

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the early 1950s, land use trends and transportation investment policies have been in a holding pattern. Communities throughout the United States have long utilized a suburban land use model, consisting primarily of disjointed and low-density residential and commercial developments. This pattern has been embraced by the majority of marketers, developers, consumers, and political leaders as highly-desirable. And in many ways it has been.

It does, however, come at a cost. Its biggest design flaw is that it virtually guarantees that cars have to be used for every trip. It also necessitates that these trips be long and numerous. Both of these things result in a society that is auto-dependent, and by extension, oil dependent. It also results in a built environment that is designed to accommodate cars rather than people. This means an environment that is unfriendly and uninviting to the few remaining pedestrians, cyclists, and transit passengers. As a motorist, this type of development seems normal. On foot, however, trying to navigate this environment of 30-foot high signs, buildings set back hundreds of feet from the curb, acres of asphalt devoted to parking, and endless webs of streets terminating in cul-de-sacs, one recognizes how unusual our post-modern suburban lifestyle really is.

We have built a transportation system to accommodate this land use pattern. Our network of interstate highways, multi-lane arterials, and large parking facilities has in many ways done an admirable job of making this type of development possible. However, as we enter the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is becoming apparent that it is time to reassess the way we have designed our urban areas for the past 60 years. Many people today are finding themselves in a situation where they have to drive long distances whether they want to or not.

So, what should we do? It is unrealistic and impractical to pretend that we can simply wave a magic wand and immediately recreate the high-density, mixed-use, transit and pedestrian-friendly environment of the pre-automobile age. We can, however, begin to give serious thought to a new way of doing things; of creating a built environment where walking,

biking, and using public transportation again become a viable option for the majority of our residents; where roads are designed to accommodate a variety of modes of transportation; and where public buildings and residential spaces retain their utility, but regain a sense of dignity and an appealing design aesthetic. There are radically different ways, for example, to design and build the same 200 housing units and 300,000 square feet of retail space.

And this is what *Connecting Communities* is all about: encouraging incremental, small-scale, and practical modifications to the way that our transportation system and our built environment interact with one another. It is our hope that by following the recommendations contained in this document, communities throughout our region will become better, more interconnected places to live.

## Recommendations

The recommendations in this guide are intended to be used by AMATS and other agencies as a framework for increasing transportation alternatives and supporting land use patterns through targeted investments. The recommendations of *Connecting Communities* are:

1. Improve **pedestrian** planning and facilities through targeted investments.
2. Improve **bicycle** planning and facilities through targeted investments.
3. Enhance **public transportation** systems to meet the needs of current users and be attractive to new users.
4. Incorporate **complete streets** principles into land use and transportation decisions.
5. Implement **land use** policies that improve community cohesion and reduce urban sprawl.
6. Integrate **environmental** planning into land use and transportation planning.
7. Improve **inter-agency coordination** on regional planning.
8. Create a **planning grant** program to implement *Connecting Communities*.

"This new highway program will affect our entire economic and social structure. The appearance of the new arteries and their adjacent areas will leave a permanent imprint on our communities and people. They will constitute the framework within which we must live."  
- Robert Moses, *Harper's Magazine*, 1956

"The right to have access to every building in the city by private motorcar in an age when everyone possesses such a vehicle is actually the right to destroy the city."  
- Lewis Mumford, *The Highway and the City*, New American Library, 1964, p. 23

"In the Interstate Highway System we have done nothing less than express our vision of ourselves .... Ultimately, the Interstate have become a physical expression of the part of the American character that desires to resolve our destiny in this seemingly limitless land."  
- Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 1997

"In the suburbs you have backyard decks; in towns you have porches on the street."  
- Andres Duany

"To understand America, you must understand highways. In this past half century, these masochistic marvels have—along with telephones, television and jet planes—reshaped American culture."  
- Robert Samuelson, *The Washington Post*, June 25, 1986

"The establishment by government of great public grounds for the free enjoyment of the people . . . is thus justified and enforced as a public duty."  
- Frederick Law Olmsted, *Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove: A Preliminary Report*, 1865