

THE AUTOMOBILE CENTURY: HOW SUBSIDIZED ROADS WRECKED TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICA



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Historical Notes No. 25

ISSN 0267-7105 ISBN 1 85637 305 3

An occasional publication of the Libertarian Alliance, 25 Chapter Chambers, Esterbrooke Street, London SW1P 4NN
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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

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FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT — RAILWAYS AND TROLLEYS

Desperation, desire, and a flame in the heart drew people to a new world. New ideas from the world left behind resonated in the new land as they never could in the old. The dispossessed from the old became land owners and potential land owners in the new, and that made all the difference. With direct connection to their own land and a continent open before them, the theoretical rights of life, liberty, and property were real and palpable. The immense gulf between old home and new was more than just ocean and finally just as unbridgeable. The tax threat to liberty and property quickly made real the unthinkable and a new national entity assumed among the powers of the earth a separate and equal station. Waterways carried the commerce and energy of the new nation to the world and the world creaked into motion with a massive Promethean jolt that would shake the heavens and propel the human race headlong into its future, leaving the gods of old to crumble into the dust of their own despotism.

The founders of the new nation had not encoded its physical form. They established the principles, confident that good form would follow good principle. When Thomas Jefferson took his leave on the fiftieth anniversary a new form was ready to rocket across a continent. The nation was still largely rural, then, and farmers were mired in mud much of the year. But the first rails were soon to be laid; one of the great derived freedoms was ready in the wings; something new was about to appear under the sun. Political freedom begat a constellation of auxiliary freedoms and this one, freedom of movement, was one of the finest. Rails connected towns and cities, industrializing the new

century, giving fleshly beings legs of steel with which to stride from sea to shining sea.

Still, people had to follow the rails, and the rails wouldn't easily carry them within the city. A self-propelled 20 mph machine swept the nation in the 1890s, but the bicycle wasn't the full answer. The electric trolley — compact, clean, comfortable, and quick — did what trains hadn't been able to do. It reclaimed the streets from horses, reducing the stench, making the entire city available to anyone with a nickel, and pushing back the city limits a few miles for yet another new form — suburbs, nineteenth century style. Investors lined up. Tens of thousands of miles of track were laid. In short order the electrics had crisscrossed the cities of the nation and were now laying rails and power lines for “inter-urbans”, connecting city with city, outdoing steam trains there, too, with frequent, inexpensive service.

A CONTINUOUS UNNATURAL INFUSION FROM OUTSIDE THE SYSTEM

A century later. Private mass urban transit has disappeared. A few big cities have tax-supported, money-losing public mass transit in place, but the service is generally much inferior to the private transit of an earlier era. A Third World system of trains still hauls some freight, and, reluctantly, a few passengers. Ships still ply the waterways and jets now the airways, but car is undisputed king. You can't live normally without it. You are licensed to drive it, said license holding a status and importance close to citizenship. Urban folklore is rife with stories of car dependency: the woman who drives her Cadillac the hundred feet from garage to mail box to pick up her morning newspaper; the Los Angeles commuter who one day pulled

out of his garage to find himself stuck in his driveway, rush hour having finally backed up off the freeway, into his neighborhood, and past his house. Police and courts have been diverted from crime control to traffic patrol. City communities designed for cars have become war zones for people. Suburban communities designed for cars have become empty of people. In those suburbs the roads are for cars and each yard is a separate and sovereign nation. There is no place for people, and little for them to do anyway, so they're nowhere to be seen. If they want to step out of their tiny nation, they must drive out. Most Americans drive ten or twenty thousand miles a year, most of that in the simple pursuit of the far away requirements of daily life. The car is quite efficient at going ten thousand miles so long as community functions are flung way off in different directions to free up space for roads and parking. But driving ten thousand miles a year just to get to work, do some shopping, and have a night out is sure not very efficient for people. How did it happen? Was this really a natural development dictated by a free economy?

