Types of Rail Transit Systems and the Movement of College Educated Young Adults into the Center of Large American Cities

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Hypothesis 1: Cities with light and/or heavy rail systems will experience a larger increase in the percent of young college graduates moving close-in than cities with old commuter rail systems (legacy).

Hypothesis 2: Cities with recently built commuter rail systems (new start) will experience a larger increase in the percent of young college graduates moving close-in than cities with old commuter rail systems (legacy).

Hypothesis 3: Controlling for city size and percent white, the presence of light rail and/or heavy rail will predict an increase in the percent of college graduates 25-34 living close-in.

Recent Investments in Urban Rail
1. Between 1975 and 1999 capital expenditures for rail transit grew from 1. From 2000 and 2012, the percent of young college educated adults living close-in could be due to the demographics and size of the cities rather than the presence of light rail.

New start commuter rail and most light rail systems were built after 1975—a time when urban renewal and the first wave of post-war suburbanization had ended. Cities with new start commuter rail have attracted a greater increase in the percent of young college graduates living close-in than those with legacy rail systems. We created a new variable (recent rail) by adding the cities with a new commuter rail system to those with a recent light rail system. This variable replaced light rail in the model. The beta for the recent rail variable was not significantly greater than zero for light rail.

Topped together these results are consistent with the widely held belief that rail systems will lure higher income individuals into the inner city. But clearly more studies are needed, as it seems likely that light rail affects location choices and related development under some conditions and not others.

References