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ANDREW REVKIN

January 31, 2008, 9:30 AM

Managing Traffic in the Urban Age

By ANDREW C. REVKIN

The human species is, at this moment, in the process of becoming a mainly urban animal after a thousand generations spent mainly in rural conditions. Many economists and sociologists see this trend as our potential salvation in a world heading toward 9 billion people, although there are some big ifs.

Video

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Urban life can be productive and satisfying and is almost always much more efficient in terms of energy and land use. Families are smaller. Incomes can rise quicker. Wealth builds from the concentration of capital and enterprise. Pollution is concentrated, too, but that makes it easier to clean up once incomes grow enough to pay for municipal services. (That hasn't happened yet in many developing-country cities.)

Then things can kick back. Prosperity in the 21st century almost always comes with an expectation of freedom of movement, increasingly in cars, as people abandon crowded buses or balky trains. Add that to the vast flow of goods trucked through cities and you get paralysis.

I explored the problem, and solutions, in several interviews this week with experts on New York City's traffic woes.

Gridlock already is estimated by some experts to cost New York City up to $20 billion a year in lost productivity. India's cities are mired in traffic. China is seeing ever more millions abandon bicycles in favor of autos. We're heading toward a world of a billion cars sometime around 2020.

Residents in Los Angeles have extended their lives into their cars, putting on makeup, watching TV, holding business meetings behind the wheel as they snake along.

Traffic has become so normal that reports on its ebbs and clots are often

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ABOUT DOT EARTH

By 2050 or so, the world population is expected to reach nine billion, essentially adding two Chinas to the number of people alive today. Those billions will be seeking food, water and other resources on a planet where, scientists say, humans are already shaping climate and the web of life. In Dot Earth, which recently moved from the news side of The Times to the Opinion section, Andrew C. Revkin examines efforts to balance human affairs with the planet's limits. Conceived in part with support from a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, Dot Earth tracks relevant developments from suburbia to Siberia. The blog is an interactive exploration of trends and ideas with readers and experts.

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Video
warming Greenland

CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

bundled on news radio with weather forecasts. But city managers and planners say traffic is not a force of nature and must be managed in a crowding world.

So how do you have a prosperous city and not have it choke on its own wealth? One way is to make drivers pay as they go, charging hefty fees when cars or trucks cross into cities' most crowded streets.

The same technology that allows 24/7 surveillance in broad swathes of London and Manhattan and has smoothed the rides of commuters on highways with EZ Pass systems can be tailored to charge for congestion, block by block. (The privacy issue is a separate matter.)

New York City, prompted by Mayor Michael Bloomberg, is moving haltingly toward establishing such a system, following London, Singapore, Stockholm, and Milan. Details are online here.

Political battles between outlying boroughs and suburbs – where car culture is stronger – and city planners desperate to unclog streets could make New York's congestion-pricing effort drag on a good while longer.

Right now, tolling is set up in ways that just make things worse, said Sam Schwartz, a former New York City transportation commissioner, also known as "Gridlock Sam," who is now a consultant. "If you are a trucker and you want to go from Brooklyn to New Jersey and you've got six or eight axles, you will pay in excess of $50 to go on highways that were designed for you," he told me. "Or we'll invite you in for free. Go over the 100-year-old Manhattan Bridge that's twisitng and cracking, and rumble across Canal Street, bounce through Chinatown and Soho, head up Hudson Street to Eighth Avenue and go out the Lincoln tunnel and we'll charge you zero. It's insane, our pricing system."

But most experts say it's inevitable that drivers in the urban age will have to start paying for the hidden costs of the congestion they create.

Some proposals take things further. The philanthropist and longtime labor mediator Ted Kheel assembled a team last year that has a plan to charge much higher fees than those proposed by Mr. Bloomberg, raising enough money — more than $2 billion a year — to make subways and buses free. You can read it here and explore an interactive spreadsheet showing how it could work.

Do you live in or around a city, and if so how do you get to work? Would you take a train or bus if traffic thinned out? Should drivers essentially pay for transit riders?

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1. January 31, 2008 10:43 am

Link

I think there's a good chance we have already hit the limits for current design answers.

There may be useful lessons in the history of cities already available to us. Would we build a city today like 17th Century London? Wandering alleys; open sewers, no fire departments? We'd shudder.

