

GREAT WESTERN ROAD

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Cover of report

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PART I : DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

The Great Western Road is one of Glasgow's principal radial routes, and has for a long time served as the main link between the city centre and the northwest.

The road's traffic function is three-fold it serves: the houses shops and other buildings that front directly onto it; as a local distributor for the area through which it passes; and as a through route for vehicular traffic between the city and places north and west of Anniesland Cross.

The section affected by the expressway proposals between Anniesland Cross and St. George's Cross is about 2½ miles in length having residential, shopping and other functions on either side. It may usefully be described in four parts.

(1) Anniesland Cross to Railway

This section of the road is lined on either side with shops which serve an important local function. As well as residential areas further west, the catchment of these shops appears to extend on either side of the Great Western Road about as far as Beaconsfield Road. An interesting feature of the Anniesland shopping centre is that a certain well known chain of shops have established a branch on either side of the road, perhaps significant in terms of the difficulty of crossing the road (already dual carriageway at this point).

(2) Railway to Beaconsfield Road

At this point Great Western Road is already dual-carriageway with predominantly residential buildings on either side. The buildings are of no special architectural quality, and being set well back from the road, do not produce any particular townscape qualities. The predominant character of this section of the road is further accentuated by a lack of trees or other "humanising" elements.

(3) Phase 1 of Expressway Proposals

Beaconsfield Road to Byres Road

Just under one mile in length, it is predominantly residential in function, but includes a hospital, University Halls of Residence, hotels and other uses besides private residences. These uses are contained within Victorian terraced buildings of exceptional architectural quality and dignity. The most noteworthy of these terraces from the purely architectural standpoint are Great Western Terrace (built in 1869 and designed by Alexander Thompson), Grosvenor Terrace (1855 by J.T. Rothead) and Kirkbee Terrace (1845 by Charles Wilson). These three terraces gain mention in the architectural handbook, "Glasgow at a

Glance”, but all the terraces, together with other elements in the street, form a unique piece of townscape.

The main elements that contribute to this outstanding quality are:

- I. The terraces themselves, together with the fine detail work of steps, railings, lamp standards and other street furniture;
- II. The unusual arrangement of private open space and service access roads;
- III. The profusion of trees and shrubs;
- IV. The various changes in levels that occur from terrace to terrace and between the roadway and the terraces;
- V. Kelvinside Parish Church, which effectively punctuates the end of this section of the street;
- VI. The proportioned relationships between the linear elements of the street - that is the carriageway, public footpaths, open space, private access roads, private footpaths and the terraces of buildings.

(4) Phase 2 of Expressway Proposals Byres Road to St. Georges Cross

Shopping and related commercial uses account for over two thirds of the total frontage development of this section of the street, the remainder being predominantly residential.

This mile-long, linear sub centre (together with the Byres Road shopping area) has a hinterland of varied and high-density land uses and also serves the more predominantly residential areas of Kelvinside and Kelvindale. Most of Kelvindale, for example, north of the Great Western Road appears to rely on this shopping area for most of its needs because, first, Anniesland, the only alternative nearby does not offer such a wide range of facilities and second, there are few shops in the area itself, and third, the No. 3 bus service makes it readily accessible.

The specialised commercial functions of the street include many car sales showrooms at the St. George's Cross end, and a variety of uses which benefit from the proximity of Glasgow University.

Great Western Road Hinterland

Kelvindale and Kelvinside north of the Great Western Road is almost entirely residential, together with associated uses such as a few local shops and several schools (one or two of which are private). This area is bounded on the west by the railway through Anniesland, on the north by the Forth - Clyde Canal and on the east by the River Kelvin and the Botanic Gardens, each of these being considerable barriers to movement. The area can be regarded as a residential suburb which looks to the city centre and Hillhead for its employment and shopping. It contains many fine Victorian houses as well as

a large Glasgow Corporation housing estate. East of the River Kelvin the character is different, local communities being more readily identifiable at Maryhill and North Kelvin, due largely to a higher incidence of mixed uses and higher residential densities. Although this district has its own local shops and services, it relies also on the Byres Road, Great Western Road shops, as expressed in the routing of buses 1 and 33.

