

**RTPI Conference**  
**A Practical Approach to Integrating Transport**  
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Centre for the Magic Arts  
London

**Synopsis of contribution by Tim Pharoah**  
**“Traffic & Environmental Management”**

*Management for whom?*

The sub title of this contribution could be “the limits to traffic calming palliatives”

The pioneering efforts in The Netherlands and Germany to tackle the negative impacts of motor traffic on the living environment paid great attention to the creation of quality urban streetscapes. In Britain, the focus has been on reducing road accidents, and traffic calming schemes have often contributed little to overall urban quality.

As car ownership and motorisation of travel increases, a point is reached where traffic calming and street redesign cannot achieve satisfactory results. At a certain level the sheer volume of parked and moving vehicles is so overwhelming that no amount of design can retrieve quality spaces. In any case, people spend so much of their “travelttime budget” in vehicles that the creation of public spaces to enjoy becomes almost irrelevant.

For public spaces to work we need people without vehicles. For people without vehicles we need public spaces that are attractive, and worth giving up driving for.

*Breaking the car habit*

Conventional wisdom states that there is nothing wrong with car ownership, only car use. But the real problem is in fact car ownership. The correlation between ownership and use (and between car ownership and the decline of all other modes) is strong. In particular, multi-car ownership spells the death-knell for other modes.

Related to this, parking is a critical factor in creating quality urban environments. Llewelyn-Davies work has demonstrated how parking rates in housing are a major determinant of urban housing capacity and quality. Catering for all parking demands at non-residential facilities also undermines capacity and quality.

The basic problem is one of space. The value of urban living is the ability to bring people and activities together. Contrary to this, the space demands of motorised travel (including vehicle parking) blow them apart.

Clever design can allow a considerable degree of motorisation within urban settlements. But the ubiquitous use of motor vehicles for all categories of travel threatens not just the urban environment, but the concept of urban living itself.

Another strand of conventional wisdom is that public transport must provide for people who switch mode from the car. While improvements to public transport are important, and very sorely needed, bus and rail travel can never supply the same degree of personal mobility (i.e. miles of travel) that is currently supplied by private cars. Reducing car travel means reducing **all** travel.

In short, there is a practical limit to how far traffic and environmental management techniques can fend off the damaging impacts of motorised travel. We are fast approaching that limit.

Most attempts to reduce traffic are feeble and ineffective. One reason is that to change behaviour requires “push” as well as “pull” measures. Encouraging public transport use, for example, is of little value unless car use is proportionately reduced. Limiting parking at one location is of limited use if it is generously provided at other (competing) locations.

I want to highlight three potentially effective measures

### **1. Reducing car ownership**

The basic problem is the car pricing regime, which creates a direct financial incentive to drive. Once bought, a car is there to be used. Very little money, if any, can be saved by reducing the amount we use our car. (This is quite separate from the problems which road pricing, or higher fuel taxes, seek to address.)

Car use correlates with car ownership. Public transport use has a negative correlation with car use. Reducing car ownership will reduce car use, and total travel.

- More rational, and equitable, use of the car would result from cars being available on a pay-as-you-drive basis. This is provided by the local shared car schemes which are now commonly found in Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland (20,000 members in 1998). In Britain, a scheme was developed for Richmond (Pharoah, 1987), and we should now be wishing luck for a scheme due to begin in Edinburgh this month. Typically, one car-share car replaces between 5 and 10 individually owned cars, and miles travelled by participants reduces by up to 50%.

## **2. Eliminate private parking**

Private parking creates inefficiencies, due to variations in demand between property owners, and over time. Private parking therefore leads to over-provision.

Private parking lowers development densities, and creates footway crossovers. This discourages non-car modes of travel.

Private parking cannot (at present at least) be controlled, and therefore undermines parking management effectiveness.

## **3. Create preferential routing for “environment combination” modes**

Studies in the Oxfordshire town of Witney revealed that 25% of car trips made by residents could easily be converted to other modes. (Llewelyn Davies, 1997). One way of encouraging mode switch is to provide more direct routes for trips by bus, cycle and foot, and less direct routes for trips by car. The concept has been proposed for Witney. It has been applied as a matter of policy in the Dutch town of Groningen, and as a basic design concept in the new town of Houten (near Utrecht).

## **Conclusion**

If we are serious about reducing motorised traffic, we have to accept measures that will compel us or persuade us to change our travel behaviour. At present, most factors persuade us to choose the car. There are signs of change, and innovative schemes in northern Europe to address travel choices at source. But the increase in car traffic continues.

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