

Reflections on the Commuting in America series



This work began more than twenty years ago with the intent of using the census data to describe the new patterns of commuting behavior that were then emerging. In that first report Frank Francois, Chair of the Steering Committee, stated “It does not purport to reflect the policy positions of any of the sponsoring organizations and should not be interpreted in this matter.” The goal was “to serve as a common resource of factual information upon which policy makers can draw in shaping transportation and development actions and policies over the coming years.” This third volume continues that approach and that goal.

As I said in my conclusion to CIA3:

“What a privilege it is to be able to work on a subject that is a source of endless interest. The need to better understand transportation behavior, and as a part of that the need to better understand commuting, is still with us and, it seems, will be for a long time. The ways in which human needs and preferences play out in a spatial context, given changes in technological possibilities, in the demography of the population, and in the larger society, generates an almost endless array of patterns to investigate and stories to tell.”

When I began the work on that first volume I certainly didn’t start with any notion that this was going to be a major part of my career’s work. I have been continually delighted that it turned into that and continually delighted that it has brought me into contact with so many of the wonderful people in our profession. It constantly reminds me how proud I am to be a part of it all.

Over that period it has evolved into the continuing story of changing commuting behavior and also into something of the documentation of the effects of the baby-boom generation on many aspects of transportation, as it rose to prominence, dominated the scene for several decades, and now moves slowly off-stage. That group, which has dominated most of our professional life times, has had immense impact here as almost everywhere else in our society. The real story is not the story of how those people got to work but the story of their jobs – jobs that our society generated in tremendous numbers to provide for the millions of job-hungry baby-boomers emerging from schools and colleges. This series could have been about the documentation of the immense unemployment spawned

by a demographic bubble. It is a tribute to our society's vitality and creativeness that this story is the story of traffic congestion among the affluent rather than about lines of unemployment among the job-hungry.

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