Modern mega-cities have already grown past current capabilities to make them safe and durable.

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- Thirsty Giant, India and water
- The Future of Calamity

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A Planet in Flux
Andrew C. Revkin began exploring the human impact on the environment nearly 30 years ago. An early stop was Papeete, Tahiti. This narrated slide show describes his extensive travels.

VIDEO »

More Video | Multimedia »

We need new paradigms here- and possibly new cities- built from scratch; like London after the Great Fire. It will probably not be fun.

— *Greenpa*

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2. January 31, 2008 10:50 am

Link

I live in the western suburbs of Chicago and work downtown. I take Metra, the suburban commuter line. The cost of a monthly ticket is very competitive when compared to the cost of driving and parking. The only problem with this is that my actual office is a 20 minute walk from the train station.

That's actually a good thing most days, but when you have a downpour or nasty winter weather, it's impossible to get a cab and the CTA buses are actually slower when you add in the time waiting for them than walking.

Adding up the trip to the train station, the train ride itself and the walk from the station to work, it's usually a 90 minute commute each way.

But that's better than a 90 minute drive because you can actually do other things, taking work on the train, reading the news, or simply taking a nap (if you're one who sleeps in public).

As it is, drivers and taxpayers in general already pay significant parts of the cost of the public transportation system. First, there's the federal grants to states, which come from either income taxes or federal fuel surcharges. Those are matched by the state and local governments who get their funding from the state income tax and sales taxes. Then there is the transit benefit, which allows riders to set aside the cost of commuting (including the parking!) out of our paychecks without paying FICA and Medicare or federal and state income taxes. So for a $100 monthly ticket we only have to earn $100 of salary. Without that break, it would take $155.40 in earnings for someone at the 25% federal marginal rate to afford the same ticket.

Given all the other subsidies, including federal grants for capital expenditures, my $100 is probably supplemented by more than $100 of government spending taxed from others who don't enjoy the service.

Congestion pricing would probably drive more people, especially at the low end of the income scale, to take advantage of public transportation options, but that would also require additional subsidies since ticket sales would not pay for the service increases that would be required to accommodate the additional demand. That means higher taxes on non-users, including some taxes that are regressive in nature.

The problem with that is that many people who pay those taxes can't take advantage of public transportation. And many who would be forced to pay the congestion pricing would be unable to avoid doing so.

If we're going to do congestion pricing, we also need to consider raising the cost of riding public transportation (and using income based discounts). Making the rides free creates a perverse situation where people at the extreme low end are paying taxes to subsidize the rides of wealthy people.

Our Governor in Illinois (who is an abject failure) recently used his veto authority to coerce the legislature to give free rides to senior citizens. The legislation that was held up was an attempt to resolve funding shortfalls. So this sort of "solution" creates additional problems.

Convoluted as all of that is, I hope it made some sense…

— *A3k*

VIDEO

Dot Earth on YouTube

NORTH POLE
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Many of the videos featured here can be found on Andrew Revkin's channel on YouTube. Recent reader favorites:

- Dr. James Hansen
- Local Cooking
- 41 Days at the North Pole
- Cuttlefish Camouflage

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- Environmental Journalism Today (SEJ.org)
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- Scientific American Blog
- Climate Feedback
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- New Scientist Environment Blog
- Physics Today News Picks
- Living on Earth (radio)
- Environment Report (radio)
- Environmental Capital (WSJ)
- Energy Outlook
- The Oil Drum
- Planet DFW (Dallas/Ft. Worth)
- PDX Green (Portland, Ore.)

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- The Academy of Sciences for the Developing World
- Science and Innovation for Sustainable Development
- The Pimm Group
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- Consilience Journal (Columbia U., student-edited)
- Squatter City
- TVE Asia Pacific
- NextBillion.net
- Appropriate Infrastructure Development Group
- Chemists Without Borders
- YaleGlobal Online
- Design that Matters
- Planetizen — The Planning and Development Network
- TedBlog
- Sustainable Design
- Inhabitat
- Private Sector Develoment Blog

MEDIA AND ENVIRONMENT

- Environmental Journalism Today
- The Observatory (CJR)
- Environmental Journalism Now
- Developing Radio
- EarthJournalism.org
- Knight Science Journalism Tracker
- Framing Science
- Yale Climate Media Forum

