

February 17, 2008



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## **Why Urban Planners Love Global Warming**

**A paper prepared for**

**The 2008 *International Conference on Climate Change***

**March 2 – 4, New York, USA**

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### **Foreword**

Many of you are concerned about the future costs that Climate Change policies may impose on the economies of the world. It is easy to presume these costs lie in the future.

However, over the last ten years, the theory of Anthropogenic Global Warming has been a major driver of urban planning theories generally described as “Smart Growth” which by constraining the supply of land have caused a massive escalation in house prices in those States and countries where the theory has been applied.

This problem of “housing unaffordability” caused many bankers to enter the “sub-prime” mortgage market. When the housing bubble burst last year the sub-prime investors lost billions of dollars, and the loss of value and loss of confidence in property investment rapidly spread to countries like Australia and New Zealand that had also pursued these costly planning theories, recently bolstered by climate change theories.

So we do not have to wait to see the costs of climate change alarmism.

They are there to be seen all around us.

## 1. A Presentation in Five Parts, and supported by Links.

### 1.1 The Format

This paper, “Why Urban Planners Love Global Warming” is Part A, or the “lead story” of a five-part package of presentations for this conference. Parts B through E are accessed through hyperlinks for those who want to pursue the issue further.

Part B is “[Halle Neustadt – the Sustainable City; a Cautionary Tale.](#)”

Part C is “[Alternatives to Smart Growth.](#)”

Part D is “[Why Planned Integration of Land Use and Transport will Not Achieve its Goals.](#)”

Part E is “[Applying Systems Intelligence to Transport.](#)”

My verbal presentation will combine all five into a hopefully coherent whole.

When papers are available on the web I have used hyperlinks rather than footnotes. Most of these link to pdf files which may contain photos and graphs and hence are large files, and may take a few minutes to download. Please be patient. It is still much faster than a trip to the library. Some links have proved erratic and I have “backed them up” in footnotes.

I recommend you read the paper right through and then browse the hyperlinks.

### 1.2 Background.

Urban Growth Management, or *Smart Growth*, in its many guises, has always been a policy in search of justification, or a solution in search of a problem.

In Post War England, the *Town and Country Planning Act* promoted Greenbelts to protect the green and pleasant land from the expansion of new cities during the post-war boom.

Thomas Sowell argues that in the US it took root in the early seventies. It became popular following the impact of the Civil Rights Legislation, as ‘*Zero Growth*’ – a means of pricing Blacks and Hispanics out of wealthy white enclaves in the US. It worked then, and still does, but was soon ruled “inappropriate” by the US Supreme Court. Of course *Zero Growth* had been dressed up as a response to the predictions of the *Club of Rome*.

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Then it re-emerged as *Growth Management*, which would save “productive” rural land from urban growth. But there is no such thing as “productive” land because only people make land productive. So that application of Growth Management didn’t work – and doesn’t work now.

Then, during the seventies, the urban intensification and public transport of *Smart Growth* would save us from the oil shocks. The shocks went away but have come again as Peak Oil. Those who yearn for catastrophe such as the overly [excitable Mr Kunstler](#)<sup>1</sup> are revelling in the “end of suburban civilisation” – or indeed, the end of everything.

More recently *Smart Growth* claims to save us from our own foolishness. If left to ourselves we will live in suburbs which will cost us more, contaminate our lungs, waste our time, make us fat, spend too much on transport and infrastructure and generally fall into moral turpitude and decline. *Smart Growth* will save us from all these sins and the salvationist<sup>2</sup> planners will deliver happiness, and we will get to ride on a train. The general public remains un-impressed, if we judge the public by its actions, rather than by the pronouncements of the planners.

Most recently the *Smart Growth* salvationists claim they can deliver us from global warming. They have assumed – as usual without bothering to collect any supportive evidence – that intensification, more public transport, urban growth limits, walkable cities, and all their favourite fads, will reduce our “carbon footprints”, lead us down the path to carbon neutrality, and consequently save the planet from human devastation.

These “carbon” driven policies are typically promoted under the rubric of “sustainable urban form” – the “designer city” again..

The Salvationists make these claims with such conviction that many on the sidelines assume they must know what they are talking about.

