



A Crack in the Pavement

Rebuilding America's First Suburbs

Episode One of The New Metropolis documentary series by Andrea Torrice

**Narrated by
Peter Coyote**

A Crack in the Pavement Synopsis

The film opens with 1950s home movies that capture the spirit of optimism felt by millions of families a generation ago, when they moved out of cities in search of the American Dream of owning a home in suburbia. Archival footage and commentary by noted experts detail the rapid construction of America's first suburbs, part of the post-war boom. The Eisenhower administration supported suburban development through massive government programs that built roads, bridges, sewer systems, schools and municipal buildings across the country. New highways and neighborhoods paved over farms and undeveloped land, and transformed America into the suburban nation it is today.

The film then looks at the precarious state of many older, first-ring suburbs by profiling two small town officials from Ohio. They take viewers on a tour of the challenges their communities are now facing. The federal and state money that helped establish these communities is gone – redirected toward new development in ever-expanding suburban rings. Like many parts of the Midwest, their hometowns are strapped for cash. Their roads, sewers and bridges built years ago now need to be replaced or repaired. Residents and businesses are leaving, and schools are emptying. Government programs to help these communities maintain and revitalize themselves are virtually nonexistent. Yet just a few miles away, a new ring of suburbs is growing and prospering.

Ordinary people and experts give insight into how federal and state transportation and housing policies favor new growth over revitalization. They explain how government policies are contributing to the decline of the first suburbs and are helping shape the rise and fall of communities across the country. Unchecked, these policies will eventually pose the same economic problems for every ring of development over time. The film also highlights some of the environmental consequences of these policies, most notably the loss of farmland and open space, water pollution and global warming.

A Crack in the Pavement then points toward solutions, and highlights some of the successes that regional government has had in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. There, a metro council of local governments works together to plan for future growth of the region's cities and suburbs. Policies that include tax sharing and mass transit have helped revitalize the region's cities and older suburbs, and curbed uncontrolled growth.

The film concludes with our two key characters and other first-suburban officials from around the state advocating for new land use and transportation policies that will ensure a better future for all communities, old and new.