clearly desire increased and improved public transportation options, as proven by the fact that the public has voted in favor of taxes to support public transportation in the past. Furthermore, since the light rail line began operation, it has consistently achieved higher-than-expected and record-breaking ridership numbers. Whereas many people initially questioned the benefits of light rail—especially when weighed against any costs that would be incurred—and many business owners complained about how much light rail construction hurt their business, since the rail’s completion the overall feedback has been generally positive.

From Chamber of Commerce representatives to government transportation officials to advocacy organizations, Arizonans recognize that the light rail has helped our state in numerous ways. Despite nay-saying during the planning and construction processes, many Arizona businesses and citizens understand the numerous benefits of light rail now that the line is up and running and people can see and experience the trains for themselves.

However, as of yet, there has been no document which compiles anecdotes of how the light rail has benefited the local economy. This report provides real-life examples of businesses that have thrived by having light rail access near their establishments, documenting perspectives from local business owners in their own words that statistics simply cannot provide.

Common Themes Identified

Combined, the interviews illustrate how local businesses have been helped by the light rail, especially pertinent information given the recently struggling economy and significantly reduced level of retail sales in general. The stories told document ways in which the light rail has helped these businesses, in perhaps unexpected and sometimes surprising manners.

It is especially interesting to note common themes and perspectives that can be identified when looking at the interviews collectively. Several common themes worth noting include:

- **Increased foot traffic due to light rail:** Despite initial misgivings about the transit line, Keith Jackson of the George and Dragon now describes himself as a light rail advocate, and says that, since the rail’s construction, he watches people come from the nearby Central Avenue and Indian School Road light rail stop into the George and Dragon—and with larger streams of people now coming in on the weekends and evenings, Keith has witnessed as many as 60 people in one night coming to his bar from the light rail.
- **Businesses shaping their location decisions in anticipation of light rail, thereby potentially decreasing urban sprawl:** Tina Martinez from the Mekong Plaza bought her property knowing the light rail would be coming soon nearby, and has seen a 30 percent increase in revenue since the light rail opened; Deborah Skinner of the Artisans’ Gallery on Mill Avenue estimates that she probably gets close to a dozen people per week in her shop that come from the light rail, having ridden the transit line ‘simply to try it out.’
- **Light rail’s value as a transportation alternative for special events like community festivals:** Chan and Quyen Tieu from UnPhogettable talk about the large, semi-annual Moon and Tet festivals held at the Mekong Plaza within which their restaurant is located—and how there sometimes isn’t enough parking space in the plaza to accommodate all the festival-goers. The light rail enables more people to attend while lessening the hassle and difficulty of parking.
- **Increased visibility for businesses near the light rail:** Mike Shaw from Brooklyn’s NYC Pizza says that the light rail helps create an awareness of his business, a benefit that he actively courts through effective advertising specifically designed to catch people coming off the light rail and draw them to his eatery by announcing specials in large print.
- **Light rail’s role in community redevelopment:** Raveen Arora from the India Plaza insists that the light rail has helped clean up the area around his plaza, closing down seedy motels

and other similar operations, and Keith Jackson from the George and Dragon says the rail has pumped life into the community on 7th Avenue near his bar, which in turn has chased out the “riff-raff” and fixed up the homes in the area.

- **Light rail’s role as a mobility option for people who cannot drive:** Doris Leis of Antiques on Central talks of Randy, her employee who cannot drive due to lack of peripheral vision, explaining that the light rail has created a win-win situation because it provides a much-needed service for Randy and allows her to hire somebody who can’t drive on his own. Michael Monti from La Casa Vieja and Pat Mulqueen from Mulqueen Sewing both spoke of the light rail increasing the number of older customers who wouldn’t necessarily have been able to patronize their businesses without the light rail.

Additionally, a number of the business owners interviewed explained that despite initial hesitations and misgivings on the exact benefits—if any—light rail would bring to their business in particular and the community in general, since the rail’s completion they have seen specific, tangible benefits ranging from increased overall foot traffic to community redevelopment. Some even went from being outspoken critics of the light rail to becoming staunch rail advocates.