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- Plenty Magazine Blogs
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- Animal Ethics
- The Ethicurean
- Switchboard (NRDC)
- Energy Smart
- ClimateProgress
- DeSmogBlog
- This Sphere
- Eco-Compass Blog

ANALYSIS AND POLICY

- Electronic Journal of Sustainable Development
- Population Counts
- Terrain – A Journal of the Built and Natural Environments
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- Energy Policy Blog
- The Breakthrough Blog
- ClimateEthics.org
- Climatepolicy.org
- Commontragedies.wordpress.com
- The Intersection
- SciencePoliticsClimate Blog
- Set America Free

FREE-MARKET ADVOCATES, "SKEPTICS," INDUSTRY VIEWS

- World Climate Report
- Hit & Run (Reason)
- Shop Floor
- ClimateAudit.org
- Climate Debate Daily
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January 31

Can Video Move the Public on Climate?

A scientist turned filmmaker tries to build a generation of science communicators who can captivate people without boring them.

3. January 31, 2008 10:52 am

Link

Eventually there will have to be a charge for dimunition at the margin.

— Steve Bolger

4. January 31, 2008 11:16 am

Link

I live in Dallas, which unfortunately has a public transit system that pales in comparison to New York. I dream about having trains and buses as accessible as they are on the East Coast.

Even so I take the train and then a bus to and from work every day. It takes me an hour because of wait time instead of 20 minutes in the car. But I never have to worry about traffic and I get time to read and relax during my commute. Also, it's considerably cheaper ($140 in gas vs $50 for a monthly transit pass) and I know that I'm contributing a little bit everyday to reducing our energy consumption.

The suburban sprawl in the west makes it difficult to devise public transit systems that serve most of the population, but it would be an incredibly worthwhile investment and I hope Mayor Bloomberg continues to set a pioneering example for the rest of the country.

— Elise

5. January 31, 2008 11:35 am

Link

New York city should follow the example of Tokyo – another highly congested city. Traffic should simply be banned on the busy streets/ avenues for a good part of the day. For example 5th avenue should be a pedestrian zone between 8.00 a.m. – 6.00 pm. We shoud not bother with toll for congested streets.

— sumita

6. January 31, 2008 12:14 pm

Link

Great cities, which are fast becoming greener, cleaner, more energy efficient and more prosperous, are responding to the new market signals of the 21st century. Those are higher energy prices, higher land prices, climbing population, static personal incomes, declining public treasuries, and lack of competitiveness in core industries. These, of course, differ markedly from the market signals of the 20th century — low energy prices, steady population growth, climbing personal incomes, growing public treasuries, and competitiveness in core industries. The 20th century was all about emptying cities and spreading people around the countryside on new highways, to new homes, in new cars. The sprawling patterns of development represent a kind of 50-year experiment, a departure from thousands of years of human history. The 21st century is emerging as a return to more familiar patterns of development, aided by new market signals that fit the context of the times. Moreover, it's displaying the flexibility at least of the American political system. The feds and states represent barriers to urban investment, but the metropolitan regions are finding ways to collaborate and invest in projects that improve their communities. There are good blogs about this mode shift, including mine at http://www.modeshift.org/

— Keith Schneider

7. January 31, 2008 12:29 pm

Link

Sprawl, Cities, … or Sanity?

As we have often seen, many people who argue against doing something to address global warming eventually include in their arguments something like this:

"Assuming global warming is inevitable anyhow, we'll just have to adapt."

There is, of course, a parallel theme that sometimes arises, explicitly or implicitly, on a closely related topic, which goes something like this:

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Why it's important to recall that sustainable is an adjective.

January 28
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Can the Asian Boom Save Room for Tigers?
A new analysis of tiger conservation plans stresses the need to maintain corridor between refuges as Asia's building boom plays out.

January 28
17

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How Obama can build on his State of the Union message with a speech explaining why an energy quest is necessary.

January 28
38

When a (CO2) Solution is Ahead of the Problem
A businessman offers a real-world strategy for engaging the public on responding to the risks attending global warming.

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The findings are another indication that recent global warming is atypical in the context of historical climate fluctuations, a paleoclimatologist says.

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"Given that immense population growth is inevitable anyhow, we'll just have to get used to it and live in Mega Cities."

This reminds me, on a societal level, of Socrates' famous quote that "the unexamined life is not worth living."

