



# Straphanger: Saving Our Cities and Ourselves from the Automobile

*Taras Grescoe*

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**Taras Grescoe rides the rails all over the world and makes an elegant and impassioned case for the imminent end of car culture and the coming transportation revolution**"I am proud to call myself a

straphanger," writes Taras Grescoe. The perception of public transportation in America is often unflattering—a squalid last resort for those with one too many drunk-driving charges, too poor to afford insurance, or too decrepit to get behind the wheel of a car. Indeed, a century of auto-centric culture and city planning has left most of the country with public transportation that is underfunded, ill maintained, and ill conceived. But as the demand for petroleum is fast outpacing the world's supply, a revolution in transportation is under way. Grescoe explores the ascendance of the straphangers—the growing number of people who rely on public transportation to go about the business of their daily lives. On a journey that takes him around the world—from New York to Moscow, Paris, Copenhagen, Tokyo, Bogotá, Phoenix, Portland, Vancouver, and Philadelphia—Grescoe profiles public transportation here and abroad, highlighting the people and ideas that may help undo the damage that car-centric planning has done to our cities and create convenient, affordable, and sustainable urban transportation—and better city living—for all.

## Straphanger: Saving Our Cities and Ourselves from the Automobile Details

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**Taras Grescoe**

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## From Reader Review Straphanger: Saving Our Cities and Ourselves from the Automobile for online ebook

### William Cline says

Offers a few quick outlines of American transportation history, as well as anecdotes about specific cities, but all this book really amounts to is a guy who loves transit talking about transit to his transit-loving readers for a few hundred pages. There's no thesis here, and despite a long bibliography, few hard facts around which one could be built.

Some of the facts that do appear are suspect, particularly Grescoe's figures for U.S. average commute time and San Francisco's transit mode share, neither of which agree with what I found in the American Community Survey or the report of the Mayor's Transportation Task Force, respectively. Maybe he's quoting a different source that used different survey parameters, but without in-line citations there's no easy way to tell. His characterization of vehicular cycling as "suicidal" shows ignorance of his subject, or at best unwarranted credulity of Mikael Colville-Andersen, who is quoted repeatedly in the chapter about Copenhagen.

Combined with some annoying deficiencies of editing, including incorrect uses of "sheath" when he meant "sheaf" and "doughty" instead of "dowdy" (presenting the usual moral quandary), one comes away having read a flimsy piece of pop pro-urbanism rather than anything substantial.

**Update 2013-12-29:** Oh, and it seems his quotation of Margaret Thatcher saying, "A man who, beyond the age of twenty-six, finds himself on a bus can count himself as a failure," appears to be a misattribution. (A columnist for the Guardian also failed to find evidence she ever said this.)

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### Kristen says

In the first paragraph of this fabulous book, Taras Grescoe writes, about the Shanghai Auto Show, biggest in the world: "Throughout the cavernous showrooms, lithe motor-showgirls in shimmering nylon evening gowns and leatherette miniskirts drape themselves over aerodynamic fenders, like molten watches drizzled over branches in a Dali landscape. On rotating platforms, surrealistic concept cars languidly pirouette..."

Wow. Beyond absolutely jaw-dropping writing, so good you want to linger over it, Grescoe can pack in more information in a paragraph than you can get in an entire newspaper article. Try this one:

Only twenty-five years ago, automobile traffic in Shanghai was limited to chauffeur-driven Hongqi limousines for Communist Party officials. Such was China's isolation that, during the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards floated a proposal to make red stoplights signify "Go." Today, there are two million cars on the streets of Shanghai. To ease congestion, a high price has been set on car registration, and bicycles have been banned from main streets. Backups in China can make even Los Angeles traffic look positively bucolic: in 2010, drivers northwest of Beijing were stuck for ten days in a jam that stretched 60 miles across two provinces. To increase mobility, China has built a 33,000-mile system of expressways in the last twenty years. Already larger than the network that connects the European Union, it will be more extensive than the United States' freeway system, by 2035. By then, carbon dioxide emissions from China's transport sector will easily be the highest in the world.

