

## **PlaniTulsa threatens American freedoms**

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Randal O'Toole, a scholar from the CATO Institute, said PlaniTulsa looks a lot like what Portland, Oregon did beginning 20 years ago when it embraced New Urbanism.

And that should worry people in Tulsa.

O'Toole spoke Saturday in Tulsa as part of a forum sponsored by OK-SAFE. A former professor at Yale University, O'Toole has written several books, including *Gridlock: Why We're Stuck in Traffic and What to Do About It*.

"I want to talk about the American dream," O'Toole said. "To own a home, start a business, to have mobility and own property. 'Smart growth' is a threat to the American Dream. That's what PlaniTulsa is all about."

The average person in American travels 19,000 miles a year and 85 percent of that is by automobile, O'Toole said. "They (the Obama Administration) are trying to coerce people out of their cars."

O'Toole said Obama wants to raise gasoline taxes to fund light rail systems all over the country. Through extensive study, O'Toole showed that city after city that has invested in light rail has lost millions if not billions in inefficiency.

In January, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood ended cost-effectiveness rules for federal transit grants - in essence saying he was willing to fund rail projects no matter how much money they waste.

Dallas invested \$550 million in light rail and the cost per year per passenger is \$12,250 - enough to buy every passenger a car of their own and eliminate light rail, O'Toole said. In Austin, Texas, the bus system was operating in the black and had \$200 million in the bank when it started a commuter train system.

"Then they went broke, using up the entire reserve," O'Toole said. "The director resigned in disgrace."

Proponents, like Tulsa City Councilor Rick Westcott, argue that they just want to offer people a choice.

O'Toole said flying costs 14 cents a passenger mile. A bus costs 15 cents a passenger mile and a car costs 15 cents a mile. Amtrak, the heavily subsidized passenger rail service, costs 60 cents a mile and high-speed rail costs more than 75 cents a mile.

A ticket from Orlando to Tampa in Florida (86 miles) costs \$50 on high-speed rail but \$20 on a Greyhound bus. If high-speed rail is offered between Tulsa and Oklahoma City, the ticket would cost four times the price of a bus ticket and save only about 20 minutes.

O'Toole said American freedoms are already dwindling in terms of property rights.

Urban planners in Oregon place restrictions on building new homes in rural areas, including: the site had to have at least 80 acres and it had to be a farm that earns at least \$40,000-80,000 a year. Only 100 homes were built in the first year of those restrictions.

O'Toole said the new urbanists want people to build up, not out.

"If my house burned down, I wouldn't be allowed to rebuild it," O'Toole said. "I would have to build an apartment.

"Most Americans want to live in a single family home. Smart Growth will make housing unaffordable."

He said the new urban planners think big residential yards are "a waste of land." They want people to live in apartments on small lots.

O'Toole said people who already own a home should be okay but their children will be forced by economics to live in high-density housing in overcrowded downtowns.

In Portland, the population is loaded with couples without children. Families with children live all around Portland where the land use restrictions don't exist. The City of Portland told one church that wanted to expand that it must be closed on Saturdays, it could have only five weddings or funerals a year and its parking would be limited, O'Toole said.

The Portland light rail system cost \$3 billion - more than 30 times the original forecast.

O'Toole said cities are using TIF districts to subsidize light rail systems. Under a TIF, a private company is forgiven taxes to encourage development.

"TIF district fees are just subsidies for contractors," O'Toole said. "The main winners are downtown property owners."

He said light rail is "good for some 'businesses.'"

"Light rail sends crime everywhere it goes," O'Toole said.

Another argument against densification is that America is filled with open spaces, O'Toole said. Ninety-six percent of Oklahoma is open space.

"We have a tremendous amount of open rural space," O'Toole said.

Rail service is “1930s’ technology” in the 21st Century, O’Toole said.

“The rail networks are all big losers,” he said.

Randy Bright, a Tulsa architect who specializes in churches, said, “New Urbanism is a movement that is sweeping the nation.”

Bright, who writes a weekly column for the Tulsa Beacon, warned that New Urbanism brings “dire consequences for churches.”

New Urbanism, which was born out of environmentalism, has form-based codes whose goal is to “densify populations and confine growth.” This strategy inevitably leads to land shortages, higher land costs and limiting of the growth of churches, Bright said. In fact, where New Urbanism has been tried, parking for churches has been curtailed and the search for land to expand has resulted in a bidding war.

Bright said he has a series of discussions with a national proponent of New Urbanism who finally admitted she was “opposed to mega churches” and called big churches “profoundly anti-civic.”

“Our churches don’t understand the problems,” Bright said.

For more information on Randy Bright, go to [www.tulsabeacon.com](http://www.tulsabeacon.com) and to learn more about O’Toole, go to [www.cato.org](http://www.cato.org)

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