

Roundtable A8: An End to Sprawl? Planning a Mass Transit Future and Smart Urban Growth

Discussion leaders: Robert Ginsburg, Center on Work and Community Development-Chicago; Greg LeRoy, Good Jobs First; Roger Toussaint, President-Transport Workers Union, Local 100; Anabella Rosemberg, Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD; Deron Lovass, Natural Resources Defense Council

Facilitator: Peter Lazes, Cornell ILR

PRESENTATIONS

Greg Leroy of Good Jobs First described initiatives to halt urban sprawl while promoting accountability and **smart growth**. The social and environmental devastation related to declining urban density and increased land consumption in excess of population growth was addressed, linking the relationship of declining union membership, falling tax revenues, and increased privatization causally to the mechanisms of sprawl. Offering 'smart-growth' as a responsible alternative to sprawl it was proposed that this process of urban development can increase job growth in the heavily unionized mass-transit and construction industries while reducing vehicular travel mileage and in turn mitigate carbon emissions.

Robert Ginsburg with the Center on Work and Community Development-Chicago examined the paradox of increased sprawl and growing congestion particular to urban areas. Addressing the need for policy that promotes reinvestment in our aging transportation infrastructure as well as job growth and congestion relief, the potential for such policy to achieve significant reductions in greenhouse gases was also assessed, noting that presently transportation accounts for 20% of the U.S. carbon emissions total.

Deron Lovass, Vehicles Campaign Director for the Natural Resources Defense Council addressed the need for revolutionary transportation policies aligned with climate goals at both the federal and state levels. Focusing on California's efforts to mitigate carbon emissions by adopting a 'clean cars' law the states governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger was praised for his signing of an executive order establishing a low carbon fuel standard. Committed to reducing emissions to 80% of today's levels by 2050 California faces the challenge of reducing over the road vehicular travel as this accounts for 40% of that states carbon emissions. With the reauthorization of the Federal Highway Bill upcoming in 2009 states can spend the federal funds provided at their own discretion and should be influenced towards investment in mass transit development, one policy hurdle to be overcome is the fact that as it presently stands revenue from the Federal Highway Trust is contingent upon growth in vehicle miles traveled. Labor was called upon to use its influence and organizing capabilities to propel the necessary policy changes.

Anabella Rosemberg of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD discussed the responsibility of unions in training workers for the transition to sustainable mobility. Citing Spain as one example where unions have promoted employer-labor agreements to provide bus services for workers to reduce the personal vehicle usage to and from the workplace. As a result of this strategy Spain has seen a reduction in automobile accidents as well as carbon emissions.

DISCUSSION

Among the topics examined during this roundtable discussion was congestion pricing and the various environmental conflicts that arise when land developers attempt to increase density of traditionally low density rural and suburban areas. **Roger Toussaint, President of the Transport Workers Union Local 100** expressed the advantage of light rail systems and ferry shuttles for connecting high and low density regions and proposed that the development of these modes of mass-transportation need to be included in New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's congestion pricing agenda.