

# Merge Lanes Ahead

Conserving energy through land use and transportation planning.

## Road Blocks to Change

**S**o far in this series of fact sheets, we have looked at the ways that transportation and land use strategies have made the U.S. auto-dependent. We also have examined a number of solutions to this problem. If community leaders recognize these transportation and land use challenges (and many do), why aren't things changing? What are the road blocks? This fact sheet explores the road blocks that citizens and community leaders face as they struggle to change transportation and land use patterns.

### Supply of Transportation Infrastructure

Fact Sheet 3 examined highway construction and traffic congestion.



Why is highway construction the most common answer to traffic congestion? The evidence suggests that almost every time a new highway lane is constructed, the new capacity gets gobbled up, and the highway is just as congested as it was before. If that's true, why do we continue to build more lanes and more highways? There are several explanations. First, most highway planners and officials think this is what the public wants them to do. Second, local officials believe that road construction is a bargain because the state and federal government pay much of the construction cost. Third, local officials believe that road building promotes economic development. Fourth, road builders and their lobbyists make sure that money for constructing roads continues to flow.

Problems with street layout and design were discussed in Fact Sheet 4. The main problems here focused on outdated standards being used by local governments to regulate subdivisions. These regulations typically call for a subdivision to have a single entrance, wide streets and lots of cul-de-sacs. Planners and engineers are reluctant to change these

*This fact sheet is one of a series examining the relationships between transportation, land use and energy.*

*Other topics include:*

- Fact Sheet 1..... Introduction*
- Fact Sheet 2..... Transportation and energy consumption*
- Fact Sheet 3..... Traffic congestion*
- Fact Sheet 4..... Street design*
- Fact Sheet 5..... Land use and transportation*
- Fact Sheet 6..... Economics of driving your car*
- Fact Sheet 7..... Reducing automobile travel*
- Fact Sheet 8..... Community case studies*

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standards because of the work required to justify new ones and because they fear litigation if someone were to have an accident on a street that was narrower than the norm.

## Land Use Management

Fact Sheet 5 examined problems associated with land use management and transportation alternatives. Most suburbs are not dense enough to support mass transit and other non-car alternatives, but are dense enough to cause traffic congestion. The way suburbs are developed

requires people to use cars to get to work, shopping, and schools. Even when shops and offices are within walking or bicycling distance, the design is so geared to cars that pedestrians are rarely seen.

Planners know that encouraging increased densities, better design for pedestrians and cyclists and mixed used developments could improve the situation, but these ideas often meet with a great deal of resistance. Robert Cervero, a planning professor at the University of California, Berkeley, suggests four reasons why land use management solutions are difficult to implement:

1. There is a mismatch between the agencies that make land use and transportation decisions. Land use decisions are almost always the purview of local government, while most transportation decisions are made at the regional or state level;

2. Land use planning doesn't precede and guide transportation decisions. While Florida has been at the forefront of comprehensive planning, all too often transportation decisions are made in spite of a community's comprehensive plan. Roads are often built to open up new land for development rather than to serve existing developed areas;
3. Land use plans are long-term propositions that are at odds with the political system, which requires short-term payoffs. Most politicians don't think beyond their two or four-year term of office; and
4. NIMBY's (Not In My Back Yard) and LULU's (Locally Unwanted Land Uses). Many suburban residents oppose higher densities and mixed use developments. It seems that any attempt to alter traditional suburban living faces vigorous opposition.

Attempts to use neotraditional planning, which encompasses many of the ideas of increased density, walkability, and mixed uses, also have been met with some resistance. Developers and bankers are reluctant to build neotraditional developments because the idea is new and untested. This is difficult to understand in light of the fact that many of the most desirable communities in the U.S. (such as Oak Park, IL, Country Club Estates, MO; Princeton, NJ; Winter Park, FL; and Annapolis, MD) were

NIMBY'S

LULU'S



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planned using these principles. Neotraditional proposals also meet resistance from local governments because of concerns regarding street width and densities.