You might think so too. You would be wrong. The costs have been massive.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.rollingstone.com/news/story/7203633/the\\_long\\_emergency](http://www.rollingstone.com/news/story/7203633/the_long_emergency)

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of “Global Salvationism” see *Economics, Climate Change Issues and Global Salvationism*, by David Henderson. Go to: <http://www.staff.livjm.ac.uk/spsbpeis/David-Henderson.htm>

## 2. The “Big Theory” of Spatial Determinism.

### 2.1 “Smart Growth” a Sub-set of a Bigger Theory

The theory of Smart Growth is part and parcel of a general theory of urban planning which assumes that central planners<sup>3</sup> have a body of superior wisdom which gives them the moral authority to direct and control where people should live, work and play.

I have no idea where this moral authority comes from, and the research demonstrates that the superior wisdom simply does not exist – which should not surprise us, given the failure of the planned economies of the last century.

The notion that central planning can achieve a better integration of the diverse and interconnected elements of a city than the spontaneous order generated by individuals operating within a market-led economy, and which are governed by the laws of deterministic chaos, is fundamentally flawed, both in theory and in practice.

The failed Soviet experiment has surely demonstrated that we cannot centrally plan the national economy, and yet the advocates of *Smart Growth* and similar urban planning theories assume that, for some reason, what has failed at a national level can succeed at the level of a city or region.

Where is the evidence? Did the Soviet cities prosper within a failing national economy?

The great cities of the world have successfully “integrated” transport and land use, and, more importantly, have enabled urban economies to adapt to changing technologies, from aqueducts, to horse drawn carriages, to electrification and to the automobile.

We are now witnessing attempts to integrate transport and land-use to lock in place the transport technologies of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and to use zoning and legal action to prevent people responding to the changes which are taking place around them every day.

While these dirigiste urban planners have been with us for decades, they are now trying to persuade us that their interventions in our lives are necessary to save the planet from global warming.

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term “central planner” for those who believe they have the knowledge to direct and control the use of land and believe in economic planning and social engineering as a discipline. In New Zealand the term “planner” is often used to describe genuine Resource Management Consultants, who implement the RMA as intended, focusing on environmental impacts. They are not my target.

Most of us gathered here are disturbed by the lack of solid scientific evidence for dangerous anthropogenic global warming. We should not be surprised to find that there is an equal lack of evidence – of any kind – to support the arguments in favor of promoting “sustainable urban form” to save the planet from global warming. (See Part D: “Why Planned Integration of Land Use and Transport will Not Achieve its Goals.”)

## 2.2 The Failure of Architectural Determinism.

During the post war decades “*Architectural Determinism*” was the dominant fad among architects and town planners. As a cocky young architect I just loved it. One justification for urban renewal and public housing was that if we put trashy people into nice “designer” housing their surroundings would transform them into thoroughly nice people.

Unfortunately, the trashy people proceeded to trash the nice architecture – and indeed frequently trashed the whole neighborhood. In English novels “he comes from the Estates” now means “he comes from a slum.” US Public Housing Projects similarly failed to uplift the moral tone of their occupants.

In “[\*The Architecture of Happiness\*](#)” Alain de Botton reminds us that “Architecture may well possess moral messages; it simply has no power to enforce them”. He illustrates the point with a photo of Herman Goering chatting with his colleagues in one of Europe’s most beautiful rooms.<sup>4</sup>

“*Architectural Determinism*” assumed that the built environment determined people’s behavior. We soon learned that, in reality, people’s behavior determined their built environment.

*Architectural Determinism* is now regarded as one of those unfortunate and now unfashionable fads of the past.

*Architectural Determinism* was a subset of a wider class of theory described as “the Design Fallacy” – the notion that design is a useful and effective tool of social-engineering.

We should know better.

**Conclusion: Architectural Determinism failed because people’s behavior determines both the nature of, and their choice of, their built environment – not the other way round.**

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<sup>4</sup> Page 21, The illustration is titled: “The moral ineffectiveness of a beautiful house.”

### 2.3 The Rise of “Spatial Determinism”.

However, central planners need their theories, and over recent decades they have developed the theory of “spatial determinism” – my term, not theirs.

