



By Bruce Schaller, CityLab, May 4, 2020

“Throughout American history, people have been trying to get away from big-city problems of disease, crowding, congestion, high rents, and crime. [But instead of moving] to the countryside, they go right to the city’s edge ... to have both the opportunities and amenities of the city ... and the safety and peacefulness of rural life.

“When housing in San Francisco or New York or Seattle gets too expensive, people move to very select cities where they hope to combine the \$5 latte with the \$200,000 townhouse: Austin, then Boise; Portland, then Columbus.

“Before the pandemic, we heard [that] the big ‘superstar’ cities have the most income inequality. They have the most people paying exorbitantly for housing. They have the most traffic congestion. But is that because they are ‘too urban,’ or not urban enough?

“Consider what happens with ‘less urban.’ Los Angeles hoped that a polycentric city, with nodes connected by highways, would marry less density with the convenience of the car. It worked until it filled up. [Kotkin conveniently ignores](#) that L.A.’s sprawl utterly failed to outrun the congestion of the urban center.

“Another solution is to sprinkle the population across the many mid-size and smaller cities that dot the American landscape. They are fine places to live and work, but it’s too early to say whether [such] places really offer an escape. [Covid-19 cases were, as of May 4, doubling fastest](#) in St. Cloud, Minnesota; Sioux City and Des Moines, Iowa; and Amarillo, Texas.

“The problem isn’t density. Density is the solution: it fosters innovation, creates jobs, manufactures wealth, welcomes diversity, and makes culture blossom. It’s [why] world-class cities across the globe are also the densest. And density is a big part of dealing with the biggest threat to us all — climate change.

“The question is not whether we need cities and density. The question is whether we have the vision, commitment, and fortitude to make our cities equitable, affordable, and sustainable as well as dense, creative, and diverse.”

[Read the full op-ed here.](#)