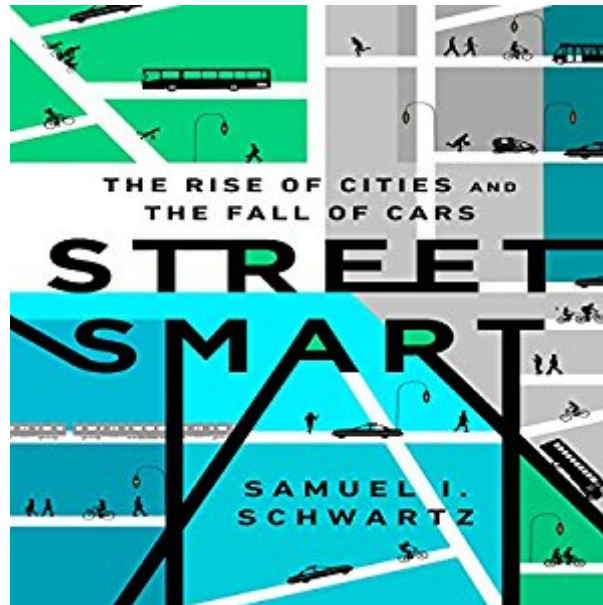


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# Street Smart: The Rise Of Cities And The Fall Of Cars



## 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.

During our research on traffic and the effects for cities I came across Samuel Schwartzes book Street Smart: The Rise of Cities and the Fall of Cars. I was hesitant at first to purchase the book as I felt it really exceeded my needs - 292 pages - on smart streets only? The title turned out to be a bit deceptive, as this book is about so much more than street design: It is an explanation of American Culture, and its obsession with roads and cars, and beyond this a deep dive into the movement created by the millennials who - for the first generation of Americans - seem willing to drive less and to share more resources. Schwartz, one of the leading transportation experts in the US and a constant proponent for intelligent transportation systems, is thrilled by the combination of a change in citizens' mentality and the smart use of data. In probably the most eye-opening chapter - "What makes a smart city?", Schwartz dives deep into what the potential for cities are. With

examples ranging from the obvious European "stars smart cities" like Copenhagen, Zurich and Amsterdam, Schwartz makes us understand, that functioning cities, which do not condemn its resident to sitting behind a steering wheel for hours at a time, are also real possible in the US: L.A. has become the most promising mega city to build a smart public transportation system Salt Lake City, with its "Envision Utah initiative has bet on walking and transit solutions back in 1997 and is now being seen as the best large public transportation system in the US" New initiatives in many smaller US cities like Boston, Austin and San Francisco show the potential for aMobility apps ranging from CityMapper, TransitAPP to Google Maps are connecting the dots for cities and citizens alike.

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