

Transportation and the Livable City An Address to the Boston 400

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Let me say right at the outset how very impressed I am by this organization and how glad I am that it exists. I cant think of a better way to celebrate Bostons 400th birthday than by building on the qualities that have placed it high in the ranks of the worlds great places. The kinds of things youre committed to--enhancing the citys public realm, strengthening economic opportunity, providing a strong social support structure and finding new ways to meet residents need for a vibrant civic life--these are the things that every city needs. I suppose that means that every American city, including many that arent 400 years old, needs an organization like Boston 400, and I commend Mayor Menino for his vision and foresight in creating it.

Speaking of Mayor Menino, I dont know of another big-city mayor in the country with a stronger commitment to preserving the heritage of his city. As some of you know, he has just completed nine years of service as a member of the National Trusts Board of Advisors. During that time he has been a consistent and outspoken champion of the importance of historic preservation, just as hes been a consistent and outspoken champion of Boston as the best city in America. Weve benefited enormously from the close relationship weve had with him over the years, and Im glad to have this opportunity to acknowledge and thank him for his contributions here before this audience of his friends and constituents.

With the end of the year, the end of the century and the end of the millennium at hand, its a good time to take a hard look around.

The good news is that the budget is balanced, unemployment rolls are low, the economy is booming. The bad news--and its very bad indeed--is that many American communities are in the midst of a real crisis--the most serious theyve faced since the darkest days of urban renewal thirty years ago.

Ironically, the news media are full of stories about the "comeback" of Americas urban centers. They show us pictures of glittering developments like Harborplace in Baltimore, the new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, the riverfront aquarium in New Orleans and shiny new office towers in Los Angeles. These mega-projects are positive signs, to be sure, but do they really mean rebirth? The picture is impressive, but is it the whole picture?

Probably not: livability is in short supply in too many of the traditional downtowns and older residential neighborhoods that we've neglected so callously in recent decades. And we're beginning to recognize that livability isn't just a warm-and-fuzzy, Hallmark-card sentiment. In an increasingly competitive global marketplace, livability is the factor that will determine which communities thrive and which ones wither. Robert Solow, Nobel Prize-winning economist at MIT, puts it this way: "Livability is not some middle-class luxury. It is an economic imperative."

My generation of Americans inherited cities that, for the most part, worked. Our legacy to succeeding generations is shoddily-built suburban sprawl and inner cities that are turning into ruins right before our eyes. If we continue to allow our cities to deteriorate, we stand to lose a major part of America's memory of itself. Our cities are the tangible "flesh and bones" of our history. They are the crucible in which much of our national character was formed. They have served as ports of entry for waves of immigrants and contain in rich diversity the heritage of Americans of every culture and ethnic origin. To turn our backs on them, to bulldoze and blacktop them into sterile homogeneity, or just board them up and write them off, is to deny and reject our own history as a people. The cost of such shortsightedness could never be paid in dollars. It would be a debit against the American spirit.

How did we get into this situation? It certainly didn't happen all at once. The sudden, cataclysmic destruction of cities is a rare occurrence. Instead, cities usually get destroyed bit by bit--nicked to death, if you will, by the urban-planning equivalent of a million paper-cuts. Many of those cuts--far too many of them--are delivered in the name of transportation improvement.

It begins when a traffic engineer notices that tie-ups are starting to occur on a particular street, so the street gets widened. New turn lanes are installed at busy intersections. A bit later, "One Way" signs go up and traffic lights are synchronized in a further effort to speed the flow. And when the flow does speed up, more cars appear to take advantage of the improvement. When congestion starts to occur again--and it always does--the roads get wider and wider. Freeways muscle in, more buildings and trees get bulldozed, more asphalt gets poured for more parking lots, more neighborhoods are scarred, more Main Streets destroyed.

It happens in a series of steps, each step apparently logical and innocuous enough. But the cumulative effect is devastating. And the final result, as Jane Jacobs pointed out in her landmark book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, is that "every place becomes more like every other place, all adding up to Noplace."

