

Reviews

From the Review Editors

To recognize reviews of exceptional quality, the review editors asked Phil Berke from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Alex Schwartz at the New School in New York, both *JAPA* editorial board members, to evaluate the nearly 70 reviews published in Volume 71. They used the following criteria:

1. Relevance to *JAPA* audience (appropriateness for teaching and practice).
2. Clarity of description of main themes/thesis.
3. Assessment of structure and content (major parts and chapters).
4. Assessment of organization and presentation of information (clarity of table of contents, usefulness of glossary, effectiveness of illustrations).
5. Intellectual rigor in analysis.
6. Lack of personal bias.
7. Quality of writing (clarity, style, wit).
8. Originality, insightfulness, creativity.

In addition to excelling according to these criteria, the best reviews stood out because they had special qualities of style or were particularly incisive. The following four reviews were selected as the most outstanding for Volume 71:

Eugenie Birch, review of *Downtown America: A History of the Place and People Who Made It*, Spring 2005, pp. 228–229

Jeremy Nemeth, review of *Land Use, Zoning, and the Politics of Land Use*, Summer 2005, p. 341

Richard Schmoyer, review of *Amsterdam Human Capital*, Winter 2005, p. 101

Emily Talen, review of *Toward the Livable City*, Spring 2005, pp. 223–224

We congratulate these reviewers for their fine contributions to *JAPA* and thank Phil Berke and Alex Schwartz for their service.

Because this issue focuses on transportation planning, we are including an insightful essay by Martin Wachs on influential transportation planning books. We also urge readers to see the many reviews of books related to transportation in the last several issues of *JAPA*.

Tom Sanchez

Special Section on Transportation

REVIEW ESSAY

Reading About Riding: Observations on 50 Years of Transportation Books

I recently retired from the faculty at the University of California at Berkeley nearly 39 years after teaching my first university course in transportation planning and policy, and have taken a position in transportation policy research with a think tank. Moving to a smaller office and a smaller home led me to self-consciously set about the task of dispersing the large library of books, journals, and ephemera I had gradually accumulated. Behaving as if my dusty, disorganized collection were the essence of my knowledge or a principal measure of the value of decades of work, I reluctantly and sometimes emotionally dispatched most of my holdings to university libraries that had served me well. Younger generations, I hoped, might make good use of them. Other materials seemed so outmoded and faded that they logically landed in the recycling bin. Why had I held onto so many documents whose relevance had faded with the years? Inevitably my heart demanded that I retain the books I most treasured: a core collection of works written by mentors, friends, and colleagues, plus those that had most influenced my thinking about my chosen field of work. While I retained some books and parted with the majority based more on emotions than rationality, the process led me to ask whether I could identify the most important books in transportation planning and policy: Which must I keep because they defined the core ideas in the field and stimulated my thinking, influenced my writing, and inspired my teaching?

Some academic fields are known by their “canons.” Many disciplines possess great books that illuminate their cultures more than bound knowledge. But while I can easily list of my favorite transportation planning books, the field lacks an identifying set of formative works. Perhaps more interesting, while sorting and packing up my library, I have gradually realized that the impossibility of identifying a small set of defining works can be as fundamental a characteristic of some fields as are core bibliographies in others. Transportation planning is not a discipline with well-defined topics and modes of inquiry. Rather, it is an area of application, in which intellectual inquiry in many disciplines provides support for action in the world of practice. Many advances over the decades have come from borrowing thought processes from other fields and applying them to planning or policymaking. The field draws from civil engineering, politics, public health, sociology, economics, and others. Innovation is the result of mixing and matching to meet needs in the real world. To make a list of required readings in transportation planning would inappropriately restrict a field that is inherently an amalgam.

Transportation systems exist to facilitate and enable other human activities, from work and education to recreation and health care. When the transport system is functioning well, it should be taken for granted and barely noticed. There is no single transportation mission and no single transportation problem. When the public and politicians focus on transportation, it is because of problems as mundane as potholes, as common and complex as traffic congestion, or as seemingly intractable as threats to personal security while