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DALLAS TRANSPORTATION



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About This Blog

Transportation writer Michael Lindenberger, reporter Theodore Kim and editorial writer Rodger Jones cover the subject from tollways to traffic, roads to rail. They invite tips and feedback from decision-makers and commuters alike.

April 2010

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



1:13 PM Tue, Apr 13, 2010 | Permalink | Yahoo! Buzz
Rodger Jones/Editorial Writer Bio E-mail News tips

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 April 27 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 Fuelish**, 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

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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



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Comments

Posted by **Modest Guy** @ 2:12 PM Tue, Apr 13, 2010

I couldn't think of a more perfect name for this guy than "O'Toole". What a hack.

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Posted by **LinZa** @ 2:32 PM Tue, Apr 13, 2010

Unbelievable. Go back, read that list of principles a second, then a third time. Guess it makes sense to spend more on transportation than on housing? Oh, and let's live further and further out so that the commute (and thus the costs) are greater. A few years back someone did an analysis of what it would take to get Houston drivers interested in mass transit. The answer was "a psychiatrist." I'm thinking it is crazy to spend hours getting to and from work, not to mention all the money.

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Posted by **michael nolan** @ 2:37 PM Tue, Apr 13, 2010

from the starting of the modern rail projects in dfw the population here has grown dramatically.

The 2000 census had dfw at 5.16 million people, the 2009 census estimate has dfw at 6.4 million people. and i ask everyone who is against rail transit how is it possible to expand the central expressway south of 635? everyone knows that Collin county has grown drastically over the past ten years.

The red line was completed in 2002 in the current form it is in. yet people are now saying, in 2010, that it has had virtually no impact on traffic. well that appearance is because of the growth! mckinney has nearly doubled in population since 2000 based on the most recent census estimates, plano and allen have also grown very quickly.

so yes traffic is worse now on the central expressway than in 2002, but it isn't because of the dart rail, it is because of the population growth

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Posted by **Mike** @ 3:35 PM Tue, Apr 13, 2010

The overwhelming majority of job growth for the last 20 years has been in the employment centers outside of 635, not in the downtown CBD which until a few years ago was still a ghost town after 7pm when they rolled up the sidewalks. Most people have chosen to live, work, play and go to school all outside of 635.

Meanwhile, Dallas controlled DART is still working on building its 1980s conceived plan to transport workers into, and to sustain, its CBD. That train has left the station.

If you chose to live and/or work downtown and are part of the 33,000 daily rail riders, I'm not knocking you. Just realize that most others have made a different choice.

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Posted by **Garl B. Latham** @ 5:29 PM Tue, Apr 13, 2010

I'm not sure what [or where] "635" is, although I presume the writer is referring to L.B.J. Freeway. If so, it's fascinating how many residents of our northern suburbs/exurbs tend to ignore the world "south of the border," apparently believing it to be of no importance - as if the satellite cities could have grown and developed without the nucleus in place!

So...we continue our unbridled auto-centrism, then use that as an excuse to maintain status quo.

Weird, huh?!

"Most people" are depending upon the on-going absence of land use legislation, a continued refusal of our "leaders" to address environmental realities and quality-of-life issues, and a never-ending flow of [relatively] inexpensive petroleum products.

"Most people" [or at least most people's progeny] are in for a very rude awakening.

Review Randal O'Toole's ideas. Look especially at points 4 and 6 ["Eliminate long-range transportation planning" and "Eliminate clean-air mandates"].

Honestly, does this make sense? Is this the sort of society we want our children to inherit?!

Scary stuff, y'all.

Garl

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Posted by **Chris** @ 6:08 PM Tue, Apr 13, 2010

I love how this 'tool' says are problems will be solved by building more highways. We've been doing that for 50 years, and we still have congestion!!

I also like how he says only 2.6 percent of the region rode on rail transit back in 2000. Then in 2008 that number dropped to 2.2 percent. Did he forget that most of the growth moved to areas not even available to rail transit?? You may as well say, only 1% of the population of America rode on DART last year.

This guy loves this argument for some reason.

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Posted by **Binh** @ 6:41 PM Tue, Apr 13, 2010

I can't believe news outlets still continue to get suckered in to taking Randall O'Toole's garbage seriously.

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Posted by **Mike** @ 7:05 PM Tue, Apr 13, 2010

Garl really? See a map of Dallas.

"I'm not sure what [or where] "635" is"

-- I was referring to the Dallas highway loop of 635/20/Loop 12/35E. It wasn't a "south of the border", it was inside the beltway (i.e. 635 loop) vs outside the beltway. When people choose to live where they want in the suburbs/exurbs one shouldn't assume it's extending their commutes or costs.

'Thares stores n jobs n skules in them thare parts nowadays even wit out da trane cummin tru no mor'

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Posted by **jimbrewer** @ 8:08 PM Tue, Apr 13, 2010

Cato institute=Libertarians. You could phone in the "studies" from their think-tank. Its always: Less government. Lower taxes. No matter what. That's what the longitudinal studies all show from the "JimBrewer Institute of Advanced Policy Analysis" all show. I ought to know. I'm a Senior Fellow there, you know.

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Posted by **Ken Duble** @ 10:20 PM Tue, Apr 13, 2010

Less government and lower taxes, except when they benefit the automotive and petroleum industries. Then it's more government -- unlike rail, widening highways involves seizing property via eminent domain --- and higher taxes. After all, roads cost more than rail in the long run because highways are

costlier to maintain.

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Posted by **Jeffrey J. Brown** @ 7:06 AM Wed, Apr 14, 2010

The congestion problem will take care of itself, as the decline rate in global net oil exports accelerates. For example, in 2004, Canada, Mexico & Venezuela (CMV) had combined net oil exports of 5.0 mbpd (million barrels per day). They were down to 4.0 mbpd in 2008 (EIA data), and assuming flat combined consumption, they were down to 3.6 mbpd in 2009.

Meanwhile, developing countries like China & India continue to consumer a larger share of a declining volume of global net oil exports.

For a good summary of our predicament, check out the following video: "End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion & the Collapse of the American Dream." The video was released in 2004, and it is quite interesting to see how events have transpired since then. I believe that it is available on NetFlix. Here is a link to the trailer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHr8OzalLM>

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