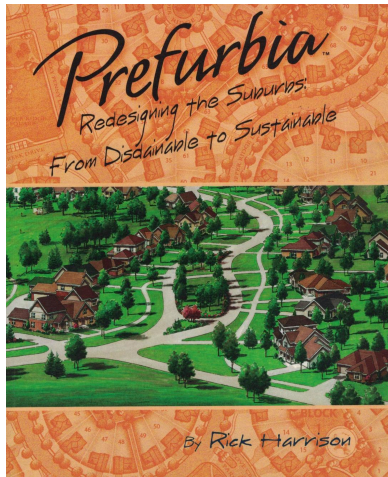


The following excerpt from *Prefurbia* was written by Richard Kronick. It is published here with permission from Sustainable Land Development International, [SLDI.org](http://SLDI.org).

## The purpose of cars (is not just transportation)



An affinity for convenient, personalized transport is nothing new. When European metalworkers learned to make spring steel in the second half of the 16th-century, an important result was the development of reasonably comfortable carriages, which replaced human-borne chairs as the preferred means of transport for wealthy people. As with cars today, carriages instantly became status symbols. In Rome in the 1570s, it was said that two things were necessary for success: to love God and to own a carriage.

And as with cars today, 16th-century carriages were not used solely to get from point A to point B. In fact, the availability of carriages almost immediately led to the popular practice of promenading: that is, driving up and down in a particular place at a particular time solely in order to see and be seen. By the early 17th century, every major European city had developed a purpose-built promenading street. This was one of the first reasons in history why anyone had wanted a straight street.

But 16th- and 17th-century promenaders did not just see each other while coursing back and forth on the boulevard. They also communicated by voice and by passing notes to each other. In fact, the most important result of promenading was the arrangement of meetings to conduct both business and pleasure. Many of these meetings took place in the carriages.

Today, only two things have changed: the technology is more complicated and more levels of society participate in promenading. Americans want cars for the same reason people always have wanted personal transportation: because we conduct important parts of our lives in cars. Cars are part of our social fabric and we will have them or we will have something else that does what cars do for us. Public transport is not the same. In other words, to understand why Americans tenaciously defend and protect their “love affair with the automobile,” it may be more instructive to focus on the part about the love affair than on the part about the automobile.