



Freedom, Mobility, and Affordable Homeownership

The American Dreamer

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From the Director

Everyone in the American Dream Coalition should know Kathleen Calongne, who is one of the nation's most articulate opponents of traffic calming. Her critiques of traffic calming can be found all over the World Wide Web and she has spoken at several Preserving the American Dream conferences.

The American Dream Coalition is fortunate that she has agreed to work for us as ADC's assistant director. I know from working with Kathleen in Colorado that she will bring an enormous amount of energy and skills to ADC.

Kathleen is currently arranging both the 2007 Preserving the American Dream conference, which will take place in San Jose on November 10-12, and the 2008 conference, which will take place in Houston on May 16 through 18. She is also available to help you arrange local conferences and speakers on transportation, housing, land use, and other issues.

While my title of director is purely honorary (i.e., unpaid), ADC is paying Kathleen out of your membership fees and contributions. Speaking of which, I hope you will use the form on the back of this newsletter to renew your membership for 2007 if you have not already done so.

The mission of the American Dream Coalition is to help you and other local activists be more effective in national, regional, and local transportation and land-use legislation and planning efforts. Please let Kathleen or me know if there is anything else we can do to help.

Randal O'Toole,
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Debunking Portland

To advocates of smart growth, Portland, with its urban-growth boundary, light rail, and transit-oriented developments, is a model of sound land-use and transportation planning. To supporters of the American dream, Portland, with unaffordable housing, severe traffic congestion, and numerous social problems associated with mandated densification, is a disaster.

The opening of a new 10-mile-per-hour aerial tramway and the extension of Portland's 7-mile-per-hour streetcar line gained the city more positive publicity. "The city that loves transit," proclaims the New York Times. "Where the car is not king," gushes the BBC.

Portland may look good to a reporter who flies in, visits downtown, and leaves, but for most of the region's residents, it is a much bleaker story. Fortunately, ADC members are doing their best to debunk the Portland mythology.

- ADC executive committee member Jim Karlock has started debunkingportland.com, a web site devoted to documenting the truth about the city's many transit follies. His saveportland.com site tracks subsidies to high-density developments.
- Cascade Policy Institute director John Charles has written or co-written several research papers showing that Portland's transit-oriented developments are an economic and transportation failure.
- ADC director Randal O'Toole continues to cover Portland's problems in his new blog, *The Antiplanner* (ti.org/antiplanner).

Here is the truth behind a few of the most important myths being spread about Portland:

Myth: Portland loves transit and transit use grew rapidly in the 1990s.

Reality: The selective use of transit numbers hides the fact that Portland lost many transit riders in the 1980s, when the high cost of rail construction forced cuts in bus service. In 1980, transit carried 2.6 percent of Portland-area passenger travel. By 1990, it was down to 1.8 percent. Over the next dozen years it slowly increased to 2.3 percent. But now history is repeating itself: even as Portland continues to build expensive rail lines, it has cut bus and rail service. As a result, transit now carries less than 2.2 percent of travel. Since 2001, the number of downtown workers who take transit to work declined by 21 percent, while the number who drive increased.

Myth: Portland's streetcar stimulated \$2.3 billion in new developments and the aerial tram stimulated \$1 billion in new developments.



Portland's streetcar trundles by a high-density housing project located near downtown. Since the streetcar opened in 2001, the share of downtown workers riding the streetcar to work has grown from 1 percent to, well, 1 percent. Photo by PDXJeff.

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Why Portlanders Hate Portland's Planning



Portland's aerial tram passes over a residential neighborhood on its slow journey from a hospital to a new office complex. Originally expected to cost \$5 million, the tram ended up costing \$57 million. Photo by Jami Dwyer.

Reality: Portland officials are double counting since the \$1 billion supposedly stimulated by the tram is included in the \$2.3 billion supposedly stimulated by the streetcar. More important, Portland provided at least \$660 million in subsidies to these developments not counting the cost of the streetcar and tram.

Portland's experience with rail transit has firmly shown that developers will build *no* transit-oriented developments near rail lines unless those developments receive other subsidies. On the other hand, they will gladly build subsidized developments even if they are not on rail lines. The rail lines have not stimulated any development.

Myth: Portland builds its transit lines on time and on budget.