Granted, the population/urbanization topics are all interrelated and sometimes difficult to dissect and place in a larger context. Regarding global warming and population growth, in my view anyhow, "job one" should be to try to face and address them wisely, and a subsidiary (but still important) task should be to prepare/adapt/adjust to those aspects of climate change and population growth that we can't fully address. So, the urbanization question IS an important one, for a number of (big) reasons, and we should strive to make urban environments more livable and green and friendly, of course, but the notion of Cities as Salvation? C'mon!

Although I appreciate the importance of the topic Andy raises here, and I'm sure he appreciates the larger story, the language we use to communicate about these things seeps into our thinking and our ways of seeing the world. The lead post here includes the following words, for example: prosperous, productive, efficient, income, wealth, prosperity, productivity, inevitable, and "salvation." Are we humans, first and foremost, or are we (first and foremost) economists?

The introductory post also mentions the notion that we are "becoming a mainly urban animal after a thousand generations spent mainly in rural conditions." Of course, evolved human nature does not turn on a dime, and sometimes these sorts of statements, depending on their context, can muddle distinctions among what has happened, what is happening, what we'd like to have happen, what would be most healthy to happen, what should happen, and so forth.

Also, economics and increasing income disparity, and considerations of justice, are highly interrelated with the dynamics of population, urbanization, traffic, local development decisions, "congestion pricing", and so forth. There is a powerful dynamic among key aspects of those things (the way they currently work in some areas, at least) that seems much like some Orwellian combination of a rat on a treadmill, a self-fulfilling prophecy, and lemmings jumping off cliffs. If I were a better writer, it would make for a great late-night TV joke. The California version of that dynamic would take too long to describe in this single post, but the whole subject deserves close scrutiny.

By the way, if you want another view of "salvation", check out the ExxonMobil piece in today's Times. Apparently, it seems that E-M feels that hydrocarbon-based fuels and stable tax policy are the roads to salvation.

Cheers.

— *Jeff Huggins*

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8. January 31, 2008
1:11 pm

Link

I live in Boston, where the transit system–though a pale shadow of New York's–does a decent job getting people around the disparate, and in some cases, far-flung suburbs (of more concern, considering how small the city itself is; the "city" line of the subway is so packed at times of high demand that it's generally faster and more appealing to walk). It's incredibly cheap, at $60 for a bus/subway combo pass for the month. But it doesn't run after midnight, and buses run so infrequently sometimes that they're officially the bane of my commuting existence. The point? Even one of the best metro systems in the states is inadequate; if we're not meeting even current needs, talk of a golden era of free public transit subsidized by drivers seems silly to me.

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I do think that tolls should subsidize expansion of public transit networks and maintenance, going into one giant public coffer of transit funds. But I don't think public transit should be free. It's already abused by many, and if it were free, abuse would be rampant. People take things for granted pretty easily. Also, if we're telling drivers that they need to pay heavy tolls/taxes to use highways, is it not a bit hypocritical to tell public transit riders there's no need for them to pay to use their mode of commuting? It costs staggering amounts of money to run public transit systems, let alone expanding and greening them (all-electric buses, anyone?). We need every last dollar we can get to that end. And Americans grumble about taxes as it is: better to maintain at least the illusion that work on transit systems is paid for by those who use it. Keeping it cheap, I believe it. When Boston's always super low rates more than doubled in less than five years, it hit the lower class pretty hard–that doubled your transit budget if it's the only mode of transit you have.

I've lived in communities where it was impossible to do otherwise than drive to work (southern Virginia), and communities in which driving was a ludicrous option no one but a brave few chose (Toronto–speaking of great transit systems…). I prefer the public transit. Even when it's slower, it's usually not by much, and I like the extra half hour of reading time in a day. But I don't think that the way to get more people to ride is to make it free. It's already cheap. The way to get people to ride is to make driving and parking cost more, and to make the public transit systems everywhere extend, like NYC's, to every couple of blocks in a downtown area to make walking to work feasible even in a Nor'easter. My personal pipe-dream? A national rail system like metro London's.

— Margaret Collins, getsolar.com

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9. January 31, 2008
1:47 pm

Link

I agree that NYC is the most carbon-efficient US city. I also agree that it's inevitable that drivers will have to pay for the negative externalities they impose on the world.

