**The urban transportation problems**

When the initial improvement of main rural roads had established definite flows of motor traffic, it became increasingly apparent that future growth of' the country’s highway transportation system should be on a scientific rather than a haphazard bases. City streets were in relative distress, and many rural highways were overloaded. As traffic in urban areas has increased, more and more attention has been focused on the problem created.

Transportation has greatly influenced the development of our city. With the invention of the automobile the city exploded. At first, use of the automobile was restricted largely to the existing street system - system designed without any concept of motor-vehicle movement. Gradually, the streets were improved, and the cities began to spread over the countryside. The introduction of freeways and expressways greatly accelerated the expansion. The proportion of people in urban areas had been increasing.

The urban transportation problem, which with the great increase in motor transportation, has become acute may be clarified with data accumulated by planning surveys and particularly from origin and destination studies. On an average, over 90% of the traffic that approaches our larger cities is destined to them. In terms of vehicle-miles, about half of our vast highway transport is within urban areas. Excepting intercity traffic there is, in proportion to the size of our cities, a typical “traffic radius” that measures the limit of motor movements to and from the heart of the city. Around the largest cities, its length is about 35 miles.

While the motor vehicle has enabled cities to expand outwardly, thus improving residential conditions, it has caused traffic congestion to increase alarmingly in the hearts of the business districts. Much of the congestion and impedan­ce is due to the rectangular street pattern that involves interrupting cross traffic. Much also can be attributed to a lack of convenient and available parking space.

As for the private cars, ten times as many persons canbe moved over a given street in mass-transportation vehicles as in private autos.

The facts developed about the downtown congestion problem indicate the need for a new approach. Primary attention must be focused upon the movement of people rather than the movement of vehicles. Mass-transportation facilities must be improved, so that fewer automobiles will come into the downtown area. Freeway plans must include not only radial lines feeding into the downtown area, but also belt lines circling the downtown area. In this way, vehicles destined beyond congested section will be diverted from the streets. Off-street parking must be provided, partly to make up the present deficiency and partly to release street-space now used for storing vehicles. Capacity of streets must be further increased by one-way and off-center operation. This multiple approach for sound, long-range development of an integrated highway system offers the only reasonable solution.

(*[Our Cities,](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/ourcities.cfm)* an excerpt from W. Lee Mertz' Origins of the Interstate System.)