

A few environmental observations from my family vacation in Tokyo. The first is an obvious one: Tokyo's public transportation system is a marvel. Several American cities have admirable subway systems but what is so impressive about Tokyo's is the sheer area it covers. It's the [largest subway and train system](#) in the world. No American subway system comes close to covering the geographic space of the Tokyo system and no American city as sprawling as Tokyo can boast of comparable public transit.

Second, the city is not only unbelievably clean but manages to be so with virtually no visible trash cans or ash trays. It's quite amazing — it's common place, for example to see people standing outside smoking but I have yet to see a cigarette butt on the ground and have spotted almost no ashtrays. I've [previously written](#) about my skepticism that social norms drive a significant amount of environmental behavior — particularly inconvenient behavior — but clearly norms differ across cultures. Residents of Tokyo have to go to some lengths to dispose of trash yet are clearly willing to do so judging from the spotless streets. The cleanliness of the city is helped by the relative lack of take out food.

Third, the Japanese have hybrid buses. As [Jonathan previously noted](#), public buses in India run on CNG (this is also true in [Los Angeles](#)). So as American cities replace and update their fleets they'll have some green options to choose from.

And finally, given Tokyo's density and its spectacular public transportation system, its per capita carbon footprint is obviously smaller than most American cities. Japan's [per capita greenhouse gas emissions](#) are less than half of the U.S.'s.