



# FREEWHEELER NEWS

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## The Growth of Suburbia – Without Bikes

By John Tetz

### Post World War II

There was a massive change from the pre-war period coming out of a depression to a post-war of wealth and plenty (I experienced both). Good economy; Cheap, plentiful, fuel; Mass move to the suburbs; Housing developments springing up

And unchecked population growth.



The distances to stores, etc. were too great to walk (ideal for biking though). Shopping centers moved outside of town forcing the use of cars. Pre-war not every family had a car. Many walked or used a local bus line. No one commuted any distance to a job. After the war automobiles became very popular, 1 car families, then 2, then 3, then 4 car families eventually became the norm. Busses disappeared. Walking disappeared. Children were bussed or driven to school – they were gyped of the space and freedom to be on their own.

Cars became not just transportation but status symbols. The basic design rule, **Form follows Function** got reversed into **Form leads Function** which showed up in tail fins, huge chrome bumpers and massive grill work.



In the airplane world where efficiency is a prime driver of design, **Form continues to follow Function** as seen in the clean efficient designs.

Bike use was considered as second class status. Bikes as local alternate transportation disappeared along with the neglect of bicycle planning. Road designs promoted only the automobile.

The word **Bike** became synonymous with **Kids – and Toys** (and remains with us today).

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The only adult cycling was weekend biking for sport/exercise i.e. expensive road bikes, mountain bikes, few set up for transportation – skinny tires, no fenders, no luggage rack, no panniers, no lights – physically not usable as alternate transportation.

Suburbia in particular is not green. Large size homes house only a few people per square feet of space. As George Carlin would say, “Room for our Stuff.” A study made in 1940, as to how many items a typical family member owned, was around 140 objects. In 1980, it climbed to 1800 objects. I wonder what the number would be today – any guesses?

Big homes require high heating and air conditioning power, have fertilized lawns, use “labor saving” devices such as power mowers, riding mowers, leaf blowers and snow blowers (exercise that most people need). Most suburbanites live within 2 to 5 miles from shopping and running errands – which is ideal for cycling while getting needed exercise, while doing useful work at the same time.

**All this added up to the beginning of truly excessive use of the Earth’s resources which continues today, but at an even higher rate.**

It was natural to drift into this post industrial life style of wealth and easy accessibility to resources. Another tendency was the thought that the Earth seemed so big that we humans couldn’t possibly affect things like the climate. And at the time global warming signals hadn’t yet emerged enough from the “noise” of climate variability for us to pay enough attention to. But all this has changed. The Earth’s resources are becoming scarce and those environmental signals have become stronger and clearer.

The problem is there are researchers around the world reporting on changes to the Earth such as ice caps and glaciers melting, water tables falling and other big ticket items. But these seemingly do not affect us personally (yet). Therefore we are less inclined to make changes or even to know what changes are needed to be made at our personal level.

Our high consumption American life style is affecting the Earth more than any other societies. It has been calculated that if every one on Earth were to live like us Americans it would require 4 Earths. Some of the low lying countries will be affected first by the high rise in ocean waters, others by the loss of precious snow melt waters for their crops. Seems unfair for us to be creating the problems and them being stuck with the problems. This climate is becoming a moral issue.

There are 100 things that we can do as individuals to help out. The first on my list is to use a bike as local alternate transportation.