In a word, no. What we have here is the finest example of a familiar story: Good Intentions With a Tax Base. You see something you don't like in the economy so you take it out of the marketplace and "improve" it. Unchecked by the marketplace, though, government programs take on a life of their own and move according to standards of their own. Unanticipated and unwanted side effects become the main effects.

Eco-nomy is eco-logy. Everything is connected to everything else by an infinitely complex web of monetary or energy pathways. Responsibility, power, and knowledge infuse every tiny node in the eco-web. You tap one part of the web and the repercussions race along unknown and unpredictable pathways to produce unknown and unpredictable effects. Banging on the system from the outside means taking responsibility and power from each agent of monetary or energy transfer without possessing the knowledge that each agent has of his or her own position in the web. Distortion is introduced. It's a crap shoot and, like the crap shoot of evolutionary changes, the vast majority of changes are detrimental. Economy and ecology left alone ultimately take care of internally generated detrimental changes, but a continuous unnatural infusion of money or energy from outside the system sends false signals along all the monetary and energy pathways. This is the story of false signals and distortion, the story of well intentioned Americans coalescing into a political movement to control, with taxes, from outside the economy, an obvious 'bad' within the economy, the story of the unexpected results, the unanticipated repercussions, and the reweaving by government of the very social fabric itself into a tattered cloth.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE RAILROADS BY "FREE" ROADS

The powerful new locomotive of the nation's economy during the last century prided itself on being *laissez faire*, but it was only so when that suited its needs. Separation of economy and state was fine when the issue was government control. But the railroads gladly accepted huge land grants to expand unnaturally quickly into the interior, and they eagerly extended their money-filled economic hands to power-seeking political hands, when they decided that a little government help might be more beneficial than *laissez faire*, or when massive fraud required a blind governmental eye.

This first big business, much of its power derived from government, quickly began to see itself as above government. Power begat arrogance, especially in the unnaturally developed interior. The Grange movement — consisting of anti-railroad farmers and small town merchants and businessmen — challenged the decaying old railroad barons, who were now sitting thick with their political cronies and watching their fraudulent money-making schemes and political connections more carefully than their business. Not quick-moving businessmen any more, but crusty old politicians unaware of what was about to hit them, the railroad bosses slowly crumbled before the Progressive movement.

Progressives saw in the car a way to escape the greedy clutches of heartless capitalism. Slow, expensive, uncomfortable, and constantly breaking down, the car wasn't seen as a threat by the old sometime capitalists of the rail systems. But auto industry executives knew better. They knew what their car could become, if someone would just give them the roads to drive on.

Throughout the nineteenth century private funds had built transportation infrastructure with spectacular success, but it was clear from the beginning that infrastructure for cars was just too expensive to be chosen in a free market. Cars were destined to remain, like bicycles, one part of a whole system of transportation alternatives. But the anti-railroad, anti-big-business, anti-rich progressive movement had been consolidating its power for several decades and the early twentieth century was its time. The "Good Roads" movement, started by bicyclists and quickly adopted by farming and auto interests, was the key. If government would build and maintain infrastructure for cars, while still requiring trains and trolleys to build and maintain their own, cars could compete. Especially if the screws of regulatory agencies were periodically tightened a few more turns on trains and trolleys. And that is precisely what happened. The Progressive movement failed to destroy big business or the rich — it just created new versions of each — but it did destroy the railroads and trolleys.

Railroads were subject to regulatory control by the Interstate Commerce Commission from 1887, but the ICC had little real power until the early 1900s. Then, after ten years or so of adapting to increasing control from Washington, Washington simply took over during World War I, a temporary nationalization from which railroads meekly emerged psychologically nationalized for good. Trolleys continued to prosper for a time, hitting their peak in ridership in 1923.

The coalition of “Good Roads” forces, weaned in the anti-railroad progressive era, was sharp, quick, visionary, and quite willing to play the Washington game. Politically sophisticated, it worked government from the very beginning to come down massively on its side. Progressives achieved two apparently unrelated objectives: ratification in 1913 of the 16th amendment allowing the introduction of income tax, and federal money in 1916 for the establishment of State Highway Departments to build a national network of good roads. US railroads also peaked in 1916 at 254,000 miles of track. Soon after they began the process of abandoning branch lines, closing stations, and firing workers as state dollars flowing into roads steadily dried up their business.