Later, in a chapter on my heart's hometown, Portland, Oregon, Grescoe gives a great description, then, ominously, writes, "Yet something is missing from downtown Portland."

Oh! My hackles slightly up, I read on...

It was only as I crossed Burnside Avenue toward Union Station and heard a train whistle ricocheting between the steel bridges spanning the Willamette River, that I realized what Portland was lacking. I'd been strolling downtown for over two hours and had yet to encounter that bane of the North American metropolis: the neighborhood-killing, blight-inducing, multilaned freeway.

All in all, this is an entertaining, fact-filled travelogue. Admittedly, I share Grescoe's absolute disdain for automobiles, highways, and suburbs. I'm pretty sure, though, that I would have loved it even if I thought cars were great.

Thanks to Goodreads Firstreads program for this first-rate book. Everyone should read it. (And get rid of their cars and start commuting by bike, train, bus, or ferry.)

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## **Justin says**

A recent surge of interest in city planning lead me to randomly put several related books on hold at the library. This was the first one I happened to read and it couldn't have been a better introduction to the fascinating field of urban studies. Grescoe is a travel writer by trade, but with a historian's love of research and a passionate love of city life -- in particular, the cities' public transit systems. (He has never owned a car.)

*Strap Hanger* operates under a simple premise: Grescoe simply went to different cities around the world and rode their public transportation, everything from the subway of New York to the teeming bike paths of Copenhagen. Each chapter uses its particular city's public transit as a lift-off point for Grescoe to explore many angles of the given metropolis, from history to culture to architecture, to crime, to education. An urban center's transportation network touches and informs every aspect of it, and Grescoe, with extreme good cheer and diligence, explores these aspects in detail, city by city, chapter by chapter. His writing is incredibly clear and precise, offering a lovely mental picture of each city's unique transportation.

I learned a lot from this book, and it inspired me to trade my parking space at work in for a monthly bus pass. Though I live in Los Angeles, where cars rule and transit still hasn't caught on as a faster, better alternative (though there's hope for this auto-mad berg, as Grescoe expounds on in the book), Grescoe make a convincing argument that riding transit means more than just getting from point A to point B. When you get out of your car, a bubble on wheels that protects you from the outside world, and use buses and trains and bikes and your legs to get around, you become more connected to the place you live, and more connected to the people around you. While I don't think the bus is going to get me where I want to go any faster than my car (if anything, it will be slower), the time spent in it will be of a higher quality than the time I spend driving. Whether talking to a stranger, people watching, or simply reading my book or looking out the window, I'm convinced riding the bus is going to improve my quality of life. I feel like a lot of people may read that last sentence and think I'm crazy -- unless you came to this review AFTER reading *Strap Hanger*.

### **Alison says**

Loved it! The author did an excellent job of laying out why public transport works and why we need it for a vital future rather relying on further proliferation of automobile culture. Made me miss Tokyo and want to move to Copenhagen.

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### **Janet says**

Enjoyed this book very much. It gave me a great deal to think about.

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### **Vincent Geels says**

funny to read grescoe's take on philly's pt system. pretty fun topical analysis of different public transportation systems around the world, along with quick historical/political primers that attempt to explain how and why these different transits developed within their specific ecosystems. makes me want to travel to copenhagen so i can travel on a bicycle highway and get stuck in a BICYCLE TRAFFIC JAM.

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### **David McClelland says**

If you're at all interested in public transit, cities, or how the two relate to one another, this is a very good read. Even if you're not, it's probably still an enjoyable book as Grescoe has a very good and approachable style, though he can occasionally get a bit repetitive. The book is essentially a look at transit planning in North America, and how that has shaped our cities, done as a series of chapters about various public transportation systems around the world. Grescoe compares North American cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Toronto to various world cities, such as Paris, Copenhagen, and Tokyo, to understand what North America cities are doing right, and what they're doing wrong. In a certain respect, it reads almost like a travel book, albeit one that focuses on some very specific things. It definitely gave me some things to think about, and made me wish for some more progressive planning on this continent.

