As cities across the nation continue to grow, a big question looms. How do they sustain growth, boost quality of life, and counter traffic and congestion — ensuring opportunity and prosperity for future generations?

Interest has grown for transportation solutions that move more people more effectively and many are now realizing the enormous competitive advantage of being able to offer a range of transportation options, including robust and well-designed public transportation systems.

At a recent urban design forum hosted by METRO for employees, panelists explored how good urban design can enhance the transit experience and draw more people to use public transportation.

"Implementing good design practices can advance the quality of life and
Panelist Natalia Berdyukova-Beard, a principal designer for SWA, an international landscape architecture, urban design, and planning firm, has worked on several international and local projects including Downtown's Avenida Houston and METRO's Arts in Transit program.

"Plazas, streets, parks, these are public places where people come together," said Berdyukova-Beard. "We can reclaim these spaces through better design and beautification, making them more productive and enjoyable for the public."

Panelist John Clegg, a principal designer for Page Southerland Page, whose award-winning work includes many high-profile private and public sector projects throughout the world, noted METRO's potential to further connect communities.

"METRO covers the whole city. When planning projects that can link and tie the city together, transit can have as powerful an impact as Bayou Greenways and other success stories that are redefining Houston. That, to me, is the potential energy METRO brings," said Clegg.

Inviting, vibrant places have one thing in common. They're designed for people. Beautiful pedestrian-friendly esplanades, safe intersections, connectivity to bike...
Designing for People: Proposed redesign of 110-Underpass, in Los Angeles, CA, shows how people-centered urban design can make public spaces more functional and enjoyable.

lanes and trails, comfortable transit stops and shelters, accessibility for wheelchairs and strollers, and stimulating landscapes are features that can make transit facilities more attractive to riders new and old.

"These are elements that can influence whether or not someone decides to use transit," added Lockett. "As urban designers, we constantly ask ourselves, how do we better our cities and make them incredible destinations to live, work and play? How do we bring life and vibrancy to what is, all too often, a drab and lifeless space?"

The potential of transit to help create vibrant, people-centered spaces is immense. Transit is woven into the fabric of cities, giving millions access to jobs, education, health care, and other opportunities. Well-designed stops, transit centers, and transit corridors can be more than just places to wait for a bus or train. They can be enriching spaces for everyday life.