



A Convenient Solution to An Inconvenient Truth

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While Al Gore's movie "An Inconvenient Truth" certainly sets up the problem of global warming pretty well, in perhaps the most dramatic fashion that the American public has ever seen and with good scientific backing, it did fall short of offering solid solutions. And many people assume that just because the problem is "Inconvenient", the solutions must also be not only inconvenient, but very painful.

Wiley Norvell, of [Transportation Alternatives](#) wrote an [essay of the same title as this post](#) (PDF) in which he attacks some of the misconceptions of how we can reduce our carbon footprint (err..SUV tire tracks) in a real dramatic way, in contrast to the many small "success stories that are touted in the media as progress." More under the fold.

Just when the collective conscience of New York's car-owning minority could relax ("something is finally being done about global warming!"), commonsense dealt a startling blow. A new study titled "Global Warming on the Road: The Climate Impact of American Automobiles" effectively dismisses global warming initiatives that fail to tackle private auto emissions. Released by Environmental Defense in June, the study estimates the greenhouse gases emitted by our rolling stock of cars are nearly twice those of major electric power companies. This should actually come as good news, insofar as global warming has good news.

Indeed, while most people think of the Federal government as the only level of government that can really have an impact on global warming, through carbon taxes or subsidies for alternative energy, it may actually be municipalities that have the most power in curbing one of the most important polluters - automobiles:

Well-meaning municipalities have nibbled around the edges of their CO2 problem for years while the federal government failed to act on industry emissions and vehicle fuel standards. As it turns out, the silver bullet to global warming is a tool of local government. Muscular municipalities like New York can reduce demand for driving, effectively slashing the biggest source of emissions. And we can start now. Mode switching--pushing people from one form of transportation (cars) to another (feet, bicycles or mass transit)--is the key. Every trip we switch from the automobile to a more efficient mode of transit not only reduces the emissions of that trip, it reduces the collective emissions of other vehicles by decreasing congestion.

Which for dense urban areas, like New York, can be a pretty convenient way to reduce our carbon footprint.

It is not as if the politics of climate change are paving the way to reform in places like Portland, Chicago and London. They have found the same policies that improve quality of life bear dividends when it comes to CO2 reduction. It is a convenient solution to the most inconvenient and dangerous situation have ever created. If we just plan for a more livable city, maybe we will not have to try so hard to stop global warming after all.

Local zoning, parking regulations, transit planning and other municipal functions can improve quality of life while also reducing the carbon footprint of a local area.

So how about it Mayor Bloomberg? You signed the Mayor's Climate Change Agreement over a year ago and we have not heard from him on how he plans to implement this citywide. The Kyoto Protocol emissions reduction target for the U.S. would have been 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. Time's running out and trends on auto-usage are in the opposite direction. Certainly, ideas like congestion pricing and High Occupancy Vehicle restrictions would improve things, but these would have to be part of a citywide initiative to reduce autotrips and increase mass transit, walking and biking.

One local elected official, Borough President Scott Stringer, will be having a conference on Transportation Issues called "Manhattan on the Move: A Transportation Agenda for a Growing City" which will be held on October 12, 2006 at Columbia University, Alfred Lerner Hall from 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Please come to express your perspective on how to Green our Transportation System and create a higher quality of life for local residents.



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