

By: Jody A. Thompson, Environmental Educator
Alabama Sea Grant/Auburn Marine Center

Americans are constantly driving. The costs of owning and maintaining a vehicle get more and more expensive, and our ever-expanding communities leave us in our cars for more and more time each day.

A new report from the Center for Neighborhood Technology and the Surface Transportation Policy Project states that in 2003, transportation costs constituted 19.1% of all household expenditures, second only to housing costs, but greater than costs for food and health care. "Driven to Spend: Pumping Dollars out of Our Households and Communities" is a follow-up report to the 2000 report "Driven to Spend: the Impact of Sprawl on Household Transportation Expenses." Another report by the same groups, "High Mileage Moms" (2002) states that on a typical day, the average mother spends more than an hour driving, traveling 29 miles and taking more than five trips, spending an average of 64 minutes per day in her car, almost 17 days per year, which is more than the average parent spent on primary childcare at that time. Add to this the cost of gas, maintenance, and insurance, as well as the cost of road building and maintenance and other infrastructure, and you can see that driving is an expensive venture.

By implementing principles of smart growth, the time and money spent on automobile travel can be reduced. Smart growth calls for mixed use areas and for availability of

transportation options, including walking, biking, and mass transit. Implementing these ideas can contribute to a higher quality of life, something we all would like to enjoy.