

SPRAWL

There Goes the Neighborhood

HOUSING SUBDIVISIONS AND STRIP MALLS keep mutating ever farther from town centers, begetting more congested highways and roads. Now "Measuring Sprawl and Its Impact," a pioneering, recently published report by Smart Growth America, shows that the virus—that is, poor development patterns—has turned lethal. The study, conducted jointly by researchers at Rutgers and Cornell universities, cross-references land-use and transportation data from 83 of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States. Its findings reveal that sprawling areas have dirtier air and a higher rate of

For example, researchers discovered there are 180 cars per 100 households in Atlanta and in Raleigh and Greensboro, North Carolina, compared with 162 cars per 100 households in San Francisco, Boston, and Portland, Oregon. As a result, there are much higher ozone levels in the first cities, and a greater incidence of pollution-related breathing ailments. Similarly, there were more traffic deaths in sprawled-out areas, owing to the car-dominant culture. "In areas that sprawl a lot, you may have a great house to live in," says Don Chen, executive director of Smart Growth America. "But it comes at a great



traffic fatalities than regions with more compact housing and access to mass transit.

"People wanted to escape from crammed cities after World War II, so they moved into the suburbs and became auto-dependent," says Reid Ewing, coauthor of the report and a transportation expert at Rutgers. Since then, he says, decades of poor planning and development have resulted in homes that are widely separated from shops, schools, and workplaces; a lack of transportation choices; and poor road networks—all with demonstrable public-health consequences, which the study bears out.

cost to your health and the environment."

The study concludes that if metro areas were more compactly laid out, thousands more people would walk to work and drive less—and breathe cleaner air. Indeed, high-density, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods are gaining currency in the real estate market, due in part to an increasing number of retiring baby boomers who prefer the convenience of in-town living. "People are getting tired of the traffic congestion and uniformity of the suburbs," says Ewing. "Sprawl is just not the American dream anymore."
—Vivienne Caballero

to a software program that interprets heat patterns. When an animal was detected near the road, the computer sent a signal to roadside signs, setting off flashing lights and warning motorists to slow down and watch for wildlife. Despite some software glitches, the trial was considered a success. By summer the company, InTransTech, plans to market the system to transportation agencies worldwide. —*Jen Uscher*

OLDIES BUT GOODIES

If you're a male sparrow who's unlucky at love, it might be because you didn't study hard enough when you were young. According to a recent report in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*, male sparrows that learned songs well when they were young are more successful at attracting mates than males that don't remember how to hit all the right notes. And the slackers can forget about trying to make up for their learning deficit with new and original songs. It turns out that female sparrows prefer songs that come closest to those they heard when they were chicks. The study also suggests that song-learning abilities reflect a bird's nutritional history, which, in turn, affects its brain development. So the female sparrow's ear is discerning those time-honored, most faithfully



Name: _____

Date: _____ Period: _____

There Goes the Neighborhood

Article questions

1. Who performed the "Measuring Sprawl and Its Impact" study?
2. What are the effects of sprawl?
3. What was the cause of sprawl?
4. What would be the results of better planned cities?