LIVABLE CITIES

"[EVERY SUNDAY IN BOGOTÁ] OVER 70 MILES OF CITY STREETS ARE CLOSED TO TRAFFIC WHERE RESIDENTS COME OUT TO WALK, BIKE, RUN, SKATE, RECREATE, PICNIC, AND TALK WITH FAMILY, NEIGHBORS & STRANGERS... [RECENTLY I VISITED AND IT WAS] SIMPLY ONE OF THE MOST MOVING EXPERIENCES I HAVE HAD IN MY ENTIRE LIFE."

—**Clarence Eckerson, Jr.,** StreetFilms

In the past twenty-five years, the New Urbanism movement has envisioned a revitalization of cities through design and planning that emphasizes:

- *Livable streets arranged in compact, walkable blocks;*
- *A range of housing choices to serve people of diverse ages and income levels;*
- *Schools, stores and other nearby destinations reachable by walking, bicycling or transit;*
- *An affirming, human-scaled city with lively streets and public spaces.* [1]

Here are some of the many ways that legislators can help revitalize their communities.

INVEST IN PUBLIC TRANSIT

Los Angeles – long the mecca of automobile America – has embarked on an incredible investment in subways, rapid bus, bike lanes, and denser mixed-use neighborhoods.[2] But transit is not just for the country's biggest cities. From 1995 through 2013, public transportation ridership increased by 37.2%—a growth rate higher than the 22.7% increase in U.S. population and higher than the 20.3% growth in the use of the nation's highways over the same period.[3] **Missoula, MT** has built an excellent bus system that ferries people to every part of the city. **Denver** offers a free shuttle bus through its bustling downtown. Cities like **Eugene, Las Vegas, Boston,** and **Kansas City** have invested in bus rapid transit with dedicated bus lanes or signal priority and other features that can make it preferable to driving for thousands of residents.

Alongside better transit should be "transit-oriented development": relatively high density, mixed-use residential and commercial space that facilitates efficient and full use of the transit options by pedestrians who live and work nearby. Residential property values perform 42 percent better on average if they are located near public transportation with high-frequency service. **Arlington, VA** has permitted development surrounding two of its metro stations, leading to significant economic growth. For every $1 communities invest in public transportation approximately $4 is generated in economic returns.[4]

Here are five strong public policy reasons to invest in transit and transit-oriented development:

- *It creates good jobs and a reliable return on investment:* with good transit, families save money, businesses gain customers, and the unemployed are put to work;
- *It dramatically improves life for senior citizens, poor people, and youth, who depend on public transit to get to work, buy food, and live a full life;*
- *It reduces our reliance on fossil fuels, which is crucial to combating climate change;*
- *It reduces traffic and cleans our cities' air;*
- *It facilitates and encourages walking and biking, which makes us healthier.* [5]

Among the many victories in the 2012 elections was strong voter support for this vision: pro-transit campaigns had an 80 percent victory rate in a year that saw a record number of ballot measures.[6] For example, **Arlington County, VA** voters approved a bond measure to fund Metro subway projects, street repair, bike/pedestrian infrastructure, and traffic calming. And

Orange County, NC voters approved a half-cent sales tax that will fund new busses and bus service, an Amtrak station, and a light rail connection from the University of North Carolina to downtown Durham.

CREATING SAFE AND "COMPLETE" STREETS

Although over 32,000 people were killed in traffic accidents in 2011, there is essentially no national dialogue on this issue.[7] We need not accept these tragedies as the cost of modern society. Cities can take the following approaches to keeping their residents safe:

DESIGNING COMPLETE STREETS: **Seattle's** City Council has required the use of this guiding principle: "to design, operate and maintain Seattle's streets to promote safe and convenient access and travel for all users – pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and people of all abilities, as well as freight and motor vehicle drivers." Cities as diverse as **El Paso, TX; Newark, NJ; North Little Rock, AR; Onalaska, WI;** and **Scottsdale, AZ,** have recently adopted similar policies. Cities can make engineering modifications to calm traffic and make streets dramatically more pedestrian and bike friendly: wider sidewalks, fewer and narrower lanes, speed bumps, raised pedestrian crosswalks, and protected bike lanes.[8]