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### **Areli Vázquez says**

El autor da su percepción del transporte, público, privado, no motorizado, y como piensa que influye en la vida de las ciudades, dando ejemplos en Norteamérica, Europa y Asia. Comparto su sentir en aquellas que he visitado. Mi capítulo favorito, donde habla de Copenhagen, con algunas referencias interesantes de la planeación que hacen en la ciudad.

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### **Leif says**

Just as shopping malls killed main streets and sidewalks, and gated communities replaced real neighborhoods, the private automobile usurped the social space once shared on subways, buses, and trains. When a society eliminates public space – when your only contact with your fellow citizen happens at 55 miles per hour, separated by layers of glass – it stops knowing itself, and can start believing the most outrageous lies: that crime is rampant, that people have no shared interests, that races and classes have no common ground. This doesn't mean that Philadelphia is about to become a placid Zurich or a conflict-free Copenhagen: historic divisions of class, ethnicity, and race run deep here. But there is a lot of evidence that geographic segregation and the privatization of public space are slowing. And for better and for worse, subways, buses, and trains have long been a crucial meeting ground for society: when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat for a white passenger on a bus in Alabama in 1955, public transport provided the shared space where racism could be challenged. It bodes well for the future that the public in Philadelphia never lost the habit of using public transportation.

If you read the above quotation and think: yeah, this is on target - a little superficial but in general solid work – then you're the right reader for this book. Grescoe does an absolutely fantastic job making the case for public transportation across multiple different urban environments through examining its history and present successes and failures. Each chapter plays a part and tackles a different urban space; all contribute to the perceptual shift that his book effects with persuasive delight. Grescoe is also writing for a public audience, of course, and so his arguments can sometimes feel limited to a specialist, a theorist, or a historian, but I found them quite balanced over the book as a whole.

Additionally, for me as a current Torontonionian who grew up in Saskatchewan, the chapter on Toronto is especially fascinating. The particular "tragedy," as Grescoe puts it, of Toronto is that a city so promisingly remarkable in its commitment to public transit could move into retrograde so quickly upon the election of Rob Ford as mayor. In the context of the other cities studied, Ford's failure of nerve and incendiary decision to dedicate money to increasingly pointless subway developments (as opposed to increasingly *effective* subway developments) seems so much more drastic than in isolation: the sad comedy of the drug-addled addict becomes a tragedy of a city that sacrificed much of its future in exchange for a few videos of Fordian mockery and a campaign built, as Grescoe puts it, on "negativity: during [Ford's first term as mayor], nothing new will be built, no jobs will be created, and nothing will improve on the streets of Toronto" (295). Grescoe points to a University of Toronto study from 2011 that discovered "that the single most reliable predictor of a voter's support for Ford – regardless of age or sex – was whether he or she owned a car" (302). Today the mayor may be different, but, as a relative outsider, I'm waiting to see what's changing.

I'll be honest: I loved *Straphanger* for its foundational principle: the joy and importance of public transportation. Get out of the way cars. The future is coming. (If only it were so easy!)

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## Jennifer says

I loved this book. The chapter by chapter explorations of different cities provided vivid illustration of what's working, what isn't, where and why. The author argues for reasonably funded, comprehensive, intelligent public transportation networks not simply because they are "green", but because they permit people to get places and live their lives in ways that make sense, and ultimately, make them happy. Public transportation is an issue I care a lot about, so it was easy for me to be pulled in by this book. At the same time, the storytelling is vivid and the author's points are argued logically, so I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who's even slightly curious about how we might go about achieving the dream of reliable, efficient, affordable, and ultimately enjoyable, transportation.