Case Studies

Mulqueen Sewing

Proprietor: Pat Mulqueen

Address: Four locations. Closest to light rail: West Mesa location, 1760 W. Main St., Mesa

Business Background

The first Mulqueen Sewing Center was established in 1978; since then, Pat Mulqueen has managed as many as eight stores at one time, although currently, he owns four, with one each in Chandler and Glendale, and two in Mesa. The West Mesa store is located right by the Sycamore and Main Street station at the end of the light rail line, and Pat says that his business has been better since the light rail's construction.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

"Not a huge amount [of people] have taken advantage of the train to get to [my] store, but some definitely have," says Pat. Overall, he says that he's pleased with the light rail—although it was a problem for his business during construction, since opening, he has been glad that it is there.

Pat says that he gets some foot traffic in his store from the large number of people parking behind the store to take the light rail. He explains that some people even park in his parking lot, but he does not mind because they are not enough to overload his business. Pat knows that customers come from the light rail because he talks to them; in particular, some customers come from Tempe because there is no longer a Mulqueen Sewing store there. Nor is there one in Phoenix, so Pat attests that he's had customers come from as far away as the Christown mall, at the complete opposite end of the light rail line.



In general, Pat would recommend others to establish businesses closer to the light rail line as opposed to farther away because he believes that it can certainly be an advantage. He admits that some businesses might be better served by the light rail than others (restaurants could particularly benefit from light rail proximity, in his opinion), but thinks that being close to the light rail could help any and all businesses.

Finally, Pat related an interesting anecdote about an annual event that Mulqueen Sewing holds: For the past six or so years, Mulqueen has been holding a two-day event/seminar on sewing at the Crown Plaza Hotel by the Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport. Pat said that attendance at the event has been steadily increasing each year, and that this year was definitely the biggest, with over 150 in attendance. Pat noted that this was the first year they ran the event since the light rail has been up and running, and said that he knew of at least 20 to 25 women who most likely would not have attended if they had to drive; the light rail made their participation possible. Knowing how many people would be in attendance, Pat even had some people drive to his store, from which point he escorted them onto the train and to the hotel himself.





unPhogettable

Contact Persons: Chan and Quyen Tieu

Address: 66 S. Dobson Rd., Mesa

Business Background

UnPhogettable is a Vietnamese restaurant located inside the Mekong Plaza at 66 S. Dobson Rd. in Mesa, right by the Sycamore and Main Street station at the end of the light rail line. The restaurant's proprietors, Chan and Quyen, coincided their business' opening with the opening of the plaza itself, and chose the plaza because they wanted to be located in an establishment that would draw customers.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

At the time when they chose to start their business, they were not aware of the plans to build the light rail nearby, but saw it as a "very pleasant surprise." They describe the light rail as being very convenient for their location, echoing sentiments that people can very easily and conveniently walk to and from the light rail stop to the plaza. Furthermore, they mentioned that, especially when the light rail first opened, many people would tour the line, riding it all the way to the end in Mesa—and the people who found unPhogettable and the Mekong Plaza during such excursions are still coming back and visiting them over time. To this effect, Chan and Quyen say that light rail and their restaurant help each other out, and assert that they have found some new customers specifically due to the light rail.

Additionally, Quyen says that she's heard the area around the plaza is much safer now (since the light

rail's completion) than it used to be, and that, overall, the rail has been great for the city of Mesa. She and her husband both talked about the large, semi-annual Moon and Tet festivals held at the plaza, and how there sometimes isn't enough parking space in the plaza to accommodate all the festival-goers—the light rail enables more people to attend while lessening the hassle and difficulty of parking. Chan praises the light rail for giving people alternatives and letting them park elsewhere.

Furthermore, Tina, the project facilitator of the Mekong Plaza within which unPhogettable is located, knew that the light rail was going to be coming to the Phoenix area, and bought the property accordingly. The investment has clearly paid off for her, since the Plaza overall has seen an approximately 30 percent increase in revenue since the light rail opened—being within walking distance from the Sycamore and Main station at the eastern end of the light rail line, Tina says that the light rail is good for her business and every business within the plaza because customers can easily walk from the light rail station and don't need a car to get there. She knows customers are coming from the light rail because she can see them walking over, notices them carrying light rail magazines, and talks with plaza customers about how they got there.

In conclusion, Chan thinks that everybody would be better served if, at each light rail stop, there was a list of attractions identifying restaurants, shopping and event centers, and other relevant points of interest in the close vicinity of each light rail station. He thinks this would bring more attention to each stop, as well as educate and inform people.