To the south of the Great Western Road also lies a predominantly residential area, but it is much more varied in character and contains some important uses within the various communities (these are Partickhill, Hyndland, Downhill, part of Kelvinside, Hillhead and Kelvingrove). As well as the important district shopping centre of Byres Road, there are various important institutions such as the University, the Royal Mental Hospital and the Western Infirmary. The area is bounded on the south and west by the Railway line, and is subdivided by the River Kelvin, to the east of which lies Kelvingrove Park, and the well known Park Circus area containing offices and private residences. Generally speaking mixed uses occur more frequently nearer the city centre, and give way to purely residential use further out.

Public Transport

Bus routes are concentrated on the three principal radial routes: Maryhill Road, Great Western Road, and Dumbarton Road/Argyle Street. Cross routes through the area occur on Byres Road, Crow Road and through Hyndland linking these two roads. A route also links Kelvindale with the city centre via the Great Western Road.

Railway - There are "Blue Train" stations at Anniesland, Jordanhill, Hyndland and Partick. All of these, except Jordanhill, have a service of 4 or 5 trains per hour throughout the day increasing to a train every 6 or 7 minutes at peak hours. None of these stations have special "park and ride" or "feeder bus" facilities.

Underground - Kelvinbridge station which lies on the Great Western Road has a "park and ride" car park, although this has poor access both from the main road and from the station itself. Other stations in the area are Hillhead and Partick (serving the Byres Road and Dumbarton Road shopping centres).

Generally speaking the districts north of the Great Western Road are poorly served by public transport compared with the districts on the south side. In this context the proposal (in the recommended bus plan in the Greater Glasgow Transportation Study) to remove the only bus service to Kelvindale will further accentuate this disparity between north and south.

PART II : THE PROBLEM

The Great Western Road has several functions which fall into two distinct groups. On the one hand there are the various land uses at either side of the street (residential, shopping, open space, hospitals etc.) together with their associated pedestrian or vehicular requirements). On the other hand through-vehicular traffic is carried which is extraneous to the needs of these land uses. Present conditions are far from satisfactory: the travelling public is subjected to frustration and delays because the number of vehicles using the Great Western Road exceeds that which it can efficiently carry, and the demand for vehicular traffic is increasing. At the same time all other functions in the street are suffering from an advanced level of environmental deterioration: increasing noise, fumes, vibration, visual intrusion and inconvenience to pedestrians, all caused by vehicular traffic. This environmental problem has also spread to the residential hinterland, the principal roads through which are used as "filter routes" by drivers wishing to avoid congestion on the main radial routes.

These problems are basically due to the opposing nature of the two sets of functions: the existence of through traffic, its volume and speed are in direct conflict with the quality (and efficiency) of the street's other functions. The nature of this conflict between traffic and environment makes it inevitable that an improvement of one cannot be achieved without a worsening effect on the other. At this point, then, if a totally improved situation is required, a clear choice has to be made either to

(a) Ensure that benefits accruing to one are not outweighed by disadvantages to the other,

or

(b) Eliminate or reduce the conflict itself (i.e. by removing either the through traffic, or the buildings and their uses from the street).

PART III : THE PRESENT PROPOSALS

The proposal to "upgrade" the Great Western Road to expressway standard involves its conversion to dual carriageway with fewer but improved light controlled intersections. Phase 1 affects the predominantly residential part of the street from Kersland Street to Beaconsfield Road to join with the existing dual carriageway. It is intended to increase the vehicular traffic carrying capacity and efficiency of this section of the road, thus shifting the "pinchpoint" where dual meets single carriageway a mile nearer the city centre.

This will be achieved by eliminating the present public footpaths at the side of the carriageway and using the space gained to provide a central reservation. Also, at selected junctions, extra vehicle lanes to ease turning movements will be provided, involving some loss of private open space in front of the

residential terraces. Access to the expressway will be limited to Hyndland, Kirklee, and Byres Roads, whilst new and altered service roads will provide access to the buildings in the street itself.

Pedestrians - will not be able to cross except at the junctions mentioned above, and then either by under or over passes. The distance between these crossing points will be at least ¼ mile. The private footpaths immediately in front of the terraces will become part of new continuous public footpaths. This will inevitably introduce abrupt changes in levels, which the pedestrian does not at present encounter.

