



## PORTO ALEGRE: PUBLIC TRANSPORT JEWEL?

FAST FACTS	Porto Alegre	Similar To
Metropolitan (Labor Market) Population	3,700,000	Seattle, Montreal
Urbanized Area* Population	2,850,000	Phoenix, Barcelona
Urbanized Land Area: Square Miles	320	McAllen (TX), Edmonton, Belo Horizonte, Adelaide
Urbanized Land Area: Square Kilometers	829	
Population per Square Mile	8,900	Buenos Aires, Birmingham, Madrid
Population per Square Kilometer	3,400	
Capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul 4 <sup>th</sup> largest metropolitan area in Brazil		
*Continuously built up area		

Porto Alegre is a delightful urban area. It is a long, linear city, stretching 20 miles (more than 30 kilometers) from the city itself to Novo Hamburgo and beyond. It is a bipolar city. The largest employment center is Centro, in Porto Alegre, but the center of Novo Hamburgo is also significant. As the name implies, there was much German immigration to this area in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is reputed that there are communities near Porto Alegre where German rivals Portuguese as the language of choice. This is also evident in the modern, new, tastefully designed air terminal, where much German is heard.

Porto Alegre is tied up with the Gaucho past of cattle ranching, as in Argentina. I was fortunate to be in the city at the end of a Gaucho festival that featured unusually large quantities of red meat. Fritz sold me the equipment for making “Matte,” the green tea of southern Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina. Maybe I will be more successful in actually brewing it than when I bought the last set with my digital daughter in Buenos Aires.

Public transport in Porto Alegre seems to exhibit both the best and the worst in policy. Porto Alegre may have the most advanced busway system in the world. Currently six busways operate, and one more will operate in 2004. The buses are unsubsidized and much of the service is privately owned. Buses are “platooned” as they leave downtown (not connected together, as in the past), so that those going on the same routes arrive at the bus stops at the same time, making it possible to have long platforms for boarding. World Bank data indicates that busway ridership is higher in Porto Alegre than in Curitiba. But the system, perhaps more effective than that of Curitiba, is not nearly so obvious. This is because Porto Alegre does not have the same iron-fisted planning policies, so that the city and its suburbs have more of the appearance of a normal Brazilian urban area. High-rise condominiums are generally found in the core, but not neatly placed in serpentine fashion along the busways. Further, there is a trend toward what are referred to as “horizontal condominiums,” which would be called “town houses” in the United States (the modern incarnation of row houses).

Like so many urban areas with limited funds, Porto Alegre has an expensive one-route rail system and seeks to build another. The first line, which operates from Novo Hamburgo in the north to central Porto Alegre, was projected to carry nearly 600,000 daily riders by 2000. The

actual number was 150,000. And now the consultants say that if the second line is built, overall ridership will be 450,000 daily. In this dubious regard, Porto Alegre needs take no back seat to the consultants who have concocted wildly optimistic projections to justify urban rail systems in Australia, Canada, the United States and Europe. It seems the nature of the profession. Of course the reward will be that after paying dearly for more than is needed, taxpayers will get to pay an annual operating deficit that is today 60 percent. This is in a city with one of the best bus systems in the world, and one not subsidized by federal, state or local taxpayers.

Why Porto Alegre, facing considerable economic uncertainty, needs to consider a \$600 million expansion of the rail system that will probably cost three times that much is as inexplicable as the justification for light rail in Phoenix or San Jose. But it is different here. In Phoenix and San Jose, few suffer the consequences of the distorted overinvestments, because they all have cars. In Porto Alegre, however, where bus services are not subsidized, unnecessary expenditure of money on fashionable, but extravagant rail could require public service sacrifices that might be felt. Such may be the cost of an industry run for the benefit of its vendors.

One does not see the extent of poverty in Porto Alegre that is apparent in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte or Manaus. Favelas appear to be few and though there is a large one on the motorway to Novo Hamburgo. The middle-income neighborhoods are more pleasing in appearance, rather like in Curitiba. The impression one gets, rightly or wrongly, is that Porto Alegre may have, all in all, among the most evenly spread prosperity for the greatest number of people of any urban area in Brazil. It could even better if future public investment decisions are better than in the past.



Porto Alegre



Porto Alegre



Centro



Busway and Station



Motorway between Porto Alegre and Novo Hamburgo



Novo Hamburgo



Aeroporto Terminal Interior



Shopping in Porto Alegre

Return: [www.demographia.com/rac-ix.htm](http://www.demographia.com/rac-ix.htm)

Home: [www.demographia.com](http://www.demographia.com)