

# TRIPPING IN MANAYUNK



## Transportation Projects Across the Country: What's Working and What's Not

*"We need to ask, much more critically, about each piece of highway construction or expansion: What will it really achieve? Could we use the money better -- for transit... or for subsidizing housing so that moderate income folks don't feel forced to move to less expensive, far-out suburbs?"*

-- Neal R. Peirce,  
Washington Post  
Writers Group

Check out the Clean  
Air Council's  
website at  
<http://www.cleanair.org>

A just-released Sierra Club report highlights some of the best and worst national transportation projects. The findings?

**1. Transportation choices improve quality of life.** By properly funding highways and public transportation, localities can reduce air and water pollution, protect open space and farmland, and help local businesses thrive.

**2. Americans want better transportation choices.** Since 1995, transit ridership has grown by 21 percent, and in 1999, ridership topped more than 9 billion trips.

**3. More highways are not the answer to con-**

**gestion.** "If you build it, they will come" doesn't just apply to the movies (a nod to *Field of Dreams*). Building highways may just invite more traffic onto the roads. And as expanded road capacity stimulates growth outside of the city core, people move farther away from traditional places of employment and commerce.

**4. Over-dependence on highways hurts communities.** Transportation planning that focuses on highways; rather than incorporating other modes of transit is harmful to local community members. Side effects include wasted gas and energy, reduced travel options and bicyclist and pedestrian safety, and limited commuter choices.

So, what are communities doing to combat this? Here are some innovative solutions to transportation woes around the country:

**California** is proposing a high speed rail line running from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and could later extend it to San Diego and Sacramento. It could reduce the need to widen highways and would operate on existing tracks. The **Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati** area is also proposing a high speed rail line.

**Portland's FlexCar** boasts more than 1,000 members that share 35 vehicles, spread throughout the

city. Each FlexCar replaces an average of six cars on the road.

**Hawaii's Primary Corridor** will be a 32.2 mile bus rapid transit system that carries 46,000 passengers daily to stops at downtown Honolulu, Pearl Harbor, the University of Hawaii, and area beaches. More than 8,000 low-income residents would be within a half mile of the bus route.

Even with so many interesting transit projects popping up across the country, highway spending far outweighs transit spending. Here are some examples of projects that are headed in the wrong direction:

The 140 mile expansion of **Indiana's I-69** would run from Indianapolis to Evansville and could close 40 to 50 local roads. It would also bisect the Patoka National Wildlife Refuge, as well as destroy 5,000 acres of wetlands, farmland, and forests.

**Pennsylvania's Mon-Fayette Expressway and Southern Beltway** will run from Pittsburgh to West Virginia, and the Southern Beltway will connect Mon-Fayette to Pittsburgh. It is anticipated that this \$3.2 billion project will draw jobs and investment from revitalized Pittsburgh into the rural areas along the new highway. Farmland and wetlands along the Monongahela River will also be destroyed.



## Travel Reduction Coast to Coast...

Way to Go, Seattle is Seattle's umbrella program for a variety of initiatives intended to improve the city's livability by reducing car use for non-work trips – and increasing the use of other modes of transportation instead.

The city's calculations show that 75 percent or more of all car trips - including 50 percent during peak hours - are for personal and family purposes rather than traveling to and from work. Driving less can improve neighborhood traffic and the quality of travel, but only if enough people make small changes in their transportation lifestyles.

Although Way to Go, Seattle uses a variety of techniques to encourage people to drive less, one of the most interesting things they do is their demonstration program, which offers a select number of families a financial incentive for a promise to not use the family's second "extra" car for six weeks, thereby reducing each family's overall vehicle use.

Participating families get \$85 a week, which is about what they would have otherwise spent on owning and operating their second car (which includes things like insurance, maintenance, gas, and parking). Each driver in the program keeps a daily diary of their



travel behavior, including costs and what mode of transportation they used, and what they would have used if the second car was allowed to be used. Participants turn in their diaries at the start of each week, and are paid by automatic deposit.

Way to Go, Seattle is in the process of creating an online diary form to make this process easier. Car odometers are checked periodically to make sure the extra car is not being used on the sly. Each household involved in the project is also involved in Seattle's outreach campaign.

How has this fared? During the second demonstration phase, five households sold their "extra" car just upon hearing about the

project when they realized the savings involved. During the last demonstration in Spring 2001, each family saved (on average) 55 miles of sitting in traffic and 44 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions per week!

As a group, the demonstration families reduced 1,200 automobile trips in Seattle's neighborhoods, 7,600 miles of traffic, and 6,100 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions. That's the equivalent of 167 ten-pound bags of charcoal! Or if converted to a volume measure, it's 52,650 cubic feet of greenhouse gases, or about 3 six-lane swimming pools of pollution! These savings were realized with the efforts of just 23 families city-wide.

Not only that, a majority of the participating families had only positive things to say about the program. One family remarked, "Today (first day without the extra car) was one of the most relaxing, peaceful days I've had in a long time. It was a great reminder to slow down and not be so busy." This program has been so successful that there are lengthy waiting lists to get into the demonstration program. Hopefully, this fall's project will be as successful as the first two have been for Seattle!



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