Reality: As debunkingportland.com shows, light-rail lines went 226 percent over the original projected cost and the aerial tram went 268 percent over the \$15.5 million cost approved by Portland's city council. Operating costs are also higher than projected.

Myth: Portland's planning has not made housing unaffordable.

Reality: Portland saw the greatest decline in affordability of any urban area in the country in the 1990s. While planners still maintain that the urban-growth boundary has not made housing unaffordable, they were elated to announce in 2005 that land prices in Portland suburbs had reached the point where developers were tearing down homes on quarter-acre lots and replacing them with high-density housing—something they previously did only if they were subsidized. Today in Portland, “affordable housing” either means subsidized housing or tiny homes that make no sense in the West's wide-open spaces.

Myth: Portlanders are happy with their planning system.

Reality: Portland-area voters are increasingly disaffected by planning. Support for light rail declined from 75 percent in 1990

to 65 percent in 1994 to 55 percent in 1996 to 47 percent in 1998. In 2004, the majority of voters in every county in the Portland area endorsed measure 37, the property-rights measure that opponents said would destroy Oregon's planning system.

Portland's planning lost much of its local luster in 2004, when former mayor Neil Goldschmidt—the father of Portland's rail transit system—was disgraced by a sex scandal. After that, Portland news reporters felt free to write about the “light-rail mafia” that existed to funnel government subsidies to Goldschmidt cronies.

Since then, Portlanders have increasingly realized that much of the region's transit planning has been nothing more than a real-estate scam, aimed less at improving transportation than at enriching a few people. Popular bloggers such as law professor Jack Bogdanski and public-employee-advocate Amanda Fritz have criticized the way these subsidies have taken funds from schools, fire, police, and other urban services.

Myth: Portland has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions.

Reality: In 2005, one county in the Portland area proudly proclaimed that it had reduced greenhouse gas emissions. But the Cascade Policy Institute proved that the claim was based on false assumptions and simple errors in arithmetic.

Myth: Portland is highly respected in the transportation community.

Reality: The Federal Highway Administration has chastised Portland for not making transportation a priority in its regional transportation plans. “It is difficult to find the transportation focus” in the plan, said the agency. Portland has failed to recognize “that automobiles are the preferred mode of transport by the citizens of Portland. They vote with their cars every day.”

Find out more of the truth about Portland at debunkingportland.com, saveportland.com, cascadepolicy.org, ti.org/vaupdates.html, ti.org/antiplanner, and bojack.org.



Thanks to the urban-growth boundary, residential land is now so costly that developers tear down homes on quarter-acre lots and replace them with four “skinny houses”—homes just fifteen-feet wide.

Six New Lanes in Six Feet of Right of Way

The Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority has used pioneering construction techniques to add new lanes to an existing tollway and offer commuters real congestion relief. The three new lanes are elevated on six-foot piers in the median of the existing highway. The lanes are used for inbound traffic in the morning, outbound in the evening, and a combination during off-peak periods.

The cost of construction was just \$14 million per lane mile, and half of that was due to fixing an engineering error. The authority expects to recover much of that cost from the company that made the error, bringing the cost down to \$7 million a lane mile. By comparison, light-rail lines planned or under construction are costing an average of \$50 million per route mile and would carry far fewer people each day than one of these lanes.

The authority opened the lanes to traffic in late 2006 and immediately saw a huge reduction in congestion. Average speeds increased from 10-20 miles per hour to 55-65 miles per hour during rush hour. In short, the new lanes effectively eliminated congestion.

Best of all, the authority expects to fully pay for the new lanes out of electronic tolls. As future traffic increases, the authority plans to vary tolls according to traffic conditions to insure that the lanes never become congested.

Martin Stone, chief planner for the expressway authority, has agreed to speak at the 2007 Preserving the American Dream conference. Congratulations to Tampa for solving the congestion problem and showing the rest of the nation how to do it.



A Tampa expressway authority built three new lanes on six-foot piers in the median strip of an existing tollway. The new lanes, whose cost will be entirely covered by electronic tolls, completely eliminated tollway congestion. Since the new lanes are used inbound in the morning and outbound in the afternoon, the authority likes to say that it built six lanes in six feet of right of way.

