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## A seven-lane monster

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Lurking in the details of recent transportation studies is the genesis of a monster that threatens the communities in which we live.

First, consider the monster's breeding grounds: the long-range implications of the Wasatch Front Regional Transportation Plan: 2011–2040. The monster dwells in the Utah Department of Transportation's design for widening 5400 South, the Main Street of Kearns.

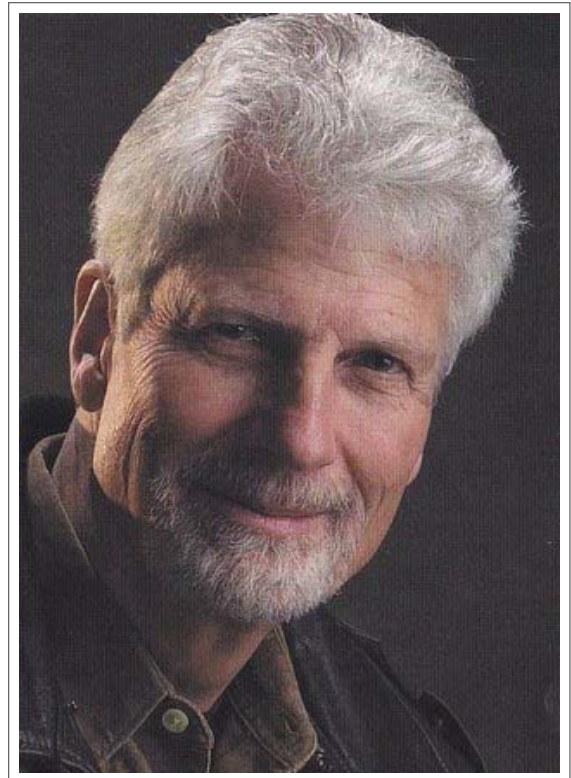
The 2040 plan was prepared by the Wasatch Front Regional Council, the agency responsible for regional transportation planning. It anticipates the Front's population will grow from 1.6 million to 2.5 million, a 56 percent increase. Even with the transportation improvements envisioned in the plan, vehicle miles of travel are projected to increase by nearly 70 percent. As the growing population moves farther away, many must drive farther and longer to reach their destinations.

The regional transportation plan projects a 74 percent increase in fuel consumption by automobiles and a 73 percent jump in CO2 vehicle emissions. Imagine a projected 70 percent increase in vehicle mileage in real terms: How many more miles of paved roads will be needed? How many more acres of parking spaces? What will our air quality be then? How will this impact our quality of life?

The 2040 RTP is based on a regional land use and transportation vision called the Wasatch Choice for 2040. A brochure describes the choices we face as one of America's fastest-growing regions and the long-term consequences those choices can have on our quality of life. Quoting from the brochure, "Will we work together today so our children and grandchildren can ... enjoy an active and healthy lifestyle ... and live in safe, close-knit communities?"

Wasatch Choice envisions Main Street communities like Kearns as linear town centers with "lower traffic volumes, wider sidewalks and more on-street parking" that "prioritize pedestrian friendly features." Building "new public transportation systems, bike lanes, and pedestrian amenities along portions of these corridors" is recommended for these busy arterial roads.

But when a planned road-widening project reaches your community, the implications of the 2040 RTP suddenly turn into Godzilla.



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The future is now for 35,000 Kearns residents with the recent unveiling of the monstrous 5400 South street-widening project. The “improvements” include widening the roadway to seven lanes, with narrow, 4- to 6-foot-wide sidewalks immediately adjacent to fast-moving traffic.

There is no room for bicyclists, no shoulders, no street parking. Pedestrian crossings are few and far apart, with no safety island or center median relief for those attempting to cross the widened roadway.

In short, UDOT’s proposed road improvements for 5400 South threaten Kearns’ community interests. The project design neither respects the “quality of life” of the residents, nor does it reflect a willingness “to work together today so our children and grandchildren can ... enjoy an active and healthy lifestyle ... and live in safe, close-knit communities.”

So beware, the same fate may be in store for your community. The 2040 RTP includes widening projects for 3500 South, 4100 South, 4700 South, 5400 South, 6200 South, 7000/7200 South, 7800 South, 9000 South, 10600/10800 South, 11400/11800 South, 12300/12600 South, and 13400 South.

Urban planning goals and objectives are exercises in futility when they are negated by transportation highway engineers imposing road improvement projects on our communities that consider only the needs of motorists. These projects are based upon growth projections and road capacity demands dictated by anticipated sprawl beyond the boundaries of our existing communities.

The Wasatch Choice for 2040 vision warns: “Continuing past development patterns will adversely affect our quality of life” and “the consequences will be severe.” As this document wisely counsels, “there is a better way to grow.” However, UDOT’s “road improvement” projects are rooted solely in the auto-centric designs of the past and fail to provide people-friendly streets that will enhance our communities.

Quoting Jane Garvey, former chief of the Federal Aviation Administration, “The future is not some place we’re going to, but a place we are creating. The paths to it are not found, they are made.”

The future of our communities depends upon the transportation choices we make now. The future will not wait. Just ask Kearns.

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