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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/lewyn/149/>

Another Environmental Cost of Sprawl

Submitted by MLewyn on Tue, 05/06/2008 - 1:37pm

Randall O'Toole has another piece out on Cato Institute letterhead (http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=9325) in which he argues that rail transit is less efficient than bus service. The details of his argument I will leave to people more expert than I in energy/environmental issues. But one thing grabbed me: O'Toole points out that "doubling the number of people on board any vehicle will cut the energy consumption and emissions of passenger almost in half." Doesn't that mean that sprawling development, by reducing transit ridership, makes transit less energy-efficient?

O'Toole's own data suggest the answer is yes: Table 6 of O'Toole's paper lists transit agencies by carbon dioxide per passenger mile. The lowest (in CO2 emissions) are transit-friendly New York (0.29 lbs. of CO2 per passenger mile), San Francisco (0.3) and Portland (0.36). By contrast, eight transit agencies emit over 1 pound of CO2 per passenger mile: Riverside, Richmond, Tuscon, Jacksonville, Dayton, Oklahoma City, Norwalk, and New Orleans - all highly car-dependent regions.

So sprawl creates a one-two punch for pollution: not only does sprawl reduce transit ridership, it makes buses and trains more polluting.

Which in turn means that using low energy efficiency to justify pro-sprawl policies creates a self-fulfilling prophecy: a policymaker who uses transit's alleged low energy efficiency to justify the status quo ensures that his or her city's transit system will continue to have low energy efficiency.

More Evidence That Sprawl Means More Pollution

Submitted by MLewyn on Fri, 04/11/2008 - 8:21am

Edward Glaeser of Harvard and Matt Kahn of UCLA have a new study out, showing that sprawling cities really do consume more energy and pollute more. Some of their conclusions:

- "• Residents of older, denser cities such as New York and Boston emit significantly less carbon dioxide than suburbanites in those regions. The annual environmental emissions damage associated with an average suburban home in greater Boston is about \$200

more than the damage associated with an average home in the city of Boston."

*"low-density development, particularly in the South, is associated with far more carbon dioxide emissions than higher density construction." This gap exists despite the fact that older, colder cities use more natural gas and home heating oil for heating.

*In particular, sprawl role model Houston is "the dirtiest among our 10 [biggest metropolitan] areas, but also among the five dirtiest overall."

The study is attached below, and is available online at:

[http://www.hks.harvard.edu/rappaport/downloads/policybriefs/greencities ...](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/rappaport/downloads/policybriefs/greencities...)

I note that this study is especially persuasive coming from Glaeser and Kahn, who are not exactly card-carrying New Urbanists. In the past, they have generally supported the sprawl status quo. For example, in a 2003 paper, they wrote: "Sprawl has been associated with significant improvements in quality of living, and the environmental impacts of sprawl have been offset by technological change." (http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=412880)

Why the Housing Slump Hasn't Hit New York or San Francisco

Submitted by MLewyn on Sun, 04/06/2008 - 9:09am

Interesting article in today's New York Times Magazine at

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/realestate/keymagazine/406Lede-t.html?...>

Bottom line: housing prices are going down in sprawl, but big cities are retaining their value.

A quote:

It may be easier to transport an individual job from New York to Vermont, but the value of being in New York is actually greater than it used to be. "The essence of cities is physical proximity," explains Edward Glaeser, a Harvard professor who specializes in the economics of geography. "They've always had the advantage of making the movement of people easier, the movement of goods easier and the movement of ideas easier." What has changed over the last few decades, Glaeser says, is that good ideas — be they in finance, entertainment, technology — have become much more valuable. The best ones can be turned into products that are soon being sold all over

the world, thanks to globalization, FedEx, the Internet and a host of other forces. But it's still much easier to come up with a good idea when you are surrounded by a lot of other people working on the same problems as you are.

Take a Look at China

Submitted by MLewyn on Sun, 04/06/2008 - 9:06am



It is an article of faith among some defenders of the sprawl status quo that China is inevitably trending towards sprawl (thus allegedly proving that the human desire for sprawl is universal). But take a look at the attached image from a new Chinese development: does it look like sprawl to you? Me neither.

For the complete article, see

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/realestate/keymagazine/406china-t.html...>

Another cost of car dependency

Submitted by MLewyn on Sun, 03/09/2008 - 2:59pm

A recent AAA study on the costs of car accidents lists the areas with the highest accident costs per capita. (See <http://planetizen.com/node/30024>)

By an odd coincidence, the most accident-prone areas (Little Rock, Nashville, and three Florida cities) are all Southern regions with minimal public transit; by contrast, the least accident-prone area was the relatively transit-friendly Bay Area.

Coincidence? I think not. Driving is like a lottery; every time you drive, there is a risk that some idiot will total your car. The more times you drive, the more times you enter the lottery. So you live in a city where most people have to drive everywhere, your chances of being hit increase as the number of car trips increase.

Smart Growth and Regulation Aren't the Same Thing

Submitted by MLewyn on Tue, 02/19/2008 - 3:37pm

Most debate over the relationship between smart growth, zoning regulations, and housing prices divides city and state governments into two categories: (a) laissez-faire, pro-sprawl governments and (b) growth management-oriented governments that seek to limit sprawl. If this assumption was correct, any link between government regulation and housing prices would be evidence of a link between growth management and housing prices.

But a recent survey by three Wharton professors (available at <http://real.wharton.upenn.edu/~gyourko/WRLURI/The%20Wharton%20Zoning%20R...>)

calls this dichotomy into question. The survey seeks to ascertain which states and regions are the most pro-regulation. Contrary to popular myth, the most regulatory governments are not always the ones that favor "smart growth."

In particular, Table 11 of the survey ranks metropolitan areas by the amount of government regulation. Portland, the bete noire of smart growth critics, ranks only No. 24 out of 47; in other words, Portland's level of regulation is about average among metropolitan areas.

By contrast, the most regulation-happy metro areas (Providence, Boston, Monmouth County New Jersey, and Philadelphia) are all in areas with weak or nonexistent statewide growth management.

The contrarian myth

Submitted by MLewyn on Thu, 01/24/2008 - 2:52pm

For some reason, defenders of the sprawl status quo are often referred to as "contrarian." For example, if you google "Joel Kotkin" and "contrarian" you get 498 hits. By contrast, if you google "Andres Duany" (a leading New Urbanist architect) and "contrarian" you only get 101.

But what the heck is contrarian about defending the status quo, especially when that status quo is defended by some of the largest and most politically savvy businesses in this country?

Businesses benefitting from automobile-dependent sprawl include a big chunk of the Fortune 500: Auto companies, oil companies, tire manufacturers. And at the state and local level, developers and road builders benefit from the status quo. (Representatives of most of these groups are on the board of the American Highway Users Alliance, a leading pro-road group; over the past 20 years, this organization's chairmen have included representatives of the American Trucking Association, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, 3M, Texaco, Chrysler, and General Motors).

And against these groups, who? A few environmentalists, and a few architects and planners and, um, um....

Saying that sprawl defenders are "contrarian" in America makes about as much sense as saying that it is "contrarian" to be Muslim in Saudi Arabia.

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