Washington was still a compact, vibrant, human community in 1916. Taxes were low, government small, and congressman a part-time job. But the progressive ideal of government as a problem solver was about to solve each of those problems and many more. A coalition of rubber, trucking, steel, and paving companies, but most of all the automobile industry, worked government to transform America with the greatest public works project, the greatest intervention by government in the marketplace in the history of the world. Thomas MacDonald, head of the Bureau of Public Roads from 1919 to 1953, orchestrated it all in a masterful demonstration of politics and public relations. Detroit and Washington locked hands. Auto executives regularly spent time serving as high government officials to make sure government got it right.

Looking back from seventy five years later, when ubiquitous car roads seem like air, a natural God-given right, free for the using, it’s hard to realize that “free” roads were not always taken for granted. But they weren’t. Back when the battle was young, President Harding told Congress that the subsidy was what made it possible for trucks to compete with trains, that if motor transport had to pay directly its fair share of the cost of highways, its inherent wastefulness would be exposed. The array of forces aligned against the President was too powerful, though. We all know the name, now, of Warren Harding, but we live in the world of Thomas H. MacDonald. In MacDonald’s world, what President, Republican or Democrat, would have the courage to say what President Harding said then? Or even the insight and imagination to notice it?

MOTORIZING THE CITIES

But even with government solidly behind the auto industry, with auto executives in Washington, Washington and state money flowing into road building, nothing in the way of regulation for buses or trucks, lots of regulation and no government money for trolleys, the cities were a tough nut. By 1920, for the first time, more Americans lived in the city than in the country. By the end of the twenties, with overbuilding threatening the auto industry, the city was an important potential market. City people had the money to buy cars but, except for the rich, they didn’t. They didn’t feel the need. The trick was to create the need. GM led the way with its strategy of “motorizing the cities”. It first tried to convince trolley companies to switch to buses but the economics were bad and the trolley companies said no. Next GM tried buying up financially shaky trolley lines and converting them to bus service, but this met surprising resistance from users. People wanted their trolleys. GM, keenly aware of its carefully cultivated public image, backed off, or so it seemed. In fact, it quickly teamed up with small-time bus operator Roy Fitzgerald, providing him with finance if he would take over trolley lines and convert them to bus lines. In return he would agree to use GM buses. GM also provided engineering and marketing surveys, and took Fitzgerald’s people through each step of the conversion, also smoothing over any political obstacles. GM (and friends) had their cake and ate it too, Fitzgerald took the heat but also lots of bucks. It still looked to be a decades-long process, though, until the federal government decided to act.

Many trolley companies were run then by electric utility companies. Depression era trolleys, with fewer commuters, were running in the red. The huge utilities carried their trolleys, waiting for better times. Utilities got little credit for their sacrifice in the anti-big business atmosphere. On the contrary, President Roosevelt kept his campaign promise to break them up. They were forced to give up unrelated businesses like trolleys. The money-losing trolleys, cut loose from their rich parents, were easy marks for GM and its front man, Fitzgerald. Trolleys, there for the taking and liquidating, were taken and liquidated. In 1936, for example, the Illinois Power and Light Company had to sell off lines in: Bloomington, Quincy, Champaign-Urbana, Decatur, Danville, Kewanee, and LaSalle-Peru.

Digress with me a bit and read once more this list of cities. As a child of the age of car this is, to me, an amazing list. Growing up in the age of car, mass transit, to me, has always meant money-losing, infrequent service limited to our largest cities. I’ve never even heard of some of the cities on this list. I don’t know the 1936 figures, but in 1988 three of them had populations under 15,000, the largest had 95,000, and the average was 35,000. Small town America, apparently,

had efficient, cheap, private mass transit. No taxes, no need for a car. But good intentions in Washington put a quick end to all that in central Illinois and across the nation.