INVESTIGATING CRASHES AND PUNISHING DANGEROUS DRIVERS: Street safety should be prioritized by police departments.[9]

PROPERLY PRICING SPACE: Urban space is valuable and scarce. Rather than subsidize the inefficient and dangerous reliance on cars, cities like **Los Angeles, Santa Monica, New York,** and **Seattle** have begun to use smart parking systems that adjust the price of parking depending on demand to reduce traffic, raise revenue, make it easier to find parking, and encourage other forms of travel.

In 2011, the city of **San Francisco** set up new high-tech meters and ground sensors in several parts of downtown to tell how busy these blocks and city parking lots were. Over the next two years, the city shifted parking costs upward on 37 percent of the time segments per blocks or lots, while at another 37 percent, the prices dropped.

Overall, driving in the pilot areas went down by about 2,400 miles per day — and circling dropped by 50 percent. Correspondingly, that helped reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent. Meanwhile, drivers reported that it took them 43 percent less time to find parking.

REBUILD OUR PUBLIC SPACES

Around the country, cities are creating new public spaces where parents, children, friends, retirees, and workers can congregate together. In 2008, **Houston** opened Discovery Green, a twelve acre park adjacent to its convention center and two sports stadiums and walking distance from its commercial downtown. Over a million people use it every year and it is revitalizing the city center.[10]

At 30th Street train station in **Philadelphia**, lanes of parking spaces were transformed into The Porch – a plaza with games, movable chairs and tables, farmers' markets, and concerts. Just outside of a major subway stop in the heavily immigrant neighborhood of Corona, **New York City** has turned an underused street and group of parking spaces into a vibrant pedestrian plaza, teeming with life.[11]

LANDSCAPE AND RESOURCES

The **National Complete Streets Coalition** is helping to coordinate campaigns for safe streets around the country, at the city, state, and federal levels. They offer tremendous resources and can give cities and advocates technical assistance in developing a Complete Streets policy.

The Equity Caucus at Transportation for America —"formed by the nation's leading civil rights, community development, racial justice, economic justice, faith-based, health, housing, labor, environmental justice, tribal, public interest, women's groups and transportation organizations— drives transportation policies that advance economic and social equity in America."

Since its founding in 1975, the **Project for Public Spaces** has collaborated with 2,500 communities and cities to help them build successful public spaces and create healthy, sustainable, and economically viable cities of the future.

The StreetsBlog network of websites provides an excellent entry point for news, policy, and advocacy surrounding the livable streets movement.

NOTES
1   See The Congress for the New Urbanism, http://www.cnu.org/who_ we_are.
2   See Matthew Yglesias, *LA's Transit Revolution*, Slate (Sept. 17, 2012).
3   "Facts at a Glance." Where Public Transportation Goes Community Grows. 2016. Accessed June 15, 2016. http://www.publictransportation.org/news/facts/Pages/default.asp
4   Ibid.
5   See Smart Growth America, at http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/issues/transportation/.
6   See Center for Transportation Excellence (Nov. 7, 2012 Press Release).
7   See Dangerous By Design, Transportation for America
8   Complete Streets Improve Safety for Everyone, www.smartgrowthamer- ica.org/documents/cs/factsheets/cs-safety.pdf.
9   See The *NYPD's Crash Investigation Problem*, Reclaim (Winter, 2012).
10   See Project for Public Spaces, Benchmark: Discovery Green, at http:// www.pps.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/discovery-green_bench- mark_aug-2011.pdf.
11   See videos of these and many other vibrant public spaces at www. streetfilms.org/catagory/public-space.