Bob's Tires

Contact Person: Genaro Centeno, Proprietor

Address: 1945 E. Apache Blvd., Tempe

Business Background

Bob's Tires is located at 1945 E. Apache Blvd. in Tempe, by the Apache and McClintock light rail station. Genaro Centeno is the proprietor of this new and used tires service, which also does mechanical work on air conditioners, brakes, tune-ups and just about everything else to do with cars. Bob's was established four years ago, although a tire service and mechanics shop has been located at this location for the past 32 years.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

Overall, Genaro likes the light rail and thinks it's good for the Phoenix metropolitan area, both in terms of people living here and those visiting from outside the city—and he believes that the people of Phoenix tend to agree with him on this assessment. He sees the light rail as being good for his business in general, and would recommend others to establish businesses close to the rail line.

Genaro speaks of many ASU students who leave their cars near the park-and-ride by his business, so when they have car trouble, they naturally come into his shop to get assistance. Additionally, he mentioned that people riding the train in general see his shop while riding along the rail line and they notice him installing tires and rims or doing other sorts of mechanical auto work. He thinks that, even if these people don't own a car at the time, they may remember his shop and potentially provide him with some business should they own a car in the future.

Genaro admits that, like many others, he was initially nervous about the light rail and afraid that it would hurt his business due to the construction closing down the main entrance to his shop from Apache Boulevard. But in the end it didn't turn out so bad, and is good now, Genaro says.

Additionally, he talks about the benefits the light rail has brought to him and his employees personally—two of his employees sometimes take the train when they don't have access to a car. In conclusion, Genaro explained that, in his opinion, the light rail is great for



the many people who need inexpensive transportation options.

India Plaza

Proprietor: Raveen Arora

Address: 1874 E. Apache Blvd., Tempe

Business Background

Raveen Arora is the owner of the India Plaza and Dhaba Restaurant located on East Apache Boulevard in Tempe. The restaurant is by the McClintock Drive and Apache Boulevard light rail stop, of which the India Plaza is a primary sponsor, having actively partnered with METRO throughout the station's planning and construction. The India Plaza was established in 2003, and Raveen, knowing then that light rail was on its way, chose the location for his restaurant accordingly.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

Raveen describes his Plaza as a "destination location" and explains that the light rail makes it easier for people to get there from all over the Valley. He extols the benefits of light rail bringing people from all cultures together and acting as a melting pot, referring to the wide variety of customers it brings into his business. He says that light rail brings more (and more diverse) customers because, "if they're thinking India, they think of his plaza." He's seen tour groups, families and other parties come in from the light rail, and has "definitely seen a spike in customers, especially diverse, non-Indian customers," thanks to the light rail.

Raveen speaks very positively about the light rail in general, mentioning the Portland, Oregon light rail in



hopes that people will use it more and, consequently, drive less.

Brad, on the other hand, thinks the rail has had numerous positive benefits on their business. For one thing, he says it has made their store more accessible to people coming from further away; instead of having to try and fit their bikes into an automobile (which may be especially difficult if they don't have a bike rack), customers can simply put their bikes on the light rail and get to Tempe Bicycle that way. The same thing goes for repairs—people can easily drop their bikes off at the shop to be taken care of and still get where they need to go."

comparison, saying that, "Phoenix needed something like [the light rail]." He says that the light rail "makes access easier, reduces bottlenecks and makes transportation more economical for commuters because, especially in these hard economic times, with gas prices the way they are, people would much rather ride the light rail and avoid traffic at the same time, while also being more productive."

Both men say that the light rail has been helpful for customers using their rental bikes. In particular, Brad spoke of customers coming from the Tempe Mission Palms Hotel and renting bikes.

From talking with his customers, Raveen says that they tend to praise the light rail for making it easier to get to his Plaza and around the Valley in general. Additionally, Raveen mentions that the light rail has helped clean up the area around his plaza, closing down seedy motels and other similar operations.

