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Redeveloping Our Cities To Reduce Congestion

Every day, millions of Americans use cars as their mode of transportation. Whether work or leisure, driving has been woven into the fabric of American life. As more people have become increasingly dependent on their cars, congestion started to affect cities. It has become an everyday problem that people have reluctantly accepted as part of urban living. However, cities can reduce congestion while improving mobility by rethinking how to prioritize congestion reduction methods. Mixed-use development, safer street design, and reliable transit provide people with more efficient transportation options, resulting in cities that move more smoothly and sustainably.

One major cause of car dependence is outdated zoning laws. When zoning laws were created, they were to protect people from development that was deemed injurious to the health, safety, and welfare. It seemed like a great and powerful tool that would keep people safe and away from dangerous buildings. After being implemented, the opposite occurred: the government could place people wherever it wanted. Christoper Silver, author of Zoning in 20th-Century American Cities, describes early zoning laws as “it was used to facilitate social and economic segregation.” Creating a divide of where people lived by race and income. An issue that is still faced today is that house prices are dictated by distance to jobs and businesses. Having a mixed-use development or zoning would help fix the issue. Business would be where

there is demand, instead of where they are allowed to exist. Whether people want to start a business, they would no longer have to rent out a big space. Bring a boost to the local economy, as there is no longer a huge burden of starting a business and the need to search for a space to open.

Local businesses' success also depends on how people get there. The goal of a business is to have as many customers as it can serve. As a result, land dedicated to businesses is mostly taken up by parking. An issue when you consider that most of the time, parking lots are empty. Cities have focused on improving the efficiency of cars, but they have ignored pedestrians. Dr. Martin Melosi wrote: “It is estimated that as much as one half of modern American cities’ land area is dedicated to streets and roads, parking lots, service stations… and more.” Cities were made for people, but destroyed to fit cars in them. A negative when you look a cities and see huge abandoned buildings and parking lots. Valuable land that will just be ignored.

When cars were starting to become a prominent mode of transportation, cities needed to set speed limits. Cities started to use the 85% rule, which suggested that the speed limit should be the speed of the 15th-fastest car out of every 100 when traveling. (Outdated tile that lets drivers set speed limits on US roads could be changing amid spike in highway deaths.) A method that many cities have adopted since it was easy to implement. It set the speed limit based on the drivers and what they felt comfortable with. What cities never consider when setting speed limits is the safety of pedestrians. Since most roads have a lack of people walking, people will speed as there is no obstacle that would worry them. If you were walking next to the road, you might not feel safe with cars next to you. It is a dangerous recipe that only takes one accident and a pedestrian to kill someone. Especially in a small town where a highway may go through, and speed will still be 45mph. A 2019 study from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found

that a 5 mph increase in a state's maximum speed limit increases 8.5% on interstate highways or 2.8% for the chance of fatalities. 5 mph is not even a big increase, especially with modern cars, since you no longer feel how fast you are going; only looking at a speedometer will tell you how fast you were going.

When adjusting how fast the speed limit should be, it should not just be a sign telling them, but the environment around them. When cities can upgrade roads to meet the demand for increased traffic, they choose to increase the number of lanes. Look at all the projects that were made to fix congestion. Some examples are increasing the number of lanes on the Katy freeway or local projects increasing the number of lanes to help more cars go through. In theory, the project would increase cars going, but the reality is that it does not include all the variables. Cars merging lanes or turning create variables that may result in an increase in congestion compared to before. While cities think bigger, the solution may be smaller roads. Road diets reduce the lanes of traffic but improve the flow of people by moving more with them walking or biking. A prime example of how a road diet improved congestion and increased pedestrian traffic is the U.S. DOT Federal Highway Administration Construction Costs Case Study for the city of La Quinta, CA. The project reduced the number of lanes from four to two, which allowed for a bike lane on each side. Contrary to what people would expect, the project was successful at its goal. The speed of vehicles was reduced, and the bike lanes allowed connectivity that resulted in an increase in pedestrian and bicycle traffic. All while reducing congestion on the roadway.

American reliance can still be part of our cities with a rethinking of how to improve cities. Removing congestion, unsafe streets, and sprawling neighborhoods will not be a simple task. Promoting a new way we design cities is an effective way to get the change that we want. Asking to remove outdated zoning laws will reduce the need to driver to places. Prioritizing cars

over pedestrians resulted in a huge amount of land being dedicated to cars when there could be more shops or housing. Change the mindset that more lanes will reduce traffic congestion and instead focus on smaller roads with more focus on pedestrians, like La Quinta's road diet project. It is not about forcing people not to use cars, but instead allowing people to have more than one choice to travel, giving people more alternatives to driving.

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Reflection

This project was kind of difficult because using AI as a resource finder was something that I am not used to. I feel that AI is only useful for giving you advice on your writing and brainstorming a thesis or topics for a writing assignment. When searching for by giving it a topic, it gave me sources that I could use, but the problem was that you had to buy something to be able to see it. I would not trust and buy something that AI recommends could be a useful source. Another problem that I faced was that after asking what I would prefer, a site or a PDF book, it gave me sources that I would still need to pay for, or a link to the resource was not working. The next part was finding sources on a specific topic that I was asking. The sources that it would give me were very vague on the topic, or just did not have enough information for me to use as a source. I felt that I had so many sources I could use, but many would not provide enough to prove the point I was trying to make. Overall, I think that you should not use AI as a form of research because it might only tell you between 5 sources when there are literally thousands of sites that provide information with one Google search. The only reason to use AI would be to ask for a source and provide a detailed explanation of the topic you want a source for, requiring you to know about the topic. This completely defeats the purpose of using AI to find sources that would be useful for a research paper or essay. AI seems like you are trying to find a rare source that is hidden, which is slightly relevant to the topic.