This new theory, as typically implemented by Growth Management and *Smart Growth* planners, holds that where people live determines how they will behave, and that once we are forced to live where they decree, our behavior will improve. The central planners now insist that if we live at high densities in central neighborhoods we will all behave like model citizens, while people who choose suburbia will be driven to all kinds of “inappropriate” behavior as the unforeseen price of their making such an “unfortunate” choice.

The spatial determinists tell us that people who live in the suburbs are more obese than people who live in downtown apartments; that suburbanites don’t go to the gym as often as city dwellers; and that suburbanites have more traffic accidents than downtown dwellers.

They are convinced that if we would just live where they say we should, we would all lead much happier and more “appropriate” lives.

When I was young I liked to eat out, go to nightclubs, dance all night, and generally live the high life – so the central city was the place for me. I could stumble home from *Club Mirage* to *Westminster Court* without risking a drink-drive conviction, and probably feel better for the walk. These days I like to read in the garden, walk the dog, grow my own vegetables, and work from home in the country. The “spatial determinists” blame my location for the lost “vibrancy”, rather than the remorseless passage of time.

**Conclusion: Our chosen behavior determines where we decide to live, and we take our own behavior with us – and that includes our obesity and other contemporary sins.**

### 2.4 The Information Problem.

One consequence of “spatial determinism” is that RMA planning documents routinely claim we must not live in the outer suburbs because our commuter trips into the central area will be far too long, cost too much, and destroy the planet by global warming. We ordinary people just don’t appreciate the total consequences of our “foolish” location decisions.

In reality, only individual households have all the information needed to make their location decisions, which are governed by a host of factors totally outside the power of government in general, and of central planners in particular.

As Randal O'Toole says in "*The Best Laid Plans – How Government Planning Harms your Quality of Life, Our Pocketbook, and your Future*"<sup>5</sup>:

*"Consider an urban area with a million people and a million parcels of property, each of which could be used for dozens of different purposes. Each of these people places a different value on each potential use of each parcel of land, resulting in trillions of different pieces of data to collect. Add transportation and other infrastructure (each item of which will be separately valued by each of the million people) changes in tastes and trends over time, and the way different uses on different properties influence the values of other nearby properties, and the data requirements reach into the quadrillions. No one can ever collect or understand this much data."*

Naturally, in the face of such complexity, central planners are forced to simplify, and O'Toole lists the standard and familiar simplifications:

- *Instead of comprehensively planning for all resources, they focus on one or two resources.*
- *Instead of measuring the actual relationships between resources they rely on preconceived notions and the latest planning fads.*
- *Instead of predicting the future, they envision<sup>6</sup> what they want and try to impose that vision on the future.*
- *Instead of finding out what the people in the region really want, they succumb to pressures from powerful interest groups.*

This is pseudo-science disguised as rational planning. Of course we need to plan our major infrastructure but fortunately major infrastructure is long-lived. The Romans built roads, dams and aqueducts and many are still in use today. The Europeans built an extensive network of canals – many are still in use today. Their use may have changed from mostly freight to mostly tourism and leisure but they remain in use. We may soon tear up most of the inter city railway tracks but the rail bed will be used for truck lanes or cycles lanes or bus lanes or whatever.

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<sup>5</sup> Randal O'Toole, [\*The Best Laid Plans – How Government Planning Harms your Quality of Life, Our Pocketbook, and your Future\*](#), Cato Institute, Washington D.C, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Through the infamous "visioning process" in which the rulers have 'visions' and the people have nightmares.

**Conclusion: Individuals have more information about their personal circumstances than planners do and hence are best placed to decide where they should live, work, and play. Planners should stick to planning long-term infrastructure.**

### **3. The Two Favourite Targets.**

#### **3.1 Buildings – carbon footprints and consents.**

The New Zealand Government (following other governments around the world) has floated a proposal that all proposed buildings be assessed for their carbon footprint, before a building permit can be issued.

This is yet another half-baked scheme which will make housing even less affordable without delivering any measurable benefit. No one knows how to measure such a footprint with any reliability, let alone over the 100 year lifetime of a building. If New Zealand adopted nuclear energy next year, the future footprints would change dramatically. The error terms are so huge as to make the exercise meaningless. I shall return to this problem later.

