

Monday, October 24, 2005

Sprawl scholar

One of our most perceptive writers on modern American cities is Robert Bruegmann, whose [Sprawl: A Compact History](#) is now in print.

Bob had sent me some of the chapters as he was writing them and I was happy to see his op-ed ("L.A., the king of sprawl? Not at all") in yesterday's *LA Times*. I particularly liked the following punch-line:

"Although anti-sprawl crusaders contend that low-density sprawl has led to longer commutes and more congestion, it is fairly obvious that the growing congestion in the Los Angeles region is a direct consequence not of low-density sprawl but of high and fast-increasing densities and the fact that the region has so few miles of freeway per capita compared to most other American urban areas. Of course, none of these objections to standard wisdom are likely to sway many highbrow critics of sprawl. Their desire to see L.A. as sprawl and therefore as not truly urban is based less on rational analysis than on subjective aesthetic judgments and class resentment.

"But there are major problems with their position. First, there is considerable room for doubt that sprawl is necessarily the major problem that many anti-sprawl crusaders believe it to be. But, in any case, Los Angeles is not a good model of sprawl. The urban area of New York or Boston, for example, each surrounded by a huge low-density penumbra, would make a better poster child for sprawl than the dispersed but relatively dense and compact Los Angeles."

posted by Peter Gordon @ 10/24/2005 03:29:00 PM