## Nick says

An entertaining and information-packed comparative tour of public transit realities in different cities around the globe, aimed at North American readers. The information is only current up to 2010-2011 or so, and there are a few inaccuracies and debatable interpretations. Sometimes the author goes on rambles about related but distinct topics in the middle of chapters without introducing them, which would normally annoy me -- but I kind of like it here.

### 4.6 Stars

#### Notes:

- Major flaw with the title perhaps -- those straps on buses suck! They slide around and cause you to bump into everyone whenever the bus moves.

- Page 12, **some key points:** Even magical, non-polluting cars are bad. Automobiles kill millions of people, including many youth, pollute the environment, make us fat and lazy, drive horrible sprawl and suburban shopping nightmare lands, waste time and fuel and cause road rage stuck in endless commuter congestion, etc. Various death stats explored.

#### NYC

- Page 20: Cool description of a massive tunnel-boring machine in action

- Page 40: Robert Moses -- was a major highway builder and a rich, entitled prick who did a small amount of good but much, much bad vs Jane Jacobs, who helped protest against his neighbourhood destruction and won.

- Page 45, **QUOTE:** "[as of 2010] 95% of Commuters get to Manhattan's central business district by transit, bicycle, or on foot. Fifty-four percent of New Yorkers don't even own a car."

#### Los Angeles

- Page 56, the end of electric street cars, **QUOTE:**

*"In a sustained and concerted effort, thoroughly documented in Peter Norton's excellent study 'Fighting Traffic', car manufacturers, auto clubs, and traffic engineers banded together to usurp citizens' ancient supremacy of the street, successfully confining pedestrians, now recast as 'jaywalkers,' to corner crosswalks and turning roadways once shared by stickball players, bicycle riders, and street vendors into motor thoroughfares and parking lots for private*

*vehicles. Motordom's greatest triumph, as Norton shows, was a slow war of attrition that all but banished the cheap, nonpolluting streetcar from the American streetscape."*

- Pages 60-61: LA sucks! Massive gridlock, pollution, crappy public transit, sprawl, car-centric... Even today, in 2018, it seems like not much has changed.
- Most New Yorkers take transit, most Angelenos don't. NYC focuses on Manhattan, an island, with expensive, limited parking. LA is full of 1000+ miles (!) of freeways and streets, with abundant parking.
- Page 71: Downtown LA a joke. Too much parking, no density, etc.

### Phoenix

- Page 81: "Phoenix is my nightmare". Essentially a sprawling, baking, car nightmare-land.
- Page 86: The Phoenix Metropolitan area has sprawl bigger than Switzerland!
- Page 88: Phoenix was, at least, like Detroit, with abandoned houses and wasteland
- Page 90: TMR in Montreal is a 'Garden Suburb'
- Page 92: Zoning and Red-Lining explained regarding suburbs. Areas are zoned to only be a specific sort of building (residential, industrial or commercial), which causes people to have to commute to work. Red-Lining is where lower income immigrant neighbourhood populace is denied mortgages. Meanwhile suburbs have tax-breaks on mortgages which means you need a car.
- Page 99, **QUOTE:**

*"By pitting you against everybody else on the road, driving turns travel itself into competition... Every time you choose to drive you are, in a tiny way, opting out of, and thus diminishing, the public realm. And that, finally, is the problem with suburbs and freeways. In order to gain a spurious freedom, which is in fact just increased mobility, millions of people turn their backs on civility -- not just politeness, but also the process of civilization building, in which cities play such a crucial role..."*

### PARIS

- Page 107: "The most ingenious and efficient urban transit network ever built" (!)
- Page 112: Electric tramways revolutionized the size of Euro-cities. Pioneered in Germany.
- Rue St Jacques in Paris is built on a Roman main street, which in turn follows a Gaulish road
- Page 114: Baron Haussmann displaced 350 000 Parisians to make his grand boulevards
- Page 117: Paris' 1960s RER line was instrumental in limiting Parisian sprawl

- Pompidou, President in 1969, was a car-loving bugger who built the ring road, river highway, 'penis tower', and tried to turn the boulevards into 8-lane highways -- but thankfully he died before that could happen
- Page 119: Delanoë, mayor from 2001-2007, reversed some of Pompidou's BS, closing the river highway, adding bus lanes, and introducing Vélib (a bicycle sharing service)
- Page 131: The Nazis almost blew up Paris, but didn't due to its beauty and a girl on a bicycle! (true?)

