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Not-so-smart growth**SECTION:** EDITORIAL; Pg. 026**LENGTH:** 281 words

Advocates of "smart growth," that is, higher-density living, usually promote it as a good - maybe even necessary - way to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide, allegedly the chief gas warming the planet, by reducing auto travel.

A new study by Randall O'Toole of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, takes another look at that.

In "The Myth of the Compact City," O'Toole shows that this is just the latest in a string of anti-"sprawl" arguments going back to the 1930s, and especially to Le Corbusier's vision of high-rise "radiant cities" that proved disastrous for American public housing.

Recently, arguments for "smart growth" have claimed lower costs for public infrastructure, greater social involvement of high-density citizens, even less obesity - all unconvincingly.

O'Toole dissects several recent publications to show that proponents almost never calculate the cost per ton of the quite small amounts of carbon dioxide avoided, almost always low-ball cost estimates and rarely admit that "tax increment" financing to repay start-up costs can deprive other urban services of needed revenue.

One paper contained figures that let O'Toole calculate the cost per ton at \$1,700 for one proposal, far above the \$50 estimate of consultants McKinsey & Co. as the dividing line between cost-effective and cost-ineffective measures.

"Smart growth" plans almost always assume more ridership for public transit, but to achieve that sometimes encourage greater congestion (a strategy of Portland, Ore.) - a very good way to increase air pollution.

Americans are not gasping for the chance to live in row houses with a little common green area. "Smart growth" quite often isn't.

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