When Jane Jacobs wrote those words in 1961, "transportation" was practically synonymous with "car." The world has changed in some astonishing ways since then--but this particular aspect of American life hasn't changed much. Today's automobiles may be smaller and less chrome-laden than they were in 1961, but they are no less insatiable in their demand for space, no less ruthlessly efficient as destroyers of communities.

This destructive power shifted into high gear in 1956, when the nation began construction of the interstate highway system, pushing multi-lane highways right through the middle of every major American city. It's well known that the interstate system was inspired by the awesomely efficient network of autobahns laid out in Germany in the 1930s, but historian Stephen Goddard has pointed out that the American version differed from its German counterpart in at least one significant element: "...the German roads sought to serve the cities, while the American roads sought to change them."

Robert Moses, perhaps the most prolific road-builder of the century, once described his technique this way: "...when you're operating in an overbuilt metropolis, you have to hack your way with a meat ax." That's a graphic and sadly accurate image of the impact of the interstate highway system on America's cities. Thousands of sound buildings--shops, warehouses, factories and homes--were demolished. Hundreds of viable neighborhoods were levelled. Scores of cities and towns were torn apart. It was almost as if America had declared war on itself.

One by-product of this frenzy of urban destruction and superhighway construction was to propel America, in the words of Lewis Mumford, into the fourth great migration in its history. The first was the great movement westward across the continent. The second was the process of coming together in towns and cities. The third was the great migration earlier in this century from farms to urban areas. And the fourth, which is still going on, is the decentralization made possible by the development of new transportation and communication technologies. These new technologies have enabled twentieth-century America to do something unique in the history of Western civilization: We've turned our cities inside out, releasing industry, commerce and population from the core, leaving ruin and wasted investment behind.

Henry Ford once said, "We shall solve the city problem by leaving the city." That was bad advice, but we're still following it. We keep running from America's urban problems, but we can't hide forever. There are now 4 million Americans living in gated communities, but it's time we realized that gated communities aren't a solution, they're a symptom of the urban crisis we've created through decades of neglect and shortsightedness and the mindless pursuit of policies that don't work.

We can't seem to shake our attachment to yesterday's vision of tomorrow--the dream of a utopia with unfettered mobility, where skyscrapers soar above acres of parkland and great highways stretch toward the horizon. In the 1920s and 30s, the most compelling expressions of this vision sprang from the drawing boards of designers such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier and their followers, all of whom were united in despising the form of the traditional city. Le Corbusier went so far as to propose that much of the city of Paris be demolished and replaced with 18 identical skyscrapers, each 700 feet tall, spaced across the landscape like gigantic tombstones. Shocked Parisians branded Le Corbusier a "barbarian," but in the United States his vision was hailed as a work of genius. The fact that this vision completely disregards the way cities really work hasn't

stopped generations of planners from adopting it as the paradigm of the ideal urban form.

Tragically, the reality turns out to be something else--something far from ideal. Instead of pastoral vistas enhanced by attractive buildings and awesomely efficient highways, we have sprawl that makes a mockery of urban vitality and turns countryside into clutter. Instead of comfortable cities that run like clockwork, we have cities that are diffuse, clumsy, expensive, and increasingly hard to enjoy or even use. Instead of shining towers in a park, we have windowless discount stores in a parking lot.

Drive down any highway leading into any town in the country, and what do you see? You see fast-food outlets and office parks and shopping malls rising out of vast barren plains of asphalt. You see residential subdivisions spreading like inkblots, obliterating forests and farms in their relentless march across the landscape. You see cars, thousands of them, moving sluggishly down the broad ribbons of pavement or halting in frustrated clumps at choked intersections or parked in glittering rows in front of every building. You see a lot of activity, but not much life. You see the graveyard of livability. You see communities drowning in a destructive, soulless, ugly mess called sprawl.

