

7. Jeffrey A. Parker. Using Value Enhancement to Finance Peplemovers in Suburban Activity Centers. Presented at the Transportation Research Board 68th Annual Meeting. January, 1989.
8. Peter Calthorpe. Pedestrian Pockets -- New Strategies for Suburban Growth: August 1987

SUBURBAN CONGESTION: THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

by

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The Committee asked me to offer some measure and scale on the problem of suburban congestions. In doing this I would like to do three things: (1) offer some comments on Elizabeth Deakin's paper, (2) toss out a few numbers on the scale of urban activity centers and observations about some of the travel characteristics, and then, (3) sum up the results of some of the initial findings from work that the Urban Land Institute has been doing.

We have just started a suburban mobility study that is looking at six centers around the country. We had a meeting of our Steering Committee in October. We used Elizabeth's paper to get people thinking about the question. The group consisted of five developers, three public officials and two consultants, people with some experience with transportation and transportation issues related to growth centers, but by and large not professions. The following are some summary notes of their reactions to in the profession, it probed some of the difficult questions and for those outside, who don't regularly deal with some of these things, I think it opened their eyes to some of the options.

First, is suburban congestion a problem? That was dispensed with fairly quickly. Perception is all, particularly in the suburbs. If the public thinks it is a problem, it is a problem, and the misery solution (that congestion has always been present in cities, and we should learn to live with it) probably is not going to work.

INSTITUTIONAL CONCERNS:

There is a feeling that there is a mismatch between the structure of governments in the suburbs and the scale of the problem. The movement of residents and jobs and commuting patters in the suburbs has flooded over the existing governmental structure. In many cases, both on the East Coast and West Coast, there probably are too many governments. Dealing with congestion requires a concerted regional approach. There are just too many cities, municipalities, townships, to get them all together. At the other extreme, for some of these major centers, there is no local government. Sometimes, special districts and transportation management associations recognize the unique needs for intense public services in these areas.

FUNDING:

Funding is a major problem. There used to be a general agreement as to who paid what and when. Among our group there was concern that there is no longer a clear understanding of what is a fair share between the public and the private sector. In many cases, it is negotiated project by project.

PRICING:

Elizabeth pointed out some of the difficulties, but pricing strategies are appealing. Pricing has political problems, but one of the pricing options has to do with parking. There is a feeling in the suburbs that free parking is a right. It is difficult for employers to change the rules on free parking for employees. For firms that do business in both central cities and suburbs, it is felt it would be inequitable to charge for parking in one place and offer it free in another.

INSUFFICIENT ALTERNATIVES TO THE SINGLE OCCUPANT VEHICLE:

The suburbs were built around the car and to try to retrofit with other transportation services makes you appreciate the complexity of that problem. One of the great advantages of moving out to the garden suburbs was that you did not have to take the bus. Residential densities in these areas typically are too low to support transit, and they are not pedestrian oriented.

Carpooling is not a one-shot solution. It is something that has to be embedded in the corporate culture and that is an important concern. You don't just "set up" a ridesharing program. It is something you must put in place, and keep plugging away at every year. Because of a failure to anticipate growth in the suburbs, as opposed to the city, there are now few circumferential roads to meet the great need for improved "cross-town" routes in suburban areas.

Urban design is something that has been largely concentrated on the downtowns, and there has been little comparable effort to look at suburban areas. The downtowns have become more pedestrian oriented and more attractive for people to walk in and take transit to.

LACK OF COORDINATION BETWEEN TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE:

One deep concern shared by virtually everybody is the lack of vision and the feeling that communities are being built project by project. The community tends to plan for a build-out scenario, and there is no interim phasing to address what we are going to do to provide transportation services to handle half of the build out. Site design typically ignores consideration of transit and pedestrian movements.

There is a feeling that development levels are approved which tax the ultimate transport capacity. That relates back to the separation of powers between who builds the roads and who approves the development. There are different levels

of control; land use control typically is jealously kept at the local, in many cases, municipal level, but much of the responsibility for providing transportation and highway improvements is at the state level. These different perspectives on the problem all have some relevance, and since each leads toward a particular solution, it is clear that the solution is going to be multi-faceted and complex. That is an uncomfortable discovery for people who are in search of some simple solution.

#### SUBURBAN CENTERS COMPARED TO DOWNTOWN:

In the Washington area, the downtown (or what is called regional core which spills over into Virginia) has about one-half million jobs. The leading suburban centers are Tysons Corner, in Virginia with about 70,000 jobs and in Bethesda, in Maryland, with 28,000 jobs. In Chicago which has one of the largest CBDs, the Loop also has over one-half million jobs. The leading suburban center there is much smaller vis-a-vis the downtown. Schaumburg, a suburb of Chicago, with about 55,000 jobs and an estimated 16 million square feet of office space, is projected to almost double. On the East-West Tollway, a booming corridor from Oakbrook to Aurora, had 5 million square feet of office space in 1980. By the time that everything that is in the ground right now is completed, that is expected to increase to almost 15 million square feet. Atlanta employs about 100,000 workers downtown. Perimeter Center, one of the leading suburban centers in the mid 80's, has about 30,000 jobs, and that is projected to more than triple to over 100,000, rivaling what downtown Atlanta is today. Downtown Los Angeles has a quarter of a million jobs. The area around the Orange County airport is one of the leading suburban centers, with almost 200,000 jobs. Now that is also an immense area of some 7,500 acres and probably represents, in terms of acreage, four Tysons Corners.