Buses - The proposals make no special provision for public transport. Although bus stops will remain near the main intersections, they must as a result be located on the new "slip" lanes. This will necessitate buses having to re-join the main traffic flow after stopping,

Environment - Designed to meet the needs of vehicular traffic, the proposals will, if implemented, bring about a further deterioration in environmental quality. It is a matter for debate whether the benefits accruing to drivers will (outweigh) the disadvantages to the community of which the Great Western Road is part.

PART IV : THE FAILINGS OF THE EXPRESSWAY PROPOSALS

The proposals are intended to achieve increased efficiency on "crude" capacity of the street for the passage of vehicular traffic, Judged purely in these terms the proposals seem difficult to criticise¹. But it would be foolish to suggest that consideration of the street's vehicular traffic function can be viewed in isolation from its other aspects. Indeed, the simple fact that objections have been raised to the scheme is a measure of the need for a more comprehensive approach. It is here that serious deficiencies are apparent.

Local Effects

The expressway proposals will affect the whole of the Great Western Road, but the greatest changes will be experienced at Anniesland shopping centre and the section between Beaconsfield Road and St. George's Cross. The expected increase in traffic volumes will result in a further deterioration in the quality of the environment, although to what extent this will occur is difficult to ascertain.

¹ There is at least one objection on traffic grounds, however, and that concerns provision for public transport. Buses may benefit in as much as all vehicles will benefit from the scheme, but they could be subjected to greater delays by having to change lanes when leaving bus stops. In any case the proposals give no specific advantage to buses over other vehicles, and this reflects an attitude towards public transport indefensible in terms of current knowledge and latest government policy.

The traffic standards set up by Phase 1 of the proposals will obviously require similar standards to be achieved in Phase 2. (Otherwise justification for Phase 1 would rest solely on the advantages, if any, of moving the "pinch point" a mile nearer the city centre). This will involve similar changes to those proposed in Phase 1, including some or all of the following:

- (1) Removal of kerbside parking
- (2) Provision of central reservation
- (3) Provision of pedestrian barriers
- (4) Elimination of right turns
- (5) Provision of extra lanes and traffic signals at selected intersections
- (6) Closing vehicle access at the remaining intersections

These measures will have serious environmental effects, particularly in the shopping sections of the street, which in total amount to nearly two miles of frontage development. Increased traffic volumes and flow will increase the hazards, inconvenience and annoyance to shoppers and others on foot. The possibilities for crossing the road will be either reduced or made more hazardous, and to the extent that front servicing of the shops is necessary, this may be subject to severe operational difficulties

District effects

Many streets through the areas to the north and south of the Great Western Road are at present subjected to the disturbance of vehicular traffic filtering through these predominantly residential areas in order to avoid congestion on the main radial routes. As vehicle capacity increases as a result of the expressway proposals then increased filtering (rat run) movements will occur as drivers attempt either to avoid increased bottlenecks or to utilise the greater efficiency of the expressway. This will occur unless environmental management measures are implemented to prevent residential streets from providing attractive alternative routes for through traffic. No such environmental management proposals have been put forward.

In addition to increased filtering of extraneous traffic, residential streets near the shopping frontages will be forced to function as car parks to replace the parking that will be removed from the Great Western Road itself. If parking restrictions in residential streets were imposed, the shopkeepers and traders would inevitably suffer from lack of accessibility and thus loss of trade.

General Effects on Transport

Since the expressway proposals are aimed at improving transport, it is appropriate to consider what they will achieve in these terms. Whoe will benefit from the increased vehicular capacity and efficiency?

There can be little doubt that the road will operate at full capacity from the moment the “improvements” are completed². It is also likely that many will be encouraged to use their private cars for journeys which they at present make by other modes of transport. The expressway proposals will aggravate the tightening spiral of increased private car journeys, less public transport passengers, higher fares, poorer service and thus further transfers from public to private transport, unless positive measures are introduced to restrict the growth of private car journeys, and to enhance the efficiency of public transport. No such proposals have been made and in fact, as already noted, there is every indication that while overall traffic flows will benefit, bus users will not share in these overall improvements.

