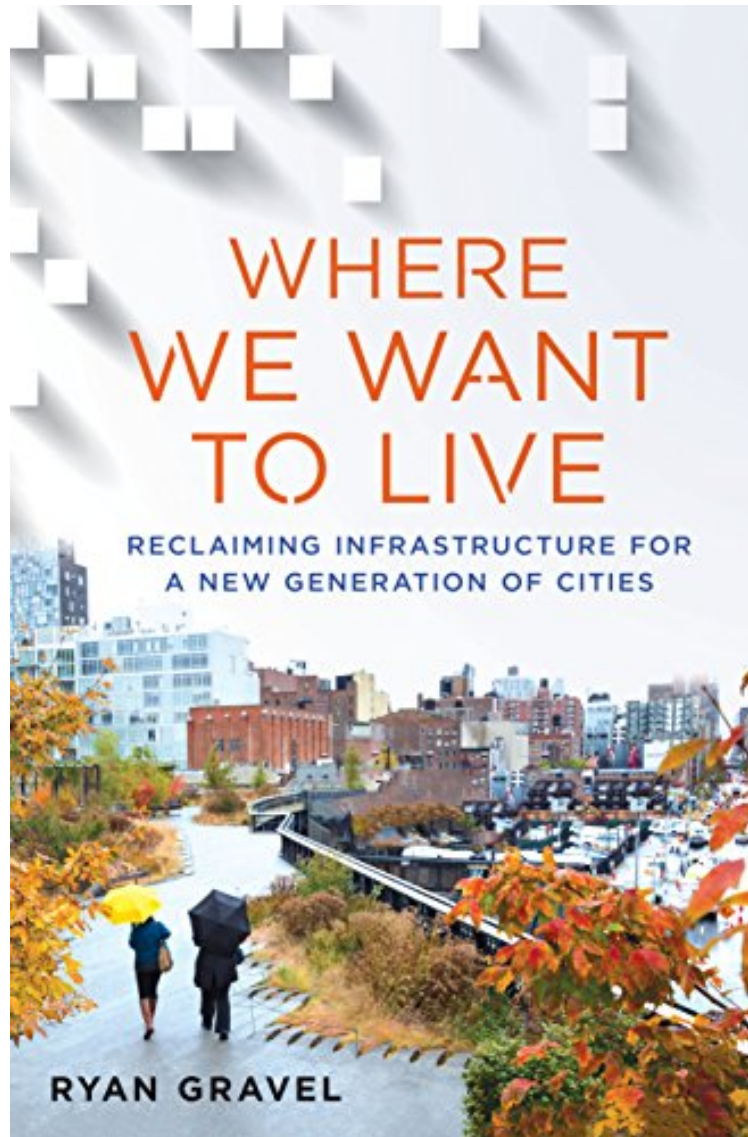


(Pdf free) Where We Want to Live: Reclaiming Infrastructure for a New Generation of Cities

Where We Want to Live: Reclaiming Infrastructure for a New Generation of Cities

Ryan Gravel

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Ryan Gravel : Where We Want to Live: Reclaiming Infrastructure for a New Generation of Cities before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Where We Want to Live: Reclaiming Infrastructure for a New Generation of Cities:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Inspirational and motivating for land use professionals By AndreaGravel has provided a great overview of urban planning and infrastructure solutions for the problems that we

face post-sprawl. I live in the Pacific Northwest and work for local government in land use. I found this book to be both inspiring and professionally motivating. The everyday interactions that are experienced when we travel by foot, bicycle, bus or light rail are profound. They help us live our lives more efficiently, happier, and they trigger a feeling of community simply by seeing and experiencing our lives within a group. These moments are seeds of empathy and alter our world view. All of this really matters to creating the types of communities that are vibrant and sustainable.

Gravel starts out reviewing city infrastructure in Paris, then Savannah, then his hometown of suburban sprawl and shopping centers in North Carolina. Essentially, Gravel sets forth infrastructure as THE major factor to a city's livability and attractiveness to residents. Then he provides an exciting narrative of the Atlanta Beltline project from the first seeds of inspiration through struggles and finally the 2016 status mid-completion (already viewed as a great success). Gravel's insights are not limited to infrastructure, though. His insights are just as transferable to any difficult to solve political problem. His takeaways of what worked for the Beltline are both helpful and easily analogized. As I've reflected on local political successes and failures, I can see very critically where the process might have gone wrong using the analysis Gravel sets forth. I hope that stakeholders and advocates in communities across the country read this book and feel similarly inspired.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. sometimes engaging

By Michael Lewyn

The beginning and end of this book discusses the growth and decline of suburbia; it didn't tell me much I didn't already know, but it may be useful for readers less familiar with this issue. Even in this relatively dry part of the book, Gravel makes a few interesting points such as a) the evils of long blocks (which make walking boring by reducing pedestrians' choices), (b) the difference between 1950s sprawl (which is basically auto-oriented but usually allows children to walk to school and a shop or two) and more recent, more anti-pedestrian sprawl and c) the inflexibility of cul-de-sac dominated sprawl, which cannot be changed from one use to another as easily as gridded streets.