With trains and trolleys dying and people forced into cars, traffic jams began increasing in the early forties, stalling the new bus transportation systems. Cities felt obliged to raise taxes again to try to improve traffic flow. New roads, however, didn't solve the problem. New roads create more traffic, not less. Not being bound by the constraints of the marketplace, new roads expand to wherever there is a "need". The planners didn't realize that the need was created by the expansion; more expansion only created more need. A mistake like that would quickly bankrupt a private business, but government has different standards and need only raise more taxes. Soon, hard on the wheels of trolleys, buses also started losing money and were quickly turned over to the city to be supported by still more taxes. The cities had been motorized. The transportation system had been socialized. You had to have a car. The trolleys and inter-urbans were dead, and public buses were just not very convenient or appealing. Transportation within the city, between cities, and across the country had become a tax supported affair.

In 1949, with motorized cities a *fait accompli*, the court found GM, Firestone, Phillips Petroleum, Mack Trucks, Standard Oil, and a number of their front organizations guilty of conspiracy in the death of the trolley. Each company convicted was fined five thousand dollars and each individual convicted was fined one dollar. The trolleys, in scrap yards and museums, didn't even stir.

Cars had won. The enemy vanquished, the battle became purely political. In-groups skirmished for power, President Roosevelt *et al* wanted it. Thomas MacDonald *et al* had it. Each group had its own vision of the new tax-created landscape. One group called the other socialistic. The pot had called the kettle black. They seemed to be having trouble identifying themselves.

UTOPIA THE GOAL OF PUBLIC POLICY

Adolf Hitler never felt any confusion about what he was. He was a visionary determined to bring the full power of the state into reforming the world after his image. Among other things he built the world's first modern freeways, a stunning achievement that fired the imagination of leaders in our own country. Auto industry executives, children of the progressive era, were acutely aware of the need for a grand government-supported vision. They never made the mistake of railroads. They had always worked hand in hand with government and put great energy into public relations and image control. Their p.r. machine now promised Hitler's dream in America, a glorious future of 100 mph, fourteen-lane super highways. A generation earlier they had convinced America that Car was

the future, and now people responded again when told the future would be even grander.

Political momentum built for a system of government funded expressways. State government, impatient with Washington foot-dragging, got off the mark first with projects like New York's Cross-Bronx Expressway. States soon found they could not only cover costs but actually turn a profit on, at least, this one part of the total road system by building tollways. The three-decade-old roads coalition, no credible enemy remaining, began to splinter: tollways versus freeways, city roads versus country roads, user financing versus general financing, federal control versus state control.

GM president Alfred Sloan Jr. had formed the National Highway Users Conference in 1932 to support the cause of "free" roads. Not having a firm grip on the concept of free enterprise, he said at the time that the NHUC would help counter "railroad efforts to hamstring the competition". An overly cautious 1950 NHUC president now warned that railroaders would use the bickering to "promote their own selfish interests", but that was obviously no longer possible. The greater threat was that Washington would lose control over road building. Good Roads forces wanted a single pressure point, and Washington was it. So they finally came back together around the idea of freeways. Everyone should pay equally, the argument now went, whether they drove or not. Fair is fair, and it wasn't fair to penalize someone just because he had a longer commute.

No matter their all-American capitalist faces, progressive sentiment and socialist thinking still dominated the road and auto industries. They were still banging on the eco-web, building a brave new world from Washington, shackling the hidden hand, unaware of the nuclear repercussions set to go off in the last third of the century when the alienated first generation raised from birth in the gutted communities of Car-world came of age.

"A PALL OVER THE LANDSCAPE"

Slowly, even some freeway visionaries had begun to see that something was not right. The man himself, Thomas MacDonald, started speaking out against what freeways were doing to the cities — dispossessing homeowners and small businesses while building towards the inevitable traffic gridlock. He proposed that anyone losing a place to live be given a place to live, and also that mass transit be encouraged. Good ideas, maybe, but whether he was right or not no longer mattered. The marketplace rewards right decisions, but transportation policy no longer had anything to do with the marketplace. Policy decisions were now political. In politics a good economic idea has no better chance, really, of becoming policy than any of the hundred bad ideas it's running with. There's no rational selection mechanism in government. MacDonald's own creation

rolled right over his deviation from the pure vision. President Eisenhower asked for his resignation in 1953.

