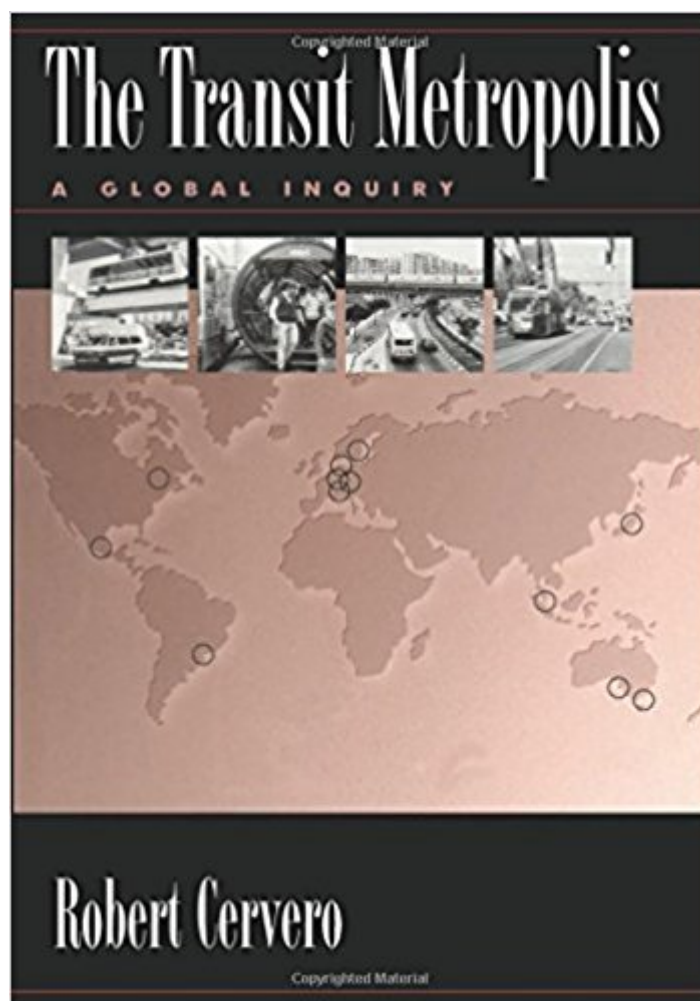


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The Transit Metropolis: A Global Inquiry



Synopsis

Around the world, mass transit is struggling to compete with the private automobile, and in many places, its market share is rapidly eroding. Yet a number of metropolitan areas have in recent decades managed to mount cost-effective and resource-conserving transit services that provide respectable alternatives to car travel. What sets these places apart? In this book, noted transportation expert Robert Cervero provides an on-the-ground look at more than a dozen mass transit success stories, introducing the concept of the "transit metropolis"—a region where a workable fit exists between transit services and urban form. The author has spent more than three years studying cities around the world, and he makes a compelling case that metropolitan areas of any size and with any growth pattern—from highly compact to widely dispersed—can develop successful mass transit systems. Following an introductory chapter that frames his argument and outlines the main issues, Cervero describes and examines five different types of transit metropolises, with twelve in-depth case studies of cities that represent each type. He considers the key lessons of the case studies and debunks widely held myths about transit and the city. In addition, he reviews the efforts underway in five North American cities to mount transit programs and discusses the factors working for and against their success. Cities profiled include Stockholm; Singapore; Tokyo; Ottawa; Zurich; Melbourne; Mexico City; Curitiba, Brazil; Portland, Oregon; and Vancouver, British Columbia. The Transit Metropolis provides practical lessons on how North American cities can manage sprawl and haphazard highway development by creating successful mass transit systems. While many books discuss the need for a sustainable transportation system, few are able to present examples of successful systems and provide the methods and tools needed to create such a system. This book is a unique and invaluable resource for transportation planners and professionals, urban planners and designers, policymakers and students of planning and urban design.

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Customer Reviews

Robert Cervero is professor in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley and author of *Transit Villages for the 21st Century* (McGraw-Hill, 1997).

The book was written by a highly reputed scholar, one of the few in the academic world who has managed to master the inner workings and the complex interrelationships of both urban transport and land use. Unfortunately in the real world these two dimensions of our modern mobility problem are dealt with separately. Even though the book's main audiences are academics, graduate students and practitioners, the good writing style and the limited use of technical jargon make the book accessible to the general public. I read this book ten years ago and decided to revisit it in light of the renewed interest in sustainable transport and clean energy fueled by the recent peak in oil prices and climate change concerns, as some of the old ideas and lessons are reemerging.

