

# Freedom just another word for automobile

## Americans' love of private cars causing traffic jams, air pollution

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It started with cavemen and rolling logs, shifted gears with Roman chariots, then shepherded Americans to the West.

But it didn't hit its stride until the 1950s when superhighways began to connect every part of America.

It, of course, is mobility through wheels, and far from being just the single biggest way for people to get from one place to another on their own, it has rooted itself in the last 50 years as the churning, burning symbol of individual freedom: freedom of movement, freedom to escape, and the freedom to unlock the never-ending, spinning urge to hit the road with go-fever.

"It's a great feeling of pleasure," said Kimberly Parks of Fountain Inn. "I love to travel by car more than any other way."

In his 1957 groundbreaking novel, "On The Road," Jack Kerouac wrote about this new love of mobility through a life in the car, the bus, the train, and especially in the head, where small-town diners were linked with big city jazz clubs by seemingly endless barren deserts, faceless cities and 1,900 miles of the road, which truly went on forever.

"It was drizzling and mysterious at the beginning of our journey," Kerouac wrote. "I could see that it was going to be one big saga of the mist."

That mist today is more of a haze, a glare, or a shimmering of



GINNIE DAVIS/Staff

**Americans love their cars, particularly the classics.**

heat rising from metal frames and bumpers as highways and smaller roads grow wider to handle more traffic.

But the love of the car is outpacing the ability to make room for them.

For example, the Bureau of Transportation reports that in South Carolina, there were 3.1 million registered cars and light

trucks, but only 2.84 million licensed drivers.

As the Upstate edges toward a population of 1.5 million in the next 25 years, the question is how to make enough room for all the cars and elude the bumper-to-bumper stall of traffic jams.

"We all really love the freedom of being able to jump in our car and go wherever we want to," said Diane Eldridge, associate director of Upstate Forever, a group that promotes smart development. "But we don't have anything proving that we don't also love the freedom to get out and walk or ride our bikes or take alternative methods of transportation."

She added that since the freedom of car travel has been somewhat compromised because of the number of vehicles now on the road, there will have to be, at some point, a balance between

the freedom of having your own wheels and freedom from excess traffic.

"We can't really accommodate the number of cars we keep putting out on the road, and even if we could keep up with it, imagine the number of roads we'd have in 100 years," Eldridge said. "So we need to come up with some other choices, and we need to have the option to not have to drive if we don't want to."

A bikeways/greenways system is on the way in Mauldin for people who like to get outdoors. And the concept of a top-notch, interlinking mass transit system has emerged in the last year as the most obvious possibility for mobility among Mauldin, Simpsonville and Greenville.

Simpsonville 2020, a local citizen advisory group, plans to have a representative from the state Department of Transportation address the future of mobility in Greenville County.

"Our Aug. 26 meeting is dedicated to transportation and alternative ways to move people and things," said group leader Butch Kirven. "We're already making recommendations to the City Council that would support some sensible growth activities."

But even if mass transit were to solve the dilemma of too many vehicles on the road, it is likely the love for the personal auto and the love of the road will continue.

"Being behind that wheel - I wouldn't have it any other way," Parks said.

Or as Kerouac wrote: "What is that feeling when you're driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing? ... It's the too-huge world vaulting us and it's good-bye but we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies."