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## Op-ed: We should stop waging a war on cars

For several decades, the politically correct thinking has been that people should ride transit, walk or bike instead of driving a car. The car is not the problem, writes guest columnist Bruce L. Nurse.

By Bruce L. Nurse

Special to The Times



A MAJOR change from the political ideology of waging war on the car to accommodating the car would be a huge step toward less traffic congestion in the Seattle area.

For several decades, the politically correct thinking has been that people should ride transit, walk or bike instead of drive a car.

But the car is not the problem.

The car is an innocent and dutiful result of the basic principles of a free society. People want to have mobility. People want to travel in a safe environment where they want to go, when they want to go and with whom they want to go. The individual right to be free is what creates the demand for the car.

The United States is the most mobile society in the history of civilization. Along with freedom and education, mobility has allowed our society to prosper economically.

Limiting parking and road capacity is a failed policy of leaders who believe transit is the solution. Transit is an important but small part of the solution. Transit has lost market share of total trips for the past 50 years.

For more than 70 years, the city of Seattle has followed a *de facto* isolation policy concerning road capacity. Seattle has opposed or limited every major project to or through the city.

Now the Alaskan Way tunnel is being built at a cost of \$4 billion with 35 percent less capacity than the viaduct that is being removed; a third bridge across Lake Washington from Sandpoint to Juanita was voted down during the Translake Study in the 1990s; and the 520 bridge replacement has been downsized from eight lanes to six with two of them designated as HOV lanes.

Seattle has also supported light rail to the Eastside, taking the Interstate 90 center roadway, reducing total lanes from 10 to eight, which will reduce the freight and general-purpose traffic in the I-90 corridor.

Half of all vehicle miles traveled in urban areas of the United States are on freeways. In other words, freeways work very well. Therefore, not providing adequate freeway capacity for the growth of a region causes congestion for personal travel and cripples the goods-and-services traffic that is significant to the economy.

Unfortunately, the politically correct ideology that has emphasized transit is now spending 60 percent of all public transportation tax dollars in King County on transit even though projections say transit, including light rail, will accommodate less than 4 percent of our daily trips 20 years from now. The car remains at over 90 percent of daily trips in 20 years.

The biggest project that is shovel-ready is the Interstate 405 Master Plan, approved by 27 government entities and agencies. A federal record of decision in 2002 accepted the plan. This major improvement to a 30-mile corridor has been recognized since the early 1990s as necessary to accommodate the growth of the suburban cities in the Puget Sound area.

Unfortunately, to gain approval of the general-capacity improvements for vehicles, it was necessary to include 40 percent of the estimated total cost of the plan for transit. Completion of the plan would help Boeing, Microsoft and many other companies that are the basis of our Puget Sound area economy. Further, the I-405 Master Plan would relieve some traffic from Interstate 5 through Seattle.

Another megaproject that would help Seattle would be an I-5 tunnel under the hills east of downtown Seattle. Today's traffic data show that nearly 50 percent of the I-5 traffic goes through downtown Seattle without exiting. A tunnel for this through traffic would relieve I-5 congestion.

To follow the political ideology of restricting use of the car and curtailing mobility is to restrict and curtail the freedom of people. This is counter to the basic principles of our country.

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Instead of car wars we should adopt a policy of dealing with cars and facilitating the use of the car for the American public.

*Bruce L. Nurse is vice president of transportation for Kemper Development Company.*