This is the ultimate legacy of decades of shortsighted transportation policy: Sprawl--the low-density development that devours open space, condemns residents to more time in their cars and less time with their families, drains the life out of traditional downtowns and older neighborhoods, and creates inefficient land-use patterns that are enormously expensive to serve. It certainly isn't hard to find: It's everywhere. The highways, subdivisions and commercial strips sprouting on the edges of Boston and Braintree and Burlington are practically indistinguishable from those surrounding Albuquerque and Atlanta and Kansas City, all of them looking like what one critic has called "Gods own junkyard."

Sprawl isn't going to go away unless we take action to rein it in. And in the most practical terms, that means doing all we can to institute more rational transportation policy at all levels of government--federal, state and local.

What does this have to do with historic preservation? Why should the National Trust care about transportation policy? Because we care about communities. The demand for wider streets and more parking lots has carved big chunks out of thousands of historic towns and neighborhoods. And we've learned that we can't revitalize our historic inner cities without doing something to control the auto-generated sprawl that pushes chaotic development further and further out from the center. There may have been a time when preservation was about saving an old building here and there, but those days are gone. Preservation is in the business of saving communities and the values they embody--and today we find ourselves battling transportation policies that seem bent on destroying both.

Let me make something clear: The villain is not the automobile--or not the automobile alone, at any rate. The simple fact is that since the 1950s, transportation policy at every

level--federal, state and local--has effectively destroyed transportation options for Americans. As Jessica Mathews wrote a while ago in the Washington Post, "Americans are not irrationally car-crazed. We seem wedded to the automobile because policy after government policy...encourages us to be."

You don't have to look very far to see the result of these policies. They have brought us to a state of affairs in which, as Harrison Salisbury wrote, "a horse and buggy could cross Los Angeles almost as fast in 1900 as an automobile can make this trip at 5 P.M. today." Those words were written 30 years ago, and things certainly haven't improved since then. The average speed on Los Angeles freeways today is about 30 miles per hour--and projections are that it will drop to 11 miles per hour by 2010. A study released just a couple of weeks ago indicates that Los Angeles residents waste an average of 49 hours per year stuck in traffic jams. The only city in the nation with a worse record is my own hometown, Washington, where time wasted in traffic jams equals about 59 hours annually per resident, or the equivalent of a week and a half of work. This translates into a high price tag for time and fuel wasted: about \$2.9 billion a year, or roughly \$860 annually for every man, woman and child in the Washington area.

These depressing statistics merely underscore the point that current transportation policies, which one critic has summarized as "feed the car, starve the alternative," simply aren't working. And how do the transportation planners propose to solve the problem? By building more highways--an approach which, as someone has pointed out, is like loosening your belt to cure obesity.

With less than 5% of the world's population, we consume 25% of the world's oil--8.9 million barrels of it burned in motor vehicles every day. Eighty-two percent of all trips in the U.S. are taken by car. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average American household now allocates more than 21% of its budget to transportation expenses, most of which are auto-related. That's more than it spends for food and over three times more than it spends for health care. And what are we getting in return for this enormous investment? Headaches. The Federal Highway Administration expects congestion to grow fourfold on our freeways and twofold on other roads over the next 20 years.

The devastation isn't limited to urban areas. The beltways that ring many cities are reaching saturation point, generating plans for new beltways and bypasses further out in the countryside that will encourage the spread of sprawl and pave additional acres of productive farmland and scenic open space.

And who pays for this destruction? A recent study indicates that drivers traveling alone to work pay only 25% of the actual cost of their commute. We all subsidize the rest of it, whether we like it or not.

