

Traffic in Towns: 50 years of hard lessons

1963 - 2013

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Walk21 München - 12. September 2013

1963: an important year for urban planning

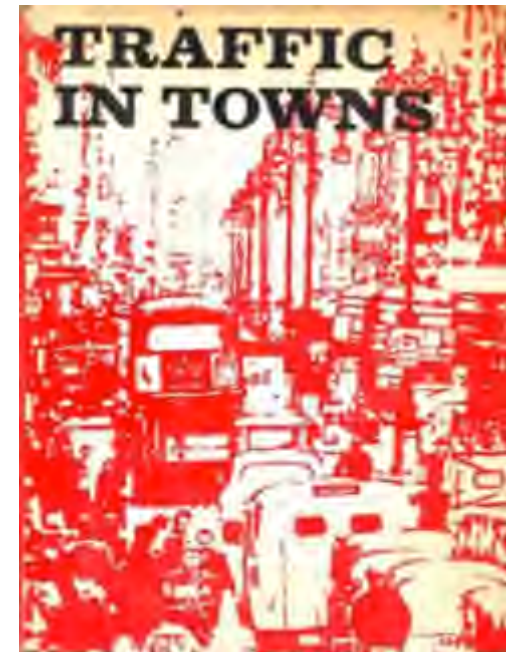
1. The Buchanan Report “**Traffic in Towns**” was published
2. I took up my first urban planning job!

This presentation - overview

1. 1963 – traffic versus towns
The Buchanan Report (Traffic in Towns)
2. 50 years of change (1963-2013)
 - How dreams became nightmares
 - The awakening
3. Lessons we have learnt
(and some we haven't)

Traffic in Towns: The “Buchanan Report”

- Extremely popular for a technical report
- 18,000 copies sold - paperback version 1964
- Hugely influential and led to:
 - Major urban roadbuilding
 - Comprehensive redevelopment
 - Environmental areas
- Government sponsored



Key points from the Buchanan Report

1. We have a **choice**: Environmental standards or mass car mobility.
2. But we can have both if we spend more re-configuring our towns – “comprehensive redevelopment”.
3. Pedestrians must be segregated from traffic.
4. New major urban roads are “inevitable”.
5. Create “environmental areas” that are “both separated and connected by a network of distributor roads used for traffic and traffic only”.

But remember the context...

1. Pedestrian casualties 5 times the rate today
2. Forecast of massive and rapid growth in car ownership (four times by 1980, in fact by 2012)
3. Predicted large population growth (+20m by 2000, in fact + 5m)
4. (Correct) prediction of “car owning democracy”

“We are nourishing at immense cost a monster of great potential destructiveness. And yet we love him dearly”

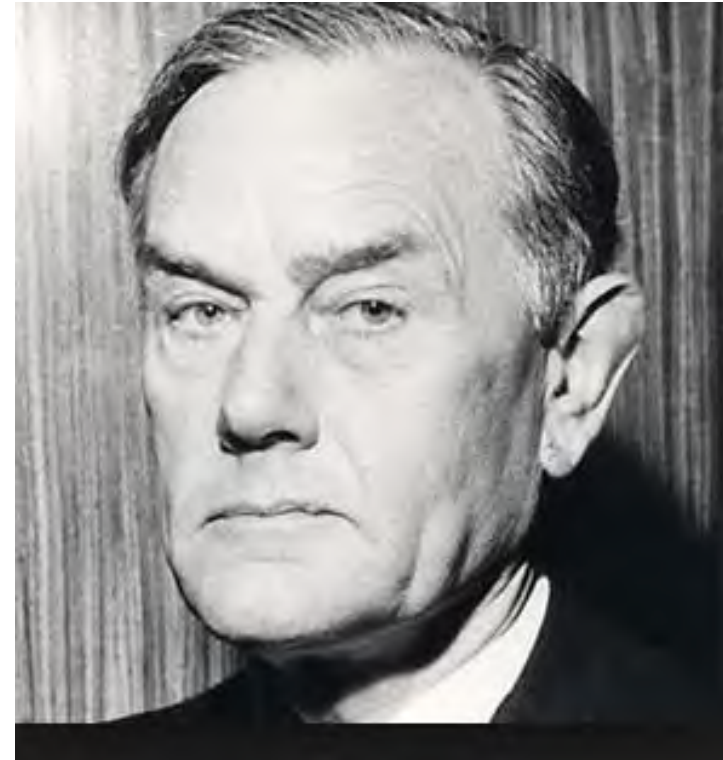
Report of the steering group, Traffic in Towns, 1963

