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No more freeways?

Might be better

Wendee Holtcamp, Apr 11, 11.

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Could major metropolitan areas get by without building any more major freeways - ever?

That is the conclusion of [a new study](#) by the Oregon Transportation Research and Education Consortium (OTREC). Not only that, they found that under the “No More Freeway” scenario, employment and housing opportunities were more evenly distributed throughout the urban areas, and mobility was more, not less, efficient.

In the report, “No More Freeways: Urban Land Use Transportation Dynamics Without Freeway Capacity Expansion,” researchers Le Zhang of University of Maryland and Wei Xu of Oregon State University used a computer simulation model called ABSOLUTE (Agent-Based Simulator of Land-Use Transportation Evolution) – previously developed

by Zhang– that allows them to play around with different land use and growth scenarios and also to look at public versus private investment (in other words, who ultimately pays for those additional freeways and roads).

In 1900, there were 149 miles of paved roadways, and by 2000 that had increased to 4 million miles. “Planners and decision-makers often are drawn to short-term solutions for prominent freeway bottlenecks,” Zhang and Wei write in the report, and as a result are often drawn to the immediate solution of building more freeways, typically using public dollars.

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Kaid Benfield
Complete streets policies are gaining popularity across the country.



Kaid Benfield
Assumptions surrounding sprawl continue to collapse.

Yet this short-term approach may have far-reaching consequences. Kaid Benfield of NRDC's Sustainable Communities and Smart Growth Program recently made that point clear in a blog post (with aerial images) for the Atlantic magazine, showing that the traditionally romantic cities of Vienna, Rome, and Paris do not have freeways running through the city center, unlike Atlanta or Dallas.

In No More Freeways, the researchers analyzed both a hypothetical urban area and the real-world Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota.

"The research question is, What is the land use and transportation impact of not building any additional freeway capacity at all? With the "No-More-Freeway" proposal as one of the alternative transportation investment policy scenarios, four additional policy scenarios are also developed, modeled and evaluated for comparison purposes: more public freeways, more private freeways, completely private ownership, and socially optional investment."

For the Twin Cities, they found that in the short term (the next 8 years), the "No More Freeway" scenario outperformed all other investment options – including public funding of freeways, private funding of freeways, and a market-based investment approach. "This suggests that more investment in arterial streets is probably the more cost-effective investment strategy than more freeway capacities given the current land use and transportation systems in the Twin Cities," the report concludes. In the longer term, they say, if demand continues to grow then freeway investment will become more cost-effective once again unless more efficient options are used, such as public transportation (buses, rail) or more efficient land use and development.

Although they acknowledge a need to improve their model and further refine the study, they would like to expand it to other urban areas.

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Comments

[Justin Carinci](#) said:

Thanks for the article. There's a page for this project at the OTREC site: <http://www.otrec.us/project/163>

Posted on Apr 14, 11 at 9:51 am

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