However, I wonder whether these movements will simply push jobs and people out to the suburbs. If cities become very good at forcing car owners to pay for the damage that they do, car owners may elect to move to places that aren't as good at charging them for their damage.

This is therefore a half-baked policy. It should be coupled with incentives and limits that control suburbanization, sprawl, and repopulation of places that aren't major metro areas. All that's happening right now is that we're strengthening the incentives to move OUT of the cities.

It should be prohibitively expensive to knock down virgin forest for a surburban development. Instead, the net effect of incentives, tax breaks, and escape from urban taxes actually incentivizes sprawl.

— vladimir cole

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10. January 31, 2008
1:57 pm

Link

Czech president calls EU climate measures 'tragic mistake'

http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=080131182928.1x5j5z0w&show_article=1

Right-wing Czech President Vaclav Klaus slammed the EU's sweeping new measures to fight climate change as a "tragic mistake" in an interview with a German newspaper on Thursday.
"I believe that our government and others will stand up against these bureaucratic ideas," Klaus told the Handelsblatt business daily.

"This package is without doubt a tragic mistake, a misunderstanding of nature and an unnecessary limitation of human activity," the outspoken Eurosceptic leader added.

"For me it is almost a tragedy."

Klaus has previously compared German Chancellor Angela Merkel's pro-environmental platform to Soviet-era centralised planning and described evidence of global warming as bogus.

He said the measures presented by the European Commission would threaten economic growth and limit personal freedom.

— *Sanjong Thapa*

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11. January 31, 2008
2:10 pm
Link

Two points:

1. The true cost of supporting a city can be seen in the surrounding countryside. The trend toward urbanization, and the view that this trend is somehow 'green', does not take into account the extended support systems that cities require. Urbanization can increase overall population, and creates population centers far from sources of food. Cities require extensive farmland, food transportation systems, extensive energy production, fresh water systems that affect the land surrounding the city for thousands of square miles, and intense waste management. The major 'green' benefit of increasing urbanization would be the reduction of suburban commute patterns, and there's no guarantee that this is the direction we're heading.

2. Bicycles are the best answer to our urban transportation needs. It's actually fairly easy to get around many old-style US cities on a bicycle, i.e. Eastern and Midwestern cities, with a dense center and tight neighborhoods; reducing or restricting automobile traffic makes it that much easier. Our urban and suburban land use planning MUST become more bicycle centric as oil heads towards $200 or more per barrel. Bicycling improves health, reduces pollution, saves energy, builds character and reduces noise. I am a daily bicycle commuter in St Louis, and I don't think any discussion of urban transportation solutions is complete without a discussion of bicycling.

— *mike*

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12. January 31, 2008
2:12 pm
Link

I've been cycling to work for years in Washington and Brussels — I get to work and back home faster than by car or metro, get my exercise in with the ride and that frees up time to spend with my family. Even in the coldest weather, today's technologies can keep you warm on a bike. And I see a lot of other folks doing it, too — both fit and amazingly unfit, so anyone can do it. I've biked anywhere from 5-15 miles each way depending on where I have lived. For me, there is no better way to encourage commuting.

So it is time to make the cost of cars reflect the impact they have on all of us. Charge for the use of the roads and the impact on the environment. Of course deliveries to businesses need the roads, so make those charges fair, but the armies of commuting SUVs with empty seats and only one driver (illegally on the cell phone and missing red lights and swerving with their hand motions to the caller on the other end) need to feel the bite of their impact.

— *Joe in DC*

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13. January 31, 2008
2:28 pm
Link

Even before moving to congestion pricing, we ought to end the street-parking subsidy.

Parking meters should charge variable rates set to ensure that some parking is always available–the rates that a profit-maximizer would charge.

This would (1) eliminate cruising for parking and thus reduce traffic, (2) induce some drivers to switch to mass transit and thus reduce traffic,(3) maximize parking revenues, which should be used to improve mass transit and thus reduce traffic.

— Daniel Greenwood

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14. January 31, 2008 2:57 pm

Link

"http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2008/01/bill-we-just-ha.html

Former President Bill Clinton "We Just Have to Slow Down Our Economy" to Fight Global Warming

what a moron

— Posted by Sanjong Thapa"

Dear distortionist,

The full quote was "In a long, and interesting speech, he characterized what the U.S. and other industrialized nations need to do to combat global warming this way: 'We just have to slow down our economy and cut back our greenhouse gas emissions 'cause we have to save the planet for our grandchildren.'"

