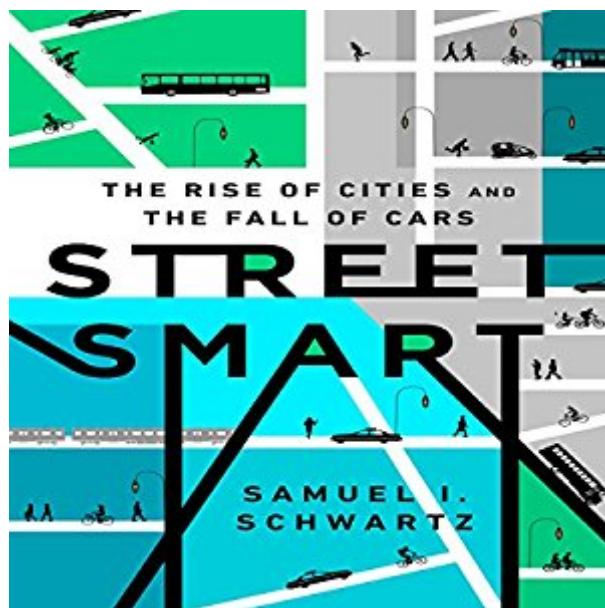


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# Street Smart: The Rise Of Cities And The Fall Of Cars



## Synopsis

With wit and sharp insight, former Traffic Commissioner of New York City Sam Schwartz, a.k.a. "Gridlock Sam", one of the most respected transportation engineers in the world and consummate insider in NYC political circles, uncovers how American cities became so beholden to cars. He also explains why the current shift away from that trend will forever alter America's urban landscapes, marking nothing short of a revolution in how we get from place to place. When Sam Schwartz was growing up in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, his block belonged to his community: the kids who played punchball and stickball and their parents, who'd regularly walked to the local businesses at which they also worked. He didn't realize it then, but Bensonhurst was already more like a museum of a long-forgotten way-of-life than a picture of America's future. Public transit traveled over and under city streets - New York's first subway line opened in 1904 - but the streets themselves had been conquered by the internal combustion engine. America's dependency on the automobile began with the 1908 introduction of Henry Ford's car-for-everyone, the Model T. The "battle for right-of-way" in the 1920s saw the demise of streetcars and transformed America's streets from a multiuse resource for socializing, commerce, and public mobility into exclusive arteries for private automobiles. The subsequent destruction of urban transit systems and the post-World War II suburbanization of America, enabled by the Interstate Highway System and the GI Bill, forever changed the way Americans commuted. But today, for the first time in history, and after a hundred years of steady increase, driving is in decline. Younger Americans increasingly prefer active transportation choices like walking or cycling and taking public transit, ride-shares, or taxis. This isn't a consequence of higher gas prices, or even the economic downturn, but rather a collective decision to be a lot less dependent on cars.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A very accessible, easily-readable account of the past, present, and future of transit throughout the US and the rest of the world. I especially enjoyed the anecdotes surrounding New York City, an area which Schwartz, also known as "Gridlock Sam," has much personal experience as Traffic Commissioner. The first half of the book is historical: expect to learn about the great engineering marvel and transportation failure of Robert Moses' Cross-Bronx Expressway, the political and economic reasons (as opposed to the oft-cited social reasons) behind the 50s white flight phenomenon, and other fascinating stories concerning the past 100 years of transit development. Schwartz's magic in this section is the "behind the scenes" perspective, prompting the casual reader (such as myself) to think about the issues like a transportation engineer rather than like a consumer. The second half of the book concerns the future, and does so by describing unique aspects of transit systems and traffic planning in other cities throughout the country, peppered with anecdotes from Schwartz's work as a consultant. Although I found this portion a little weaker than the NYC historical review (though I admit I am a biased reader who purchased the book out of interest in NYC's infrastructure), it was interesting to learn about the transit systems in other cities. The section about self-driving cars was especially insightful, for the same reasons as the historical portion -- it approached the topic from the perspective of a transportation engineer rather than the perspective of a technologist or consumer. The reasons I didn't rate the book 5 stars were: I found the section on Millennials and the benefits of walking a little bit unnecessarily long, although I understand why Schwartz would include it assuming an older target audience. I also would have appreciated more details, both historical and technical, in some sections, even if those details risk boring or alienating a more casual reader. If you're looking for a very easy to read introduction to the broad world of transportation and its political, social, and economic state within the country (or specifically NYC), then I highly recommend this book. If you're looking for a detailed introduction to transportation engineering, this might not be the right place to begin, although it might serve as motivational material to dig deeper.

Very fascinating book while remaining accessible and fun to read. The author does a great job of

combining in-depth technical language without suffering from a dry writing style. In regards to content, his descriptions are thorough and open minded. Despite what many may think, the book is not a complete attack on cars, but rather an exploration of the benefits of reducing car presence in densely populated areas and making other forms of transportation more appealing. He still acknowledges the role cars fill and their importance to the transportation sector. I would recommend this book to anyone who's curious in how transportation works in a city, places with state of the art transportation systems, and what the future of commuting and traveling can be.

Great lessons from one of the nation's most prominent traffic engineers on congestion, sprawl and why we need to do something about them. As a Cleveland, Ohio cyclist, I found it insightful, but as a taxpayer I found it compelling. We can't afford unbridled highway expansion, when we can't maintain and repair what we already have.

This book was an eye-opener. I think the biggest thing for me was how it addressed autonomous vehicles or driverless cars and how they are not the solution that so many people think they are, that is, without effective integrated transit systems to collaborate along side them.

A wealth of history and wisdom. Enjoyed it immensely.

Eye-opening exposition of urban life! Brilliant.

Brilliant! Nonfiction from personal professional practice point of view.

This veteran of transportation planning gets across a holistic view of how to move cities out of automobile dependency. And he's wickedly funny at times.

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