The economic consequences of current transportation policy are sobering enough--but in the long run, the social consequences are even more disturbing--and too often

overlooked. To begin with, our single-minded focus on the automobile has left us less mobile--not more so--than we were in decades past. A large segment of the population, including the very young and the elderly, can't drive--and since few other transportation options exist and development patterns make walking impractical, these people have little choice but to sit at home. Children can't just go outside and play; suburban development is so sprawling that friends may live miles away, and the only way to get to a playground is to be driven to it--if there's someone around to do the driving. Traffic-harried commuters leave home earlier and earlier and get back later and later, ending up with less and less time to spend with their families. As drivers we are cocooned in our cars, isolated from chances to meet or talk to one another in ways that build a sense of community. In recent months a new term has entered the lexicon of transportation-related dangers: "road rage" that propels frustrated motorists into violent confrontations with their fellow drivers and pedestrians, too often ending in tragedy and adding to the sad tally of more than 40,000 Americans who die on the roads every year.

We often hear that Americans will never shed their attachment to cars, that Americans will never adjust to using other modes of transportation such as public transit or walking. I believe this is wrong. Of course American cities can't be turned into outsized European villages where people walk everywhere. We're not so naive as to believe that we can eliminate the need for freeways, but we can increase the range of transportation options that will reduce auto-dependence and the resulting congestion that inevitably leads to more freeway construction.

We need a thorough nationwide rethinking of our approach to transportation. Public officials, transportation planners, civic leaders and private citizens can--and should--take sensible steps to make it possible for us to live comfortably and work efficiently without driving an average of 12,000 miles per year as we currently do.

I can sum up the challenge in a single sentence: We need transportation policy that offers us choices. Crafting such a policy is an effort that need not cost huge amounts of money. In fact, we should adopt the attitude of a British statesman who told his colleagues in the darkest days of World War II, "Gentlemen, we are out of money. Therefore we shall have to think."

The first and most important step toward building a transportation policy that offers choices is to recognize that the way we zone and design our communities either opens up or forecloses transportation alternatives. We must get rid of provisions in our land-use policies that mandate auto-oriented sprawl and doom efforts to provide cost-effective public transit. These policies have wiped out walkable older communities while preventing the creation of new ones. By mandating inordinate amounts of parking and unreasonable setback requirements and by prohibiting mixed uses, many current zoning laws make it impossible--even illegal--to create new development with the sort of compact walkable environment that attracts us to older neighborhoods and historic communities all over the world. In addition, municipalities should promote downtown housing and mixed-use zoning that reduces the distances people must travel between

home and work. The goal should be an integrated system of planning decisions and regulations that knit communities together instead of tearing them apart.

Second, government should think of "transportation" as more than another word for "highways." In 1991 the federal government enacted a piece of legislation that represents an important step in the right direction. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, universally known as ISTEA, reduces the financial incentive for states to favor highway construction over all other transportation modes, opens up the transportation planning process to local communities and citizens, and provides funds for projects that will enhance communities and transportation facilities. Before ISTEA, a community's transportation choices were largely limited to how many lanes of new pavement would be rammed through productive farmland or existing neighborhoods. ISTEA gives communities more voice in determining how their transportation needs should be met.

Rational, farsighted transportation policy should do more than concentrate on getting goods and people from one place to another. ISTEA represents a major step toward realization of that goal by making it possible for transportation investment decisions to be influenced by community livability considerations. The Act's planning requirements can improve the quality and scope of information that public officials receive on transportation options and on the impacts of transportation investments on economic development, the environment and the overall quality of life in their communities.

After five years of successful implementation in hundreds of communities across the country, ISTEA is currently up for reauthorization. Various groups have tried to remove provisions that they don't like. Some opponents of the current law, for instance, feel that the federal government should simply make block grants to the states and allow them to use the funds as they please. Others are strongly opposed to the diversion of any transportation funds for non-highway projects, and still others don't like the ISTEA provision that sets aside funds for enhancement projects. Happily, we believe we've managed to beat back this opposition, and were very pleased with the "new" version of ISTEA that is currently awaiting action in the Senate.

Third, Congress should direct the Department of Transportation to develop new road design standards for urban, historic and scenic areas. Standards now in use are systematically destroying the walkability--and livability--of small-town Main Streets and big-city downtowns and neighborhoods alike, and are eroding the scenic character of historic parkways and byways. They frequently prohibit engineers from designing roads for slow speeds, even in quiet residential areas. By mandating excessively wide streets and roads, state highway agencies contribute to the sprawl that virtually guarantees continued auto-dependence.

