

Institution of Civil Engineers (North Wales)  
Conference: Traffic Calming and Restraint

A THIRD LESS URBAN TRAFFIC ?

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**REVERSING PRESENT TRENDS**

Meeting the full potential demand for car access in towns is neither desirable nor feasible. Attempts to satisfy demand have failed to provide a transport solution and have degraded the environment and the quality of life. More roads and car parks simply reproduce these problems on a larger scale, and drain away resources needed for investment in "town friendly" transport.

Unchecked, the relentless rise in traffic will lead to further congestion, danger and pollution, and threaten the economic vitality of urban centres.

Civic leaders must therefore chart a new course which can offer a better outcome for their towns.

Some local authorities have adopted traffic "restraint" policies, but not one has yet put forward a policy for overall traffic **reduction**. Current restraint policies are incapable of securing such a reduction because they focus on only a limited segment of urban travel, namely peak travel to and from town centres.

Public transport can be expanded, but it will never cater for the quantity of travel by car. Reduction of car travel therefore will almost certainly involve reduction of total travel. If this means people incurring lower travel costs, this will be beneficial.

**A CONUNDRUM**

It is difficult to persuade people out of cars unless alternative means of travel are improved. But equally, it is difficult to improve these alternatives (walking, cycling, public transport) with the present and increasing levels of car use. Bold action is needed to solve this conundrum.

The key is to secure the benefits of less traffic, through a better quality environment and more comfortable patterns of living. People will then choose to drive less in towns, and fewer people and jobs will move away from towns and cities. (The trend has been for two thirds of traffic growth to occur outside built-up areas.)

**BE POSITIVE**

There is no need to be apologetic about measures to reduce traffic. The aim is better access and a better town for all, and this must be promoted in a positive way. The question, then, is not "how do we tell people to drive less?" but "how can we show people the

benefits of driving less?".

### **PRESERVING OUR ASSETS**

Britain, like other European countries is fortunate in that most people live in areas that were developed before the age of mass car ownership. This gives us the chance to live with minimum car dependence. The most urgent requirement is to preserve those features which avoid excessive car traffic, including:

- \* Relatively low car ownership
- \* High proportion of journeys on foot
- \* Compact towns and suburban centres
- \* 80% living in urban areas

### **BENEFITS OF LESS TRAFFIC**

The emphasis of much transport planning is on the problem of traffic congestion. Yet attempts to reduce congestion may aggravate or leave untouched other dimensions of the transport problem, such as road safety, exhaust and noise emissions, community severance, poor public transport, unequal access to facilities, and restrictions on the freedom of those without cars. A much broader approach is needed, covering a range of objectives.

In pursuing the economic objective, the assumed link between traffic and economic efficiency must be broken. There is evidence that car travel in Britain is greater than our economic performance can justify, and also that less traffic would be good for business. Pursuing environmental goals is not in conflict with improved access; only with more cars.

### **WHAT ACTION CAN BE TAKEN?**

The Friends of the Earth guide to traffic reduction (FOE, 1992) advocates a target for a 30% reduction of urban traffic by the year 2005 (from 1990 levels). The report identifies 18 techniques which local authorities can use immediately to reduce traffic, and a further 10 which local authorities could legitimately expect more powers. The report gives examples of how these techniques can be used to produce a better quality environment. But local authorities should not have to work alone. National traffic reduction targets will help to give focus to the change of policy. Everyone should participate in this change, including the people whose lives and livelihoods will benefit.

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Reference: Tim Pharoah, "Less Traffic, Better Towns", Friends of the Earth, 1992.