The middle of the book, focusing on the Beltline, was more interesting to me. Gravel notes that while megaprojects often trigger a "Not In My Back Yard" (NIMBY) response to affected neighborhoods, neighbors of the Beltline got behind it. Gravel suggests that it was popular precisely because it didn't originate from a mayor or real estate developer or some other controversial group, and also because it would replace abandoned rail lines that had been centers for crime and vagrancy. (Also, parks tend to be less polarizing than transit or new housing).

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Visionary's Look at Remaking the City

By Mark H. Pendergrast

Ryan Gravel is one of the few living American architects/city planners who can legitimately be called a visionary. His 1999 master's thesis at Georgia Tech envisioned a streetcar loop inside the Atlanta city limits, to connect four separate railroad lines, mostly termed "belt lines"; when they were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, because they formed a kind of belt around the central city. They lay only two or three miles in radius from the city center, and aside from one section in the northwestern part of the city, they were mostly abandoned. In fact, most parts were covered with kudzu vines and homeless encampments. By reviving these forgotten, neglected corridors, Gravel wrote in his thesis that "the Belt Line should accomplish more than just an improved system of public transportation. It has the potential to change the way we look at Atlanta. Instead of dividing neighborhoods, the old railroad tracks could reconnect home and destination, rich and poor, black and white. Perhaps the city's problems could lead to its salvation. Troubled by pollution and congestion, Atlanta can seize this chance to redefine itself," he wrote in his thesis.

Gravel never expected his thesis to become reality, but that's exactly what is happening, and his original vision has expanded to include a walking-hiking trail and new parks. In this book, *Where We Want to Live*, Gravel briefly summarizes how the BeltLine (as it is now spelled) project came into being, initially through grassroots efforts that he helped to lead. But the main point of his book is a big-picture exploration of how re-inventing old infrastructure can help to remake our cities into places where, as the title says, we actually want to live—in a greener, more walkable, more intelligently developed way, with denser residential patterns, mixed-use developments, fewer automobiles, and more walking and biking.

In this book, Gravel, who now travels the world to advise other cities, discusses not only the Atlanta BeltLine, but many other "catalytic infrastructure" projects, among them New York's High Line and prospective East River Blueway, Miami's Underline, Philadelphia's Rail Park, Detroit's Dequindre Cut Greenway, the Los Angeles River restoration, the Iron Horse Trestle in St. Louis, the Harborside Embankment in Jersey City, the Midtown Greenway in Minneapolis, Lafitte Greenway in New Orleans, Buffalo Bayou Park in Houston, S-Line in Salt Lake City, Singapore's Rail Corridor, Vancouver's Arbutus Corridor, Buffalo's Belt Line, Paris's Promenade Plantee and Petite Ceinture. All of these projects are reinventing old infrastructure (mostly abandoned rails).

I do have a few quibbles with the book. Gravel provocatively entitles one chapter, "There's Nothing Wrong With Sprawl," then proceeds to tell us everything that is wrong with sprawl. Also, he does not go into any detail on all of the challenges that the BeltLine faced in coming as far as it has. There have been enormous problems, involving legal challenges that led to a state constitutional amendment, a last-ditch effort by Amtrak to take the northeastern section, the Great Recession demolishing income estimates for the BeltLine tax allocation district, an unworkable contract with the Atlanta Public Schools, and more, so that it's quite miraculous that the project is still coming along. And it is unlikely that the entire project will be finished by the 2030 target date. In fact, it isn't even clear if streetcars will make it onto the corridor along with the walking/biking

trail (though a new city tax to support MARTA, Atlanta's rapid transit, may provide hope). These are issues Gravel does not cover in this book. (I should reveal that I am working on a book about Atlanta, my birthplace, which will be a good complement to Gravel's. I am focusing on the BeltLine project in much greater detail. Gravel is one of the major characters in my forthcoming book.) But these are really minor cavils. What Gravel has done here is to offer a clarion call, a sermon if you will, to support these innovative urban projects. In his final chapter, he exhorts readers: "By experimenting with new ideas, cultivating a political structure for change, stopping sprawl, and shifting to more sustainable growth strategies, we can generate significant and positive change. Whatever road we take to get there, we will have to build broad support around an aspirational view of our future. This will require us to dream, think, and plan, but we will also need to take action." Ryan Gravel's book should be required reading for city planners and those who care about our future. About the reviewer: Mark Pendergrast is an Atlanta native who is writing a book about Atlanta with a focus on the BeltLine and its adjacent neighborhoods. It should be published by Basic Books in the spring of 2017. You may reach him through his website, [...]