The point is that provision of more road space BY ITSELF can contribute nothing to solving the overall transport problem.³ If the Great Western Road proposals formed part of a comprehensive plan to “relieve congestion” by management techniques and by facilitating the operation of public transport, whilst at the same time “protecting the environment”, then criticism of them could be at a more sophisticated level. As it is, the proposals offer little hope for ameliorating transport difficulties, whilst causing a further decline in the already appalling environmental conditions created by traffic in the Great Western Road. “There seems to be a greater reluctance to accept a deterioration of traffic conditions than of the quality of the living environment.”⁴

PART V : PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

The present problems have already been described as the conflict between vehicular movement and environmental standards, manifested in the deteriorating quality of both. It is therefore clear that in determining the nature of future action a decision must be made as to which of these conflicting functions in the street is to take priority. Ideally this choice should result from an analysis of all the relevant costs and benefits to the community (including of course both social and economic costs) of alternative courses of action. At

² This is supported by the now widely accepted “Parkinson’s law for traffic” which is that in densely built urban areas, traffic increases to fill the road space available (unless measures are introduced to restrict the amount of traffic generated).

³ Mishan, in discussing engineering solutions to traffic problems such as the building of improved roads, bridges, by-passes and so on, sardonically reviews their past success: “If the engineers could save us by such methods.... we should by now have had ample evidence of their success from the United States where municipalities’ engineers have been bending over backwards for years in the endeavour to accommodate the motorist, yet no relief is in sight One might have thought we could, as nation, save ourselves some bitter experiences by tearing a page from the American diary. Apparently, however, we are determined to subject ourselves to the same experience by having the same piecemeal approach, albeit more cautiously, in response to the growing traffic until we reach the same situation of near chaos.” (E.J. Mishan “The Costs of Economic Growth”, Penguin, 1969)

⁴ Ref: Michael Thomson criticising current attitudes to transport planning in his recent book “Motorways in London” (Duckworth, 1969).

this point in time, no acceptable method of social accounting has been developed, though the principles are fairly well understood⁵. In the absence of such methods, therefore, a value judgment must be made and embedded in planning policy for the Great Western Road. Those responsible for the management of Glasgow, and the Great Western Road in particular, should not shrink from their responsibility to make this value judgment, nor should they make it without due consideration of the following factors:

The White Paper on Public Transport and Traffic (Command 3481) said that as part of comprehensive policy for dealing with urban transport, local authorities would be asked to prepare short term Traffic and Transport Plans. In March 1968 the Scottish Development issued a circular (No. R.177) which made this request and set out the scope and aims of the plans. It stated in particular that there would be the need for measures designed specifically to:

- a) Relieve congestion.
- b) Build road safety measures into highway and traffic plans.
- c) Protect the environment by traffic measures.
- d) Facilitate the operation of public transport.

The present proposals for the Great Western Road are not designed specifically either to protect the environment or to facilitate public transport and so it seems reasonable to ask whether:

- 1) Glasgow Corporation can justify the lack of comprehensiveness of the proposals
- 2) The Great Western Road is considered a special case, either in terms of its traffic function or its environmental quality. If it is, what are the justifications for and implications of such considerations? Does the Corporation intend to produce a Traffic and Transport Plan on the lines set out by the Government?

These questions are particularly justified in the light of the following quotations from the SDD circular:

The transport plans must show how the authorities “intend to relate their traffic and parking policies to their available road capacities and policy objectives”

“In achieving some of those objectives the control of parking will be a crucial instrument. The amount of parking space allowed and the way in which it is used must be related realistically to the capacity of the town’s road systems and the needs of public transport”.

“Another key field will on deciding where the needs of moving traffic must come first and where traffic should be restricted in the interests of the pedestrian and the environment.

⁵ See for example “The Costs of Economic Growth”, E.J. Mishan, Penguin, 1969

The plan should amongst other things “state the local authority’s transport objectives against the town planning background and alternative strategies considered.”