Buildings are attractive targets for such nonsense, simply because “they are there” and easily taxable.

#### **3.2 Transport and “Sustainable Urban Form.”**

Private motor vehicles are also attractive targets.

Some speakers at a recent major transport conference in New Zealand – *Transport – the Next 50 Years* – fell into the carbon footprint trap. Although the dominant theme of this excellent conference was the development of transport infrastructure, a major “sub-theme” was the “obvious” connection between private vehicle use and anthropogenic global warming.<sup>7</sup> The promoters of “sustainable urban form” were in “climate change clover”, and generally seized the opportunity to persuade us that they should be given the power to “design” “sustainable cities” with “compact urban form” behind *Metropolitan Urban Limits* (or *Urban Growth Boundaries*) so as to increase densities, stop people living in suburbs, force them out of their autos and onto buses and trains, or onto cycle tracks and footpaths.

They simply assumed these draconian interventions were self-evidently necessary as pathways to salvation from Global Warming. *Smart Growth* fans take it as read that suburban living sets us on the pathway to global warming hell.

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<sup>7</sup> Recently renamed Climate Change – which means any major weather event is evidence of AGW.

They are wrong.

Transport analysts acknowledge that the modern private-vehicle fleet is more fuel-efficient in its overall operation than buses and trains. This is because the whole-of-day percentage loading of the private automobile is much superior to the whole-of-day percentage loading of the public transport fleet. The UK *Rail Safety and Standards Board* recently admitted that catching a diesel train is now twice as “polluting”<sup>8</sup> as traveling by car for an average family. No amount of social engineering by managing “urban form” can significantly change these whole-of-day loadings because the majority of vehicle trips in a modern city<sup>9</sup> are for social and recreational activities rather than commuter trips, and commuter trips become less focused on the CBD by the day.

Consequently “getting people out of their cars and into buses and trains” does nothing to reduce the family “carbon footprint” and almost certainly makes it worse. More importantly, the New Zealand government’s own climate change web page tells us that the private vehicle fleet accounts for only 8.5% of New Zealand’s greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>10</sup> Only a third of those vehicles are in large urban centres. So manipulating urban form can impact on only something under 3% of New Zealand’s total greenhouse gas emissions. And the impact goes in the wrong direction anyhow.

I suspect the figures for the US would be similar.

### **3.3. *Consuming Australia* report confirms Vehicle Emissions barely figure.**

This application of Carbon Footprint alarmism to support *Smart Growth* theory has been further undermined by a recent Australian study, [\*Consuming Australia\* by Sydney University’s Australian Conservation Foundation](#),<sup>11</sup> using data collected by the *Centre for Integrated Sustainability Analysis*. You cannot get a much more PC name than that – it combines conservation, sustainability and integration into one title!

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<sup>8</sup> This is a typical Orwellian corruption of language in which Carbon Dioxide is described as a pollutant, even though it is essential to all life on earth. By condensing carbon dioxide to “carbon” the public is even further confused about the difference between carbon dioxide and genuine pollutants such as soot. (Carbon)

<sup>9</sup> At least in the modern “new world” cities that have developed mainly since the widespread use of the automobile. It may not be true for “older world” cities such as New York.

<sup>10</sup> It is a common “dirty trick” for anti-car global warming alarmists to announce that transport accounts for about 40% of greenhouse gas emissions and then target the automobile for intervention. This is sleight of hand. The 40% figure relates to all transport including aircraft, (domestic and international), shipping, rail, long-distance trucking, private commercial fleets, public transport, and the private automobile fleet. I have seen the same trick pulled using US, UK and European statistics. These people have no shame.

<sup>11</sup> If the link does not work go to: [http://acfonline.org.au:80/uploads/res/res\\_atlas\\_main\\_findings.pdf](http://acfonline.org.au:80/uploads/res/res_atlas_main_findings.pdf)

**Figure 1. Average household profile: Greenhouse gas emissions.**

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (LZW) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

The title of the report is equally appropriate to these anthropomorphic times conveying – as it does – the idea that those dinkum Aussies, represented by Mel Gibson, (Mad Max) and Russell Crowe<sup>12</sup> (*The Gladiator*) are somehow chomping away at the map of Australia until it finally disappears.