It has been difficult to get a good fix on travel behavior at these centers. We have commuting data, census information, and typical OD surveys. It is more difficult to get a sense of what is happening inside of the centers after the employees get to work. Do they stay there? Do they walk back and forth? Do they drive around? Here are a few statistics from a survey that was done by the Orange County Transit District, when they went into a number of the activity centers in Orange County and did some fairly intense survey work evaluating travel patterns, employers, attitudes on commuting and on what to do with the traffic problems in the south coast area, which includes South Coast Plaza, the highest volume shopping center in southern California. This area is part of a larger airport area which contains about 200,000 jobs and some fairly intense development. They estimated that about 90% of the commuters drive to work alone, 8% carpooled, and less than 1% each walked, used transit or vanpools or other means of getting to work. The stories about congestion in Southern California are legendary and yet, according to the surveys, 58% reported that it took them less than 20 minutes to get to work and 50% said the trip was less than 10 miles. So it appears that people are compensating by taking shorter trips on congested facilities. In addition, 38% said they stopped on the way to work at least once a week and 90% stopped on the way home, which gives you some insight into the difficulties of a transit solution, to accommodate this need for multiple service trips. Even with the intense level of commercial activities within this, 27% said they banked within the South Coast Area while 29% said they went outside to do their banking.

Parking is a big issue. 98% of the employees parked free. 80% of the employers do not pay for parking for their employees. One-third of those own their parking lots so it is not really relevant. 20% of the employers reported that they did pay for parking for their employees, an average of about \$41.00 a month. In those cases, when there is a charge for parking, the employees never see it. It is absorbed by the employer.

Employers were surveyed about their support for ridesharing. The first question was: do you distribute rideshare information? None of the employers with fewer than 100 employees did. 23% of those with more than 100 at least took the step of distributing information. Nor surprisingly, none of the small firms had a transportation coordinator. 7% of the large ones did. About 2% of the small employers said they provided some kind of preferential parking, and of those with more than 100 employees, 10% said they did. The Urban Land Institute has undertaken case studies of suburban activity centers in Washington D.C. Bethesda and Tysons Corner were selected as two case examples. They were analyzed by setting up teams of people in three different areas: physical design, economic and market studies, and sociology.

These are two very different centers. Bethesda is basically a street car suburb where the commercial area began to grow up around the 30's. It is seeing a second wave of development as opposed to Tysons, where the first wave of development really began in the '60s with a regional shopping center surrounded by new office development.

Bethesda is relatively small compared to some other areas - 406 acres in a relatively tight compact area - but even this small area, there are different districts, and it can be along walk to get from one to the other. It was estimated that there were 4 million square feet of office space in 1980. It is expected that they will add 2.8 million square feet more by 1990. They had been under a moratorium that was lifted in the mid 1980's. The county held what was called a "beauty contest" for proposed projects, and they approved nine of them, so development has been springing forth almost over night, at least in the view of some of the residents.

A survey was made of residents within two miles of the center. They were asked what do you like, and what don't you like about this area? What they liked was the variety of shops and services: 30% cited that. They liked the fact that it was close to home, and they did not have to drive 8 miles to get a loaf of bread.

They like the large choice of restaurants. (Bethesda was characterized as having more restaurants than downtown Denver). They liked Metro.

What didn't they like? They did not like traffic congestion; not surprisingly, 66% cited that. They complained about the disruption that was related both to the construction of the new buildings and to some of the street changes. When asked about the role of this suburban center, 72% said they felt it should function as a community center for the neighborhood, but only 40% said that it did. Two-thirds believe that Bethesda functions like a regional downtown, and most people don't like that. It is a major concentration of employment and retailing and the citizens don't like that. Commuting data on Bethesda showed that 46% of the commuters got there in less than 30 minutes. About 15% of the

office workers ride transit, compared to 31% of the hotel workers. It has Metro stop with very extensive bus service, but by and large most people arrive by private auto.

Similar studies were done in Tysons Corner. The consultant team initially was overwhelmed at dealing with such an immense geographical area, with 17-18 million square feet in development right now, which double in the future. The initial checklist of recommendations is intended to summarize points for both Bethesda and Tysons.

One issue is local control. You need to develop a local institutional framework, and encourage district management, operation and promotion. It must be recognized that these are major concentrations, and there needs to be some attention paid to some form of management and control institution.

There was a feeling that the problem was not that the centers were too dense but that the density was not in the right places. What was really needed was to concentrate development in some areas and keep it out of other areas; to plan clusters of higher density activity; to provide a hierarchy of usable open spaces, so like downtown, there can be places to walk, have picnics, etc.; and to reinforce the identity and image of the activity center and its sub-areas.

Finally, activity centers need to plan pedestrian mobility and linkages. Look at fringe parking instead of putting everything right next to or surrounding the buildings. Separate through traffic from internal traffic. Typically through traffic gets the preference from people that are responsible for moving traffic, and that causes problems with the center itself. One of the difficulties of having suburban centers located at high accessibility locations is that there is a lot of traffic going by.

increase the public transit options - provide consistent signing. Many of these appear to be fairly obvious, and they are things that a lot of people have been saying for years. It is time to implement them.

#### SUBURBAN CONGESTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL POLICY

by

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Our existing surface transportation systems as well as the institutional programs, roles and resources that support it were developed more than a generation ago for a socioeconomic and geographic environment substantially different from today's. As the nation looks ahead to the 21st Century, it is apparent that new policies and programs are needed to respond to emerging problems and opportunities. With the completion of the Interstate Highway System and the need to reauthorize the major federal transportation programs, the 1990's provide a unique opportunity to consider the appropriate national response to the emerging challenges to improved mobility.