

Review: Breaking Gridlock: Moving Toward Transportation That Works

By Jim Motavalli

Reviewed by Kathy Piselli
Vistronix, Inc.

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Jim Motavalli. *Breaking Gridlock: Moving Toward Transportation That Works*.
San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2001. 306 pp. ISBN:1-57805-039-1 (cloth).
US\$23.00

Every day millions of Americans face the problem of how they are going to get where they need to go. And for the majority of us who live in urban centers, this problem gets more expensive, more dangerous, more time-consuming, and more frustrating every day.

Journalist, radio show host, and academic Jim Motavalli takes a long view of how we got where we are today and what our options are for the future. *Breaking Gridlock's* eleven bite-sized chapters cover how we got this way, a compact but comprehensive picture of how things are now, how Europe addressed the same problem, and what the author calls "viable options" for future auto, bus, train, plane, and ferry solutions.

Technological solutions to gridlock-maglev trains, intermodal stations, fuel cell cars-have been around for awhile. What holds us back is a national commitment. It is not technology but lifestyle that must change. Transit options must not only be comfortable and convenient, but the nation must overcome its fear of what Motavalli calls the "democracy" of mass transit. What will it take to get us out of our cars? This is the true message of the book, interwoven throughout.

Compactness and readability make the book unique. It is useful for anyone from high school on up, top management, legislators, frustrated commuters, or journalists wishing to familiarize themselves with the topic. Case studies span the nation from Boston to Santa Barbara, enhancing the book's broad appeal. The large amount of information included is well disguised by the book's easy to read style. The section on fuel cells, for example, manages to blend politics, economics, science, and popular culture into one easily digested chapter.

Included is a useful listing of people interviewed (identifying their affiliations) for quick reference, plus a list of groups that have produced advocacy materials, along with the usual references, bibliography, and index.

Hopefully, this book will need a revision soon. New federal and state initiatives

could force a rewriting of sections covering fuel cells, diesel buses, and rail. The Segway is too new to be present in this book. But the ending pages, called "lessons learned," remain a great summary for a city planner, or commuter, seeking a new way to "help keep us from driving off a cliff."

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