Anyhow, the Sydney researchers found that total transport activity – including private vehicle use, public transport and aircraft – accounts for only 10.5% of the carbon footprint of the average Australian family. This was the smallest slice of the carbon footprint “pie”. (See the pie chart above.) Food accounted for over 28% of the footprint. Putting everyone on a diet would have a greater impact on the family’s carbon footprint.

Now there’s a new campaign for *Weightwatchers* – “Join up and Save the Planet!”

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<sup>12</sup> Actually a New Zealander – but we are accustomed to these “adoptions”.

Governments wanting to take the carbon footprint of dwellings should note that “construction and renovations” account for only 11.8% of the family’s carbon footprint – a bit more than transport, but much less than “other goods and services” at almost 30%.

The report bluntly concludes:

*If every Australian household switched to renewable energy and stopped driving their cars tomorrow, total household emissions would decline by only about 18%.*

So why do our social engineers focus on transport and construction which are such small slices of the carbon footprint pie?

Again, I suspect it’s just because “the autos and houses are there” – and, in particular, they are there to be taxed, inspected, and regulated.

### **3.4 Live where you like – Location Doesn’t Matter!**

This Australian study also examined the carbon footprints of families living in different States, different cities, and in different locations within cities. The researchers probably expected to come up with support for Smart Growth claims that high-density inner-city living will help save the planet while suburban living sends us down the pathway to toast.

Instead, they found that “place doesn’t matter.”

Household income proved to be the major “carbon variable”. Families with the smallest carbon footprints are on lower incomes and live on the outskirts of town. The carbon footprint “criminals” are on high incomes, and live in “vibrant downtown communities”. Burning up all that midnight ethanol must pump out the CO<sub>2</sub>.

The researchers had to grit their teeth and declare that:

*Despite the lower environmental impacts associated with less car use, inner city households outstrip the rest of Australia in every other aspect of consumption. ... the opportunities for relatively efficient compact living appear to be overwhelmed by the energy and water demands of modern urban living. In each state and territory, the centre of the capital city is the area with the highest environmental impacts, followed by the inner suburban areas. Rural and regional areas tend to have noticeably lower levels of consumption.* (my emphasis)

There goes the *Smart Growth* neighborhood!

## 4. What is the Most “Sustainable” Housing?

### 4.1 Adaptability is the key to long term “sustainability”.

Politicians love to talk about “Sustainability” which can mean whatever the speaker wants it to mean, or the listener wants it to mean. Ask most people what they mean by “sustainable” and the replies are more garbled than most attempts to explain quantum mechanics. So when a politician promises to deliver “a sustainable future” everyone nods their heads because they all have their own idea of what a sustainable future is for them.

However, the evidence from life itself, from bacteria to human beings, is that the key to long term survival in the face of changing environments, (if this is what we mean by sustainable) is long term adaptability.

If a species is genuinely vulnerable to a small change in temperature then it has long disappeared from the planet. If some alarmist claims are true, then polar bears “don’t exist” because they could not possibly have survived the Earth’s earlier warm periods. The surface dwelling anaerobes certainly didn’t survive the onslaught of atmospheric free oxygen – and their survivors now live beneath the surface, or inside organisms where they are safely out of harm’s way.

Humans are the most successful species on the planet in terms of habitat coverage because we are the most adaptable species on the planet. When it got cold during the little ice age we invented knitting and the Polynesians had the good sense to stop paddling towards New Zealand.

So if we wish to build sustainable housing then surely we should be focusing on the most adaptable housing. We need a housing type that can be changed quite easily to adapt to changing household size, to changing activities, to changes in technologies, and to changing needs of care.

If vegetables get expensive, or unavailable because of some disaster or war, then a home garden is a useful option.

Now consider how easy it is to add a bedroom to a sixth storey apartment, or to retro-fit solar heating, or to add a home office with some measure of separation, or even to park a boat.

If the apartment has been built of concrete for acoustic purposes then it can be difficult to rewire and change the plumbing. And multi-storey buildings have all that public internal space which needs to be lit and heated.