Key insights of lasting value

1. Traffic is not a separate entity. It is dependent on the arrangement of buildings and the activities within them. Integrated land use and transport planning is therefore essential.
2. The volume of traffic and its distribution can be quantified and predicted, for more robust decision making.
3. Traffic limitation (even with new roads and reconstruction) “is quite unavoidable.”
4. Parking is the key to controlling traffic.
5. Public transport will always be essential (though this is expressed as something to be regretted, as if public transport was an unfortunate necessity).

Plans from the Buchanan consultancy

1. Guildford 1965
2. Cardiff 1966
3. South Hampshire 1966
4. Ashford 1967
5. Bath 1969
6. Canterbury 1970
7. Edinburgh 1971



All proposed major urban roads, even in the heart of historic cities. Some were built.

Example: Buchanan Plan for Cardiff 1968



Major roads never built

Buchanan and Partners Preferred 2001 Highway Network for Cardiff

Distributor roads and environmental areas

1. Two tiers of traffic roads
2. Distributor roads even within the environmental “cells”
3. The city would be chopped up into pieces by big roads
4. Analogy was used of rooms and corridors in a hospital – but the city is not a hospital.



*The principle of the hierarchy of distributors.
Access roads not shown.*

Distributor road “by-passes”

- The theory was that distributor roads would be built that would act as by-passes for urban quarters (“environmental areas”). Through traffic would be excluded from these areas thus minimising traffic intrusion.
- The very term “environmental areas” implied that outside these areas the environment would be destroyed by roads and traffic. As indeed was the case in practice.

Did distributor roads work?

- Sometimes the by-pass was built, but nothing was done to create the environmental area. E.g. East Grinstead, Sussex, UK
- The distributor/by-passes were often created out of proper streets, destroying their character in the process. E.g. Ring roads in Ashford and Chatham (Kent, UK)

An example of what was termed “traffic architecture”,
segregation of pedestrians and traffic



In practice, segregation was done cheaply, and without regard for pedestrians



More often, segregation of pedestrians and traffic was done without multi-level



The 21st century awakening

- Major urban roads are being torn down.
- Localities are being reconnected.
- Space is being shared between people and vehicle traffic.
- Pedestrians are being given greater priority.
- Lower traffic speeds are becoming the norm.

Urbanity is reasserting itself

Some examples from the UK

East Grinstead, Sussex

A town centre by-pass was built, but the opportunity was not taken to reduce traffic in the town centre.



The by pass



The historic High Street is still dominated by traffic

East Grinstead, Sussex

A new plan for the town (East Grinstead Neighbourhood Development Plan, draft 2013) is proposing the pedestrianisation of the High Street.



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An impression of how the street could look

Thamesmead – a new suburb in south London 1968 - 1974

The dream (as portrayed at the time)



Thamesmead, south east London

The reality

In 2012: “Eighty-nine per cent agree that walls, walkways and bridges should be removed to create a safer pedestrian environment.”

Greenwich News December 2012



Built 1968-1974

Chatham (Kent)

The 1960s ring road had become a one-way race track.
In 2006 the ring road was converted to 2-way.



< Ring road flyover demolished 2008

Below: The same location today



Ashford (Kent)

The ring road has been converted from one-way to 2-way, and one third of it converted to “shared space”



Above: Built in 1970s, 3 lanes one-way

Below: The same location today
(rebuilt as shared space)



Birmingham

As a car manufacturing city, it put forward a vision of the motor age city. This image from the 1940s reveals a lack of understanding that more cars means less public transport.