Bostonians don't have to look very far to find an example of a state transportation agency that has moved away from this "one-size-fits-all" approach to road design. In 1996 the Vermont General Assembly directed the state's Agency of Transportation to

develop new standards for the construction, rehabilitation and repair of highways, roads and bridges--a process made possible by changes in the law expressed in ISTEA, incidentally. The standards were developed by a working group that included experts in the fields of transportation engineering, architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, and natural and cultural resource preservation. In a radical departure from typical state standards, these emphasize that "good design" cannot be achieved without consideration of context and setting in Vermont's cities, towns, villages and rural corridors. Last month the National Trust presented one of its 1997 National Preservation Awards to the Vermont Agency of Transportation in recognition of its pioneering efforts to balance the need for safe and efficient transportation with the need to preserve historic resources and distinctive community character. Interestingly enough, at the presentation ceremony itself, this award was one of two that received the most enthusiastic, sustained applause from the audience.

Finally, federal and state transportation departments should give higher R-&D priority to concepts that reduce auto-dependence. Current research agendas are still heavily weighted in favor of auto travel and high-tech approaches. A network newscast last week featured a segment on ongoing efforts to develop a "smart car" that will dramatically improve highway safety, and we've all heard predictions of the coming of "smart highways" that will make driving practically foolproof. Technological advances such as these offer options that should be studied, of course. But low-tech initiatives should be looked at too--relatively simple things like increased licensing of private bus and van lines, more infill construction to bring about the kind of density that makes public transit feasible, and increased emphasis on creating and preserving pedestrian-friendly environments. What's needed is research into urban planning policies that cut down on the amount of time we spend behind the wheel. What's needed is research into ways of making the automobile a servant instead of a master.

Changing old habits won't be easy. But we owe it to ourselves and our children to decide whether we really like living in a society in which, to paraphrase Joan Didion, the only thing constant is the rate at which it disappears. Do we really like the kind of cities our transportation policy has created? I don't think so. If we liked them, we wouldn't be on the brink of abandoning them.

Can we really change decades of auto-centric transportation policy? It seems to me that we have little choice.

In devoting our very best efforts to rethinking transportation policy, we're merely recognizing the fact that this is the single factor that has contributed most to the decline of America's cities. Rethinking transportation policy is the most effective step we can take to put the brakes on urban disinvestment and the sprawl it creates, and to redirect our energies and resources to the reclamation of older communities. Rebuilding communities around existing urban centers makes more sense than unmanaged sprawl that devours rural resources. The time-honored "don't-worry-there's-plenty-more-where-that-came-from" approach won't work anymore. We don't have an infinite amount of land in this country to build upon--and even if the natural resources were available, we don't

have the money to build the new roads, schools, and other infrastructure that sprawl demands. We have huge investments in the physical resources of our cities--in the sidewalks and sewer lines and utilities, not to mention the buildings themselves. We cant afford to go on wasting them as we have done.

More important, we cant afford to go on wasting the people in these places, people whose lives are too often plagued by the absence of opportunity, by hopelessness and crime. Inner-city residents have never before been so isolated from mainstream society, so completely cut off from both the glittering glass towers downtown and the tidy brick houses of the suburbs. That isolation--and the frustration it engenders--cannot be allowed to continue if the very fabric of our society is to survive intact.

In our efforts to construct sound transportation policy and enhance urban livability, there are a few places that offer instructive models for the rest of us to follow. One of them is Portland, Oregon, whose recent history demonstrates the effectiveness of sensible land-use planning in making a city a better place to work and live. In 1973 the state of Oregon adopted legislation that requires every community to calculate the amount of land it needs to accommodate growth during the next 20 years. Then it draws a circle--an urban growth boundary--around that land and concentrates development inside it. Other provisions of the law seek to prevent sprawl from paving over Oregons farmland and forests and require that local transportation plans consider alternatives to the automobile and avoid reliance on any single mode of transportation.

