

Network Effects Paper
Prof. Clay Shirky
Yonatan Kelib
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Comparison between Amtrak and Private Passenger Vehicles (PPV)

I chose these two forms of transportation networks because of my extensive travels over the past few years. I traveled from the East Coast to the West Coast with some friends for almost two months by car in order to do some sightseeing after my graduation from college. A few years later, I decided to also take the same trip using Amtrak going from one city to another until I reached San Francisco. From my own personal experiences, I would like to share with you some of the advantages and disadvantages of using either one of these networks.

PPV vehicles and Amtrak are both public transportation, but only Amtrak is mass transportation. Amtrak and private passenger vehicles both cost money, but only Amtrak is flat rate based on pre-selected destination point (the end-user through their ticket purchase partially pays for a portion of Amtraks operating costs), while the transportation cost (fuel and maintenance) for a PPV is calculated by the end user's personal destination selection and is the sole responsibility of the PPV owner. Riders wait for Amtrak to arrive and leave on a pre-set schedule but PPV owners can arrange their own travel schedules. Certain amenities are provided for in Amtrak that would require the PPV owners to stop and use. There is higher cost for Amtrak to the end user over PPV but this is due to the higher level of convenience experienced by the end user.

Here are some basic facts about the infrastructure and use of these two transportation networks. Amtrak transports passengers to over 500 communities in 46 states and even has routes serving Canada. It covers a total of 22,000 miles and serves over 25 million passengers as of 2005. Amtrak is a quasi-government agency in the process of becoming a private entity and has over the years seen a decrease in passengers due to increased competition from the airlines industry and PPVs.

In order to understand the importance of PPVs in the U.S transportation network, we must be aware that there are 250 million private passenger vehicles in the U.S as of 2004 and they travel over 160,000 square miles of networked freeways. The PPVs have been responsible for redefining the American landscape and enabling the creation of networked urban centers and shaping the society we live in and influencing our lives and actions.

Advantages/ Disadvantages of Amtrak:

The advantages of Amtrak over PPV are safety, comfort, and efficiency in time, cheaper. Overall the end user pays more for the higher level of convenience/ accommodations that Amtrak can offer versus a PPV for either short or long term trips. Another advantage is efficiency in the use of time to another with less traffic congestion energy conservation/ pollution reduction when using mass form of transportation such as Amtrak.

The disadvantages of Amtrak over PPV include limited destinations, lack of flexibility when it comes to time constraints for end user, as well as, a greater chance of life threatening injuries if a railway accident occurs.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Private Passenger Vehicles:

The advantages of PPV over Amtrak include more destination selections, ease of travel restrictions, clearly marked roads and information, use of such support groups such as AAA for roadside assistance. The disadvantages of PPV over Amtrak include transportation cost (fuel and maintenance cost), traffic congestion, overall time spent navigating from one selected destination to another.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, both networks are truly critical to the overall transportation network system within the U.S and have helped form the very nation we live in today. While it is true that the passenger railway system has seen a decline in passengers over the past few years, it proved its importance especially after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, as it continued to function while the airline industry halted its services for several days.

I personally find both transportation networks to be highly efficient depending on the end users needs and can be used to compliment the shortcoming of the other. The overall issue of cost versus convenience is truly illustrated in the comparison of these two networks but it is only the end user who can decide which is of more importance to him or her.