The Artisans' Gallery

Proprietor: Deborah Skinner

Address: 414 South Mill Ave., Suite 121, Tempe

Tempe Bicycle

Contacts: Bud Morrison, owner and Brad Levan, manager

Address: 715 South Rural Rd., Tempe

Business Background

Tempe Bicycle at South Rural Road is located within walking distance of the ASU campus and the University/Rural light rail stop. Its owner, Bud Morrison, and manager, Brad Levan, have slightly conflicting opinions about how much the light rail has impacted their business, but both are positive about the transportation line in general.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

Bud does not think the light rail has had a huge impact on his business one way or the other; however, he does think the rail is a good thing overall and



Business Background

The Artisans' Gallery, located at 414 South Mill Ave., showcases 100 different artists, featuring an eclectic gathering of local handcrafted jewelry and Arts. It originally opened in the spring of 2008, and is the only jewelry/art gallery of its kind on the famed Mill Avenue.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

"The light rail is quite beneficial," declares Deborah Skinner, artisan and owner of the independent store and gallery. "It definitely increases traffic and provides a service that visitors, local residents and students need."

Deborah highly recommends others to establish businesses close to the light rail line, explaining that it provides an "opportunity to have public transportation dropped at your doorstep, which is great." She speaks, in particular, of many customers who have taken trips along the light rail line to "see what's out there," having come from Tempe, Mesa and all along the rail line. She estimates that she probably gets more than a dozen people per week in her shop that took the light rail simply to try it out, and she knows this because she is curious about the demographics of her customer base, often inquiring of her customers whether they are visiting the Mill Avenue District for the first time, travelling from out of town, taking advantage of the light rail and/or the first hour free at the public parking areas, or simply live 'right around the corner' and are out for a stroll.

She says that customers she sees coming from the light rail range in age, anywhere from 20 to 70 years old, and that a good number of people come in with kids in strollers, because the spaciousness of the rail provides them with easy access and transportation.

The Mill Avenue light rail stop is located at the northern end of the street, and the Artisans' Gallery is a good 500 feet south of the stop; the fact that Deborah has seen a significant increase in business from the light rail highlights the benefits the rail line has brought to the entire Mill Avenue scene. For customers to make it to the Artisans' Gallery, they first have to pass by numerous other businesses along Mill, and based on Deborah's description of the customers she talks to who have come from the light rail, it's likely that these folks are casual shoppers who utilized the



light rail to get to Mill Avenue and explore the different shops and boutiques along the strip.

Deborah added a note, saying that she originally grew up on the east coast, so she's accustomed to vibrant public transportation systems like the Boston T and the Washington, D.C., Metro. She says she is happy to see that the Valley is finally getting 'on board' with the benefits of train transportation.

Monti's La Casa Vieja Steakhouse

Proprietor: Michael Monti

Address: 100 South Mill Ave., Tempe

Business Background

Michael Monti is the owner of Monti's La Casa Vieja Steakhouse, a full service casual steakhouse that has been in his family since 1954. The Steakhouse enjoys a vibrant history, with a claim to fame that the great Sen. Carl Hayden was born in the very same building now occupied by La Casa Vieja.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

Michael admits that despite the toll the economic recession has taken on his business, the light rail has benefitted and continues to benefit La Casa Vieja.

One thing he talks about is how the light rail provides easy access to downtown Phoenix and all the events therein—he talks about how any event in downtown Phoenix is now "our event" due to the accessibility to the light rail and ease of transportation it provides. Michael "believes the light rail has increased the syn-



As a self-described “food and beverage guy,” Michael highlighted the facilitation light rail provides for pub crawls, scavenger hunts, line-hopping, and other sorts of activities—entirely new ways people are finding to spend money and entertain themselves—all of which benefit establishments like his.

He also talks about the simple connection the rail provides between his restaurant and attractions like the Arizona Science Center and the Heard Museum, enabling customers to travel back and forth between these locations easily.

One unexpected boon the light rail has brought to La Casa Vieja is ‘geriatric tourism,’ as he describes it: senior citizens who come from retirement communities as far away as Power Road in Mesa. Michael says that they’ll often rent a van collectively, stop at the park and ride, ride the light rail all over the Valley, and then finish the day at his Steakhouse for dinner. Additionally, Michael talks about patrons of his who live in Phoenix and hadn’t been able to go to La Casa for years, but are now able to, thanks to the light rail.

Michael and Eddie, his manager and co-owner, also extol the benefits of light rail for his employees, especially the students. They talk about the huge amounts of traffic brought by special events like the P.F. Chang’s Rock and Roll Marathon.

