

Randal O'Toole: *Gridlock: Why We're Stuck in Traffic and What to Do About It*

A summary of the video: <http://www.cato.org/event.php?eventid=6666>

Featuring the author, **Randal O'Toole**, Senior Fellow, Cato Institute; with comments by **Michael Replegle**, Global Policy Director and Founder, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy; and **Anthony Downs**, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution, and , author of *An Economic Theory of Democracy* and *Still Stuck in Traffic*.

O'Toole points to revolutionary transportation innovations that will make personal transportation safer, faster, and more energy efficient than any form of mass transportation. These technologies were demonstrated in 1997. VW has an in-car-only automated system. Individual prosperity has increased as human mobility increased and home ownership has increased (because entrepreneurs get their first capital by mortgaging their homes). Public transit is too costly. New York City has the most efficient system in the U.S. but costs \$0.75 per passenger mile, as compared to \$0.25 for an automobile. In China, the cost ratio is 5:1. Computer-controlled cars would permit 8000 vph on a highway, as compared to 2000 vph today. The increased safety will permit lighter cars so that fuel consumption would decrease 30%. Adaptive cruise control, which maintains a fixed distance from the car being trailed, is already being installed in cars. Some cars already have the capability of following the lane lines. The computer-controlled cars can be programmed for engine failures, blowouts, etc. (Downs wondered who would be liable for an accident.) Driverless roads and/or cars are needed, not mass transit. The transition to driverless cars will take 18 years, which is the time to turn over the entire fleet of cars.

Replegle said that people need choices. Public transit gives them an alternative to cars. Public transit reduces congestion. People want to spend less time traveling. People like to live in a town/city environment; today's flight to low density is an aberration. We also need local attractions so that people will not need to travel to attractions. Multifamily homes require less investment so that people have more money for other items. People who take mass transit have better health. Greenhouse emissions are greater for automobiles, when emissions from automobile production and gasoline production are included. We need high-density living so people can walk, bike, and take public transit to where they want to go. The New National Blueprint describes a good approach to a penalty/reward system. Increasing highway throughput will encourage greater sprawl.

Downs said that public transit has a greater subsidy rate than automobiles have. In the U.S. and in Europe, 80% of transportation is by automobile. The same trend is found in Asia. In the U.S., 92% of households own at least one car. Light rail has had no impact on reducing congestion. There is no room for more roads in today's cities. Efficiency is maximized by having people working near each other; therefore, people need to work in a common office. Congestion results from prosperity, although planners reject the necessity of congestion as a result of prosperity. Transportation should be controlled at the State level because there is too much corruption at the Federal level. The politicians are co-conspirators with the developers. We must accustom ourselves to congestion. It is a result of prosperity.