

From the Director

by Eileen Bruskwewitz

The 2013 Preserving the American Dream conference was a great success, with more than three dozen excellent presentations, a fascinating tour of the region, and wonderful food and service provided by the Doubletree Hotel.



If you weren't able to attend, some of the presentations are [on line](#), and the entire conference is on eleven DVDs that we are offering for \$50 to ADC members and \$100 to non-members (membership is just \$30). To order, use the form on page 4 of this newsletter.

We are already planning our 2014 conference, which will take place in Denver on September 19 through 21. In addition to our regular meetings, this year's conference will have several hands-on workshops such as how to download and analyze important census and other data—bring your laptops or iPads! I hope to see you in Denver in September so we can all learn how to be more effective advocates for the American Dream Coalition's three goals of freedom, mobility, and affordable homeownership.

Fighting Boondoggles

by Gini David

First, the bad news: So-called “smart-growth,” central planning schemes involving land use and mass transit, are popping up all over the country like crabgrass. Now the good news: Some folks have successfully managed to galvanize opposition with grassroots organizing tactics and to beat boondoggles before they blossom into financial fiascos for taxpayers.

I learned these things at the Preserving the American Dream conference in Washington DC last October. To combat big government boondoggles, the ADC provides strategic and tactical counsel from planning experts like the Cato Institute's Randal O'Toole, demographer Wendell Cox, ADC's executive director Eileen Bruskwewitz, transit expert Tom Rubin, ethics analyst and writer Stanley Kurtz, and many others. (*Note: [Speakers' biographies](#) and most [speakers' presentations](#) are available on the ADC web site.*)

The three-day conference kicked off with an all-day tour of urban projects in the DC Metro area, highlighted by the infamous “Million Dollar Bus Stop” in Arlington (which isn't paved with Swarovski crystals), the proposed Silver Line Metro to Dulles International Airport, and the tree-lined town of Bowie, aka “Maryland's Levittown” as an example of a well-planned suburb.

Transit issues were the focus of much of the ADC conference because in urban planning this is often where the tail wags the dog and creates most issues for citizens. Ideally, the end game should be improved mobility—getting people to employment centers—and congestion relief balanced with fiscal responsibility. As Randal O'Toole argued, quoting FTA Administrator Peter Rogoff, “paint is cheap,” and mobility can often be achieved with bus systems that are more flexible and far more affordable than fixed rail systems like refurbished trolleys and mega-million dollar projects like our SMART train. *(continued on page 2)*



Gini David mugs for the camera as participants in the ADC tour scrutinize the “million-dollar bus stop” in Arlington County, Virginia. The county planned to build several more such bus stops, which did not even provide shelter from rain, but was stopped by local activists.

Fighting Boondoggles *(continued)*

But in the last decade or so, there's been an explosion of rail projects. Like moths to flame, many politicians and planners seem drawn to rail projects because Congress tempts them with "new starts" grants that reward transit agencies for designing the biggest possible boondoggles. Rail plans usually begin with good intentions, often marketed to the public as "Smart" and "Sustainable." But too often, ridership projections are fudged to sell projects to taxpayers who later get stuck with construction over-runs and ongoing maintenance. Consider this stat: nationwide, American cities face \$60 billion in unfunded maintenance costs for rail projects!

What's more, Panos Prevedouros, a professor of transportation engineering at the University of Hawaii, told the ADC audience that rail projects are rife with corruption and fraud, quoting Bent Flyvbjerg, the renowned Chair of Large Program Management at Oxford University: "Rail projects are the projects most fraught with delusion and deception." As Prevedouros explained, "Deception because proponents lie to constituents and overstate ridership and understate costs. And delusion because proponents believe that their projects are better and different than other failures from the past."

Further complicating matters: many transit projects are hog-tied to massive land use plans like Plan Bay Area or Portland's Metro. Federal transit funding becomes both the carrot AND the stick, forcing cities to comply with specific density quotas and "affordable and fair housing" standards, eroding local control, and chasing compliance with far-away bureaucracies and non-government organizations. (Sound familiar?)

