

The Public Purpose

Number 72 • October 2003

Texas Transportation Institute Data Confirms Traffic Trends Worse in Smart Growth Portland

Each release of transport or housing data seems to confirm what is obvious to all but the urban planning clerics --- that Portland's draconian "smart growth" land rationing policies are making things worse for the vast majority of its citizens.

How Portland's policies of scarcity in the face of plenty transformed a low cost housing market into one of the least affordable in the nation is legendary. Between 1991 and 2001, Portland's housing affordability dropped more --- much more --- than in any other major metropolitan area. Local officials, parroting lines fed them by the planners, tried to suggest the explosion in housing costs relative to incomes was driven by demand. They should have checked. Other metropolitan areas, such as Atlanta, Dallas-Fort Worth, Phoenix and Raleigh-Durham grew faster (experienced greater demand), but saw little or no loss in housing affordability. The difference, of course, is land regulation, which Edward Glaeser and Joseph Gyourko found to be a principal cause of higher housing costs around the nation. But who needs data when you have ideology?

The latest blow is the recently released Texas Transportation Institute *Annual Urban Mobility Report*, or more precisely, the data in the report.¹

- Portland now ranks 8th out of the 75 studied urbanized areas in Travel Time Index --- a measure of the average travel delay during peak period (a Travel Time Index of 1.10 means that travel takes 10 percent longer during peak periods than during uncongested periods).
- For its size, Portland has the worst traffic congestion in the nation. Portland is estimated to have 1.6 million residents. All urbanized areas ranked above it have populations above 2.0 million. 20th ranked Las Vegas is the next ranking urbanized area that is smaller than Portland,

¹ This distinction is made because the text of the report goes to such lengths to find a relationship between Portland's policies and "average" performance with respect to annual traffic delay hours. In fact, the report provides no evidence to support its speculation that land use policies have caused average delays to rise at a slower rate than overall traffic congestion. If Portland's "smart growth" policies were living up to the promises of their architects, Portland would not be average, it would be superior. In addition, as this commentary indicates, by other traffic indicators, Portland falls far short of average, the opposite of what smart growth promoters would suggest.

excepting urbanized areas that are adjacent to other much larger areas (Riverside-San Bernardino, San Jose and Fort Lauderdale).

- Predictably, Portland's densification policies have created more intense traffic congestion. From 1982 to 2001, Portland's roadway travel miles per square mile increased 68 percent, more than double the 27 percent average of the 75 urbanized areas.
- Portland's per capita roadway travel increased more from 1982 to 2001 than all but four of the 40 urbanized areas with more than 1,000,000 people.

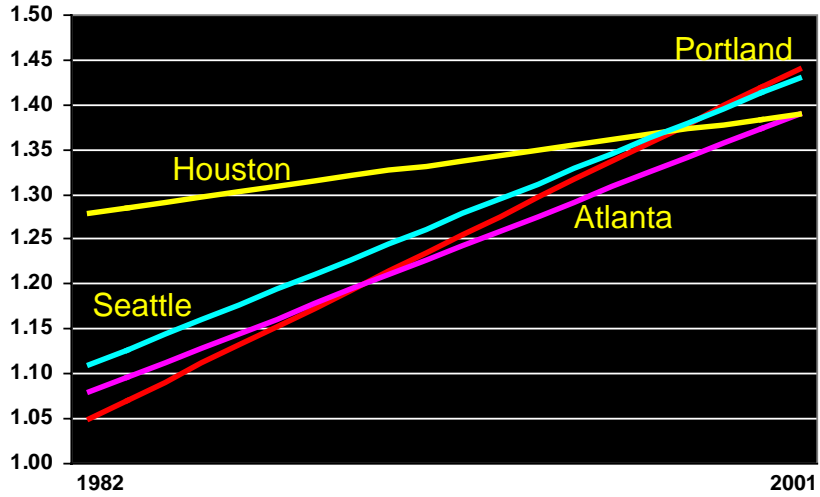
Perhaps most telling of all, however, is the fact that the Travel Time Index rose second only to that of Los Angeles among the 75 urbanized areas from 1982 to 2001.

From 1982 to 2001, Portland's Travel Time Index increased 37 percent, from 1.05 to 1.44. This is despite Portland's policies that limited highway expansion and instead focused on transit improvements, including its 40 miles of light rail. Over the same period of time, Houston pursued near opposite policies, expanding its roadways while building no urban rail. Houston's Travel Time Index rose only nine percent, from 1.28 to 1.39. Similarly, the Travel Time Indexes of Atlanta and Seattle rose less than that of Portland. Both Seattle and Atlanta are recurrently criticized by urban planners for their land use policies that differ from Portland's (chart).

If Portland's smart growth policies were producing their advertised results, each of these results would have been virtually the opposite.

Travel Time Index Trend

PORTLAND WORSE THAN ATLANTA, HOUSTON & SEATTLE



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