



SHAREWAY 2030

# Navigating a megalopolis

The American dream of seamless commutes, suburbia and big cars has turned into something of a nightmare for many. Architect Eric Höweler contemplates a radically different model for the USA's Northeast Corridor.

INTERVIEW by *Richard Hall*

Richard Hall: How did the "Shareway 2030" project take shape?

**Eric Höweler:** Some auto manufacturers are realizing that streetscapes are being transformed to de-prioritize the car and they want to understand the wider urban context better. So Audi's research team asked six architecture firms to submit "visions" for the future of urban mobility. We chose to pitch a remake of the Boston-to-Washington (BosWash) megaregion envisioned by Jean Gottmann in his 1961 book, "Megalopolis."

What exactly is BosWash?

**Eric Höweler:** At the heart of BosWash is the notion that many cities in the USA are no longer discrete entities; one metropolitan area often spills over into the next. The megalopolis 1960s futurists imagined for the year 2000 is now a reality. Within the BosWash region, which is now home to over 53 million people and generates one-third of the nation's GDP, America developed a number of (sub) urban prototypes – cul-de-sacs, strip malls, drive-thrus – which have been exported all over the globe. These experiments are no longer sustainable. So we tried to re-imagine mobility and collective consumption patterns in such a megaregion in 2030.

So, it's an alternative American Dream?

**Eric Höweler:** In a way, it is. Car ownership and the wider narrative of freedom and social mobility are certainly intertwined in the USA. As architects, though, we tried to conceive of urban mobility in its widest sense. The Shareway encompasses housing and suburbs, the train/plane/car/bike interface, "last-mile" strategies, house sharing and urban agriculture.

How would the transport component of Shareway work?

**Eric Höweler:** The core consists of a bundled transit system connecting public and individual transport to a single artery running along the 400-mile stretch of Interstate 95. The Shareway is a network of hubs and pathways (including a high-speed train running above the I-95) in which people and cargo would travel along a "stacked" route. Bundling allows passengers to switch between the different transport modes and local and national transit. To help reduce air traffic in BosWash and accommodate larger planes and cargo ships, the Shareway would link the high-speed transport network to a multi-level "Superhub" in Newark.

What other innovations does Shareway propose?

**Eric Höweler:** In addition to these mobility scenarios, we imagined a "Sharestay" time-share system for houses where you only pay for the time you actually spend in a building. And we experimented with urban agriculture schemes ("Farmshare") and an innovative rotating road surface ("Tripanel") that would flip between city street, park and energy source. Shareway ultimately aims to replace isolated, unimodal commutes and inefficient, dispersed infrastructures in the BosWash region with a tightly meshed transport ecosystem orchestrated by smart software and social media. In this world, access – switching and sharing – would matter more than ownership. ■



**Eric Höweler** is a registered architect, architectural writer and co-founder of Höweler + Yoon Architecture LLP, an interdisciplinary design and research practice. He is also Assistant Professor at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design in Boston, USA.