****Winner, Phillip D. Reed Award for Outstanding Writing on the Southern Environment****A Planetizen Top Planning Book for 2017**** After decades of sprawl, many American city and suburban residents struggle with issues related to traffic (and its accompanying challenges for our health and productivity), divided neighborhoods, and a non-walkable life. Urban designer Ryan Gravel makes a case for how we can change this. Cities have the capacity to create a healthier, more satisfying way of life by remodeling and augmenting their infrastructure in ways that connect neighborhoods and communities. Gravel came up with a way to do just that in his hometown with the Atlanta Beltline project. It connects 40 diverse Atlanta neighborhoods to city schools, shopping districts, and public parks, and has already seen a huge payoff in real estate development and local business revenue. Similar projects are in the works around the country, from the Los Angeles River Revitalization and the Buffalo Bayou in Houston to the Midtown Greenway in Minneapolis and the Underline in Miami. In *Where We Want to Live*, Gravel presents an exciting blueprint for revitalizing cities to make them places where we truly want to live.

"This is a local story, but it echoes one of the grand themes in contemporary city-building: the transformation of industrial relics into new public amenities...Gravel makes a case as cogent as any we've seen for why governments need to favour this form of development and stop subsidizing sprawl." *The Globe and Mail* "An uplifting story about what people can accomplish working for a common purpose they make their own." *Kirkus* "What if infrastructure was viewed not as something over-budget and/or in need of repair but as a conduit to creating better, more livable cities? In *Where We Want to Live*, Ryan Gravel makes a passionate case for infrastructure as catalyst, arguing that our collective imaginations and energy can transform the places we live in. Absolutely inspiring." - Allison Arieff, Contributing Columnist, *The New York Times* "Crisp and smart. Where do we want to live? Ryan Gravel, who will likely be remembered as one of our nation's highest impact urban designers, has some remarkable answers from his nearly two decade journey exploring the topic. At a time when sustainability, race relations, and economic growth seem more perplexing than ever, Ryan's ideas address all of these issues through a thoughtful approach to the development of our cities. As a doctor, I am also well aware of the tremendous health benefits a walking city can have on our health. Decreases in blood pressure and obesity and increases in connectedness, happiness and joy. I don't always think about these issues on a spectacular day of running or biking on the Atlanta Beltline with my three daughters. I simply know this what a real city can feel like." *Dr. Sanjay Gupta*, chief medical correspondent at CNN "Ryan Gravel's new book starts with the premise that big infrastructure ideas can yield huge economic and social payoffs. With the spirit of Daniel Burnham's famous "make no little plans," Gravel shows how his concept for the Atlanta Beltline is changing everything there, becoming a model for how all metropolitan areas can achieve transformative change. The Beltline is the most important infrastructure project in the country today, linking rich and poor neighborhoods to each other and to transit, and sparking billions of private sector investment already and tens of billions to come. Just as every metro area in the country adopted some form of belt highway, every metro will built a Beltline...surprisingly, Atlanta is doing it first. A hopeful book with achievable goals." *Christopher B. Leinberger*, The Charles Bendit Distinguished Scholar and Research Professor, George Washington University School of Business "In a time of political complexity Ryan Gravel delivers with a beautifully written call-to-action for more responsible and inclusive infrastructure in our cities and metropolitan regions." *Nathaniel Smith*, Founder Chief Equity Officer, Partnership for Southern Equity About the Author RYAN GRAVEL is the founding principal of Sixpitch and creator of the Atlanta Beltline, the reinvention of a 22-mile circle of railroads that began as the subject of his master's thesis. In September 2016, he was awarded the inaugural Judy Turner Prize. A designer, planner, and writer, he is increasingly called to speak to an international audience on topics as wide ranging as brownfield remediation, transportation, public health, affordable housing, and urban regeneration. Gravel lives with his family in Atlanta, Georgia.