

Locomotion and the First Motion

JOHAN WOOLMAN, an 18th-century Quaker, is well-known for his travels in the American colonies to witness against slavery. He refused to use horse-drawn coaches because he felt he could not participate in a system that was abusive to animals and people.

"So great is the hurry in the spirit of this world that in aiming to do business quickly, and to gain wealth, the creation at this day doth loudly groan," he wrote.

So how would Woolman travel if he were around today? Participants in a recent workshop on "Friends and the Environment" concluded that he would go by *inter-city bus!* Reflecting on the long-range consequences of his actions was central to his spiritual life, so he would, no doubt, be alarmed at the social and ecological harm being done today by the widespread use of automobiles. He would be critical of laws and pricing mechanisms that are masking the true social and environmental costs of manufacturing and operating cars. He would decry the way nearly every facet of modern life has been adapted to their use.

Woolman also wore undyed clothing in protest against the slave-supported dye industry. So it is likely that he would see a connection between the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and this country's growing dependence on imported oil. He would call on Friends to look deeper and see whether the seeds of this tragedy might be finding nourishment in our personal modes of travel.

There are those today who argue that "the economy" and people's "personal freedom" would be harmed by curtailment of automobile use. But Woolman probably would re-

spond as he did to Quakers in his time who saw no alternative to their ownership of slaves: "We are called to live in right relationship and to cease from all customs that are contrary to divine teachings. God has provided resources sufficient to meet our true needs without our having to exploit others and steal from future generations." Accordingly, today's glamorous individual "escape machines" would be condemned by Woolman as "superfluities" that hinder our spiritual growth.

AT ANY RATE, the golden age of the automobile is drawing to its inevitable conclusion. As a result of the expected peak in world oil production early in this century, fossil fuels will become prohibitively expensive for more and more people. More and more of us will be compelled to walk, bicycle, and use public transit. One way to soften the impact is to anticipate and phase in the needed changes in the way we live and travel.

Technological advances are important, but more depends on what happens in our *thinking and attitudes*. Being mindful of our Quaker testimonies of simplicity, equality, and peace can lead to a positive vision that makes us *delight* in the prospect of redesigning our communities and transit systems to be more sustainable and life-affirming. We can also recover the lost joys of a slower pace of life and closer connection with God's creation.

Traveling gently on the earth really comes down to *love*, what Woolman called "the First Motion": How much do we love the earth and its community of life? As much as we love ourselves? More than we love our cars?

—Louis Cox



Resources

- Alvord, Katie, 2000. *Divorce Your Car: Ending the Love Affair with the Automobile*. Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers.
- American Public Transportation Association <www.apta.com>.
- Bikes at Work. <www.bikesatwork.com/carfree/automobiles-and-environment.html>.
- Congress for the New Urbanism. www.cnu.org
- Electric Wallpaper, 2004. *The End of Suburbia* (video), <www.endofsuburbia.com>.
- Environmental Defense Fund. <www.environmentaldefense.org>.
- Hartmann, Thom, 2004. *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*. New York: Three Rivers Pr.
- Heinberg, Richard, 2003. *The Party's Over: Oil, War, and the Fate of Industrial Societies*. Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers.
- James, Sarah, et al., 2000. *The Natural Step for Communities*. Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers.
- Strawberry Creek Friends Meeting's Deeper Ecology Study Group. <www.dimeagallon.org>.
- Victoria Transportation Policy Institute. www.vtpl.org.

Quaker Earthcare Witness

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QEW's Vision and Witness

WE ARE CALLED to live in right relationship with all Creation, recognizing that the entire world is interconnected and is a manifestation of God.

WE WORK to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God's creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the earth's ecological integrity.

WE PROMOTE these Truths by being patterns and examples, by communicating our message, and by providing spiritual and material support to those engaged in the compelling task of transforming our relationship with the earth.

Simplicity as Spiritual Exercise series

Traveling Gently on the Earth



What Would John Woolman Drive?

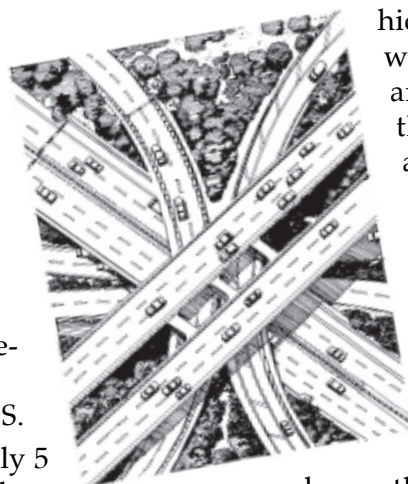
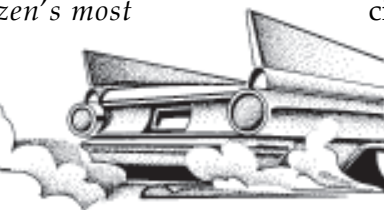
What would happen if some of the resources currently devoted to maintaining roads and vehicles could be spent on making our communities better places to live?