Michael reiterates the fact that he’s grateful to be located close to the light rail line because if gas prices start to go up (as he imagines they very well might), people are going to increasingly want to live close to public transportation.

ergy between downtown Phoenix and Tempe, so that significant events on either end of the Phoenix or downtown Tempe segments can increase retail traffic at the other station[s].” He also notes that hotels tend to have higher occupancies when events and trade shows are taking place, which in turns benefits his business.

Furthermore, Michael refers to the “obvious and interesting dynamic between social media” and the light rail, talking about the “large group of ‘new urbanites’ who organize their social lives around the rail line,” thus increasing the customer frequency for those businesses in close proximity to the rail line. In particular, he talked about the relationship he has formed through Twitter with people like Nick Bastian of Rail-life, who maintains a social site that bills itself as “your resource for all that is light rail in Arizona” and lists restaurants and other destinations along the rail line.

Michael believes the light rail is creating a corridor of higher density living that attracts people who want a non-suburban lifestyle. He describes himself as conservative, and a former light rail skeptic, and although he doesn’t believe all the marketing he sees in favor of light rail, he does believe that it: a) concentrates development so that future residents don’t have to drive as much; b) brings residents a whole new cultural subset that they otherwise wouldn’t have; and c) brings in new economic players, new types of residences, and new careers.

Furthermore, he “tends to believe that all future growth patterns are changed [by light rail], and that people are going to deliberately move around the line.”



The Marquee Theatre/Lucky Man Concerts

Contact: Tom Lapenna, Talent Buyer

Address: 730 N. Mill Ave., Tempe

Business Background

The Marquee Theater, located by the Center Parkway and Washington light rail stop, is owned by Lucky Man Concerts, Inc. Tom Lapenna is Lucky Man's sole owner and talent buyer. Recently, they have been surveying their customers to see how concert-goers are travelling to shows and have come up with some interesting, albeit varied, results.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

Tom can account for varied light rail use by the different genre of music, demographic and age of the patrons. As an example of how light rail use varies, he says that on one sell-out night, out of 1,500 concert attendees, 175—over 10 percent of the total audience—got to the Marquee by light rail. In contrast, on a different evening, out of 800 concert-goers, only 5 took the light rail. Lucky Man has not yet analyzed their results, but the numbers are interesting.

In general, Tom thinks favorably of the light rail, although he doesn't think it's helped his business tremendously. He likes that it provides options for his patrons so they have more choices on how to attend concerts and other events, and thinks that, in general, having your business near a light rail stop will help the business.

Brooklyn NYC Pizza

Owner: Mike Shaw

Address: 144 E. Washington St., Phoenix

Business Background

Brooklyn NYC Pizza is a pizza restaurant located at 144 E. Washington St., right by the Washington and 3rd Street light rail stop and within minutes of the Phoenix Convention Center, Chase Field and U.S. Airways Arena by foot. This prime location yields a great deal of foot traffic coming to and from numerous events and games in the downtown Phoenix area, all of which has been significantly boosted by the light rail, according to Mike Shaw, the eatery's owner.



Impact of Light Rail on Business

"I used to be able to make it to every game by half-time," says Shaw. "Now I'm lucky to get there by the third quarter, if at all." Shaw explains that Brooklyn NYC Pizza has been steadily doing more business each year for the past four since it opened, especially since the light rail's installation. He even said his business was helped by the construction, since construction workers would often come to his establishment for a slice of pizza for lunch.

Overall, Mike unhesitatingly says he "loves the light rail, even the new wraps and advertisements they're doing;" he lauded the Suns' ticket-share program (i.e. fans can use their game ticket stubs to ride the light rail without having to pay any additional ridership fee) and extolled the benefits of being able to take the light rail if planning to drink, thus eliminating potential drinking-and-driving scenarios. He did mention that the Suns chipped in 31 cents or so per attendee at their games for the ticket-share program, and expressed a desire for the Diamondbacks to do the same thing, noting that he saw the most Diamondbacks-related business this past summer and equating said business to the light rail's influence.

Mike said that the light rail helps create an awareness of his business, so even if people don't necessarily stop, they pass by and note the pizza shop for potential future patronage. That's not to say that they don't also patronize the business, however.