Five years later Eisenhower and the roads coalition had re-formed behind freeways. Earth moving equipment was deployed throughout the nation to begin laying 250 to 300-foot wide alleyways of concrete through forty thousand miles of forest, farm, and city. The vision of coast to coast freeways inspired the President's dreams, but when he saw from his limousine window on the way to Camp David the monstrous slash cut through north-west DC, he was furious. His version of the vision had freeways going around cities, not through them. Aides had neglected to tell him that in the political process of compromise and coalition building the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) had promised city politicians they could use freeway building as a means for urban renewal.

Ike's shock at what his vision had become was echoed here and there. A federal housing official said the inter-states would leave us, *"a planless scattering of homes, factories, stores and what have you ... in clusters of suburbs ... that will be like a pall over the landscape."* A New York homebuilder and future congressman wondered whether Americans wanted, *"to see cities which are inhabited by low income white and colored people, while around the city lives a ring of middle and higher income whites."* These prophetic voices at the fringe of public sentiment were ignored by the bulldozers moving on the churches, schools, businesses, and homes of the powerless.

Nashville, like cities across the country, routed its inter-states through poor black neighborhoods in the name of urban renewal, razing 750 houses and businesses in the commercially zoned district. The black business owners, prohibited by Jim Crow laws from relocating to white areas, went to court to block the freeway. The court dispensed justice, saying too much time and money had already been spent to alter it.

Novels describing the utopian cities of the future were a staple of forward thinkers in the 19th century. Chaune Thomas, in his 1878 contribution to the genre, anchored his mega-city of Tone around huge double-decked streets to speed private cars (visualized by utopians as early as 1836) through city to suburb. After Tone, most utopias seemed to be centered on similar expressways, connecting the city to the suburbs, where readers and writers of utopian novels would presumably live. Workers would stay in the city in giant skyscrapers set in parks. Progressive politics and utopian dreams moved early 20th century city architects, businessmen, and politicians to offer a thousand proposals for razing the cities to fulfil the dream. The planners, members all of the car driving elite, would generously let government pick up the astronomical tab. Artistic mock-ups invariably showed

cars moving on wide uncrowded streets with ample parking.

Only government can see the overall picture, develop a comprehensive plan, decide for our own good how we should spend our money. Even at the cost of some temporary hardship to the dispossessed in the cities, removing the blight was the obvious first step in urban renewal — obvious, anyway, to car-fixated social engineers with lots of other people's money to spend. So, utopia became the goal of public policy. The Nashville story was repeated a thousand times across the nation. In ten years the nation, as well as its urbanly renewed citizens, would certainly thank their wise leaders.

“WHITE ROADS THROUGH BLACK BEDROOMS”

Desperation, desire, and a flame in the heart brought no Africans to the hallowed shores of freedom. Africans were just brought. Contradiction sits firmly, if not easily, in the human heart. Lovers of freedom and fighters of tyranny had no problem with buying, keeping, and selling people. But contradiction of this magnitude cannot last forever. It must be resolved, one way ... or the other. Ninety years after emancipation it could no longer be denied that “All men” means “All people”, that a black man shall not be counted as three fifths of a white man. The dispossessed in the new land held America to fulfil its promise and destiny. Rosa Parks said: “I will sit here.” Students at a Woolworth's lunch counter said: “I will sit here.” The nation again creaked into motion; again a massive Promethean jolt shook the human stage.

White America, whether it sympathized or not, could certainly understand Rosa Parks and the Greensboro students, but something beyond comprehension was smouldering in the cities. The eco-web, rewoven by government for a select group, was about to rip. For six days Watts burned on TV, a dark lightning storm in every white household, a malevolent cloud, a low drumbeat rolling ominously into safe havens. This made no sense. Something was off. Watts shouldn't happen in the land of liberty and justice for all. We didn't know it then, but what we were watching was the true city of the future in the process of fiery birth.