But all is not lost. A fascinating "Beating Boondoggles" workshop presented testimonies by people like Eileen Bruskewitz, ADC's executive director and a former county supervisor in Dane County, Wisconsin, which encompasses uber-liberal Madison. Eileen opposed a wasteful rail project using a cool tool box of publicity tactics that turned personal attacks on her as a "knuckle-dragging conservative" into PR gold. Local shock jocks rallied around the spunky, self-proclaimed "Cavewoman" and her "No tax for tracks" campaign, causing the rail plan to go belly up. On the West Coast, Tiffany Couch, a CPA/CFF and forensic accountant—how sexy is that!—dug diligently for real numbers and dubious practices on a high-profile \$1 billion rail project between Oregon and Washington. Tiffany's forensic accounting skills and articulate, common sense exposed local corruption and helped defeat the project.

Also inspiring were Karen Jaroch and Sharon Calvert from the Tampa "No Tax for Tracks" group, who won the ADC's annual "American Dreamers" award for their fearless fight against a 2010 tax increase to fund a rail project in Hillsborough County. I met people who were at different stages of their local battles—people like

Barbara and Giselle from Pinellas County who were fighting a wasteful rail plan, and Katherine Kersten, a policy analyst from Minneapolis whose regional government received a \$5 million "sustainable community grant" from HUD, as our own ABAG did to promote Plan Bay Area. Bottom line: Federal \$ = Carrot and Hammer.

A major speaker was Stanley Kurtz, author and Senior Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, who warned about the murky end game of the Regional Equality Movement exposed in his book, *Spreading the Wealth: How Obama is Robbing the Suburbs to Pay for the Cities*. And at Monday night's dinner, newly elected U.S. Representative Thomas Massie (KY-R), lightened the mood with an inside look at Congress and a wicked sense of humor: "In DC, I drive a cheaper Tesla sedan with a bumper sticker reading "Kentucky Friends of Coal."



Rep. Thomas Massie tells what it is like to be an iconoclast in Congress.

The conference ended with savvy grassroots organizing tips from an all-star panel featuring Mimi Steel, who discussed opposition to Plan Bay Area, and Andrea McCarthy of the Cato Institute who gave common sense media relations tips ("call people, follow up!"). For me, the most compelling insights came from Hadley Heath, a policy analyst at the Independent Women's Forum (iwf.org) and sometimes Fox contributor, who gave tips on messaging and language. Referencing Jonathan Haidt's book, *The Righteous Mind*, which studies moral values and politics, Hadley suggested using words like "fairness" and "caring" which tend to resonate more favorably with liberals.

I got plenty of inspiration and resources from the American Dream conference. And a little hope that people are fighting big government boondoggles—and occasionally winning!

Gini David is a freelance writer and activist from Marin County, California, in the San Francisco Bay Area.

“Sustainable Planning” Threatens American Dream

At least five states require cities and counties to do “sustainable planning.” The Obama administration has given grants of up to \$5 million to more than 50 other city and regional governments to do such planning.

Sustainability is supposed to mean meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” As ADC co-founder Randal O’Toole notes in a recent [Cato report](#), somehow this broad-based term has been redefined to mean “reducing greenhouse gas emissions,” which in turn has been redefined to mean “reduce per capita driving by increasing urban densities.” In fact, O’Toole shows, there is little evidence that increasing densities does much to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and much evidence that making cars more efficient is more effective than trying to reduce driving.