### Strasbourg

- Page 134, Has a very nice tram setup and transit scheme

### Freiburg, Germany

- Page 135, Super-eco Freiburg suburb of Vauban reduced car-use by 70% and charged 17,500 Euros for a parking space! I've been to Freiburg and it is an amazing, tram-linked utopia of sorts.

### COPENHAGEN

- More bikes than people
- Page 143, **QUOTE:**

*"In Denmark, as in Holland and Belgium, a policy of strict liability applies to motorists: in accidents, the presumption of guilt is on the driver, who is considered to be the operator of a potentially lethal piece of heavy machinery. Opening a door on a cyclist is a serious offense, and -- except in extreme cases, where a bike rider blindsides a stopped car -- it is the driver's insurance company that has to cover all the costs."*

- Page 152: In Copenhagen cycling style is emphasized over speed, which leads to increased safety

### Moscow

- One of the most (as of 2010) congested cities on earth, with ever-increasing and totally unsustainable car traffic jams
- Page 160, crazy stats on developing nations and rapidly-rising car ownership.
- Same page, 161, Moscow elite and powerful attach sirens to their massive bullet-proof cars and bully their way through traffic. They've run over people who haven't moved. Disgusting.
- Page 162: Moscow's metro is one of the deepest systems in the world. Some areas are more than 52 floors down...
- Pages 163-164: Moscow's metro has very high ridership, is generally much, much faster than driving, but has aging infrastructure.

- There are beautiful, incredible and extravagant stations, with massive foyers and antechambers. They were built by Kaganovich in Stalinist times to be more impressive than Capitalist systems.

- Page 167: The Moscow Metro was a 'shock' project. Stalin employed the might of Soviet volunteers and authoritarian power to hack it out of the earth. Crazy.

- Page 173: Russia accounted for 2/3 of all road fatalities in Europe! One hundred people died per day, on average, in automobile accidents in Russia!

**QUOTE:**

*"This means that, in one country alone, cars kill more people every four days than have died in all the attacks targeting public transport in Europe since 1990. The real terror, I figured, wasn't underground. As I walked back toward the Park Kultury station, I saw it was all around me on the streets of Moscow, where speeding oligarchs, road rage-filled skinheads, and the vodka-drunk of the new Russia could be seen cutting each other off, trying to bribe traffic cops, and driving their armor-plated BMWs up onto curbs."*

- Page 176, **QUOTE:**

*"In the past, nobility meant mobility. Aristocrats in pre-revolutionary France used to send lackeys running ahead of their carriages with burning torches to warn peasants off the roads. In the days of the tsars, the passing of the carriage or sleigh of a Russian nobleman was announced by the manic jingling of bells. The Soviet nomenklatura, those uber-proles in the dictatorship of the proletariat, appropriated aristocratic rights-of-way to barge through the streets in motorcades of Volga limousines. 'Russia has almost never belonged to the Russian people,' author Boris Fishman has noted. 'Historically, its bounty has been hoarded by a select few.'"*

Tokyo

- A city of trains. Busiest train station on earth (Shinjuku).

- Pages 179-180: Fascinating rush hour traffic description -- the orderly filing of thousands of people. Stations with their own individualized train departure music. Amazing.

- Page 181: Dozens of metro lines in Tokyo, millions of people riding.

- Page 184: Innovative Japanese tech and transit analysis keeps everything running on time and smoothly.

- Page 186: Japanese love trains, and their train network is amazing. Their metros have air-conditioning, heated seats, and two minute wait times.