*Chez McShane – an adaptable sustainable dwelling.*

However you look at it, the most adaptable, and hence the most sustainable dwelling looks something like my own cottage above, complete with verandah additions, retro-fitted solar heating, vegetable gardens, wood burning stove, sky dish, and a separate building containing three offices on broadband and a sleep-out.

## **5. The End of Spatial Determinism?**

*Consuming Australia* has knocked the props out from under the argument that urban intensification is a cure for global warming by reporting that sprawling outer-suburban households have lower carbon footprints than those living in the centre of town.

And now the US urban economists, Professor Peter Gordon and his colleagues, have established that vehicle commuter trips are now outnumbered by non-work trips for social, recreational and other activities. The demographer Philip McDermott's<sup>13</sup> reports this was the case in New Zealand as early as 1997/98:

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<sup>13</sup> Phil McDermott, *Demographic Trends and Shifts in Transport Planning* a paper presented to the 7th Annual Land Transport Summit, 2007.

*More immediately, even the presumption that trip making and transport capacity demands are still largely shaped by work trips is contentious. The National Travel Survey in 1997/98 indicated that work trips are in the minority. If we ignore trips to home (one third of the total) only 20% in total were actually to work (main or secondary job.) The figure rises to just 25% if we limit the analysis to car drivers.*

Hence, if planners force households to live close to the CBD to reduce the household work trip, they almost certainly increase the household's total driving times and distances – and their fuel consumption. Furthermore, edge-of-city dwellers in the US have the shortest commuting times – they tend to drive across town to their jobs on the fringe rather than into town to the CBD. Professor Peter Gordon's web page is [a treasure-trove of evidence on patterns of work and residence in modern cities](#).

Typical papers include:

- [The U.S. Context for Highway Congestion Pricing](#) [PDF]
- [Urban Spatial Structure and Economic Growth in US Metropolitan Areas](#) [PDF]
- [Where do \(near\) 300-million Americans Live and Work?](#) [PDF]
- [Residential Location, Land Use and Transportation: The Neglected Role of Nonwork Travel](#) [PDF]
- [Travel Trends in U.S. Cities: Explaining the 2000 Census Commuting Results](#) [PDF]
- [Settlement Patterns in the U.S. and Canada: Similarities and Differences — Policies or Preferences?](#) [PDF]
- [Is Sprawl Inevitable? Lessons From Abroad](#) [PDF]
- [Transportation and Land Use](#) [PDF]
- [The Continuing Decentralization of People and Jobs in the United States](#) [PDF]
- [Bicycling Boom in Germany: A Revival Engineered by Public Policy. A Comment](#)

Central planning lore assumes that households have only one member and that this individual commutes to the CBD. In reality, different household members set out on different trips, serving different activities, in different directions. Consequently no central planner has any idea how to optimize any household's location. It's time these myths about commuter trips were literally laughed out of court.

Professor Gordon's work also demonstrates that cities cope with changing patterns of activity and trade by "churning" their land uses through different locations over time. This churning activity necessarily changes "urban form" in unpredictable ways. The rate of economic

growth correlates directly to the rate of churn and hence attempts to freeze urban activities into fixed locations have a negative effect on growth and development.

We should celebrate flexible land use rather than attempt to enforce rigid “growth management” rules.

If we want to promote economic growth and development we must avoid any interventions which inhibit economic development in general and flexibility in particular. That includes interventions in supply and price, as well as location.

Finally, spatial determinism’s war against the automobile flies in the face of basic freedoms. As Professor Gordon says<sup>14</sup> “Country music fans celebrating *My Mean Green Freedom Machine* know what they are singing about” and “It is not only American teenagers who see an operator’s license as their Declaration of Independence”.

We are people. We are not Lego blocks – providing a life-times toy-time work for central planners.

Motor vehicles do have adverse environmental effects. But the most efficient and effective way to address these effects is by focusing on the fuel, the engines, and the emissions at the exhaust pipe. The modern vehicle fleet grows more efficient and less polluting by the day.

