

Appendix IV

Challenges of Urban Sprawl Growth Patterns

Suburbs are showing the strains of sprawling growth that creates long commutes and traffic congestion, overcrowded schools, and other sprawl-related problems. At the same time that disinvestment is harming central cities and many suburbs, other suburbs are showing the strains of sprawling growth. Sprawl is a particular type of suburban development characterized by very low-density settlements, both residential and non-residential; dominance of movement by use of private automobiles; unlimited outward expansion of new subdivisions and leapfrog development of these subdivisions; and segregation of land uses by activity. Suburban residents are suffering from the effects of increased traffic congestion, time-consuming commutes, and the loss of recreational opportunities and open space.

And there is a new readiness among local leaders to forge a common agenda across historical divides. A May 1999 survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors asked leaders of 93 central cities and 66 suburbs to identify the most important challenges facing their communities. The responses make clear that sprawl is creating strains for many suburbs: indeed, 74 percent of suburban officials identified "limiting the negative effects of sprawl on the community" as a challenge affecting their community. The specific problems associated with sprawl were also cited as important challenges: for example, suburban officials listed "cutting traffic congestion on roads and highways" as their top challenge, cited by 91 percent -- far more than listed any other challenge. Eighty percent listed "protecting the environment as the community grows," and 75 percent cited "avoiding overcrowding of schools."

The costs associated with sprawl are mounting, so curtailing sprawl could save substantial sums of money over the coming decades. A research team at Rutgers University that carefully studied the costs of sprawl concluded that pursuing strategies to facilitate greater growth in developed communities would generate savings by decreasing the consumption of developable land and increasing land available for recreation. By growing smarter, communities could reduce traffic congestion and the Nation could save billions of dollars every year in spending for roads, sewers, water, and other vital infrastructure. The broader costs associated with sprawl include:

- **Poverty concentration and job mismatches.** The outmigration of middle- and upper-income Americans has left behind concentrations of poor people and has sapped once-thriving areas of their economic vitality. Rapid development outside of central cities has created a mismatch between where many potential workers live and where the jobs are located. This leads to high joblessness in some pockets while jobs go unfilled in other parts of the same otherwise healthy metro areas.

Communities Address Job Mismatches

Ft. Worth, TX lost thousands of jobs in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but employment has now come back strong. Fort Worth Works tries to ensure that central city residents can access jobs in the city's booming suburban markets. Thirty community agencies and educational institutions participate, providing training and other needed workforce supports. The initiative also provides transportation for inner city workers to jobs in the growing industrial area near the airport, as well as childcare support. Participating employers include Federal Express, Intel, S.W. Bell Telephone, Nokia, BF Goodrich, and Sprint. After landing a huge contract, Trinity Industries, a local rail car manufacturer, faced the difficult task of locating more than 600 welders. Fort Worth Works brought together the company, local school districts and other training agencies to find and train qualified welders. Trinity eventually hired 650 people -- 415 came from inner-city neighborhoods.

- A study of the changes in metropolitan area settlement patterns between 1980 and 1990 found that metropolitan areas, in which central city poverty was more concentrated in particular census tracts suburbanized faster than metropolitan areas in which central city poverty was less concentrated. For example, if Chicago's poverty population in 1980 were one-half as concentrated as it actually was, the Chicago metropolitan area would have suburbanized at a rate 19 percent slower than it actually did from 1980 to 1990.¹ Moreover, an analysis from the Woodstock Institute quantifies the city-suburban job disparity in the Chicago region. From 1991 to 1996, employment in the Chicago region rose by almost 8 percent. But the city is actually losing jobs at a slightly greater pace than in the 1980s, with a decline of 40,000 manufacturing jobs between 1991 and 1996. In many older suburban areas, employment growth was slowing too; some areas registered actual job declines in certain key sectors.²
- Public transit is frequently not designed to carry central city residents to suburban jobs. In Boston, researchers studying entry-level job openings found that welfare recipients using transit would, after a 1-hour commute, still access only 14 percent of the jobs in the region's fast-growth areas. In Atlanta, less than one-half of the region's entry-level jobs are located within a quarter mile of a public transit route -- and almost no jobs are accessible by transit in job-rich Cobb and Gwinnett counties.³ In addition, a significant share of central city residents do not have cars to access those suburban jobs.
- Racial and ethnic segregation exacerbates the situation by limiting minorities' access to housing in the suburbs. As a result, African-Americans and Hispanics are likely to bear the largest employment losses from the discrepancy between central city and suburban rates of job growth.
- **Shortages of affordable housing near jobs.** Shortages of affordable housing in growing suburban areas compound job mismatches, as rental increases price poor workers out of growing areas with better job opportunities.
- **Public capital and operating costs.** Sprawl drives up total spending on roads, bridges, sewers, and other public capital because existing networks have to be extended further and because new systems -- typically underutilized -- must be constructed at high cost. Road costs are 25 to 33 percent higher and utility costs are 18 to 25 percent higher in communities marked by sprawl than in sprawl-free communities. Municipal and school district operating costs are 3 to 11 percent higher in sprawling developments.
- **Loss of open space and sensitive environmental land.** Sprawl encroaches on forests, coastal areas, and fragile natural habitats and threatens native wildlife. It consumes 25 to 67 percent more open land than nonsprawl development and produces about one-third more water pollution.
- **Travel costs.** Because of our development patterns, Americans are driving more. Between 1983 and 1990, the average miles traveled annually per person in the United States rose by 19 percent; vehicle miles traveled went up even faster -- by 37 percent.⁴ That means Americans now spend the equivalent of almost 2 waking hours every day driving somewhere in their cars.⁵ Persistent traffic jams used to be a problem in a handful of cities such as Los Angeles and New York. Now congested freeways are a national epidemic. An index developed by the Texas Transportation Institute indicates that congestion worsened in 47 of 50 major U.S. cities from 1982 to 1991.⁶ Concerns about traffic are not coming only from people who must commute. Increasingly, employers too are worried about long and enervating commutes for their workers and the negative impact of traffic on the capacity to fill suburban jobs.

¹ Stacy Jordan, John P. Ross, and Kurt G. Usowski, "U.S. Suburbanization in the 1980s," *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, October 1998, pages 611-627.

² *A Rising Tide But Some Leaky Boats*, Woodstock Institute, Chicago, 1998, page i.

³ F. Kaid Benfield, Matthew D. Raimi, and Donald D. T. Chen, *Once There Were Greenfields*, Surface Transportation Policy Project, National Resources Defense Council, Washington, DC, 1999, page 125.

⁴ Robert W. Burchell, *The State of the Cities and Sprawl*, report prepared for HUD, 1999, page 6.

⁵ F. Kaid Benfield, et al., *Once There Were Greenfields*, page 130.

⁶ Robert W. Burchell, *The State of the Cities and Sprawl*, page 6.