- Page 196: Nevertheless, the government keeps building highways, even though many youth think cars are uncool.

## Bogota, Columbia

- crazy dangerous in the 80s and 90s
- Now every Sunday is Bicycle Day (page 210)
- Page 216: Bogota still has a horrible, free-for-all minibus situation (2010), but it's been mostly replaced by their futuristic bus express network
- Page 217: A crazy, Lithuanian, pants-dropping, Dean of the National University became mayor in 1995 -- Antanas Mockus. He was pro-transit and progressive.
- Page 218, the next mayor, Penalosa, was later the president of a bus company. He built a 24km bicycle and pedestrian highway. He greened and progressed the city a ton! Bike paths, parks, affordable housing, libraries, running water, stole land from the rich and gave it to the poor.
- Page 218, looking down on the rich!**QUOTE:**

*"We wanted to make people look down on the values of the criminals in our society. We were saying, 'You, with your big cars and fancy jewels, we think you are stupid, we think you are animals!' Penalosa rose from his chair, sweeping an arm over his desk. 'What we respect is music, and sports, and libraries. For us, the neighbourhood hero was not the mafioso with the big motorcycle and the flashy clothes, but the young man who played sports and read books and rode around on an old bike.'"*

- Page 219: Penalosa used 'bollards' to block cars from parking on sidewalks and to take back space for pedestrians
- He created the TransMilenio transit network -- rapid buses and quick-boarding stations

Incredible mayor!

- Pages 220-221: More on Bogota's BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) system
- Page 229: Downsides to the BRT -- uses diesel and victim of its own success/overcrowding

## Vancouver

- Page 253, 2010: Lowest per-capita carbon emissions of any city in North America!
- 10% fewer cars entered Vancouver in 2010 versus 2000
- Vancouverites protested in the late 60s against freeways, formed a political party, and got elected. Today, no freeways enter Vancouver.
- The Skytrain is highly successful, with high density development around stations and downtown
- Fast buses head to the stations and are popular, and parking is very expensive (about the same for an hour as an entire day in Portland, Oregon)

### Side Note on the history of North American Train Travel

- Train travel in North America used to be much better. The USA was the envy of the world in terms of trains, and now it's crap! Page 261: A luxury train ran out of Montreal to New York, and it ran much faster than it's modern version!
- Pages 263-264: The US has only one 'high-speed' train (2010), and it's not very good or fast. Canada has none. GM convinced the US railroads to tear down electric wires so they could sell them less-efficient, more polluting diesel engines.
- Page 264: A good argument for subsidizing train networks: Airports and roads are already highly subsidized.
- Page 265: The Republicans killed Obama's plans for high-speed rail around the US -- those buggers!
- Page 266: It took the author about 13 hours to train from Montreal to Philadelphia -- it would have taken about 3 hours in Asia or Europe.

### Philadelphia

- On the up, very walkable in parts, fairly bikable, based on the grid layout of William Penn from 1682
- Page 270: Edmund Bacon - a crazy city developer. Bacon did good and bad things in his long career, but near the end he turned strongly against cars and car culture.
- Page 272: Philly transit is widespread and available, but it's also a logistical mess, including tons of outdated tech, policies and union BS (2010). It's also highly segregated at times, with the cheap buses being taken by minorities and the slightly more expensive trains being taken by whites.
- Pages 277-278: West Philadelphia was/is a great place to live. Real community and nice old houses.