American Dreamers Bring the Message Home

Each year, the Preserving the American Dream conference brings dozens of experts together with activists from all over the nation. At the Atlanta conference in September, many of the activists resolved to bring some of those experts into their home towns. Here are some of the events they have held or have planned.

In October, Dale Evans brought the Reason Foundation's Robert Poole and ADC's Randal O'Toole to a conference in Honolulu aimed at finding ways to relieve Oahu's serious congestion problems. The program was sponsored by the Hawai'i Highway Users Alliance (HHUA) with the goal of influencing the city's proposal to build an expensive rail line.

Also speaking at the Honolulu conference was Martin Stone, the planning director of the Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority, who described a new elevated freeway that greatly relieved congestion in east Tampa at a very low cost (see above story). Rounding out the conference was Panos Prevedouros, a transportation engineering professor from the University of Hawai'i. In November, HHUA held a second conference featuring John Charles of the Cascade Policy Institute and the Reason Foundation's Ted Balaker.

Three Santa Barbarans who attended the Atlanta conference, John Self, Michael Self, and James Westby, form the nucleus of Santa Barbara Safe Streets, which supports reduced congestion and opposes traffic calming. The group sponsored a February 9 half-day conference on Santa Barbara transportation issues.

The conference featured Santa Barbara city Councilman Das Williams and a representative of the local transit agency. From out of town, the group brought ADC's Randal O'Toole and John Forester, an expert on cycling who spoke at the 2005 Preserving the American Dream conference.

Neil Williamson directs the Free Enterprise Forum, a Charlottesville, VA, think tank. After attending the Atlanta conference, Williamson invited Randal O'Toole, Wendell Cox, and other American dream speakers to a monthly speakers' series that the Forum offers in Charlottesville.

The American Dream Coalition can help you bring speakers to your community. Visit our speakers' bureau on line to select from a variety of experts and sample their presentations. For information about how to arrange either a local conference or a speakers' series, contact Randal O'Toole at rot@ti.org or Kathleen Calongne at kathleen@americandreamcoalition.org.

On November 10-12, the 2007 Preserving the American Dream conference will visit one of the most-regulated, least-affordable urban areas in America, San Jose. Just six months later, on May 16-18, 2008, the sixth annual Preserving the American Dream conference will take place in America's least-regulated, most-affordable urban area, Houston.

Smart-growth advocates say Houston is only affordable because it is so unlivable. Yet the Houston area has been growing by more than 100,000 people per year, three times faster than Portland or Denver, and more than thirty times faster than San Jose or San Francisco. Houston must have something to attract these people.

Find out for yourself! Plan to attend the 2007 conference to see whether smart growth has made San Jose livable. Then follow that up with the 2008 conference to find out what makes Houston so attractive to so many people. Both conferences, of course, will feature tours of the cities and dozens of expert speakers.

Why are we holding the 2007 and 2008 conferences just six months apart? At the Atlanta conference, the ADC steering committee decided to hold future conferences in the spring. There wasn't time to plan a conference for spring 2007, so rather than skip 2007, the group decided to begin this policy with the 2008 meeting.

American Dream Coalition Membership Form

The American Dream Coalition provides numerous benefits for its members, including:

- Research on national and local issues;
- A speakers' bureau;
- Leadership training;
- The annual Preserving the American Dream conference;
- Assistance with regional workshops;
- The ADC news blog;
- Communications with other activists;
- The *American Dreamer* newsletter and e-mail news.

Your membership fees and contributions help pay for these activities. Sustaining and full/group members each have one vote on the ADC steering committee. Associate and individual members elect three members of the ADC steering committee. Contributions in excess of \$25 per year are tax deductible.

To join or renew your membership, use this form or go to the American Dream Coalition's web site.

- I/we would like to join the American Dream Coalition as:
- a sustaining member (\$1,000)
 - a full/group member (\$250)
 - an associate member (\$100)
 - an individual member (\$25)
- I would also like to contribute \$_____.
- Enclosed is a check for \$_____.
- I will pay by PayPal to american@americandreamcoalition.org.

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email address _____

Web site (for groups) _____

*Make checks payable to the American Dream Coalition and mail to:
ADC, P. O. Box 1590, Bandon, Oregon 97411
or email to rot@americandreamcoalition.org*

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