"I can see people coming from the light rail," Mike explains. "From a big crowd of around 50 or 60, maybe 10 will peel off and come get some pizza." Furthermore, he continued, especially during the 'snowbird'



season, riding the rail is a “big adventure” and regular contingents of senior citizens will come in around once a month or so. Mike has even designed his advertising to particularly catch people coming off the light rail, announcing specials in large print so as to draw customers in—and it’s definitely been working, he says.

“I don’t want to give the false impression that light rail has taken us off the charts sales-wise, but it’s definitely helped,” says Mike. Additionally, he says that he’s seen a lot of travelling going on along the light rail line, having witnessed people walking by from the Hyatt going toward the airport and other such destinations. “It’s not unusual,” explains Mike, “for people to come into the restaurant and ask where’s downtown, where’s the action? So I tell them to jump on the light rail and go to Mill Avenue.” He also says that he and his wife live in Phoenix but sometimes take the light rail toward Mill to find fun places to go, happy hour specials and the like.

Phoenix Public Market/ Community Food Connections

Contact Person: Cynthia ‘Cindy’ Gentry

Address: 14 E. Pierce/721 N. Central, Phoenix

Business Background

Cynthia “Cindy” Gentry is the Executive Director of Community Food Connections (CFC), which operates the Phoenix Public Market. CFC is a non-profit organization that works to increase access to healthy food, particularly for underserved, low-income families, children and seniors, while at the same time keep-

ing farmers and our agricultural heritage viable and making the connection between producers and consumers more immediate. All of CFC’s programs work to create revenue and income for producers while increasing access to nutrition and building community.

Community Food Connections was started in 2002, planning and studies for the market began in 2003, and the open-air market debuted in 2005. The location for the Phoenix Public Market was chosen after a series of national studies helped to determine the prime spot for a market that would have good visibility, access to the freeway, be surrounded by historic neighborhoods, be close to the business community and a variety of other factors.

Despite the down economy, the Market has been continually growing—even in the current recession, sales are up 24 percent compared to where they were last year. Cindy attributes this, once again, to a variety of factors, including but not limited to “a huge and willing group of partners who have good will and know-how and interest to help them; a huge amount of collaborators from the downtown Phoenix partnership, to the Phoenix community alliance, to the vendors themselves,” along with a lot of hard work and good people who simply see the Market as an asset, want it to thrive, and are willing to help accordingly.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

Cindy thinks the light rail is “very cool” and “part of the future.” She says that the Roosevelt Avenue light rail stop near her market is one of the busiest and she attributes the Market to at least part of that, citing an *Arizona Republic* article that she believes said the same thing. She also explained that, at first, she could tell when people were coming from the light rail because they often used the golden Sacajewea coin dollars, although there don’t appear to be as many in the light rail machines any more.

She views her Market as part of a revitalization effort that she didn’t know was going to happen—the opening of the Market has coincided perfectly with the new trend toward open-air markets and supporting local businesses and communities.

Furthermore, Cindy feels that the light rail has played and will continue to play a key role in all of this. She describes it as “part of a livable, sustainable city,”

which she says is more involved than simply “being close to light rail.”

“You have to figure out how to make streets walkable and connected, and get some life on them—everything is chicken-and-egg,” explains Gentry.

In particular, Cindy describes the light rail as having helped her business with signage and event and activity promotions. She mentioned the benefits for people coming to the Market from Tempe and Scottsdale, including ASU students who come from the main campus to volunteer. She also talked about her aunt, whom she described as a “really scary driver” and said that the only reason she can actually come to the market is because she can use the park-and-ride, then take the light rail.

In conclusion, Cindy talks about being from Chicago, a city where “public transportation works.” She thinks that “light rail, high-speed passenger rail and commuter trains are going to be the savior of whomever didn’t plan this city and created sprawl. We need density to have a great city, and to have density, we need public transportation.”

