

# AllendaleStrong...

*Neighborhood Group Stands against Powerful Interests determined to harm the Natural Environment...*

Residents of Allendale, an inner-city neighborhood in Shreveport Louisiana, formed a learning-doing community during 2012. This was their response to a confusing and manipulative public process that intentionally attempted to pit neighbor against neighbor. The decision to destroy Allendale with an inner-city freeway preceded any public process. Hard to believe that in 2019 any city would be looking to waste public investment on such an outdated and totally discredited idea, but welcome to not only Shreveport, but also Lafayette and Little Rock. Colleague groups in those cities, like *AllendaleStrong*, have encountered Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), responsible for regional transportation planning, are engaged in applying flawed standards and practices that work against building environmentally and financially sustainable cities. Efforts in all three cities are citizen led initiatives to shift public investments to smarter solutions that stop the unsustainable expansion of city infrastructure.

Over the last 70 years, MPO's following their 80-year-old untested standards have orchestrated perhaps the largest human assault on the environment in history. The shift to auto-centric cities was an untested historical departure from city-building knowledge accumulated over thousands of years. MPO's have never checked promised prosperity against real outcomes. In recent years more independent research has revealed that urban freeways produce counter-intuitive negative impacts. For example, attempting to solve freeway congestion by adding more lanes actually increases congestion. Also, urban freeways create a fictitious demand (*induced demand*) that does significantly more harm than good by expanding infrastructure and inefficiently increasing vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Where cities are tearing down urban freeways the induced demand evaporates. As much as 50% of VMT on urban freeways is fake demand. Despite the growing body of knowledge, many MPO and DOT's (State Departments of transportation) continue using deeply flawed standards that generate ridiculously expensive urban freeway solutions that don't work. Urban freeways are a fundamental cause of the environmental, social and financial crumbling of cities. Track the cause of a problem that challenges your city. You will likely find urban freeways contributing to the problem.

Here is an excerpt from Yale University SETO Lab research, [Environmental Impacts of Urban Growth](#) that emphasizes the environmental problems from continuing current urban growth patterns:

“The conversion of Earth’s land surface to urban uses is one of the most irreversible human impacts on the global biosphere. It hastens the loss of highly productive farmland, affects energy demand, alters the climate, modifies hydrologic and biogeochemical cycles, fragments habitats, and reduces biodiversity ([Seto et al., 2011](#)) We see these effects on multiple levels. Future urbanization will, for example, pose direct threats to high-value ecosystems: the highest rates of land conversion over the next few decades will likely take place in biodiversity hotspots that were relatively undisturbed by urban development in 2000 ([Seto et al., 2012](#)). Within cities, the nature of urban growth is also an important determinant of urban dwellers’ vulnerability to environmental stress ([Güneralp and Seto, 2008](#)).”

Shreveport’s story of urban freeway induced growth is an example of environmental, social and economic disaster. Unfortunately, it is an example of what has happened to cities across the US. For perspective on the growth problem, consider Shreveport at three points in time: 1950, 1980 and 2018. In 1950 Shreveport was a city of 127,000 people living within 24 square miles. The city was well maintained and growing incrementally with efficiency. The city was appropriately branded as ‘*a city on-the-grow.*’ Downtown was vibrant as approximately 35,000 lived within walking distance. Public transportation was excellent. Shreveport was a reasonable example of proven successful city-building.

During the 1960's Shreveport, like many US cities, embraced a new unproven growth narrative for reorganizing the city to auto-centric development patterns. With the federal government paying 90% of costs, Interstate-20 was routed east-west cutting through the heart of Shreveport, wiping out vibrant African American neighborhoods with no ability to resist. The federal funds and promises of what is now exposed as the '*Growth Ponzi Scheme*' (Marohn) were so intoxicatingly addictive that no US city could resist. Local planning and growth policies shifted to send clear messages that Shreveport will abandon the old and move wealth to new growth patterns. Elected officials mistook their political power as sufficient preparation to guide and negotiate this historical experiment. Unaware the expensive auto-centric infrastructure shift created a competitive advantage for non-resident owned formula businesses, political leaders seemed to strangely work against local ownership of business activity, even offering financial incentives to bigger-is-better non-resident owned businesses.

