

# ISRAEL SMART GROWTH POLICY PROJECT

## COMPLETE REPORT WORKING PAPERS I, II, III, IV & V



WILL LAND USE PLANNING SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF AUTO DEPENDENCY?

**DRAFT**

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JUNE 2009

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Israel Smart Growth Policy Project is a nine month research initiative devoted to changing travel behavior through land use planning. Financed by the New Israel Fund's Social Justice Program and sponsored by Adam Teva V'Din, the project's two short term goals are to establish a technical understanding of land use planning's contribution to auto-dependency and to devise a public policy framework that will promote transit-oriented development. The long-term purpose of this initiative will be to fundamentally improve the quality of life in Israel by eliminating the social and environmental hazards of auto-dependency.

### **The Reason for the Study**

Beginning in the 1970s, Israelis increasingly began to rely upon the automobile as their primary form of transportation. Over the course of three decades, the percentage of people using mass transit for work trips plummeted from 60% to 30% of the population. Car-ownership rates steadily climbed while automobile trips grew longer in time and distance. Today, Israel has one of the highest levels of vehicle kilometers travelled (VKT) in the western world. The triumph of the private car over mass transit is often explained as the inevitable product of market forces, global trends and consumer preference for independent travel. Less explainable, however, is the continuing popularity of the automobile in spite of its well-known social and environmental impacts. Without doubt, Israel's auto-dependency has resulted in polluted cities, worsening congestion, escalating infrastructure costs, vanishing open spaces, and horrific road accidents. In spite of all these externalities, and in spite of astounding investments in mass transit infrastructure, Israel is still becoming an even more car-centric society.

To some extent, Israel's travel behavior is simply a product of economic forces. As societies become increasingly affluent, they consume more of everything – including cars. Meanwhile, government subsidy of road infrastructure and corporate subsidy of car usage has made it very easy for many Israelis to forsake the bus. Like most countries, driving on Israel's roads is free while taking transit costs money. However, misguided infrastructure investments and flawed incentive structures address only one part of the mobility question. The single most important reason for Israel's deepening addiction to driving is that the country's land use policies prioritize the flow of automobiles instead of minimizing the need to travel.

Today, Israel's largest housing developments are being built in the middle of isolated agricultural areas with no connection to established urban centers. Commercial developments are built alongside an ever expanding highway network. Parking lots and roadways are a privileged land use not only in the Central District's new suburbs but also in established urban centers. Throughout the country, the notion of the sidewalk as public urban space has been eclipsed by the assumption that the motorized vehicle always has the right-of-way. Even Israel's railway stations are auto-oriented, wholly devoid of any integrated urban design scheme and

instead ringed by commuter parking. In sum, Israel's land use schemes have all but ensured that driving will generally be a more rational option - a faster option - than taking transit. Even with worsening rates of traffic congestion, it is still more convenient for Israelis to travel by car in order to reach highly dispersed destinations.

No small number of interventions have attempted to solve Israel's transportation problems but none of them have affected mode split, the percentage of people who use the automobile as their primary form of transportation. Heavy rail investments have generated substantial ridership but still serve only a very small portion of the total population. Ambitious light rail schemes have been in the planning stages for years but exorbitant capital costs and technical challenges have stifled their implementation. More recently, an electric car scheme has captured considerable political support and financial capital even though its environmental benefits are highly questionable. Several national planning initiatives including TAMA 35 have advocated for sustainable development while failing to offer any concrete policy guidance on the subject of auto-dependency.

The time has come for Israel to embark upon a new approach to urban planning in which land use planning and transit planning are fully integrated. By changing the way that urban space is designed and built, it is possible to make mass transit the primary form of transportation for the majority of Israeli residents. Throughout North America and Europe, new urban planning agendas are resurrecting older ways of designing streets, neighborhoods, and regions. Through "smart growth planning" and "transit-oriented development" schemes, auto-oriented environments are being retrofitted into walkable urban districts anchored by transit stations. No such movement has been pioneered in Israel. In fact, the disconnection between land use and transportation has never been studied in any systemic fashion by government, the private sector, the academy, or the environmental NGO movement.

#### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The Israel Smart Growth Policy Project was designed to fill the research gap on smart growth policy in Israel. The project took a broad approach, considering the interactions between transport and land use for the entire country rather than for one specific city or region. Over the course of nine months, five working papers were produced. Draft versions of these working papers are compiled in this report.

- **Working Paper I** shows how the rising rates of automobile dependency in Israel are attributable to the disconnection between transport and land use planning.
- **Working Paper II** inventories the social, environmental, and economic costs associated with auto-oriented development.

- **Working Paper III** presents innovative strategies, funding sources, and public policies that have supported transit-oriented development in the United States.
- **Working Paper IV** reviews the institutional and regulatory barriers to implementing smart growth in Israel.
- **Working Paper V** presents a draft set of recommendations for reforming Israel's institutions and public policies in order to facilitate transit-oriented development and smart growth strategies as an effective means for reducing automobile dependency in Israel.

The production of these working papers involved a combination of data collection, field observations, and stakeholder interviews. Some of the preliminary findings of the study were also presented at several venues in Israel including the Israel Planning Association's annual conference. Included within the Appendix of this compilation are the Powerpoint slides for the most recent version of this presentation.

THE ISRAEL RAILWAYS ALIGNMENT AT ARLOZOROV IN CENTRAL TEL AVIV



No matter the frequency or quality of service, mass transit will always fight a losing battle against the automobile so long as land use planning prioritizes road infrastructure over all other uses.