Connecting the Dots Between Transportation, Climate, and Inflation

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We’re Stuck in a Vicious Cycle of Automobile Dependence

More people have no choice but to drive almost everywhere → Political support for public money to subsidize highways

Existing land uses & those who are there are left behind → Roads and auto-oriented land uses are built

Employers & residents move to areas with new investments
Cumulative spending on infrastructure, all governmental levels, 1956 to 2017

Source: CBO; chart by Yonah Freemark/The Transport Politic

- Highway
- Mass Transit & Rail

Billions of 2017 dollars

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Highway</th>
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In Metropolitan Areas around the Country, Commuters Are Choosing to Walk and Take Transit to Work Less Frequently
Change in share of working-age commuters using transit or walking to get to work, 1970–2019, nine largest metropolitan areas (2019)
Automobile Dependence Costs Everyone More Money

- Auto dependence encourages car ownership
- Car ownership—even without driving—is expensive
- Car dependence means more and more driving
- People who can’t afford it are left behind
- Car-dependent land uses are more expensive to maintain
- More driving means more gas, possibility of crashes
Households with Cars Spend Considerably More on Transportation

Share of consumer expenditures spent on transportation


Notes: Data are for households with a primary householder between 25 and 65 years old. There is no statistical difference ($p < 0.05$) in t-tests comparing overall nontransportation expenditures among the income buckets above $25,000. $n = 3,332$ respondents.
Car Dependence Means Excessive Exposure to Inflation

- Imagine three hypothetical households in a world of $3/gallon gas
- Assumes 30 mpg cars and $7,000/year for car maintenance

**Household 1**
- Spends $3,000 a month on mortgage
- Lives in a walkable community and doesn’t own a car
- $4,000 a year on transit, bikes, taxis
- Total: $40,000

**Household 2**
- Spends $2,500 a month on mortgage
- Owns 1 car. Averages 14 mi/day
- $10,000 a year on car, transit, bikes
- Total: $40,000

**Household 3**
- Spends $2,000 a month on mortgage
- Owns 2 cars. Averages 40 mi/day
- Spends $16,000 a year on cars
- Total: $40,000
Under High Gas Inflation....

- Imagine three hypothetical households in a world of $6/gallon gas
  - Household 1
    - Spends no more on transportation expenditures
  - Household 2
    - Spends around $500 extra per year on gassing up, totaling $1,000
  - Household 3
    - Spends around $1,500 extra per year on gassing up, totaling $3,000

That’s a 7.5 percent increase in household expenditures.
Reducing Automobile Dependency Can Reduce Costs

- A society where fewer people drive is a society with less transportation expenditures overall.
- It’s a society that’s more resilient to random spikes in energy prices and that is less destructive to the environment.
- It’s also a place where access to daily needs isn’t dependent on personal wealth.
Thanks!