

Sustainable Mobility in the US and Canada

New Governance Models for
a Low Density Continent

39th Johns Hopkins' International Urban Fellows
Conference, Bologna, June 13-17, 2009

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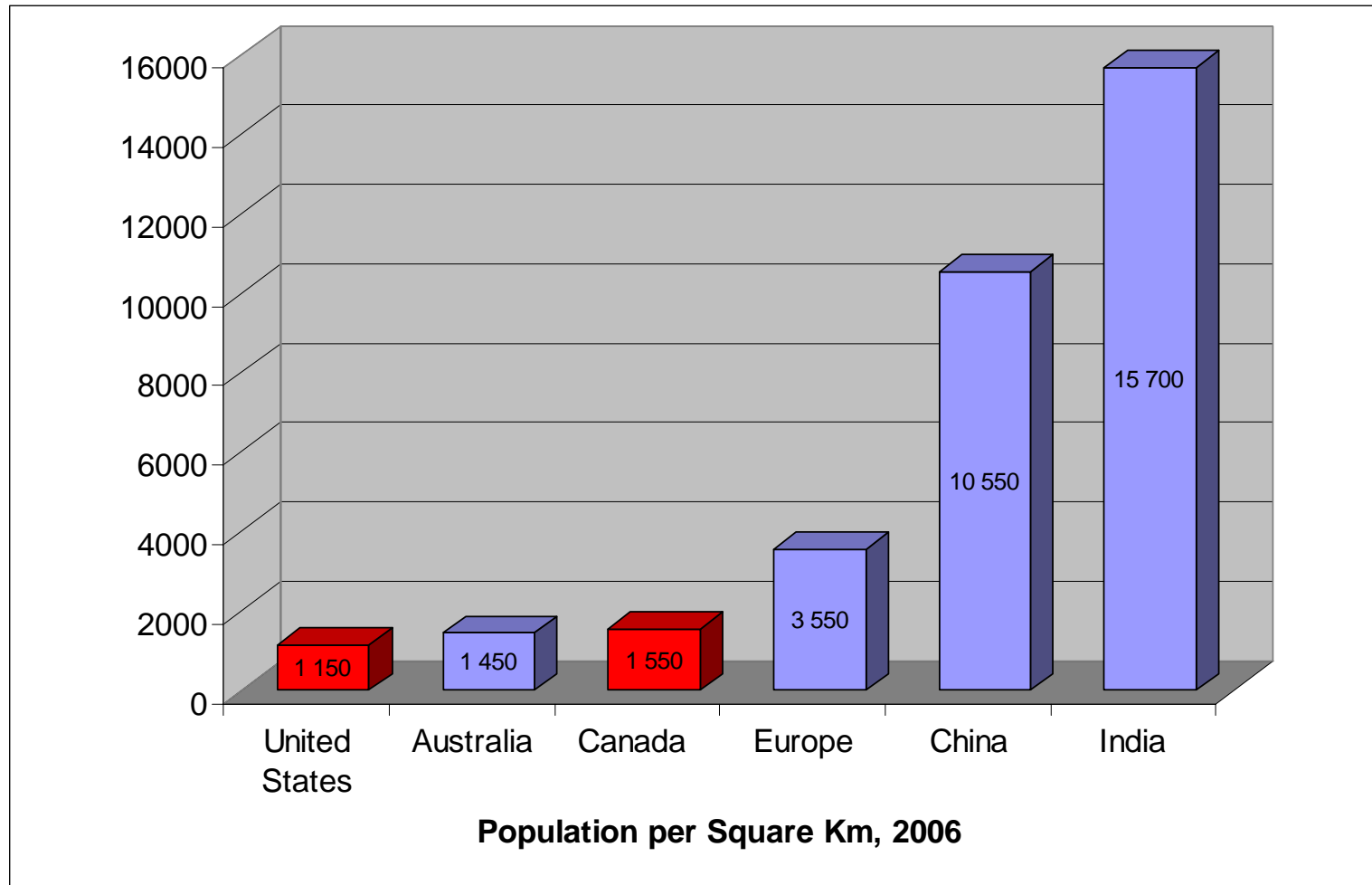
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Urban Areas Population Density



Source: Based upon data from Demographia - www.demographia.com/db-worldua.pdf

Impact of urban sprawl

- Sprawl development model: discontinuous suburban development with low population densities and high dependence to cars.
- Sprawl threatens sustainability of cities by:
 1. Destroying land.
 2. Increasing energy consumption (long commutes; traffic congestion and harmful emissions).
 3. Negative impact on central city and older suburbs.
 4. Public health problems (poor quality of air; obesity, etc.).

What is sustainable transport and mobility?

Sustainable transports

- 1980s – Traditional planning
- How do you provide a public transportation service?
- Opposes individual (cars) versus public oriented transports
- Promotes increased public transports (buses; trains; etc.)
- Technical decision making

Sustainable mobility

- 1990s – New perspective
- How to get people from A to B?
- Promotes a better integration of individual and public transports (including walking, cycling, public transit, cars, parking, tooling, etc.)
- Focuses on multi and inter modal transports (combination of several means of transportation to get to destination – car, bus, walk)
- Demand driven

Governance problem #1: Lack of public awareness

- The economic argument of rationality and full knowledge of individuals in decision making don't apply to transport!
- Individual travel decisions are thus limited – people don't understand the collective costs and the impacts of their decisions on traffic and travel time, environment, health, etc.
- People are not exposed and/or educated to sustainable mobility principles – yet, **public acceptability is essential to fundamental changes...**

Governance problem #2: Lack of integrated transportation objectives

- Fragmented policy orientation (urban and transportation policies are not well integrated):
 - Land planning;
 - Roads and highways development;
 - Tooling policies;
 - Parking policies;
 - Public transit policies;
 - Housing;
 - etc.
- Very few incentives for transportation planners or local politicians to adopt a comprehensive approach

Governance problem #3: Weak regional governance

- Senior governments don't provide the right incentives (lack of regulations and funding toward sustainable mobility principles)
- Weak metropolitan governance in transportation planning (competition between central cities, old suburbs and new suburbs)
- Most metropolitan areas are going in two directions at once: intensification in some areas and sprawl at the margins
- **This is the politics of compromise – trying to accommodate individual and public transportation at the same time doesn't work...**

Two ideas for a paradigm shift

Involving people

- Public acceptability drives political acceptability
- Need active involvement of populations in transportation planning and decisions
- Social marketing strategy needed to inform people about transportation alternatives and the impact of decisions on transports

Recentralization of powers

- Central governments (federal, states, provinces) need to set the incentives toward sustainable development (regulations and spending power)
- Metropolitan governance has often failed in the past – need to rethink the current structures of decision making
- I question the idea of “subsidiarity” as far as transportation policies are concerned

A window of opportunity for mid size cities?

Challenges that don't hit the wallet

- Global warming awareness
- Suburban people exhausted by travel time and delays
- Demand for better public transit systems
- Demographics (aging will change land development patterns)

Challenges that hit the wallet

- Gas price increases (we all know now that it will not stop!)
- Impact of the current global crisis:
 - Limitations on credit (housing, or buying cars)
 - Lost savings (reduction of expenditures; changes in consumption patterns)
 - Public finance crisis is expected after the economic recovery (more taxes and more rational public expenditures)

Will mid size cities avoid the same mistakes...