The '*Growth Ponzi Scheme*' created an illusion of wealth as Shreveport grew to its peak population of 207,000 occupying approximately 90 square miles by 1980. The not-understood-swindle was creating an illusion of wealth generated by short-term gains produced by cycles of new development that extend city infrastructure. The illusion is perpetuated by ignoring long-term accumulating infrastructure maintenance deficits. A tragic long-time standard practice of municipal accounting. All aspects of city operations and finances increasingly stress toward a breaking point.

Shreveport leaders, unwise to the ticking infrastructure time bomb, chose to accelerate wealth evacuation by further cutting up the city with I-49 Inner-city south of I-20. By 2018 Shreveport grew to 120 square miles even though population declined to 189,000, a trend that appears will continue. Sometime during this 1980 to 2018 timeframe, accumulating infrastructure maintenance deficits reached a tipping point. The Growth Ponzi Scheme time bomb exploded. Shreveport is now struggling to fund \$1.1 billion EPA consent decree sewer system maintenance projects. That is the tip of the iceberg, the infrastructure maintenance deficit is likely \$3-6 billion. A former Public Works Director framed the problem magnitude, "Shreveport has the same miles of pipe as Cincinnati has serving 2 million people." Additionally, cut-through freeway induced growth has left 53% of Shreveport households living in poverty (ALICE) within long-neglected disinvested neighborhoods.

Challenges are complex and further complicated by powerful leadership self-interest. Certainly, opportunist that became wealthy playing the Growth Ponzi Scheme would like to continue, but at what cost to Shreveport and its citizens? If not so sad, Shreveport's growth over the last 70 years of experimenting with cut-through freeways could be a tragic comedy. For almost eight years *AllendaleStrong* has stood for Shreveport and against the interests of Shreveport's powerful leaders who control influencers, political will, paid consultants and all resources except the relationships of *AllendaleStrong's* learning-doing community. *AllendaleStrong* has attracted support from the Sierra Club legal team, Tulane Environmental Law Clinic and Yale Environmental Justice Law Clinic as well as other local and national lawyers. Strong Towns and their network across the US have also provided professional analysis and media support.

*AllendaleStrong* continues working to help Shreveport citizens understand the untrustworthiness of our transportation planning bureaucracies. Transportation bureaucracies seem unwilling to listen and think beyond their flawed standards that unnecessarily increase costs of all projects and justify unjustifiable mega-projects. Continued belief in those flawed standards have Louisiana facing a backlog of \$15 billion in unfunded highway maintenance and another backlog of \$15 billion in unfunded mega-projects like I-49 ICC freeway, a mega-project that made the 2017 US Highway Boondoggles list.

Louisiana's annual share of the Federal Highway Trust Fund is approximately \$700 million for use as the federal match covering approximately 40% of projects eligible for federal transportation funding. The remainder of project funding comes from local and state sources. Those legislators that believe highways are

Louisiana's future is always looking to redirect to highways state funds intended for other purposes. A couple of examples: (1) Obligating state debt by creatively borrowing \$15 million each year from the Unclaimed Property Fund or more recently, (2) deciding to borrow against the annual BP settlement payments for the Gulf oil spill. The solution is not higher taxes or taking funds from other needs, but changes to the standards that will eliminate many projects and reduce costs of others. *AllendaleStrong* invites similarly motivated groups to align and work collectively to change standards used to justify and design urban highways.

*AllendaleStrong's* learning-doing community is for a smarter alternative in Shreveport: (1) *designate the existing loop as I-49 for through traffic* and (2) *construct a local traffic business boulevard over existing routes as I-49 ICC*. The boulevard is approximately 7% of the projected cost for the planned 3.5-mile cut-through freeway. Overwhelming evidence supports *AllendaleStrong* wisdom and position. Please join the learning-doing community in growing public understanding and support for the business boulevard. Responsible civic leadership is growing in Allendale. Don't be surprised that Shreveport's path to an equitably prosperous future may very well emerge from Allendale.