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The Changing Science of Urban Transportation Planning

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The last half of the 20th Century was the age of the automobile, and the development of bigger and faster roads defined urban planning for more than 50 years. During this period, transportation planners developed sophisticated behavior models to help predict future travel patterns in an attempt to keep pace with ever-growing congestion and public demand for more roads. By the 1990s, however, it was clear that eliminating congestion with new road capacity was an unattainable outcome, and had unintended effects that were never considered when the automobile era first emerged. Today, public expectations are rapidly evolving beyond “building our way out” of congestion, and toward more complex definitions of desired outcomes in transportation planning. In this new century, planners must improve behavior models to predict not only the travel patterns of the future, but also the subsequent environmental, social and public health effects associated with growth and changes in travel behavior, and provide alternative transportation solutions that respond to these broader outcomes.