

Paul Steinberg, GoCarma

Poster Title: It's Time To Start Counting People—Not Cars

Abstract: The ability to move from one area of the nation to the next, free of harassment, is part of the fabric of this country. Freedom of mobility is a cornerstone of liberty, so much so that the authors of the constitution empowered the Federal government with the responsibility to manage the movement of commerce. Over our history, it's been the expansion of mobility that has fueled our economy and our growth. Railroads helped us secure manifest destiny, a single nation from coast to coast. Construction of massive ports and canals helped leverage millions of acres of farmable land to feed not only a nation, but a world. The car allowed individuals and freight to leave the city and create 'suburbs'. Yet now, as our economy evolves and our people become the commerce, it's transportation that threatens to strangle commerce, not expand it. Congestion has become one of the single greatest hurdles to growth, costing the US economy nearly 305\$ billion in 2017. Despite an onslaught of new technology and business models, too many transportation officials are counting cars as a measure of success. DOTs still have no idea how many people are traveling in each of those vehicles on the road. In the past, vehicle occupancy was not an important piece of data. For more than a hundred years, we have measured the success for any road project was the total capacity of vehicle throughput. Moving forward, it must be passenger throughput. With the U.S. average vehicle occupancy at peak travel times is 1.1, there is strong evidence that will drop with the introduction of Autonomous Vehicles unless policies are in place to address the potential for empty electric vehicles circling city streets to avoid parking while owners are inside buildings. DOTs must better leverage the existing capacity we have by pushing more people through instead of adding capacity to push more vehicles through. I am not advocating for everyone to start riding the bus, nor are we suggesting that we should stop building roads. But we need to recognize the state of play and face the facts that a vehicle with one or even zero (autonomous) people inside puts more burden on our transportation system than a vehicle with 2-3- or 4 persons. It's time to stop asking how many cars, and start asking 'How many people are we moving down our roads?'