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Letters

Motorless mobility

In "Energy Efficiency: Less Means More" (SN: 5/7/88, p.296), Janet Raloff cites several technologies for saving energy. Most apply to buildings. Despite a comparative silence from conservation experts, the transportation sector offers similar scope for drastic savings. This will come not from marginal increases in motor fleet efficiency, but from large-scale abandonment of the personal automobile.

Demand for personal mobility is usually no more than a demand for specialized, personalized, high-quality information. Automobiles satisfy only a small fraction of our information demand. They do this at an enormous cost in time, money, environmental degradation and violence to human and animal life.

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Cover: This unique composite view combines a white-light image of the sun's corona, as photographed during a total eclipse last March, with an X-ray image of the sun's inner corona, captured by a camera aboard a sounding rocket launched just hours before the total eclipse. Such a composite image allows solar scientists to match coronal structures with near-surface features to create a three-dimensional picture of solar activity. This example is one of several in which researchers are using new instruments and techniques to delve into the workings of the sun. (Photos: High Altitude Observatory, NCAR/Lab. for Atm. and Space Physics, Univ. of Colo.)



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The cost/performance of information-modifying (i.e., computer) hardware — unlike that of automobiles — has been improving exponentially for the last 40 years. Related technologies of communications, software and social organization are improving along with computer hardware. Their combination will render the personal automobile largely unnecessary within 10 years and wholly uneconomical within 20. Some people may still choose to drive, just as some people remain fond of horses today. Workers and companies that substitute faster and more efficient computer access will gain an overwhelming competitive advantage.

We will reap enormous benefits from this transformation. These will include a rise in real income, reduced personal and environmental stress and the emergence of habitable cities. Everyone with an interest in any of these values can promote their cause by

understanding and vigorously advancing this trend.

*Daniel Mocsny
Cincinnati, Ohio*

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