



Karen Anderson

Let me be the first to point out the obvious: We have a serious transportation problem

If you own a home in or around Seattle, you'll be able to relate to Club columnist Karen Anderson's observations on what it's like to go anywhere.

Seattle has a split personality when it comes to traffic. Just take a look our cars. Half of us are zipping around in SmartCars, Fits, and the eerily stealthy Priuses. The other half are barreling down the freeway in Jeeps, Explorers, and family vans equipped with full-size TV screens to keep the kids entertained.

But whether we drive sub-compacts or land yachts, our vehicles are dwarfed by the same two massive problems: Seattle's glacial rush hour traffic and the city's vanishing downtown parking.

I've lived here for 30 years and watched the city and county governments attempt to address these problems. Some people would say that they aren't taking action, but I think they're taking a lot of actions. The problem is, most of their actions are contradictory.

To discourage driving, they're removing most of the downtown parking lots. To discourage car ownership, they're allowing building of multi-family residential structures with little or no parking.

Unfortunately, at the same time, they're whittling away at our bus routes and fighting off the concept of regional light rail as if it were a zombie apocalypse.

It's rumored that a former mayor proposed that Seattle simply adopt the motto: "Abandon all cars, ye who enter here," but that it got bogged down while they fussed over the choice of a suitably hip typeface for the signage. The choice of an emblem for the city transit policy was much easier: A native land snail against a background of slippery asphalt.

Our transit situation is actually quite amusing – at least for our visitors from Boston, Washington D.C., New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Paris and London. What tales they must tell when they get back to civilization!

Tourist: I say, old chap, could you direct me to the Underground?

Seattle resident: Err, yes – you mean the Underground Tour?"

Tourist: No need for a tour. Just wanted to hop on the train and get up to Capitol Hill.

(The Seattleite bursts into tears.)

With our cars and buses stuck in traffic and our rapid transit system stuck on the drawing board, the obvious alternatives are bicycling and walking. But I dare you to step outside and say that with a straight face in mid November. No sooner have our famous October rains set in than our cheery hordes of bicycle enthusiasts give way to grim-faced packs of bicycle fanatics, of whom I am not one. The idea of

presenting myself at a downtown business meeting clad neck-to-toe in damp Day-Glo Lycra frightens me (and it would probably frighten my clients even worse).

Make no mistake: I believe that cars are on the way out in urban areas, and that taking the bus, walking and riding your bike will eventually take over – by about 2040. By that time, there'll be no need for cars whatsoever. We'll all live on Rapid Ride routes that lead to jobs in South Lake Union and our shopping will be dropped directly onto the balconies of our high-rise condominiums by drones.

Meanwhile, I'm keeping my (sub-compact) car but doing all my driving in the opposite direction from downtown. Hello Northgate, Shoreline, Lynnwood and Everett. Farewell, West Seattle. We'll see you again after the waterfront tunnel

project is completed, a Ballard-to-Alki ferry system is put in service, or the Star Trek transporter system becomes a reality – whichever comes sooner.

It was 45 years ago that folksinger Joni Mitchell indignantly whined that "they paved Paradise and put up a parking lot!" How times have changed. For today's Seattle driver, the sight of a nicely paved parking lot would be Paradise. We won't talk about the hourly rates. That's for another column.