For a clear indication of how Oregon's legislation works you need only look at whats happening in Portland. The adoption of an urban growth boundary has allowed Portland to define the territory within which it can provide public services economically. Knowing that it will not be called on to build new roads and water lines and provide police and fire protection to newly-developed areas sprawling farther and farther out from the urban core, the city can focus its energies and its tax dollars on improving the quality of life for city residents.

A 1991 study showed that Portlands urban growth boundary had expanded by only 2% in the preceding 17 years--but had contained 95 % of the areas residential growth. Developers are now building single-family houses on smaller lots and constructing more of the multifamily housing that constitutes about half of the market demand. This concentration of development has made mass transit feasible: The city is currently building a \$1 billion light-rail line to serve new and existing residential neighborhoods. Concentration of development has also stimulated reuse of existing buildings downtown. The Wall Street Journal recently noted that "the number of downtown jobs [in Portland] has doubled since 1975 without the city adding a single parking space, widening roads or building new ones." I dont know of another city that can make that kind of claim.

But far-reaching legislative innovation isn't the only means of reaching the goal of good transportation policy. Gradual, incremental action can be equally effective--as your experience here in Boston demonstrates. Over several decades, Boston has created a

regional transportation system that is highly efficient and arguably more diverse than any other in the nation. In the process of building a system that is the envy of many other cities, Boston has confronted--or is now confronting--a wide range of significant transportation-related issues and has developed--or now has the opportunity to develop--solutions that could be applied in other communities.

Some 30 years ago, public protest halted construction of an interstate highway that Tip O'Neill likened to a Great Wall of China through the neighborhoods of southwest Boston. That action was a harbinger of what's happening today, when Boston is one of a handful of cities that are taking action to repair an urban fabric ripped apart by the intrusion of a multi-lane high-speed highway. San Francisco tore down its Embarcadero Freeway several years ago, and Fort Worth, Texas, will soon do the same to a section of I-30. But your current effort is the biggest, most ambitious project of its kind yet seen in America.

There's a wonderfully satisfying symbolism to the "Big Dig." Boston is literally burying the legacy of Le Corbusier and Robert Moses--the notion that the highway is the only way, that cars deserve better treatment than people, that building highways must take precedence over the preservation of livability. It's an idea that's been around too long. We're well rid of it. And once the elevated Central Artery is finally gone, you have a marvelous opportunity to do something creative with the land that the highway once devoured--something that can knit neighborhoods back together and enhance and enliven the urban environment. Not many cities are given the gift of "new" land right in the center of everything, and people all over the country will be watching to see what you do with it.

This city's commitment to an efficient mass-transit system stretches back to the creation of America's first subway. The "T" celebrates its 100th birthday this year, and it has become such an established fact of city life that it's impossible to imagine Boston without it. People write songs about it and of course they complain about it--but more important, they use it and depend on it, and it keeps growing to meet their needs better. But here too, there are challenges to be met. As the system expands and new stations are opened, it is important that the chance to mandate human-scale, pedestrian-friendly development around the stations not be allowed to slip away. Transit stations can be a focus for revitalization of decaying neighborhoods or a catalyst for the construction of new housing and commercial facilities nearby. To make a new station nothing more than the centerpiece of a vast new parking lot is to miss a valuable opportunity.

Rail travel in the Boston area is still alive and well, offering another viable alternative to auto travel to thousands of riders every day. I'm told that MBTA is completing a study on the creation of a Rail Link that would join the railroad systems north and south of the city--an idea which, to an outsider at least, seems to have a great deal of merit. Likewise, as the Central Artery is rebuilt underground, the reestablishment of close connections between the city and its harbor could mean an expansion of water transportation routes. Links such as these could further strengthen the diversified

transportation web that knits Boston together and ties it to the surrounding region, including the newly established Harbor Islands National Recreation Area.