In relation to the last item quoted, no alternative strategies other than that to which the present proposals relate have been put forward for consideration in public. In outlining the content of the plan, the circular again stresses the need to set out alternative policies or strategies, and also suggests the following key question should be answered:

“Are there particular environmental constraints which require that in some areas limits should be put on the volume or type of traffic?”

Of all the existing streets in Glasgow, one would expect the Great Western Road to be of sufficiently high quality and character to merit special consideration in this respect. Indeed, the whole area of fine Victorian housing, of which the Great Western Road terraces are perhaps the most notable part is of such high (or potentially high) quality that consideration of its designation as a conservation area would be appropriate. In view of the attitudes expressed by the present proposals, such consideration would also appear to be long overdue.

PART VI : ALTERNATIVES

In the light of recent policy statements and the need to regard the Great Western Road as a street of unique architectural character, it is surely reasonable to consider alternative courses of action which may go further towards ameliorating the present conflict between traffic and environment. Detailed and comprehensive studies would, of course, be required before any firm proposals could be put forward, but the following points suggest certain lines of investigation which could usefully be undertaken:

(1) Reduction of Traffic

This could be achieved by securing a transfer of personal journeys from private cars to public transport (either train or bus). Through traffic could also be diverted off the Great Western Road at Anniesland Cross. Park and Ride facilities could play an important part in achieving an overall reduction in vehicular traffic.

(2) Alteration of Traffic Composition

Certain types of vehicles create more environmental nuisance than others. A reduction in the number of heavy commercial vehicles in the street would improve environmental conditions, even if the total number of vehicles remained the same. The same applies, of course, to buses but their continuance can be justified because of the larger vehicle volumes that would result from their removal from the street. It is basically a question of comparing the different conditions created by traffic volumes, traffic speed, and vehicle composition of traffic flows.

PART VII : PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

a) Park and Ride

Little has been done in Glasgow so far in providing park and ride facilities. Of the 21 stations north west of Anniesland for example, only 13 have parking facilities, the total number of spaces being no more than 300. Also a Park and Ride car park has been provided at Kelvinbridge. It has been said that this scheme is not working well and that park and ride therefore may not offer any solution to the problem. The Kelvinbridge car park, however, has very poor access from the main road, and for pedestrians between their cars and the underground station. Furthermore it lies little more than a mile from the city centre. It is hardly surprising that having got so close to the city centre motorists are reluctant to change their mode of transport - particularly as the interchange itself is so inconvenient. If park and ride is to make any significant contribution, it must be planned thoroughly and comprehensively. If an improved situation on the Great Western Road is to be achieved then motorists should be persuaded to transfer to public transport at or further west of Anniesland. At Anniesland itself there is vacant railway land adjacent to the station that could accommodate parking for 60 - 70 cars, and a further 40 - 50 cars could be accommodated in the Top Rank cinema car park (also adjacent to the station) which is little used during the day time. Also, ample space exists nearby (north side of Great Western Road) that could be used for a car/bus interchange station.

Naturally problems would arise over the provision of such facilities, and the division of responsibility for them, but these, and the costs involved, would probably prove more acceptable than problems and costs of the present proposals.

Similar interchange facilities could be considered further out, particularly in relation to Blue Train stations. It is worth noting that park and ride can easily be made to work by restriction of central area parking and increasing parking charges. But these measures cannot be justified unless they are done in conjunction with the provision of efficient interchange facilities further out, and a simultaneous improvement of public transport services.

b) Reduction of Private Cars

The benefits of Park and Ride would be further exploited if all through traffic using the Great Western Road could be diverted except buses. The resulting users of these buses would benefit from their increased efficiency due too the reduction of traffic congestion. A number of alternatives present themselves for dealing with traffic not allowed through the Great Western Road:

(1) Crow Road is to become dual carriageway to link up with the existing Balshagray Avenue. This will eventually link with the Clydeside Expressway.

(2) Meanwhile, what are the possibilities of a one way system involving the use of Dumbarton and Pointhouse Roads?

c) Environmental Area Status

The whole area described at the beginning of this report could be considered as an environmental area, and the access points and internal road system modified accordingly. A study would be required of the various possible alternatives, including the stopping off of residential streets to vehicles, and limitation of access points into the area.

End