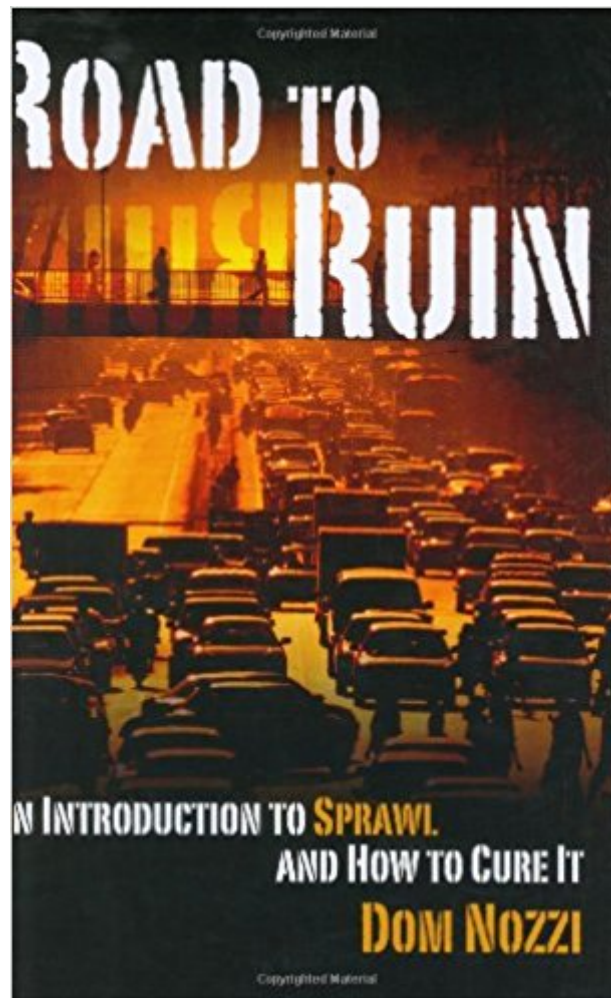




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Road To Ruin: An Introduction To Sprawl And How To Cure It



Synopsis

What causes sprawl, and are there sensible solutions to its aggravating problems? Nozzi delivers an easy-to-follow introduction to sprawl's causes and offers common-sense solutions available to communities. The time is ripe for resurrecting the tradition of designing that makes people, not cars, happy. Since the end of World War II, America has been obsessed with a desire to improve conditions for cars, not people, primarily through enormous subsidies for road widening and construction of free parking. Not only does this obsession worsen conditions for motorists (at great public expense), it traps communities in a vicious cycle that delivers a declining, sprawling, financially bankrupting future—regardless of the quality of regulations, plans, planners, or elected officials. Nozzi delivers an easy-to-follow introduction to sprawl's causes and offers common-sense solutions available to communities. The time is ripe for resurrecting the tradition of designing that makes people, not cars, happy. The key is returning to modest, human-scaled streets, parking, land use, and development regulations. Design principles encouraging walking, bicycling, and mass transit in conjunction with automobile travel are essential to creating livable cities once again. A professional city planner for over 15 years, Nozzi has firsthand knowledge of what works, what doesn't, and what real-world obstacles are faced when dealing with sprawl. Aimed at people who want an insider's introduction to our road, traffic, and land-use problems, this book is a useful guide to both professional planners and citizens concerned about the future of their own communities.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"[P]rovides an arsenal of facts for a campaign against the types of land use patterns popularly and pejoratively perceived as sprawl and the types of transportation improvements that encourage those patterns. The book is easily accessible to planners, planning commissioners, policymakers, students, or citizens with an interest in the topic."-Journal of the American Planning Association

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"Hurrah for Dom's work and clear vision for progressing toward human-scaled, people-oriented remedies to the suburban, car-dependent, traffic congestion most of us are plagued with."-Dan Burden Executive Director Walkable Communities, Inc.

"He uses plain English and simple drawings to clearly illustrate the origins of the crisis in community we face today. He deals with the erroneous "solutions" typically proposed by citizens, professional community planners and elected officials."-Andres M. Duany Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company

"In these pages we are shown how the physical form of our settlements and the details of our streets should matter most to us, rather than the number of lanes or the speed of the cars. Here we are told, let cities be cities, and don't suburbanize them."-Victor B. Dover, AICP Dover, Kohl and Partners

DOM NOZZI is Senior Planner, Department of Community Development, City of Gainesville, Florida. His work has focused on long-range planning, urban design, and the preparation of land development regulations.

