

# **Traffic Jam: the Politics and Practice of Congestion Mitigation**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Around the world, mobility and congestion relief has risen to the top of the urban agenda, rivalling concerns about other issues that challenge the vibrancy and vitality of cities such as public safety, affordable housing, health care and education. This paper traces the varied reasons why redressing road congestion has become a top priority, highlighting how constituencies concerned about environmental degradation as a result of car emissions and urban sprawl have found allies in groups such as health care professionals, labour unions, big business, social justice organizations and suburban commuters. Stemming from the coalition of interests concerned about congestion, it is shown that urban rail projects, particularly those that are off-road and do not interfere with the amount of road space allocated to cars and trucks, have become the congestion mitigation strategy of choice.

And yet, while widely popular, international evidence is presented to suggest that these interventions often fail to meet their expectations with respect to ridership, financial returns, environmental amelioration and the promotion of social inclusion. In this light, the paper concludes by examining the conditions under which urban rail projects are successful, and identifies complementary policies and investment strategies to mitigate congestion.

**Key Words:** traffic congestion, public transport