### Montreal and Beyond

Page 295: Public transit is SOCIAL

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## **Andrew says**

### A One-Minute Review

Straphanger is a smart bit of urban writing from Taras Grescoe, who collects transit systems like tourists collect snow globes. Transit-map geeks like me need no longer feel alone. Grescoe's travels from Shanghai to Montreal unearthing unique social, historical, and political stories about how urban and suburban environments develop transit systems. From what could have been in Los Angeles, to the propaganda-driven architectural beauty of the Moscow Metro, Grescoe identifies stable political and financial will as the cornerstone of good transit. So, while politics may scuttle Bogotá's otherwise ingenious quick-fix bus solution, look to Toronto for a true basket case. Grescoe's take on Toronto is overly political for my taste compared to his practical approach in other chapters, but he produces warnings from which all Canadian cities can learn – after, of course, enjoying a little schadenfreude. Straphanger (the title immediately resonates with transit riders) is both study and prescription – a great read for the commute that should inspire

straphangers everywhere to demand better.

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## **Dlmrose says**

3+

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## **Ken says**

An amalgam of journalistic feature writing, travel writing, history writing, and persuasive writing, STRAPHANGER is a State of the Mass Transit Union speech worth heeding. Author Taras Grescoe takes readers to 13 cities -- Shanghai, New York City, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Paris, Copenhagen, Moscow, Tokyo, Bogota, Portland (OR), Vancouver, Philadelphia, and Montreal. Here he provides a history of each city's mass transit, where they stand now in their progress (or lack thereof) of moving people quickly, conveniently, and relatively cheaply, where they hope to go in the future, and what (and who) are the obstacles.

To achieve this, Grescoe meets key personalities of the mass transit scene in each city, interviews them, and weaves their words into the chapters. He rides buses, subways, bicycles, bullet trains, and electric trams, describes the experience, and gives us a feel for what it would be like to live in each of these cities today (consider it a scouting report if any of them are on your radar as possible places to move to). He builds a passionate, yet reasonable and realistic, argument against the automobile. He identifies freeways as the nooses that strangle cities, destroy neighborhoods, undercut attempts to resuscitate urban life. He celebrates the renaissance of city living, the fact that the post-Baby Boomer generation is migrating back to urban centers and questioning the "American Dream" known as the "suburb."

In fact, even those approaching retirement with a gated community in the suburbs in mind as a final home might reconsider after reading STRAPHANGERS. There's a certain appeal, a certain charm, to thriving, safe neighborhoods in a city that include easy access to trustworthy, clean, and safe public transportation, with all one's shopping needs within miles of your home. If this sounds unrealistic, Grescoe's description of cities like Tokyo, Copenhagen, and many others not mentioned in chapter headings (Strasbourg, for instance) proves that a "Brave New World" for mass transit is not some pipe dream. In fact, it is a reality in many places -- right here in 2012. Leaders in these progressive cities understand that the long-term approach of financing mass transit is worth every penny, that revenues poured into highways are lost monies which only add to our traffic, pollution, and health woes.

As you might expect, there are good guys and bad guys in this picture -- and many in between. Read STRAPHANGER, and you'll find out where you stand in this picture. Grescoe writes as well as he rides. As a fiction reader, I was pleasantly surprised with my commute through these pages. Hopefully, you will be, too.

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## **Ellen Keim says**

I love nonfiction like this! A mix of history, social commentary, technical explanations, travel writing, and personal anecdotes, this book satisfies on so many levels. Anyone with an interest in city planning, urban living, the energy crisis, ecologically responsible lifestyles, other cultures, and of course different modes of

transportation has to read this book.

The only thing I didn't like about this book is that after a while I got really confused about all the kinds of public transit and how they get cobbled together in many, if not most, cities in an attempt to move large masses of people around as painlessly as possible. The author's analyses of what works and what doesn't were fascinating and gave me a lot to think about.

If only we could implement these solutions more widely in America, but alas, Americans love their cars and the flexibility and freedom they give them too much. I did think it was interesting when the author gave examples of how freeways and cars are making life untenable for many urban (and even suburban) dwellers. I had no idea how bad traffic problems have become in some cities!

I live in an area (Columbus, Ohio) with very little public transit: basically buses that don't serve the entire metropolitan area and feeble attempts to create bike paths. Unfortunately, shortsighted politicians and policy-makers continually shoot down any suggestions to improve our system. Maybe this book should be on their required reading list!

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