Reality is true to itself, not the dreams of any special group. The wonderful new world being thought of could never be built as anticipated. The connections and processes involved are for too complicated for any human plan, and no human plan could be free of the shadows cast from the dark recesses of the human heart. The modern city would reap what the heart had sown in such hopefulness, but the seeds were scattered far from the balanced soil of the eco-web.

Trolleys were the legs of the poor, as well as the middle class, until government, the car-driving friend

of the poor, killed them, offering instead inadequate buses and subways, or nothing at all. Still, three out of five city Americans didn't have a car in the sixties, some because they didn't need one, others because they couldn't afford one. Jobs followed government roads beyond their reach and moving around the city was a pain compared to an earlier era, but the three in five still managed to get by, while the two in five battled growing gridlock. Then the freeways came to save us from gridlock and get us there even faster. Gridlock has only grown worse and *there* has been pushed ever farther from here. Freeways surrounded and isolated Watts, walling in the people and out the jobs. Publicly funded good intentions laid "*white roads through black bedrooms*", dismembering community. After Watts the contorted face of the new city burned across the country the next two summers. Over the next three decades the urbanly renewed occasionally erupted as in Watts, but daily small-scale street warfare was more common. City citizens of gutted communities sank slowly with the smokey socialist sunset into nightmare.

Six or seven decades ago Los Angeles had a thousand miles of trolley track extending outward up to sixty miles from the center. Then government, in pursuit of a dream, taxed the people and built a freeway system to replace it. Hopelessness has replaced that dream and all others in the denuded center. Liquor stores and broken windows have replaced community. Pushing drugs is the closest many get to productive labor and education happens at 'schools' where children of children carry guns. Oh, America, our children spend their nights in cold terror and their days with cold steel in their pockets and a cold hardness in their eyes.

Senator Jennings Randolph of West Virginia, Public Works Committee chairman and former contractor, was a solid Good Roads man until the riots hit. That Good Roads were gutting the cities came as a shock. He joined other stunned politicians in supporting mass transit in hopes of linking city workers with suburban jobs.

We had come full circle. We'd taken a dynamic, effective private mass transit system and killed it for an expensive elitist dream. Now that the unanticipated consequences were burning the cities of America, government waded in again with another plan. They would fix things with publicly built mass transit. They would add significantly to the tax burden to achieve, ever so slowly, a tiny fraction of what the free market had quickly given us many years before. It hasn't helped the inner cities, though. Again unanticipated consequences rule the day. Originally intended to get city citizens to jobs in the 'burbs, it has become a way to get suburbanites through traffic gridlock to good jobs in the city.

And still the centers collapse. Tax dependency replaces community and productivity for those left be-

hind. The tax base, however, has been removed to the suburbs. The suburbanites see no need to pay good tax money to support sinking centers, but have no problem at all with using tax money to sink the centers, or with using the still essential city services themselves.

THE CARNAGE AND THE GRIDLOCK

Deregulation of trains in the seventies and eighties has led to a mini-comeback of sorts, but rail's advantages over road are still smothered by the untouchable government subsidy. No one knows exactly how much the car subsidy is. Estimates range from one hundred to three hundred billion dollars a year at all levels of government, about a quarter of that for municipal costs — police, courts, traffic control etc — and the remainder mostly for road construction, road maintenance, and subsidized parking. Count another fifty billion dollars a year protecting "vital national interests" in the Middle East. Add billions more for indirect costs, things like: government mandated air pollution control, disposal of junked cars, batteries, and tires, added health care costs for accident and pollution victims, the vastly more expensive car friendly forms of mass transit (subways), a hundred billion dollars a year sucked up by traffic jams, and a good chunk of the four hundred billion dollar-a-year cost of crime — largely a direct result of communities gutted by cars.