—Faith & the Common Good
<www.faith-commongood.net>

Traveling Gently on the Earth—What Would John Woolman Drive?

For Whom the Car Tolls...

- ❖ A U.S. Environmental Protection Agency report says, "Driving a private car is probably a typical citizen's most polluting daily activity."
- ❖ Our cities have become islands of toxic chemicals from the use of vehicles burning fossil fuels.
- ❖ Each year many thousands of tons of car-related chemicals are washed from streets and into waterways and aquifers, in addition to contamination from leaking underground fuel tanks and used motor oil illegally dumped into storm sewers and landfills.
- ❖ An estimated 63 million tires were dumped in 1996, adding to some 800 million tires stockpiled in dumps, which are ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes and a very serious fire hazard.
- ❖ Vehicles kill thousands of pedestrians and over a million animals every year in the U.S.
- ❖ Each year the U.S., with only 5 percent of the world's population, consumes about 26 percent of the world's petroleum production. Cars and light trucks consume about 43 percent of this energy and about 16 percent of the total energy used in the U.S.
- ❖ Petroleum prices are expected to rise dramatically early in this century, as world oil production peaks and demand continues to rise.



- ❖ In 1987 cars in the U.S. averaged 25.9 miles to the gallon. By 1998, fuel efficiency had dropped to 24.6 miles per gallon.
- ❖ U.S. foreign policy appears to be increasingly driven by growing dependence on imported petroleum.
- ❖ Motor vehicles account for a significant proportion of air pollution, including 33 percent of the carbon dioxide emissions, a major contributor to global warming.
- ❖ Emissions from passenger vehicles (including nitrogen oxide, which contributes to acid rain) are increasing in Canada, and the U.S. gains in fuel efficiency and the benefits of antipollution devices are being offset by growth in the number and size of vehicles and the number of miles driven.
- ❖ In urban areas, road surfaces cover about one-fifth of available land. Rural roads in 1997 covered an area larger than the state of Maryland.
- ❖ Large amounts of wetlands and prime farmland are lost for every acre of paved surface added to urban areas or highways. These impervious surfaces increase the rate and volume of pollutant runoff into lakes and decrease regional groundwater recharge.

Facts cited here were gathered from websites listed in the Resources section (over).

A Farewell to Cars?

Personal choices

- ❖ **Drive less!** Both local and global pollution would be dramatically improved if each car-driving person used their car 30 percent less.
- ❖ **Use a vehicle that is suited to your needs.** Resist the temptation to buy a larger, heavier car, van, truck, or SUV. Consider a fuel-efficient hybrid.
- ❖ **Improve the fuel efficiency of your vehicle** through regular maintenance, moderate driving habits, planning ahead to avoid unnecessary trips, and carpooling. Avoid unnecessary engine idling, and stay within the posted speed limits. (*You get 30-percent better gas mileage at 55 mph than you do at 75 mph!*)
- ❖ **Reduce the need for a private vehicle.** Locate closer to work. Use a grocery delivery service. Use public transit. Bicycle and walk whenever possible. Consider joining a car co-op. Go carless and lease when longer trips are needed.
- ❖ **Rediscover the pleasures and health benefits** of walking and biking to work and shopping.
- ❖ **Write letters** to newspapers and elected officials in support of public transit and higher fuel-efficiency standards for cars.
- ❖ **Start a "Dime-a-Gallon" fund** in your Meeting to support local organizations that are working for cleaner and more efficient transportation systems.



Public policies

- ❖ **Discourage single-rider commuting.** Treat the use of public roads as a privilege, not a right. End indirect subsidies for private car use. Set tolls, gasoline taxes, and license fees to reflect their true social and environmental costs.
- ❖ **Improve efficiency of traffic**—Create dedicated bus lanes and give priority to carpools and vehicles with three or more passengers. Separate commercial and private traffic. Encourage large companies to stagger working hours and decentralize administrative operations.
- ❖ **Reduce the need for commuting.** Curtail urban sprawl through "smart growth" policies. Link residence and business uses by rezoning and rebuilding cities.
- ❖ **Reward car pools and car-sharing plans.**
- ❖ **Increase funding and support for public transportation systems.**
- ❖ **Stop building car-oriented roads and highways.** Build more lanes for pedestrians, bicyclists, and small electric cars.
- ❖ **Provide generous development grants and tax incentives** for all non-polluting transportation alternatives.
- ❖ **Encourage movement of freight by rail and barge** rather than by trucks.
- ❖ **Set vehicle quotas and driving permits/fees in urban areas** to control regional air pollution and traffic congestion.
- ❖ **End "free" parking.** Set fees to reflect the true cost in land use and other resources.