Birmingham

The city centre was rebuilt in the 1960s with a grade-separated ring road which cut off the centre from the rest of the city



Above:
City centre in the 1950s

Below: Ring road at Masshouse Square



Birmingham

Parts of the inner ring road have been demolished to allow better pedestrian connections. This has released new sites for development.



Above:
Demolition of the ring road

Below: Flyover removal creates new development sites, and pedestrian crossings at surface level



Edinburgh (World Heritage Site)

Buchanan proposed a motorway that would have cut through the heart of the historic centre. After a fierce battle, this was never built. But the historic University area was damaged with brutalist buildings and new roads.

This city vandalism,
Only 5 mins walk from the
Royal Mile, has yet
to be undone



Nottingham

Maid Marion Way carved through the city centre. It has now been “civilised” by removing pedestrian subways and providing ground level crossings.



Before

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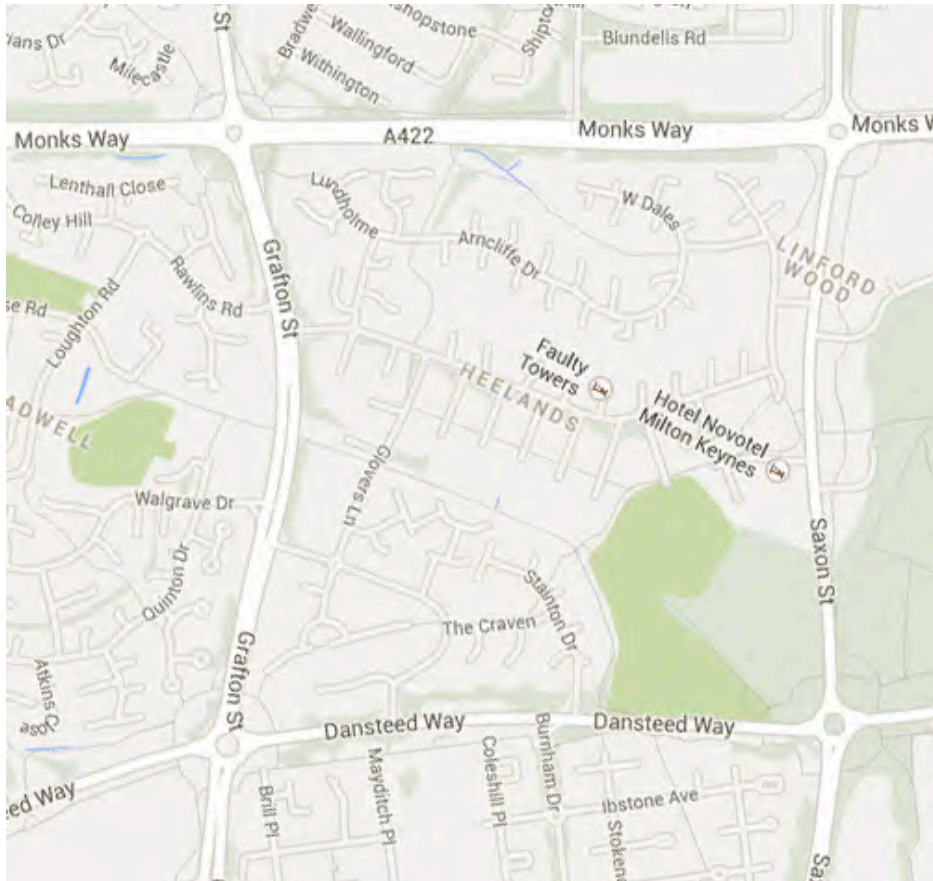