Boston, of course, has always been an eminently walkable city, a fact which is celebrated daily by residents, commuters and tourists alike. The good news--and it's very good news indeed--is that the city demonstrates a firm commitment to protect and enhance its walkability. By guaranteeing the viability of residential neighborhoods on the edges of the central business district, Boston has made it possible for thousands of people to live near their downtown workplaces and to carry out their daily routine without resorting to any form of transport other than their own legs. By completing other pedestrian-oriented projects like the Harborwalk, the city can continue to make it easy for Bostonians and visitors to get better acquainted with the wonders of the city in a most enjoyable and interactive way.

My friend Carter Wilkie has pointed out to me that Boston owes its scale to 18th-century merchant ships and wagons which made this city a busy crossroads of global trade long before the railroads built Chicago and the automobile built Los Angeles. And now, on the threshold of the 21st century, the force that is likely to shape the city's future is telecommunications--the transfer of goods and services over computer networks. While the decentralizing tendencies of this new technology could scatter some business and their employees over hundreds of miles, these same tendencies could actually reinforce the magnetism of cities where face-to-face communication is still a necessity. Boston seems well placed to become one of the busiest crossroads on the information highway.

Subways, buses, cars, boats, trains, shoe-leather and cyberspace--Boston's extensive range of transportation options is a model for other cities to emulate. But by itself it isn't enough. A city isn't livable merely because it makes it easy for people to move around. Having an enjoyable or efficient way of getting there doesn't really mean much if "there" isn't worth getting to. Lewis Mumford recognized this when he wrote, "The time is approaching...when there will be every facility for moving about the city and no possible reason for going there."

In a book called *The Great Good Place*, sociologist Ray Oldenburg reminds us that the spread of rigid single-use zoning districts and the increasingly transient nature of modern society have led to the disappearance of local gathering places like neighborhood taverns and corner stores, where people could stop off and linger, blow off steam, form acquaintances and cement the kind of attachment to neighbors necessary for civic trust. When he is accused of trying to turn back the clock in order to bring back the past, Oldenburg replies, "We don't need the past. We need the places!"

Movement is a meaningful part of human life, but it's no more meaningful than coming to rest in a safe, supportive, pleasant, livable environment. Place matters. The mark of a livable city is that it balances the need for convenient movement with the need for truly habitable places, places worth caring about.

Bostonians have good reason to be proud of their city's longstanding commitment to the preservation and enhancement of the places and the unique community character that make this a special and uniquely livable city. Historic neighborhoods such as Beacon Hill and the Back Bay are among America's greatest legacies from the past, and everyone in this country who cares about our shared heritage owes this city a debt of gratitude for having kept these places alive for us to enjoy.

I can't resist the opportunity here to put in a plug for the preservation of one of Boston's most significant and beloved places, Fenway Park. Like many other people, baseball fans and non-fans alike, I have followed with great interest the ongoing discussions about Fenway's future. I certainly understand the team's desire for expanded and improved facilities, but I'm not convinced that those needs can't be accommodated through sensitive renovation of the stadium on the current site, as Mayor Menino has urged. Fenway Park is a national treasure. There's no other place like it--and that fact makes it worth our very best efforts to save it.

In Boston, as in dozens of other cities, preservation has demonstrated its effectiveness as a tool for creating and sustaining livability. We know that preservation can't solve all urban problems, but in neighborhood after neighborhood we've seen how it can provide some answers in areas such as the provision of affordable housing, the revitalization of downtown business districts, the creation of stable residential environments in older neighborhoods, and the like.

To cite a single example, I'd like to call your attention to the work of a program that just may be the best idea the National Trust ever had.

The National Main Street Center was created to find ways to use preservation as a tool for bringing new economic life to traditional downtown business districts. The Center has worked in almost 1300 communities since 1980. Nationwide, the program has generated more than \$7 billion in reinvestment in older downtowns, resulted in the rehabilitation of 37,000 buildings, produced 39,000 net new businesses and more than 140,000 net new jobs. Every dollar spent in support of a Main Street program leverages more than \$30 from other sources. These numbers translate into something marvelous: downtowns reborn, community economies strengthened, a new sense of hope and pride in places where those commodities were in short supply a few years ago. It all spells one thing: success.