These benefits are delivered rapidly as improvements in air quality testify. On the other hand attempts to reduce driving by changing urban form imposes massive costs and any benefits – and I repeat, if any – are delivered only in some distant future by which time technological advances will have left the spatial determinists well behind.

We can only hope that “spatial determinism” will soon be as passé and laughable as the “architectural determinism” of old.

**General Conclusion: If central planners want to make a useful contribution to the management of urban areas they need to focus on how cities actually work rather than on how they believe they should look, while leaving pollution and energy efficiency to the engineers and scientists.**

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<sup>14</sup> In *Is Sprawl Inevitable? Lessons from abroad* (see the list of paper above)

## 6. The Goodall Report – Great News for Couch Potatoes!

*Consuming Australia* knocked the props out from under the argument that urban intensification is a cure for global warming by reporting that sprawling outer-suburban households have lower carbon footprints than those living in the centre of town.

And now a report by Chris Goodall,<sup>15</sup> a UK Green Party Parliamentary candidate, and author of *How to Live a Low-Carbon Life*, has come up with the ultimate ‘climate change heresy’ – [car-loving couch potatoes will help save the planet!](#)

Goodall explains that:

*Food production is now so energy-intensive that more carbon is emitted providing a person with enough calories to walk to the shops than a car would emit over the same distance. The climate could benefit if people avoided exercise, ate less and became couch potatoes.*

Goodall finds that driving a typical UK car 5.0km adds about 1.0 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere, based on Government figures. On the other hand, walking the same distance uses about 180 calories and would need about 100g of beef to replace those calories, resulting in 3.6kg of emissions, or four times as much as driving.

Hence, he concludes:

*The troubling fact is that taking a lot of exercise and then eating a bit more food is not good for the global atmosphere. Eating less and driving to save energy would be better.*

I’ll say it’s “troubling”. All those Smart Growth planners demanding we walk everywhere, are hell-bent on destroying the planet! Someone should tell all those Smart Growth planners so we can be left to make our own choices about where to live and work and play.

But don’t hold your breath. Central planners will always find some excuse to push the rest of us around.

## 7. Who knows how to make a Carbon-Neutral Pencil?

### 7.1 The Apparent Contradictions

Alert readers may have noticed two apparent contradictions within this paper so far.

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<sup>15</sup> For the London Times report on this and other heresies go to:  
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/science/article2195538.ece>

Section 2.1 opened with:

*Government has floated a proposal that all buildings be assessed for their carbon footprint before issuing a building consent. This is yet another half-baked scheme which will make housing even less affordable without delivering any measurable benefit. No one knows how to measure such a footprint with any reliability, let alone over the 100 year lifetime of a building.*

Yet this paper has referred to two calculations of carbon footprints as though they were well-founded “matters of fact”.

The first was the report *Consuming Australia* by Sydney University’s *Australian Conservation Foundation*, using data from the *Centre for Integrated Sustainability Analysis*.

We can probably accept these findings if only because any organization with “conservation” and “integrated sustainability” on its letterhead would almost certainly have started out expecting to find the opposite.

Also, the authors of *Consuming Australia* analysed broad sectors of activity rather than a single product or process. They found transport accounted for only 10.5 % of the Australian family’s “carbon pie”. New Zealand’s private vehicle fleet accounts for only 8.5% of our fossil fuel consumption. The two findings support each other.

However, the second set of research findings were even more “heretical”. Chris Goodall, the UK Green Party Parliamentary candidate, declared that:

*Food production is now so energy-intensive that more carbon is emitted providing a person with enough calories to walk to the shops than a car would emit over the same distance.*

We could expect that many people would question Goodall’s research.

And they certainly did. [The Times on Line](#) story carries over 320 responses from critics and supporters of Goodall’s story from all round the world – from America (especially Portland), Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, and the UAE. The debate was quite heated – the global warming was palpable.

Some criticized the choice of beef as the “calorie compensator.” Others challenged the “system boundary”, asking whether Goodall counted the energy used to make the car. The cyclists also had their penny-farthings’ worth. These two studies point up the apparent

paradox of such “carbon footprint” analysis; the more “micro” the analysis, the more room for dispute, and the more self-evident our ignorance.