After

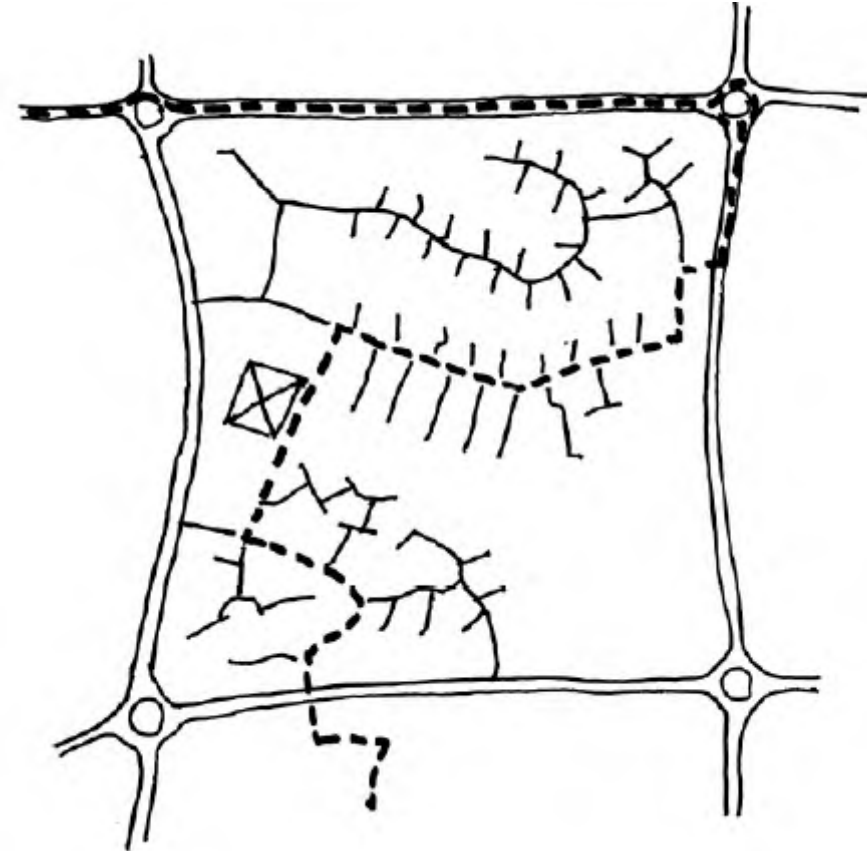
© geograph

Milton Keynes new town (from 1968)

The town was built as a motor car city. It follows the Buchanan principle of high capacity roads separating “environmental areas”



One of the 1km “grid squares”



- Almost impossible to provide quality public transport
- Local journeys on foot difficult

Milton Keynes

The grid roads are too widely spaced for easy walking to bus stops. Crossing the road is via pedestrian subways or bridges.



Key lessons learnt

1. We cannot reconstruct cities without destroying the life in them.
2. We cannot build our way out of congestion: in urban areas demand will expand to fill the space provided.
3. We **can** mix pedestrians with traffic. The key factor is **speed**, not volume.
4. We can have good environment AND good accessibility; but not mass **car** accessibility.

Buchanan's "choice" proved to be false

...and lessons not yet learnt

1. “Distributor” roads continue to create poor walking conditions and divide communities.

Divisive distributor road

Recent urban extension, Chelmsford (Essex. UK)



- Two residential areas divided
- No footpaths or crossings

lessons not yet learnt (cont.)

1. “Distributor” roads continue to create poor walking conditions and divide communities.
2. Comprehensive and quantified analysis does not necessarily produce the right solution.
3. The power of the motor and road construction lobby can overturn political common sense.
(Does this explain 2. above?)
4. Destructive urban roads are still proposed, but with new justifications (e.g. “boost the economy”) (*see next and last slide*)

10 July 2013 Last updated at 11:14

London roads £30bn plan unveiled

A £30bn blueprint which includes digging road tunnels beneath busy junctions has been put forward by a task force set up by the London mayor.

The 20-year vision includes changes to the North and South Circular roads and major schemes at Vauxhall, Waterloo, Elephant and Castle and Old Street.

The RAC said it was "exciting" to see tunnelling projects akin to a "Crossrail for cars" being considered.



A major scheme is proposed for Old Street, in east London

Thank you