Undoubtedly still worth the reading. Part One presents the conceptual framework for the transit metropolis as a paradigm for sustainable regional development. The first chapters present a concise discussion of all the negative impacts deriving from the automobile-center society and its sister, urban sprawl, and how they have resulted in the ever weakening of public transportation, particularly in the US. He briefly discusses the myriad of negative impacts resulting from this auto-dependent model, including traffic congestion, traffic accidents, air pollution, energy consumption and oil dependency, social equity, and other environmental impacts, including climate change, already a concern circa 1997. The book makes quite a convincing case for the lack of sustainability of the auto-centric culture. Despite the greatly appreciated benefits of personal mobility freedom, he shows that the main problem with automobile travel is that it is often grossly underpriced, producing ever growing auto use and becoming an additional incentive for more urban sprawl, spiraling in a vicious circle that deepens the world in its oil dependency and the other negative impacts. He recognizes that underpriced car use is a concept grasped only by academics, transportation economists, engineers and planners, and a cadre of environmentalists, but the strategies to set the price right, such as congestion pricing and variable parking pricing, are highly resisted by the public, and feared

by most politicians, as they think that embracing road pricing is political suicide and staying in office is their chief priority. As a lively example, just check out the latest decisions by London's new mayor, Ben Johnson, who is slowly dismantling the now renowned 2003 London congestion charge. First he scraped the pollution charges that were going into effect in October 2008 for high polluting vehicles, and now he will pull back the 2007 western extension by 2010. Cervero's central thesis is that mass transit when harmonically integrated to the urban form is a sustainable solution for our car-dependent world. And to illustrate his thesis, he presents a dozen cases of islands of excellence located throughout the world, where the marriage between transport and land use has worked in the long term. The Second part presents these successful cases: Stockholm, Copenhagen, Singapore, Tokyo, Munich, Ottawa, Curitiba, Zürich, Melbourne, Karlsruhe, Adelaide, and Mexico City. These chapters illustrate practical solutions to the chicken-and-egg dilemma between transport and land use. I particularly found very instructive the remarkable cases of Stockholm, Curitiba (Brazil), and Singapore. A common element in all of them is political vision and will, and integrated transportation and land use planning for the long term. Because this is quite a voluminous book (460+ pages), I recommend you read Part One and they go hopping from case to case, beginning with the three cases above mentioned. Though published some 10 years ago, the book is not outdated yet, and it is only missing the new congestion pricing schemes that recently were implemented in London, Stockholm, and Milan. Also missing is the global embrace of Curitiba's transit model, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), now implemented throughout Brazil and in several countries, including the US and China, and recently upgraded to the next level by TransMilenio, in Bogota, Colombia. Anyway, there are few textbooks available today discussing these recent developments, particularly congestion pricing, and only mentioned briefly in recent publications. For the time being, you might find reasonable summaries on the existing and proposed congestion pricing schemes at Wikipedia. I highly recommend Cervero's book for those interested in urban transport sustainability. For a book covering the complementary part of the sustainability equation, clean fuels and alternative and advanced fuel vehicles, I recommend the recently published *Two Billion Cars: Driving Toward Sustainability*, a book dealing very comprehensively with the analysis and mid to long term policies, technologies and expectations regarding conventional oil, low-carbon fuels and alternative fuel vehicles, particularly hybrids, electric and fuel cell vehicles using hydrogen. This book is also very helpful to understand why the US was left behind by Europe and other countries in terms of transport sustainability and more efficient and clean vehicle technology.

This was assigned to me in a Urban Transportation class in the Geography Department at a university. The teacher thought it was wonderful, but the rest of the class hated it. Too dry, too dense, very boring. I object to the author's thesis of buses being the solution to transportation problems. The author loved buses, the teacher loved buses. I hate buses. I believe the solution is intra-urban railways and additional elevated freeways for cars. I am old-fashioned enough to believe cars are solution to getting around until someone invents the flying car. No buses. The prose is bureaucratic, academic and a tough slog to get through. And the fact that a bunch of undergraduate geography majors hated it (not just me) shows some evidence of it not being a successful book.

In writing the Transit Metropolis, Robert Cervero did a great job of stating and providing examples for the proposition that transit, land use and urban planning must be coordinated and share the same goals in order to be successful. The definition of success is a publicly accessible (as distinct from publicly owned), useful, and integrated transit system that both is a response to and a determinant of the built environment. After laying out his proposition, he provides a rich set of examples; case studies from cities around the world where a successful transit metropolis has emerged, either through a transit system adapted to its environment, a built environment adapted to its transit system, or by adaptations of both transit and the environment. He also takes as separate examples of success those metropolises where a strong central core city has been both the focus of transit development and the benefactor of transit as a factor in the center city's revitalization. The book is optimistic about the future of transit metropolises built on the basis of careful planning as desirable, attractive places to live, even though they imply higher population densities than most of us in the US associate with gracious living. Follow the plan, have patience and visionary leadership, and the future need not be degraded by slavish reliance on the automobile. It is now 12 years since the book's publication. In that time, the world of the new millennium has unfolded as no one expected in 1998. Public suspicion of planning and political institutions, especially land use planning, is much stronger than it was two presidential administrations ago. Economic slowing has left most governmental bodies with crushing debt instead of developmental funding. Though this may impact the further development of automobile facilities, it has a particular impact on the kind of comprehensive regional planning the author sees as a critical component of success. It's unclear whether cities, at least here in the US, presently have the political will to act on such a scale in the absence of an immediate crisis. Still, the book provides a clear set of guidelines for implementing an integrated transit metropolis, based on detailed analysis of successes from around the world. It's still worth reading.

A good compilation of what is happening around the world for those interested in transit planning. Easy reading also for a more casual audience. Perhaps some information are outdated, so a companion website could help to keep things current.

Excellent book, just a little bit outdated now. Cervero is a leader in the field of public transit, and I hope he comes out with another edition of this book.

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