## 7.2 Leonard Read’s Famous Fable

In his classic essay [\*I, Pencil, my Family Tree as told to Leonard E. Read\*](#), Leonard Read demonstrates that no single person knows how to make a pencil on their own.

He does this by listing the pencil’s components (cedar, lacquer, graphite, ferrule, factice, pumice, wax, glue etc) and identifying the multitude of people involved, down to the coffee drinker in the forest and the lighthouse keeper guiding the shipment into port.<sup>16</sup>

The pencil’s self-analysis begins with:

*My family tree begins with what in fact is a tree, a cedar of straight grain that grows in Northern California and Oregon. Now contemplate all the saws and trucks and rope and the countless other gear used in harvesting and carting the cedar logs to the railroad siding. Think of all the persons and the numberless skills that went into their fabrication: the mining of ore, the making of steel and its refinement into saws, axes, motors; the growing of hemp and bringing it through all the stages to heavy and strong rope; the logging camps with their beds and mess halls, the cookery and the raising of all the foods. Why, untold thousands of persons had a hand in every cup of coffee the loggers drink!*

F. A. Hayek drew on Read’s essay to illustrate his theory of “spontaneous order” and to explain how prices gather together huge amounts of dispersed information to guide our choices and actions. As the Pencil “says”:

*There is a fact still more astounding: the absence of a master-mind, of anyone dictating or forcibly directing these countless actions which bring me into being. No trace of such a person can be found. Instead, we find the Invisible Hand at work.*

In Milton Freidman’s famous video “Free to Choose”, he summarized Read’s essay and went on to say:

*No one sitting in a central office gave orders to these thousands of people. No military police enforced the orders that were not given. These people live in many lands, speak*

*different languages, practice different religions, may even hate one another—yet none of these differences prevented them from cooperating to produce a pencil.*

### **7.3 What is the Pencil’s Carbon Footprint?**

If no single person, or even a committee, knows how to make a pencil on their own, how can any person or committee calculate its carbon footprint? How can anyone know the carbon footprints of the people who help make the pencil by mining graphite in Ceylon, or making candelilla wax in Mexico, or building the lighthouse that guides the ship into port?

Calculating the greenhouse gases emitted during the myriad processes that go into making the pencil adds yet another level of complexity to the “production calculation” and requires another round of knowledge – taking the exercise even further beyond the realms of possibility.

Two ironies follow.

The critics of Goodall’s thesis usually wanted to extend the boundary of his “carbon system” to capture more processes. But the more we extend the system boundary the greater our ignorance. The other irony is that given the ability of prices to capture so much information, a “best guess” on emissions is probably to pay the least. If new products are cheaper than recycled ones they probably burn less carbon.

### **7.4. The Litigation Risk.**

The Pencil’s autobiography even reminds us that any application for a certificate of carbon neutrality is open to challenge in court, or even action by the Commerce Commission or its equivalent here. Objectors simply have to extend the boundary to include the coffee-makers in Brazil. Any claim to carbon neutrality can be challenged on the grounds of false claims – by simply extending the system boundary to include say the truck-builders of America or the ship-builders of Japan. New Zealand farmers have used the process in reverse to challenge “food miles”.

Finally, how many bureaucrats would be needed to calculate the carbon footprint of every element of every building – including the pencil used to draw the plans? This opens up yet another channel for trade competitors and the like to use the courts to block new developments.

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## 8. Conclusion

We will find ourselves burdened with such nonsensical regulations as the request for calculated carbon footprints, and the equally nonsensical strictures of Smart Growth, only because simplistic but élitist minds cannot believe that high levels of spontaneous order can operate without being directed by conscious plans created by the planners, informed by their own ‘superior’ knowledge.

The autobiography of the pencil proves them wrong.

We need no further justification to restrain the power of the state and to retain our personal freedom to innovate, freely trade and generally organize our own affairs. I presume researchers in the US and elsewhere will soon repeat the *Consuming Australia* exercise. Maybe the *Heartland Institute* should get in first.

Such research should kill the ‘Climate Change’ based arguments in favor of Smart Growth stone dead. However, the Smart Growth planners are like rust. They never sleep.

So what will they think of next?

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**February 17, 2008**