The Main Street program started out in small and medium-sized communities, but now it is at work in big cities too. Just as cities and towns need viable downtowns in order to survive, neighborhoods need viable commercial areas in order to support and enhance the daily lives of their residents. As a city councilman, Tommy Menino saw what the program accomplished in the highly successful revitalization of the Roslindale commercial district. As mayor, he worked with us to create our first-ever citywide Main Street program here in Boston. Today the program is working in 15 districts across the city to give neighborhood commercial areas a new look and new life--and to preserve

and strengthen the community character that is such an integral part of Boston's livability.

That kind of success in building and enhancing livability is the goal of a marvelous piece of legislation recently introduced in the Massachusetts legislature by Senator Robert Durand. It's called the Massachusetts Community Preservation Act, and it would provide a steady funding source for preserving and improving a community's infrastructure--the very sort of thing that is at the very core of the work of Boston 400. Essentially, the act would enable communities to impose a modest increase on an existing real-estate transfer tax, the proceeds from which would be targeted to the preservation of historic resources and open space, the provision of affordable housing, septic system improvements and the clean-up of polluted sites. I believe that this legislation could have an enormously beneficial impact on the livability of Massachusetts communities, and I'm proud to say that the National Trust is working as part of a broad-based coalition to get it passed.

Back in 1966, a group of people got together in an attempt to chart a new course for preservation in the United States. One of them was a Bostonian, Walter Muir Whitehill. Those were the dark days of interstate highway construction and urban renewal, when landmark buildings and neighborhoods were being ruthlessly swept away in a misguided pursuit of "progress." Against that backdrop of wrecking-balls and rubble, these visionaries wrote a thoughtful plan for the future:

If the preservation movement is to be successful, it must go beyond saving bricks and mortar. It must go beyond saving occasional historic houses and opening museums.... It must attempt to give a sense of orientation to our society using structures and objects of the past to establish values of time and place.

That's a prescription for livable cities. It reminds us that in saving old buildings and neighborhoods, we strengthen a partnership which makes for orderly growth and change in our communities: the perpetual partnership among the past, the present and the future. It's a dynamic partnership. It recognizes that we cannot afford to live in the past, so it encourages each generation to build in its own style, to meet its own needs by taking advantage of the very best of contemporary thought and technology. But it also recognizes that we can't afford to reject the history, the culture, the traditions and values on which our lives and our futures are built.

When that partnership falls apart, when the connections between successive generations of Americans are broken, blank spaces open up in our understanding of the long process that made us who we are. History dissolves into myth, neither believable nor particularly useful, and values are eroded. But when it is allowed to work as it's supposed to, that partnership produces a healthy society with the sense of continuity that art historian Sigfried Giedion says is "part of the very backbone of human dignity."

Day-to-day contact with the evidence of our past gives us confidence because it helps us know where we came from. It gives us a standard against which to measure

ourselves and our accomplishments. And it confronts us with the realization--sometimes exhilarating, sometimes disturbing--that we, too, will be remembered and held accountable, that future generations will look at our work as the standard by which to measure their own performance.

Will we go down in history as a people who allowed movement to take precedence over place, or will we find a way to make transportation policy a force for strengthening communities instead of ripping them apart?

Will we keep on merely accepting the kind of communities we get, or can we summon the will to demand the kind of communities we want and need and deserve?

Will we be remembered for what we have destroyed or allowed to fall apart? Or will we be remembered for the livable cities we leave behind?

The choice is ours to make, and the time to make it is now.

Richard Moe is co-author, with Carter Wilkie, of the recent book, [Changing Places: Rebuilding Community in the Age of Sprawl](#). To order a copy of the book, please contact the National Trust's Public Policy Department at 202.588.6255