Although Nozzi covers some of the same ground covered by other anti-sprawl polemics, he does cover one issue especially well: street design. While other sprawl critics focus on aesthetic or environmental issues, Nozzi zeroes in on the importance of street design for good urbanism, discussing such issues as cul-de-sacs, street width, and curb radii. For example, Nozzi asserts that street width is a more significant cause of auto-oriented sprawl than zoning or planning, because when a road is widened, it becomes less convenient for pedestrians, thus generating additional high-speed traffic. Because many people don't want to live on the same street as speeding cars,

such streets become unsuitable for housing. So even if such a street is zoned for mixed use, the road widening essentially turns it into a commercial zone. As a result, zoning and planning are unlikely to change an already built-out area; instead they just codify the status quo. There are a couple of things that could have used improvement. Sometimes Nozzi's discussion of "big picture" issues (e.g. what's wrong with sprawl) is a bit one-sided. Although Nozzi cites plenty of statistics, defenders of the status quo have their own statistics, and Nozzi doesn't really grapple with them; this book is more a short statement of the case against sprawl than a detailed weighing of both sides' arguments. His discussion of congestion might seem unclear to less knowledgeable readers. On the one hand, he points out that regions that have invested heavily in new and widened roads have not built their way out of congestion (p. 20). On the other hand, he writes that "Congestion has gotten a bad rap." (p. 21). I think I understand his point (i.e. that anti-congestion measures typically work in the short run but fail in the long run) but am not sure that casual readers would see what he's getting at. Although this book may not be the ultimate guide to sprawl, this book is masterful for what it is: a short, detailed explanation of how American street design favors cars over people.

Is the road to utopia on - well - a bigger, faster road? Dom Nozzi doesn't think so. The Gainesville city planner taps a 16-plus-year career in urban planning to describe what he calls an American obsession with improving conditions for cars rather than people in a new book titled "Road to Ruin: An Introduction to Sprawl and How to Cure It." "When cars come first, more public money is sunk into costly road systems. Pollution increases, traffic accidents go up and residents ultimately live farther from where they need to go. That causes them to drive more, thus the need for more roads, and so on, and so on." "What's happened is we have become our own worst enemy. It's a vicious cycle," said Nozzi, who's worked at the city since 1986 except for a three-year stint in Boulder, Colo. "We have essentially locked ourselves into our future." Nonetheless, he's a realist. Nozzi's not asking people to move from their suburban homes to inner cities, or even to give up their SUVs. Instead, he believes communities should offer a variety of lifestyle options so that residents can, if they choose, leave their cars in the driveway and walk, take a bus or bike to work. Since World War II, Nozzi argues, the development of hinterland subdivisions - also known as sprawl - has become a priority. Some city and county codes even prohibit mixed uses - areas that combine shops, offices, and apartments or homes. Thus, government contributes to the cycle of an auto-dependent society, he says. Governments even require a certain level of parking for shopping centers and office buildings, which play their own part in proliferating car usage, he says. "As long as there is abundant free parking, people will continue to use cars," Nozzi said. While people may be

apprehensive about separating themselves from their vehicles, he ponders in his book why millions of people each year vacation in Charleston, S.C., Savannah, Ga., European cities and other walkable towns. Yet, these days roads are made like "racetracks," Nozzi contends. Street trees are removed so that no drivers crash into them. Corners are rounded so that turns can be made at high speed. And lanes are widened to give motorists more room. "If you build a road for high speeds, what you will ultimately get are high speeds," Nozzi said. He describes these high-speed roads as barriers to lifestyles. No one wants to walk or bike in an area where cars whiz by. No one wants to live there either. So up goes another cul-de-sac subdivision so everyone can be safe. "When you make cars happier, you inevitably make everything else less possible," Nozzi said. He's been a student - and proponent - of "new urbanist" planning for the better part of two decades, earning first a bachelor's in environmental science from the State University of New York in Plattsburgh in 1983 and two years later a master's in urban and regional planning from Florida State University. And Nozzi lives what he preaches. His Duck Pond neighborhood home dating to 1913 is just steps from the Thomas Center, where he heads the city's long-range comprehensive planning. Ironically, one of the builders of his home, Hartwell Kelley, who owned a sawmill, is presumed, Nozzi said, to be the first person in Gainesville to own a car. By JANINE YOUNG SIKES Gainesville Sun Note: the author of this story did not rate the book, but required a rating to post this "review."

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