The George and Dragon

Contact Person: Keith Jackson, General Manager

Address: 4240 N. Central Ave., Phoenix

Business Background

The George and Dragon is an English restaurant and pub, located at 4240 N. Central Ave. in Phoenix, right by the Central Avenue and Indian School Road light rail stop. Keith Jackson, the General Manager, describes himself as initially being against the light rail—in fact, he even wrote articles for the Phoenix Magazine’s ‘Inkslinger’ column scorning the light rail.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

Despite his initial misgivings, Jackson now describes himself as a light rail advocate. He says that, since the rail’s construction, he can watch people come from the light rail stop into the George and Dragon—and he’s seen larger streams of people come in on the weekends and evenings, witnessing in one night approximately 60 people coming to his bar from the light rail. Jackson says that he uses the rail himself and

that it brings a lot of people from the eastern part of the valley, who wouldn’t normally make the drive to Phoenix, for recreational purposes from bar-hopping and pub crawls to concerts and theater-going.

Jackson says that, despite the fact that the George and Dragon is generally doing less business now than it was several years ago, he attributes this factor to the economy and says that overall, the light rail has been good for his business in numerous ways. For one thing, he says it has pumped life into the community on 7th Avenue near his bar, which in turn has chased out the “riff-raff” and fixed up the homes in the area, none of which are bad things, in his opinion.

Furthermore, Jackson believes that the light rail has given the downtown Phoenix area more of a “metropolitan feel,” which he also considers a good thing.

Antiques on Central

Contact Person: Doris Leis, Co-Owner

Address: 5037 N. Central Ave., Phoenix

Business Background

Doris Leis is one of the three present owners of Antiques on Central, an upscale antique mall with 75 dealers under one roof and 16,000 square feet of space. The gallery is located at 5037 N. Central Ave., right by the Central Avenue and Camelback light rail stop. An antique store had been at this location for about 22 years, but Antiques on Central itself was formed 2 and a half years ago by its three current partners: Doris, Sylvia and Cliff.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

In the beginning, all three owners had quite negative impressions of the light rail; however, on the very first day of the light rail’s service, two couples came to the antique shop from Mesa, describing Antiques on Central as the destination that provided them the excuse to travel the light rail line. Doris was truly surprised by this, but certainly not unhappy. She admits that she can’t say a lot of people ride to Antiques on Central by the light rail, but some people—like the aforementioned two couples—do make a point of using the light rail to get to a particular destination, such as her shop, and she said that those people have enjoyed their experience.

Doris also talked about one employee, Randy, who rides the light rail to work every day. Lacking peripheral vision, Randy cannot drive, so the light rail is truly ideal for him. He praises the light rail for being dependable, comfortable and affordable, noting that although the fare is the same as for the bus, the timing for the light rail is better and he enjoys the experience more overall. Doris described this as a win-win situation, because it provides a much-needed service for Randy and allows her to hire somebody who can't drive on his own.

Randy went on to further extol the benefits of light rail in being expandable (i.e. more cars can be added during high-volume events such as ball games, conferences, etc.) He said that when he goes to a ball game, his wife will park the car and they'll hop on the rail. Randy explained that, like Doris, he was nervous about the initial expense of the light rail, but he "thinks they did a pretty good job" and overall is happy they installed it.

Doris mentioned her fondness of the Central corridor in general, through which a significant portion of the light rail line runs, and she reiterated that, "despite being negative about the light rail at first, I now think it's a wonderful thing."

Practical Art

Proprietor: Jane Reddin

Address: 5070 N. Central Ave., Phoenix

Business Background

Practical Art is a gallery that sells, on behalf of local artists, hand-made local items that are usable, functional and practical. It is a unique sort of business whose wares include items such as pottery, knit-ware and furniture, amongst other pieces. It is located on Central Avenue, within walking distance of the Central Avenue and Camelback light rail station.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

Jane Reddin, the owner of Practical Art, chose the location of her business in large part because of its proximity to the light rail. She knew that the Central Avenue and Camelback light rail station was going to spur development and interest in the area—and she has not regretted her decision.



Photo courtesy of Lisa Olson

"[The Central Avenue and Camelback] intersection has really benefitted in particular. Since Practical Art opened, lots of other spots have opened—the vitality at this intersection really has a lot to do with the light rail stop being there," says Jane.

Furthermore, as she personally lives near the Encanto and Central Avenue light rail stop, she's always been interested in the idea of having an easy commute to work, which the light rail now provides for her.

Overall, Jane says she's very happy with the light rail and is pleased that it's had even larger ridership numbers than were predicted. She says that even though people tend not to buy very much when they're riding the train, they'll often come back and make a purchase later, so she doesn't mind and is happy for the business and the exposure.