## Travel Demand Management

Fact Sheet 6 discussed the economics of driving. The general perception is that driving is cheap. The cost for gas, oil, tires and maintenance comes to less than 10 cents a mile. The costs of car ownership, licenses and insurance are fixed – they are the same whether the car is driven one mile or 50,000 miles. Few drivers consider the indirect, or hidden, costs of driving since we don't pay directly for air, water, visual or noise pollution damage, motor vehicle accidents or the loss of land devoted to cars. Government at all levels provides massive subsidies to ensure we have plenty of roads, highway patrols and gasoline. Because the perceived cost of driving is very low, the demand is quite high. The only existing effective constraint on driving is congestion.

A broad range of alternatives to driving were discussed in Fact Sheet 7.

While many of the alternatives are inexpensive, there is little incentive to use them because the perceived cost of driving is so low. Alternatives to driving are considered only when the cost of driving increases. In the U.S., the

primary costs of driving are congestion and, in some places, parking.

Some examples of what communities across the U.S. are doing to manage congestion were presented in Fact Sheet 8. These case studies illustrate two points. First, congestion can be managed without constructing new highways, and second, road blocks to

change can be overcome. Four examples are discussed: transportation management associations; trip reduction ordinances; a combination of ridesharing and parking management; and competitive bidding by local transit agencies.

## What you can do

Many of the road blocks to reducing our dependence on the automobile will not be overcome by any single initiative. They will require a combination of efforts involving when, where and how roads are built, how we use our cars, and how we build our communities. They also will need the active involvement of individuals as well as local, state and federal

government. Here are some things you can do:

### *Transportation Infrastructure*

- Get involved in meetings on transportation planning issues held by your Metropolitan Planning Organization (if you have one) and other government agencies. Ask these questions:
  - > Is the road improvement really needed?
  - > What assumptions were made to determine the need for a new or expanded road?
  - > What alternatives to new construction have been examined?
  - > If the improvement is made, how much will it really cost?
  - > If the improvement is made, how much time will it save drivers?
- Urge local planners and decision-makers to:



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- > Provide bicycle and pedestrian networks that are as good as road networks.
- > Revise subdivision standards to allow street grids and narrow street widths.
- > Permit the use of traffic calming devices such as roundabouts and woonerfs.
- Talk to officials in other cities (Tampa, Naples, Gainesville) that have already implemented traffic calming devices. Ask them:
  - > How were they implemented?
  - > How much did they cost?
  - > How well are they working?

**Land Use Management**

- Review your local comprehensive plan, subdivision regulations and zoning code.
  - > What do these documents say about densities and mixed uses?
  - > Are the densities high enough to support transit walking and cycling?
  - > Do they offer the flexibility needed for neotraditional projects?
- Urge local officials to encourage new developments which:



**40 CENTS PER MILE**  
behind

- > Are compact enough to make transit, walking and bicycling feasible.
- > Have a mixture of land uses close to one another.
- > Are designed to be pedestrian-friendly in these ways:

- Buildings are close to the street.
- Parking lots are behind buildings.

- There are landscaped and shaded pedestrian and bicycle paths.
- Conflicts with automobiles are minimized on pedestrian and bicycle paths.
- Travel to Seaside, Haile Plantation, Celebration and other neotraditional developments outside of Florida to:
  - > See how these projects look.
  - > Find out how well they work.



**Travel Demand Management**

- Before driving your car, consider that it will probably cost at least 40 cents per mile – not including the environmental and hidden costs.
- Consider alternatives that would reduce the use of your car, such as:
  - > Factoring commuting distances into decisions about where to live.
  - > Combining trips (trip chaining.)
  - > Carpooling.
  - > Bicycling or walking.
  - > Using public transit.
  - > Telecommuting.
  - > Changing your work schedule.
- Promote policies that would change the economics of driving including:
  - > Pay-as-you-drive insurance.