He also said, with reference to those rich countries that are committed to saving the environment, "They got serious about a clean, efficient, green, independent energy future…. If you want that in America, if you want millions of jobs that that will come from it…vote for her"

Sounds like he simply screwed up in the first quote and said something silly. Happens to everyone at one point. Thanks for the misinformation though.

[ANDY REVKIN notes: The Carpetbagger Report blog has a great deconstruction of the Internet distortions that exploded and then quickly imploded after the ABC piece was posted. Note how several libertarian and conservative bloggers actually sided with Clinton on this.]

— D

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15. January 31, 2008 3:14 pm

Link

I live and work in Manhattan and commute by subway. I think congestion pricing is a great idea. Using the proceeds to expand the mass transit system is even better. Reducing pollution and traffic are meaningful goals that will really improve the quality of life for people in and around the city.

— Mike

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16. January 31, 2008 3:18 pm

Link

Any article, essay or concept about managing urban growth is incomplete without an anlaysis of the benefits of telecommuting. Why waste so many resources in moving people to data when it is easier, cheaper and eco-friendlier to move data to people?

Thnk about how the current situation looks to an alien visitor to Planet Earth: Whe all rush into the cities at the same time, then rush out at the same time, and then complain about the traffic and worry about the effects of car emissions on Global Warming! Our costly homes are all empty during the day and our million-dollar office buildings are empty during the night, and we complain housing is expensive! (And if we all were aware the cement used in building oaffices and homes and roads is one of the largest emitters of carbon dioxide we would be worrying about that too…

So help your city, community and yourself too by telecommuting, and we will all be the better for it.

— jahman

17. January 31, 2008
3:27 pm
Link

It would be nice if Washington could realize that even if congestion pricing were effective (we'll skip the implications of paying for a street you then have to pay an additional surcharge to use); the effects of congestion pricing in a highly urbanized area like New York are not going to play the same way in a sprawl like Los Angeles.
These one-size solutions tied to your highway dollars are a recipe for serious unhappiness.
The power to tax IS the power to coerce.

— Emmett

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18. January 31, 2008
3:56 pm
Link

What's with the bright idea of charging people. Does anyone have a brina big enough to come up with another idea. Make it sso people can't afford it — brilliant

— P.H.

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19. January 31, 2008
4:35 pm
Link

I live in the downtown/Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle, but I'm originally from suburban southeast Texas. I've been here in Seattle for about ten years and in that time I've given up my dependence on the automobile, almost entirely. I walk, bike, and bus. Walking is great. It's a fundamental part of being human and, due to cars and desk jobs, it's slowly being removed from most people's lives. Capitol Hill is a highly walkable place. Everything I need is within about four or five blocks of my apartment: banks, grocery stores, bars, restaurants, a million coffee shops, a post office, dry cleaners, etc. These options really wouldn't be feasible if I lived in the burbs. So, it's my choice to live here that makes my pedestrian lifestyle possible. Rent is higher, but the difference wouldn't come close to paying for carpayments, gas, and insurance.

My fiance, whome I live with, has a small fuel efficient car which she drives fifteen minutes to work almost everyday (sometimes she bikes it) and which we use for trips. On those days that she bikes into work, she uses a beautiful bike trail, that rolls through trees and parks and passes the nice houses on the shore of Lake Washington. The experience (on nice days) is about a thousand times better than the experience of sitting in traffic. So, we haven't completely removed the car from our lives, but we can definitely see a possible future where those beautiful bicycle paths are more common, where walkable neighborhoods are standard rather than the exception, and where public transportation is greatly improved. Sometimes I think that those people you here about, commuting two hours each way to work everyday, are just victims of the slow boil. Driving just becomes worse and worse, but it didn't happen all at once so they think it's normal. "Thats reality." There is nothing natural about traffic conjestion. It's no good. It's not reality, or at least it doesn't have to be.

— Marty Cline

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20. January 31, 2008
4:52 pm
Link

Congestion in New York City is not just a problem of cars and trucks crowding our streets. Anyone who has been in midtown ever knows that we are close to an all out overflow of people. I believe that a good solution to many of these problems is to make it easier for people who want to commute from outer areas to get here without using a car. I would be glad to move to Pennsylvania if there were realistic commuting options. Trains work but there aren't enough of them and they cost an average person a significant part of what they make. I believe we would go a long way to easing all of the crowdedness of our city if we made it easier to get into and out of this place for people willing to commute.

