

Uncommon Sense

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In 1776, Thomas Paine wrote a pamphlet which questioned the divine right of kings and defined the rights of man, to advocate for the American Revolution. He called it Common Sense. At the time Paine's sense was decidedly uncommon, and he was decried as a radical.

The transformation of the highway system in the Plan of Nashville may seem, at first glance, to call for a new American revolution. Actually, what the Plan proposes is an evolution.

The truly radical gesture--in the sense of practices and policies of extreme change--was the introduction of the limited access highway into the urban fabric in the first place. Today a proposal to carve concrete canyons through our traditional neighborhoods--often African-American and always low income--would be rejected as politically impossible. Metro officials would undoubtedly reject a plan encouraging massive amounts of residents and businesses to flee to surrounding counties while at the same time permanently removing thousands of acres from Metro tax roles. Watchdogs of the public health would protest the negative impacts on air and water quality. Most importantly, Nashvillians would refuse to ransom the long-term welfare of their city for short-term gains in motoring speed.

We know more now. What we need to remember, from our history as a community, is that transportation is an evolving art. It is time to begin to recognize that the limited access highway in the city is a period piece, and move on.

From [The Plan of Nashville: Avenues to a Great City](#).
Vanderbilt University Press (Nashville) 2005.