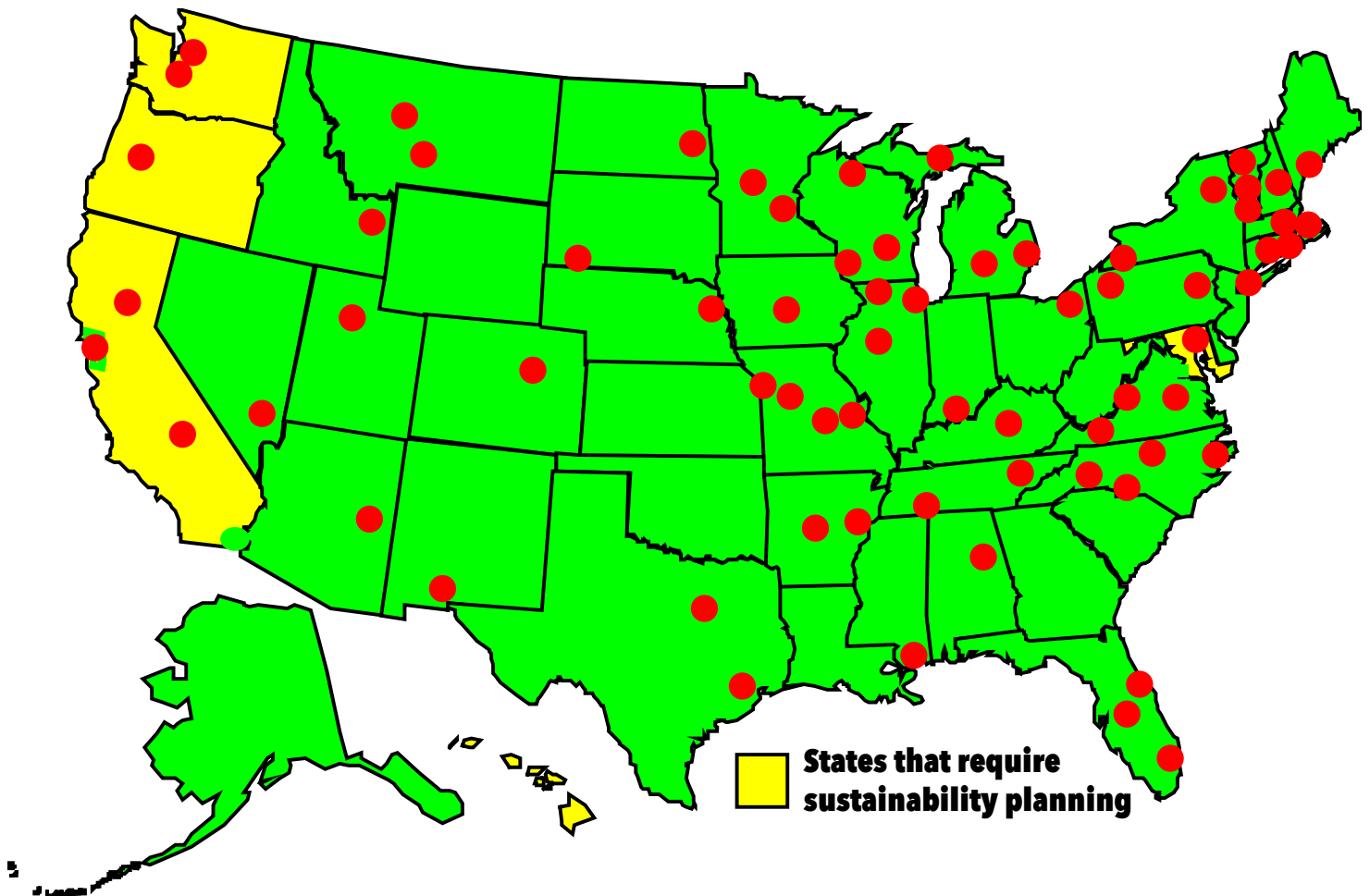
Many people point to Agenda 21—a document that came out of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro conference on sustainable development—as the source of these misconceptions. But Agenda 21 actually says nothing about reducing driving or increasing urban densities. All it says is that cities should:

a. Integrate land-use and transportation planning to encourage development patterns that reduce transport demand;

- b. Adopt urban-transport programmes favouring high-occupancy public transport in countries, as appropriate;
- c. Encourage non-motorized modes of transport by providing safe cycleways and footways in urban and suburban centres in countries, as appropriate.

American urban planners interpret (a) to mean increase densities, but as noted this does little to reduce driving and there are better ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars. Further, the “as appropriates” in statements (b) and (c) are ignored by planners who propose expensive (and greenhouse-gas emitting) transit projects that do little to improve transportation.

If you are resident of one of the states or cities marked on the map below (or even if you live elsewhere), you should check to see what kind of plans your regional or local governments have in mind. Do they propose to reduce the share of people living in single-family homes by 37 percent, as Portland has done? Do they propose to reduce per capita driving by 50 percent, as Washington has done? If their goals are anything like these, then they are finding solutions to the sustainability question that are expensive, intrusive, and likely to fail.



Yellow states on this map require cities and counties to do sustainability planning. Red marks city or regional governments that have received federal Housing and Urban Development grants for such planning. For a complete list of sustainable communities grants, see the [2010](#) and [2011](#) grant lists.

Why Come to Denver?

Why hold the next American Dream conference in Denver? Actually, a better question would be, why hasn't the Coalition already held one in the Mile-High City?

In 1997, Denver-area voters rejected a ballot measure aimed at building rail transit in the region. Significantly, the region made improvements in bus service during the 1990s that increased the share of people taking transit to work from 4.7 to 5.1 percent.

But in 2004, a multi-million dollar campaign funded by railcar manufacturers and contractors persuaded voters to spend \$4.7 billion on six new rail lines. Almost as soon as the election was over, the projected cost of the lines ballooned to \$7.9 billion. To pay for these lines, the region's transit agency scrimped on bus service and by 2010 the share of commuters taking transit to work fell to 4.6 percent.

Rail transit is only part of a scheme to increase urban densities. An urban-growth boundary has pushed housing prices to double what they ought to be. Denver and surrounding cities have also spent more than \$1 billion in tax-increment financing and other subsidies to high-density developments along planned rail lines.

One development alone, Stapleton, received nearly \$300 million in subsidies. The American Dream Coalition is holding its conference in the Stapleton area so people can get an idea of what it is like to live in a high-density community. Some of the homes are nice, but yards are tiny and multifamily dwellings outnumber single-family.



A typical street in Stapleton.

One of the most singular parts of the Denver area is Boulder, often described as "25 square miles surrounded by reality." In the 1970s, Boulder decided to limit growth by issuing only enough building permits to increase residences by just 2 percent per year. The city also bought so much land outside the city limits that it now has a huge greenbelt amounting to six acres of undeveloped land for every acre of land inside the city. One result is that Boulder housing is less affordable than in 95 percent of the rest of the country.

All these things and more will be viewed on the optional bus tour on September 19. Conference discussions will help people in other parts of the country insure that their regions don't make the same mistakes that Denver and Boulder are making.

ADC Membership Form and 2014 Conference Registration

You can join ADC, renew your membership, order 2013 conference DVDs, or register for the 2014 Preserving the American Dream conference using this form or [on-line](#). If you just want to register for part of the 2014 conference, please use the on-line form.

- Yes! Please sign me up to attend the 2014 Preserving the American Dream Conference. I am enclosing a check for:
 - \$229 early-bird rate (conference and meals from Friday dinner through Sunday lunch; rate increases to \$249 after September 4)
 - \$99 student/low-income (same meals)
- Please include me on the optional Friday tour, including lunch, for \$50
- Dietary request: Kosher Vegetarian Vegan
- Please send me 11 DVDs from the 2013 conference for \$50 (members) or \$100 (non-members)
- Please enter or renew my individual membership in the American Dream Coalition for \$30
- Please enter or renew my group membership in the American Dream Coalition for \$250
- I also want to contribute:
 - \$100 \$1,000 \$ _____
- Enclosed is my check
- I will pay by Credit Card through PayPal using on-line registration at americandreamcoalition.org.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

e-mail _____

Please make checks payable to American Dream Coalition and send to ADC, P.O. Box 76, Camp Sherman, Oregon 97730. Full refunds will be provided if you cancel before September 4 or if someone else takes your place.

The Embassy Suites Stapleton, 4444 N. Havana Street, Denver, shown below, offers a conference rate of \$119 per night for any nights from September 15 through 23 if you make reservations by September 4th. To reserve rooms, call 303-375-0400 and specify you are attending the American Dream conference, or go to the [Embassy Suites](#) web site and, when asked, enter "adc" in the "group code" field.