By her estimation, about 20 to 30 percent of light rail traffic actually winds up in a sale for her. She says that many of her customers coming from the light rail have ridden it all the way from Mesa, and often are visiting her store for the first time. Sometimes they'll "pop in to check out" Practical Art while in the area going to a nearby restaurant, and will often return at a later date to make a purchase.

Jane definitely recommends that others establish businesses close to the light rail, as she thinks that it's always good for business to be in a location with a sense of vitality and lots going on—being near a light rail stop automatically does that in her opinion. Along these lines, she spoke of evening events Practical Art sponsors, particularly around First Fridays—customers will drive to Practical Art, then ride the rail down to Roosevelt Row to participate in the festivities.

AMF Christown Lanes

Contact Person: Pat Cook, General Manager

Address: 1919 W. Bethany Home Rd., Phoenix

Business Background

Pat Cook is the General Manager of AMF Lanes at the end of the light rail line, near the 19th Avenue and Montebello stop. AMF Lanes is a 48-lane bowling center with a full bar and snack bar. The bowling alley was established in the 1950s and has its established league base to thank for the majority of its business. Of this base, Pat said that she knows of a few who do take the light rail regularly, especially some seniors amongst the population.

Impact of Light Rail on Business

Overall, Pat thinks the light rail is good, despite some initial misgivings she had. Pat now praises the light rail for having cleaned up the area around her bowling alley and helping to get rid of some of the litter and litter-causing agents in the vicinity. She said that she would recommend others to establish their businesses closer to the light rail line as opposed to further away, because it provides easy access for people to get to their businesses, both in terms of employees and potential customers.

In particular, Pat said that the light rail has helped the business of the bowling alley by bringing in large crowds of ASU students, sometimes coming from downtown in groups as big as 25 to 30. She spoke very positively about her own first light rail experience at the beginning of February 2009, relating a



story about riding the rail downtown for a conference. Pat praised the rail for being “easy, clean and full;” she said she rode it during rush hour and had a very good, very positive experience. “The price was good,” Pat said, “and I’d do it again. It beats looking for parking!” In total, 20 employees from her company travelled downtown for the conference, and she spoke of one man who drove in from Mesa and had to pay \$30 for parking. “To go downtown it’s wonderful because you don’t have to deal with parking,” explained Pat.

Pat said that she thinks it would be great if the light rail extended all the way out to Glendale, especially to the Cardinals stadium. She said that especially in regards to people who like to drink and socialize before games, the light rail would really be beneficial for everyone.

Conclusion: Keep Light Rail On Schedule

The businesses presented in this report have benefitted in numerous ways from being located near the light rail line. Local businesses have seen new customers come through their doors for a variety of different reasons related to the light rail—from riding the line for the first time and exploring the points of interest to which the light rail provides access, to coming to their establishment as a particular destination on the light rail line, to stopping by on their way to some other attraction.

In addition to the economic benefits illustrated in this document, the light rail represents a strong initial step Arizona has taken toward a 21st century transportation solution that moves us forward while creating jobs and reducing the amount of time we spend

Methodology

While the business owners interviewed are not intended to be a scientific sampling of business owners in Arizona, care was made to identify and select a cross section of businesses who represent various different types of establishments from retail stores to restaurants to service providers, spanning the entire geographic length of the light rail line to ensure representation from every part of Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa along the line. To conduct the interviews, we approached the proprietors of businesses along the

in traffic, our dependence on oil, and the pollution we spew into the air. Light rail serves as a shining beacon for Arizona, demonstrating that public transportation can be efficient and popular as well as exceed ridership expectations.

Yet, in spite of benefits that the light rail line has provided for businesses, local decisionmakers have cut public transportation budgets and the light rail line expansion has been postponed.

The Arizona PIRG Education Fund hopes the business examples provided in this report will serve as encouragement for our public officials to commit to the light rail's expansion and completion according to plan, without further delays.

light rail line and asked if they were willing to be interviewed for this report. We also reached out to several people particularly involved in the local business community for good suggestions of business owners to approach.

Each interview was conducted either over the phone or with the business owners face-to-face in their establishment. The information gathered during these interviews was edited so as to be properly incorporated within the specific format of this report.

**Arizona PIRG Education Fund
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