

Appendix 1: AP Human Geography Topic VII.A.3. Borchert's Epochs of Urban Transportation Development

Urbanization is a product of access, and access is a function of transportation capabilities. It is for this reason that most early cities were located along waterways since this provided the best and cheapest access for goods and people. Changes in transportation technology allowed for more and different points of access. Geographer John Borchert developed a schema to identify four distinct epochs in transportation within the United States. Each epoch altered spatial interactions between urban and rural areas, and each had an enormous effect on the development of the North American interior and in the changing hierarchy of cities.

The first of Borchert's epochs was the Horse and Wagon Epoch (1790–1830) when the need for water-based navigation kept most sizeable cities along the Atlantic coast or on some of the eastern rivers serving Atlantic ports. The development of canals in the 1820s and 1830s helped to link these river and lake systems by water and spurred the development of the eastern Midwest. The second epoch is termed the Regional Railroad Network Epoch (1830–1870) and commenced with the development of the steam driven railroad and the steamship. New rail lines connected existing cities and new cities emerged along the railroad networks. The biggest beneficiary of the growth of the railroad was Chicago which was situated at the node of these burgeoning rail lines. Cities such as Omaha, Minneapolis, Memphis, and Atlanta (originally named Terminus) grew and prospered as well. With the development of the transcontinental railroad, the third epoch (the National Railroad Network Epoch (1870–1920)) tied the entire country together and allowed for urbanization and industrialization to flourish wherever rail lines had been laid. Finally, the fourth epoch, the Automobile-Airplane Epoch (1920–present) moved the country from a network of rail lines to a network of roads and air routes. Automobiles were used for personal transportation and trucks were used for shipping. Cities were able to prosper in places that had previously been bypassed and this era saw the migration of people from the industrial north to the south and the west. It was more important for major cities to have a large airport than a big train station.