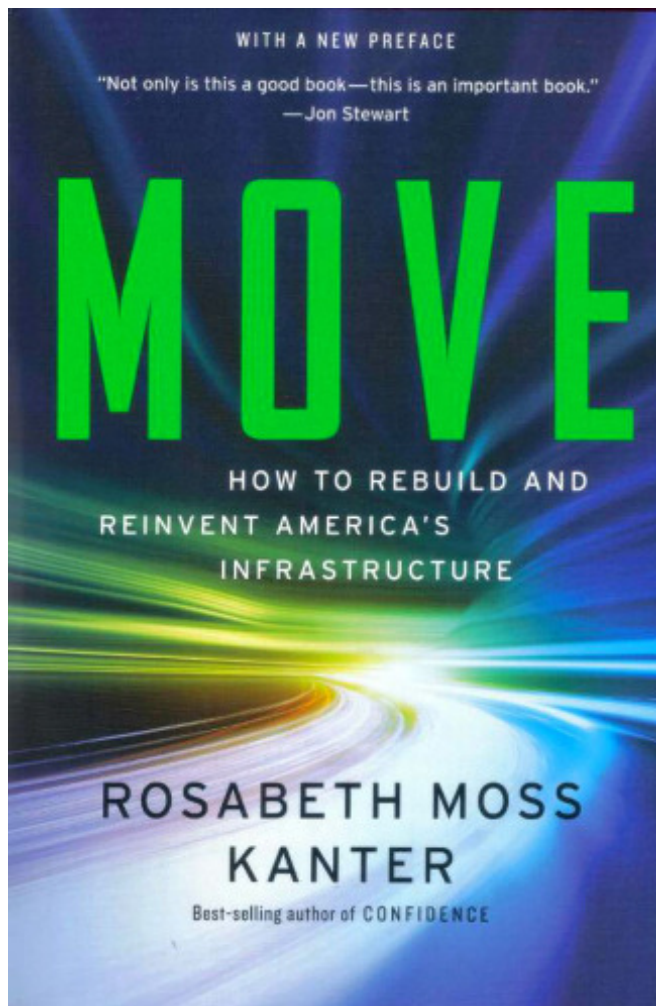


## ‘Move’ studies crumbling infrastructure

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*“Move: How to Rebuild and Reinvent America’s Infrastructure” by Rosabeth Moss Kanter. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2016, 336 pages, \$16.95.*



“The average American commuter wastes a total of 38 hours in traffic per year: This amounts to 5.5 billion hours in lost U.S. productivity annually and 2.9 billion gallons of wasted fuel,” Rosabeth Moss Kanter explains near the beginning of “Move: How to Rebuild and Reinvent America’s Infrastructure,” her new book on our crumbling transportation system. “Traffic congestion alone costs about \$70 billion per year in time wasted, and the public health cost of pollution from that congestion is about \$15 billion per year.”

So begins Kanter’s foray into the rapidly deteriorating state of our roads, bridges, railways and air transportation systems, as well as the information and management support scaffolding on which they increasingly depend. By almost every measure related to overall efficacy, according to Kanter, the United States is falling behind the rest of the world in our capacity to effectively compete in the delivery of goods and services. Moreover, she makes a convincing case that our current situation is the direct result of our inability and/or unwillingness to take responsibility for a critical aspect of our national sovereignty previous generations saw as an indispensable

precursor for both individual as well as societal prosperity.

Consider what she has to say about the airline industry in “Up in the Air,” the third chapter: “The past few decades have seen a steady descent from great heights, and that costs the economy, the airline industry, passengers and the environment. There is congestion on the ground, congestion in the air, and reliance on ground-to-air traffic control systems designed decades ago, modernizing steadily, yes, but very slowly. Regulators with outdated premises can be at odds with tech entrepreneurs, delaying the use of world-class technology innovation. Industry leaders develop agendas, but there is no national vehicle to address the challenges together, and the Federal Aviation Administration is captive to the congressional budget process.”

“Move” is extensively researched, with 20 pages of source notes at the conclusion of the introduction and seven chapters comprising the main text. The volume is as much a history lesson as it is a prescription for dealing more imaginatively and productively with our present

embarrassment. As Kanter astutely observes, this has not always been the case. Two hundred years ago, the combined efforts of government at all levels and business and industry in all sectors helped create a transportation framework that was the envy of the international community. But as the author makes abundantly clear, those days are long gone. As our priorities have shifted, our infrastructure has fallen into a state of disrepair and neglect to the point where it is not only one of the most disorganized systems in the world, it is quickly becoming one of the most dangerous.

Kanter identifies five key factors that form the architecture for a successful transportation system; these include safety, cost effectiveness, productivity, environmental-friendliness and economic development. In meticulous and convincing detail, she then dissects each in terms of its potential contribution to a more responsive transportation infrastructure. Again and again, she emphasizes the paramount and growing importance of regional planning, especially in urban areas that are beginning to reach their maximum carrying capacity. We have to bring order to the chaos, and we have to realistically invest in reimagining and reinventing how our entire system functions as an integrated arrangement.

A huge part of the problem, Kanter argues, is self-inflicted. We have made it so difficult to actually do anything these days that our resolve to improve the situation, even when we acknowledge its inherent dysfunction, is often insufficient to overcome our creeping yet remarkably resilient inertia. She gets to the heart of the challenge in the following passage from “The Will and the Wallet,” the sixth chapter and one of my personal favorites: “Infrastructure projects in America can be so complex that they seem like a jobs act for lawyers: multiple layers of government, numerous regulatory hurdles, environmental permitting and high levels of political uncertainty. But even lawyers understand that legal costs can grow too large relative to the size of a given project. That, plus political risks, drives away investors.”

Ultimately, what distinguishes “Move” from similar efforts in the same genre is Kanter’s unrelenting and unambiguous focus on what needs to be done in order to ensure our children and grandchildren do not inherit a nation where it is almost impossible, literally as well as figuratively, to engage in commerce on the massive scale that will be needed to meet the needs of a population predicted to reach at least 450 million by 2100. Toward this end, she spends considerable time – and more than a few pages – outlining successful projects such as the Port of Miami Tunnel and the ever-expanding proliferation of high-occupancy toll lanes. By taking a more evidence-based approach to reinvigorating our infrastructure; i.e., by looking objectively at what works and what doesn’t, Kanter is convinced we can turn congestion and anarchy into order and efficiency. But we have to be willing to sacrifice local convenience for the greater good – something Americans seemed to be better at in the past than they are now.

Kanter holds the Ernest L. Arbuckle Professorship at Harvard Business School, where she is also chair of the Harvard University Advanced Leadership Initiative. Her previous books include “Supercorp: How Vanguard Companies Create Innovation, Profits, Growth, and Social Good,” “American the Principled: Six Opportunities for Becoming a Can-Do Nation Once Again,” and “Confidence: How Winning Streaks and Losing Streaks Begin and End.”

If you are concerned about the current state of our infrastructure, as I am, you should probably add this one to your reading list. I remain optimistic, but time is not on our side.

*Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*