

# Transportation Past, Present and Future

by George Koch

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Most of you are familiar with transportation modes of the past. Men on foot, animals, wheeled carts, boats, trains, trolleys, buses, and personal transportation, otherwise known as cars. Over the years I've studied these modes searching for some common denominator, something that would tie this complex subject together, to make it

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more easily understood, and from this to supply answers to the third part of my theme....Transportation in the Future.

I believe most of you would hope that my searching found the key to this mystery and that the key would be real estate. That isn't too far from the mark but the real key is people. For thousands of years the tide of transportation rose and fell with the rise and fall of population. Although the number of people inhabiting our planet earth has been constantly on the rise for the past century, this has not always been true. In earlier history wars, plagues, famine and flood caused substantial declines in the population and equally substantial declines in the movement of people and the goods needed to sustain them. Real estate played a part in all this but not in the way you would like to see it. Revolutions were fought to establish ways to equitably distribute this primary resource but this did not have a major effect on transportation. Rather it was the topographical characteristics of the land that dictated early transportation paths. Waterways first, since in general, these provided the most easily negotiated routes and also because water is the most essential need of both man and beast. Early trails followed the waterways, followed by rough roads, railroads, trolleys, and finally, the highway system. Take a map of any area of the world, lay out major streams then overlay railroads, then highways, and you will find that, to an amazing degree, they overlap one another. Now plot on a final overlay....symbolic

population density and the whole meaning of my original statement becomes clear. It is people that provide the common denominator for all transportation needs.

In the early nineteen hundreds, the dependence on easily traversable terrain declined. Development of the gasoline engine and new transportation vehicles did not need the relatively low friction factor of steel wheels on steel rails. People could, and did, strike out in all directions. Goodbye traditional patterns and projections, hello freedom for everyone to own and live on his own piece of property. And with this freedom came a rising hallelujah chorus, led by road builders and engineers, enhanced by developers and raised to a crescendo by the people involved in the buying and selling of real estate. Lord be praised! We've found the land of milk and honey and for a pittance every man can have his share. Hallelujah!

But wait a minute, who paid for all of this? Highway proponents will quickly point out that through special interest taxes on vehicles, tires, oil and gasoline, supplemented by tolls in some instances, the user and thus the primary beneficiary paid for the ever growing street and highway network with secondary benefits going, without cost, to non-users in the form of lower transportation costs for the goods they consume.

Others are not so enthusiastic about the program. Railway proponents point out that they must pay taxes on their plant, equipment and rights of way while highway users are exempt from these taxes. Thus the railroads subsidize the highway system and in the process find themselves with declining revenues, which in turn require cutbacks in service and reduction of maintenance for the facilities providing this limited service.

Highway opponents, perhaps the most vociferous of these groups, cry

for an end to subsidized highways and a transfer of the highway user funds to other social programs nearer and dearer to them. Suddenly the hallelujah chorus become the Tower of Babel. Since no one understands anyone else, no one listens. All of this presents a rather simplistic view. The whole problem is complicated by government programs, not necessarily related to transportation but having a significant impact on the need for more and better systems.

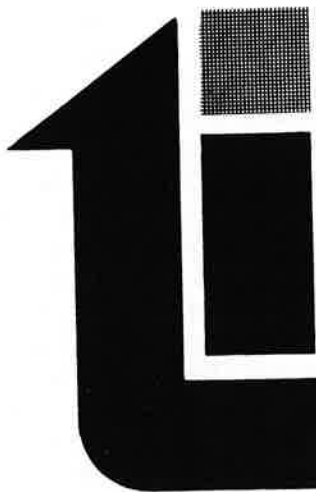
Probably the most important of these programs in terms of impact on the transportation system, was the Federal Home Administration. Started prior to World War Two, this program permitted low down payments and federally insured mortgages which brought home ownership into the reach of nearly everyone. Following the war, this program was expanded and a new program to aid veterans in obtaining homes was added. These programs,

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