The carnage and the gridlock grow apace, but our leaders see nothing wrong with lavishing ever more money on cars. This is government thinking. When the money you spend doesn't accomplish its intended goal, spend more money. That gleam in the eyes of social engineers is 'smart highways', computerized electronic control of traffic. Watch your wallets, friends, this one is expensive, and bound to fail. They intend to decrease gridlock by smoothing out traffic flow and increasing carrying capacity. They still don't know that so long as potential is greater than capacity, any new capacity will be quickly filled by unused potential. Los Angeles has proved that when you don't pay directly for driving, the potential is limitless. The expensive new systems, in other words, will increase traffic rather than decrease gridlock. And of course the new systems will do nothing about communities gutted so that Car may have room to run.

Taxes for mass transit since the seventies have led to a mini-comeback, too, for subways, buses, and the modern version of the trolley car — light rail. The subsidy is laughable compared to the car subsidy, and ridership laughable compared to car ridership. But it is a tiny step towards preserving the remnants of real city communities for the day we decide to let loose the productive energy and precise solutions of people choosing freely where to put their transportation money.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS OF CHOICE

Conservatives and environmentalists, those avowed enemies and unwitting allies, live remarkably similar lives. They are the winners in the game of *Hand in the Public Coffer*. They have, for the most part, found a relatively comfortable niche on the borders of a system unravelling from the center. They use government to support their lifestyle, even though that means banging on the economy with the crude hammer of market intervention. Both groups want to stay where they are, keep what they have, and use more government and taxes to solve the resulting problems. They don't agree on everything, of course. Mass transit is the stated government program of choice for environmentalists and government the solution to society's problems. Cars are the government program of choice for conservatives and the free market the stated solution to society's problems. But environmentalists commute and shop by car, drive a hundred miles to go hiking, and think it all natural. Conservatives complain about welfare cheats and bloated bureaucracies, but miss the biggest government project of all sitting at the end of their driveways. The two groups engage in intellectual fencing but they live in the same neighborhoods, go to the same schools, shop at the same stores. Together they support the system they believe supports them. Environmentalists end up centering their lives on the most environmentally destructive machine we have. Conservatives end up centering their lives on high taxes, big government, and massive state intervention in the economy.

TAKE CARS OFF WELFARE!

But imagine what we still could have if we all just accepted the easy idea that people should pay for what they want. It's natural that the car industry doesn't think a long distance commuter should be penalized. If he were penalized, by paying directly for what he wanted, he wouldn't be a long distance commuter, his family wouldn't need more than one car, and cost efficient transportation systems would dominate. Government weeps for one industry unable to compete on its own. The car industry has never felt it fair that it should be made to suffer just because it happens to be the most expensive and inefficient transportation system around. Government, enamored of fairness, but even more of power, agrees, and cripples the competition.

Allow me to take a wild guess and say that since 1913 government money spent on car roads, and the consequences of car roads, is roughly equivalent to income taxes collected. Suppose we get government out of the transportation business, take cars off welfare, and dissolve the IRS — or, more practically, reduce federal and state income taxes, sales taxes, and property taxes by the portion that now goes to cars. With cars off welfare we'd walk a hundred miles a year and trolley a

thousand miles to accomplish what takes a car ten thousand miles a year. And when we do drive it will be on those uncrowded roads you see on TV car commercials. For short hops you may cruise town in a clean, nimble, cheap five horsepower vehicle that gets you there faster than those space-eating, tax-chewing hundred horsepower machines that now cruise for over-size parking spaces and sit stuck in long lines of similar giant machines. Or maybe you'll ride a bicycle or even walk on attractive, safe, vibrant streets, breathing exhaust-free air. However we do it, though, taxes can be cut by hundreds of billions of dollars.

As things stand now, government has taken the choice from us. It has taken our money and used it to build for us a new world. But this new and unnatural world has led inevitably to new and unnatural patterns of living. The unanticipated consequences twist and crash their way through our communities, our natural environment, and, most tragically, the lives of our children.

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Although all of the following books include important pieces of the puzzle, they are not written from anything like a libertarian perspective.

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