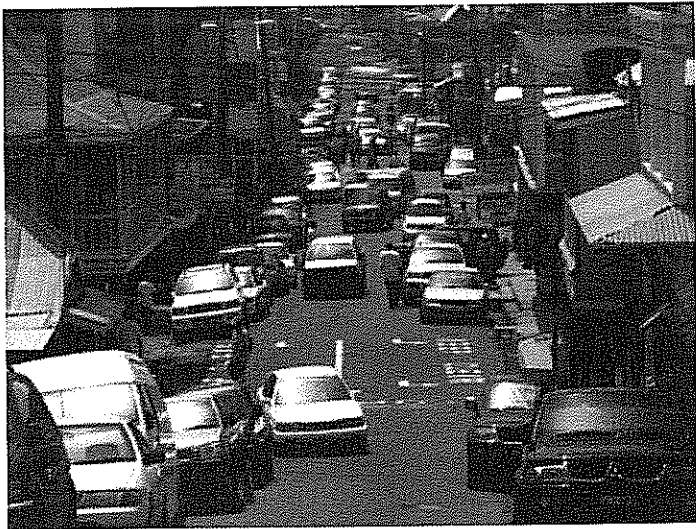


# Congestion

Just another taxing opportunity

By David Brooks

Congestion. We see it nearly every day. Traffic snarls, long delays, queues for parking lots, no room here or there, even on the train you have to stand, that's if you can get on. The supermarket car park is hell. Drive another 5 or 10 minutes to find a parking space. Dammit! Can't "they" do something about this congestion? Those car parks cost so much; perhaps a bus or tram next time... But that means you work to their schedule, the bus runs only on the hour and takes twice as long to get even near home, and then you have to drag the shopping another mile or so in 30 degree heat.



It's a great subject, congestion! Just about everyone who "cares" or has a PhD in something has written about it. And they all seem to want to use taxation to cure it. Now that actually works! The way it works though is to make it too expensive for the less well off (poor people) to drive into town. It forces them to use public transport or not go at all. Taxes of course are generally "on the nose," so "charges" are the in thing. Councils love charges and parking fees. And they love to "fine" those who do something adverse to their policies. It literally brings them in millions of dollars that they do not have to raise by a rating system so hated by the wealthy. These charges inevitably lead to "inner city

decay." Falling land values, less people (isn't that what they were after?) increased safety problems, falling trade – you've read the story often.

So it adds up to "we want the people" and "we don't want their vehicles" and "public transport is too expensive to supply" and "Urban Sprawl is bad" and "decentralisation is good" and "inner city decay is bad" and – and – and, does anyone really know what is wanted?

Strangely nearly all writers on the subject appear to accept congestion as a given. That it is a natural event, a societal disease, to be cured by mans superior knowledge. Few ask why there is congestion. I mean, why ask awkward questions when you already know the answer?

Have any of the "experts" ever questioned the existence of "cities"? At least as we know them! Does it ever occur to anyone that cities are primarily anti people?

Anti civilised? You pack 'em in, then you complain like hell about them being there. And why do they pack into cities? Services, convenience, economics! Economics?

Why of course. People, you and me, are economic entities. Economics is all about people. If we were not here there would be no economics. We are manipulated by economic forces continually. What do you think all that advertising on the telly is about? At the bottom of all this nonsense about congestion is the land question. It is not only a matter of collecting the rent of land for public purposes. It is a matter of land use in every sense. The land is not the exclusive realm of the rich, of corporations, or of "Royal" families with their Dukes and Lords. The land is a necessity for every being on earth. If you crowd people into little spaces then you get congestion. If you ring cities with "green belts"