— Blake

21. January 31, 2008
6:22 pm

Link

We need a creative, multi-prongued approach to the transportion and air/noise pollution crisis in New York City. Everything that makes driving in the city LESS attractive should be promoted, everything that makes walking, biking, skating and riding transit MORE attractive should be promoted. Drivers won't like it if there's less parking (free or otherwise), fewer lanes, more ticketing for speeding, running lights, and parking violations. And YES, congestion pricing. I like the idea of charging drivers so much that we have enough money to run the transit system without fares. I like the pilot project on Ninth Avenue, taking away car lanes to create safe space for bikers. New York would be the perfect bike town — if it weren't for car traffic. (Of course, not everyone is fit enough to ride a bike, so we need more non-polluting surface transportation options, too.) How about more bike shelters instead of parking spaces? How about free city bikes like in Paris? We should send more people to Europe to study the models developed in cities of various sizes, instead of reinventing the wheel… Many great ideas can be implemented neighborhood by neighborhood to reduce traffic and reclaim public space for the people who live and visit here.

— Christiane

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22. January 31, 2008
6:37 pm

Link

#1 Sanjong Thapa: Please tell me your argument for calling Clinton a moron for advising us to slow down the economy. I've commented on this issue on the lengthy "Scientists" blog. You really do need to explain your opinion.
And #15, maybe he didn't misspeak. Maybe he meant it.

Last night we heard Michael Khalilian, Chairman and President of the IPCC, advising that we could/should use waste vegetation to produce biofuels. That's pretty high-level endorsement, but one I've abandoned after thinking it over and concluding that cellulose etc. is needed to maintain soil humus for better crop yield.

— WL Hamilton

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23. January 31, 2008
7:18 pm

Link

I live in Los Angeles, car capitol of the world. I think we need to find new ways of mass transit, and new ways to make mass transit cheap to build. Finding ways of combining green technology with mass transit needs might be one way (I don't even PRETEND to know how that might work). We may someday get those Jetsons anti-grav cars that don't pollute, but not if we, as a species, continue to provide tax incentives to auto manufacturers and oil companies…and yes, I drive a car that uses gas.

— Stephen Carver

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24. January 31, 2008
7:18 pm

Link

It is so nice to hear that Mr Bloomberg want to charge drivers to pass New York city's crowded street. He absolutely should do so. We should encorage people use public transfer. Let people get out the habit to use cars instand to use public transfer. If people get to used to it, the problem will be solved. The important things is habit!!. As for me, half years ago, in the morning, when I commuter to company, my husband sent me two stations long then I can sit down in train, of course it was very comfort. However, for a reason, my husband could not drive. I have to take train from the begining for one month. After one month passed, I get to used to take train from begining and totally not to take the train. After my husband became be able to drive, I thought that I should contribute to fight global warming. Therefore I continue to take train to commuter from begining everyday not to take the car. This becomes my habit now. I do not feel pain and good for my health. From my example, we can know the habit is very important. If you get to used to it, you can not use car. By the way, in my hometown one middle city of china, we have no car days every week. In that day, except public transfer and tax, private cars are baned to drive in crowded streets of city. This may be a good way to control city's transportation.

— Wang Suya

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25. January 31, 2008
7:19 pm

Link

You city dwellers have your air pollution and CO2 emissions from your traffic, but it's looking like us country dwellers are facing new air pollution and CO2 from three electric power plants planned for Nevada. Is this lame-duck administration trying to get these dadgone things launched just before they hit the dusty trail on shanks mare?

There's the Toquop plant 1100 MW gas-fired in Lincoln County near the Utah line and two coal-fired plants at Ely and nearby White Pine. The National Park service has modeled their probable effect on nearby NPS areas and concluded that the Class I air quality designation of Zion National Park would be exceeded. That's not including the huge increase in CO2 insult to our global atmosphere.

I'm pleased that Park Service has weighed in on this impending violation of the Clean Air Act. I hope you city guys and gals let your representatives know that you'd like to have a clear view of Zion Canyon forever and a day – and intend to turn your lights down accordingly to make it possible.

— WL Hamilton

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