



April 13, 2010

'Gridlock: Why We're Stuck in Traffic and What to Do About It'

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You won't read details here, but they're featured in a new book by that very name, written by Cato Institute's Randal O'Toole. He will be the featured speaker at a luncheon event next Tuesday sponsored by the National Center for Policy Analysis.

From the publisher:

America is the most mobile society in history, but our transportation system is on the verge of collapse. Traffic congestion is today five times greater than it was 25 years ago, yet many transportation plans and projects are making it worse. As Randal O'Toole reveals in *Gridlock*, the prime causes of our ailing system are a government transportation planning philosophy whose primary goal is to diminish auto use. ...As a result, the automobile which is accessible to almost every family in the nation and provides unparalleled access to better housing, low-cost consumer goods, a choice-driven affordable life, and freedom--is being deliberately forced off the transportation grid by the expensive "solution" of little-used high-speed trains and urban transit lines.

As for what Mr. O'Toole prescribes, I imagine he draws from a Cato policy

analysis paper from last year, in which he advanced these principles:

1. Apportion funds to states based on population, land area, and user fees
2. Require that short-term plans be efficient or cost efficient
3. Create a citizen-enforcement process that will ensure efficiency and cost efficiency
4. Eliminate long-range transportation planning
5. Allow unlimited use of road tolls
6. Eliminate clean-air mandates
7. Avoid earmarks
8. Remove employee protective arrangements from transit law

Not going to argue here, 'cept to say that lots of people find the transportation costs associated with sprawl very expensive, as documented in last month's report *Pennywise, Pound Foolish*, by the Center for Neighborhood Technology. (OK, I know, Rockefeller Foundation.)

That report asserts:

... transportation costs of working families, defined as those households earning \$20-50,000 annually, can equal or exceed housing costs on the urban fringe. The burden of needing to own one more vehicle

per household is severe for these families-- vehicle ownership alone averages more than \$5,000 per year, while fuel and maintenance can add another \$2,000 per vehicle annually. At a fundamental level, such high costs attached to assets that depreciate in value limit the ability of these families to save and build wealth.

The study cites Dallas as one metro area where transportation costs exceed housing for working families, 31 percent to 26 percent.

Pick your agenda.

Meanwhile, Mr. O'Toole reaches conclusions on rail transit that are well-articulated by the title of a paper put out by Cato last month: *Defining Success: The case against rail transit.*

In it, D-FW's rail system gets this writeup:

Despite spending hundreds of millions on light rail and commuter rail, rail transit has had virtually no impact on the transportation habits of the region's residents. In 1990, before any rail was operating, 2.7 percent of the region's commuters took transit to work. By 2008, when the region had nearly 75 miles of rail transit, just 2.2 percent of commuters took transit to work. Like other regions, Dallas-Ft. Worth has attempted to promote transit-oriented developments along its rail lines. Unlike regions in Oregon, California, and a few other states, Texas municipal governments can wield only carrots, not sticks, in promoting such developments, as Texas law does not allow counties to zone unincorporated areas. As a result, transit planners must rely solely on subsidies rather than urban-growth boundaries and their effects on land prices