

State of the City: The Arteries of Transit

Like any other great city, New York is a vast social complex dependent in the highest degree on the ease with which its citizens can move from section to section—whether to earn a living or to enjoy the city's rich cultural resources.

The pressing question now facing New Yorkers is whether its arterial system of subways, buses, taxis, commuter lines and private cars has not already fallen to a level where it cannot fulfill that purpose. Has the system become so sluggish, inefficient and frustrating that the city has been brought to the point of no return?

Not yet. But the downward movement is too headlong for any New Yorker to view even the near future with complacency.

This city owes to geography a three-way jurisdictional division over transportation. The city's own Transportation Administration, the state's Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the interstate Port Authority divide regulatory control and planning along lines that make logical sense but inevitably overlap and sometimes conflict. Closer coordination in planning would bring greater coherence to the transportation pattern of the area but, in all fairness, the real problem in this case is not that convenient whipping-boy, bureaucracy. The problem is money.

Deeper still, the problem is that of New York as a whole—a shrunken tax base for financing public services and an apparent incapacity to impose to the full the rule of law against thuggery and vandalism. In the subways (as elsewhere), lawlessness has reached alarming proportions.

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