

Zoned Out: Regulation, Markets, and Choices in Transportation and Metropolitan Land Use

A seminar by

*Jonathan Levine, Associate Professor and Chair
Urban and Regional Planning Program
University of Michigan*

*Presented by the Center for Transportation Studies
Portland State University
Portland, Oregon
April 21, 2006*

Abstract

The search for solutions to urban sprawl, congestion, and pollution has inspired a wealth of alternatives, including smart growth, New Urbanism, and transit-oriented development. Since 1970, researchers have sought to assess such alternatives by evaluating their transportation benefits. Implicit in research efforts, however, has been the presumption that, for these options to be given serious consideration as part of policy reform, science has to prove they will reduce auto use and increase transit, walking, or other physical activity. *Zoned Out* argues that the debate about transportation and land-use planning in the United States has been distorted by a myth – the myth that urban sprawl is the result of a free market. According to this myth, low-density, auto-dependent development dominates U.S. metropolitan areas simply because that is what Americans prefer.

This seminar confronts the free market myth by pointing out that land development is already one of the most regulated sectors of the U.S. economy. Noting that local governments use their regulatory powers to lower densities, segregate different types of land uses, and mandate large roadways and parking lots, it argues that the design template for urban sprawl is written into the land-use regulations of thousands of municipalities nationwide. These regulations and the skewed thinking that underlies current debate mean that policy innovation, market forces, and the compact-development alternatives they might produce are often “zoned out” of metropolitan areas. When people believe that current land-use development is governed by a free market, any proposal for policy reform is seen as a market intervention and a limitation on consumer choice, and any proposal carries a high burden of scientific proof that it will be effective. By contrast, a recognition of the role of regulation in constraining current options should change this

burden of proof and the way in which transportation and land-use innovations are debated.

Speaker Biography

Jonathan Levine is Associate Professor and Chair of the Urban and Regional Planning Program at the University of Michigan. He teaches courses in transportation policy and planning, public economics in urban planning, and quantitative planning methods, in addition to several doctoral seminars. Levine's research focuses on the relationships between transportation systems and land use in metropolitan regions, factors that drive the development of such systems, and the efficiency of public transit. Levine has worked with organizations including the Michigan Department of Transportation, Mineta Transportation Institute, Ann Arbor Transportation Authority, and SMART (Suburban Detroit Public Transit), in research and planning in transportation. He is the author of *Zoned Out: Regulation, Markets, and Choices in Transportation and Metropolitan Land Use* (Resources for the Future, 2006).

For more information about Jonathan Levine: <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/jlevine>