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PLANNING FOR TRAFFIC REDUCTION

Tim Pharoah,

**School of Land Management & Urban Policy, South Bank University,
London, SW8 2JZ, Tel 071 815 7310/7345.**

Reversing present trends

It has become clear that 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. More roads and car parks simply reproduce problems on a larger scale.

If nothing is done, the relentless rise in traffic (Fig 1) 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:

Typical traffic restraint policy

- * Town centres
- * Peak Hours
- * Work journeys

A further popular misconception is that public transport can be increased to take a large proportion of travel diverted from the car. The present and forecast levels of car travel never were catered for by public transport, even in its heyday (Fig 2). Reduction of car travel therefore will almost certainly involve reduction of total travel.

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. This will make it easier for people to drive less in towns, and help to stem the drift of population and

activities away from towns and cities. (The trend is 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 first and most urgent requirement is to preserve those features of urban life which avoid excessive car traffic.

Assets favouring minimum car dependence

- * 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 (Fig 3).

In pursuing the economic objective, there is a need to break the link between traffic and economic efficiency, just as the link between economic growth and energy consumption was broken in the 1970s. There is evidence that car travel in Britain is greater than our economic performance can justify (Fig 4) and that less traffic would be good for business (Fig 5). Pursuing environmental goals is not in conflict with improved access; only with more cars.

What action can be taken?

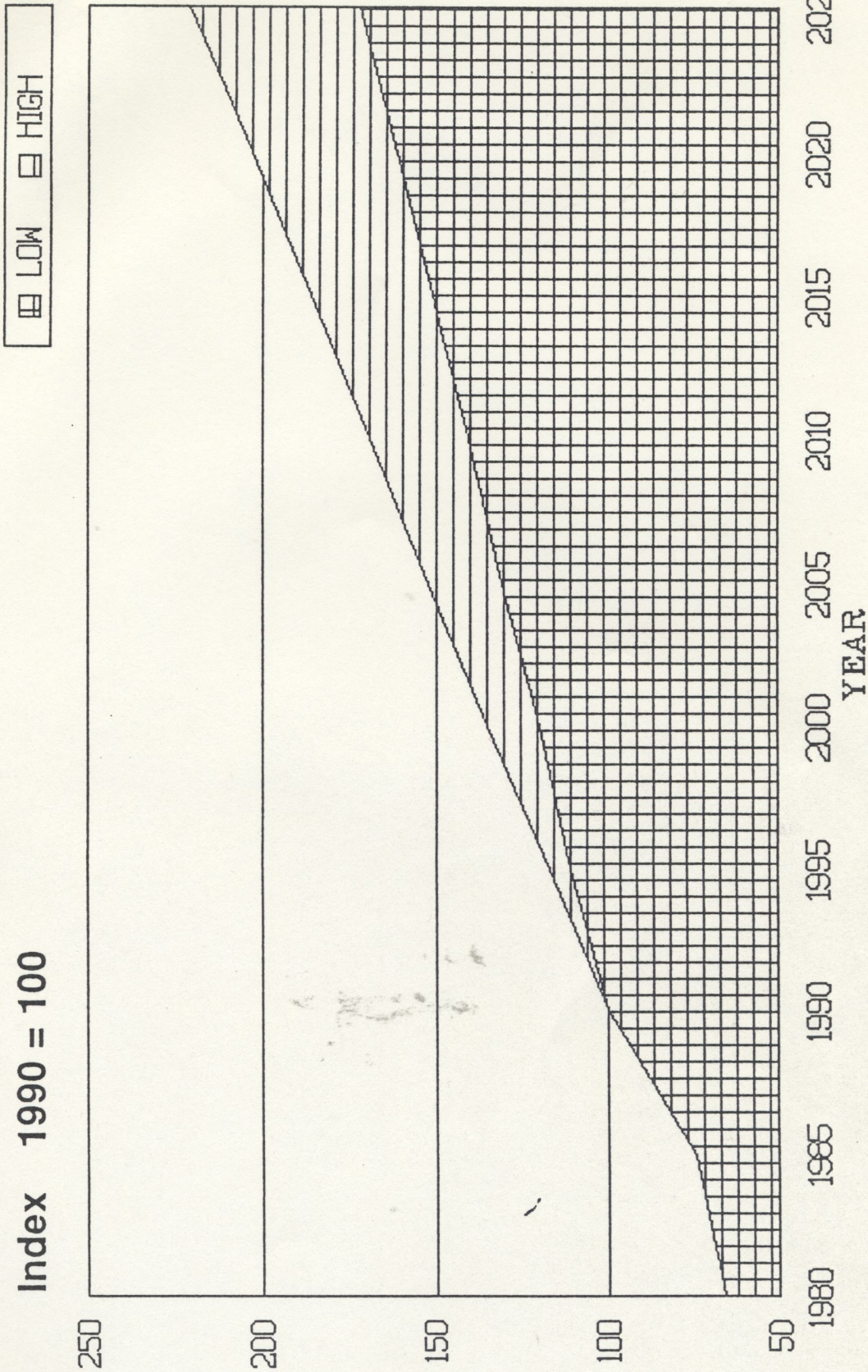
The Friends of the Earth guide to traffic reduction (FOE, 1992) identifies 18 techniques which local authorities can use immediately to reduce traffic, and a further 10 which local authorities could legitimately be given powers to implement. The report gives examples of how these techniques can be used to produce a better quality environment. But local authorities should not have to work alone. Everyone should participate, including the people whose lives and livelihoods will benefit.

Reference

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

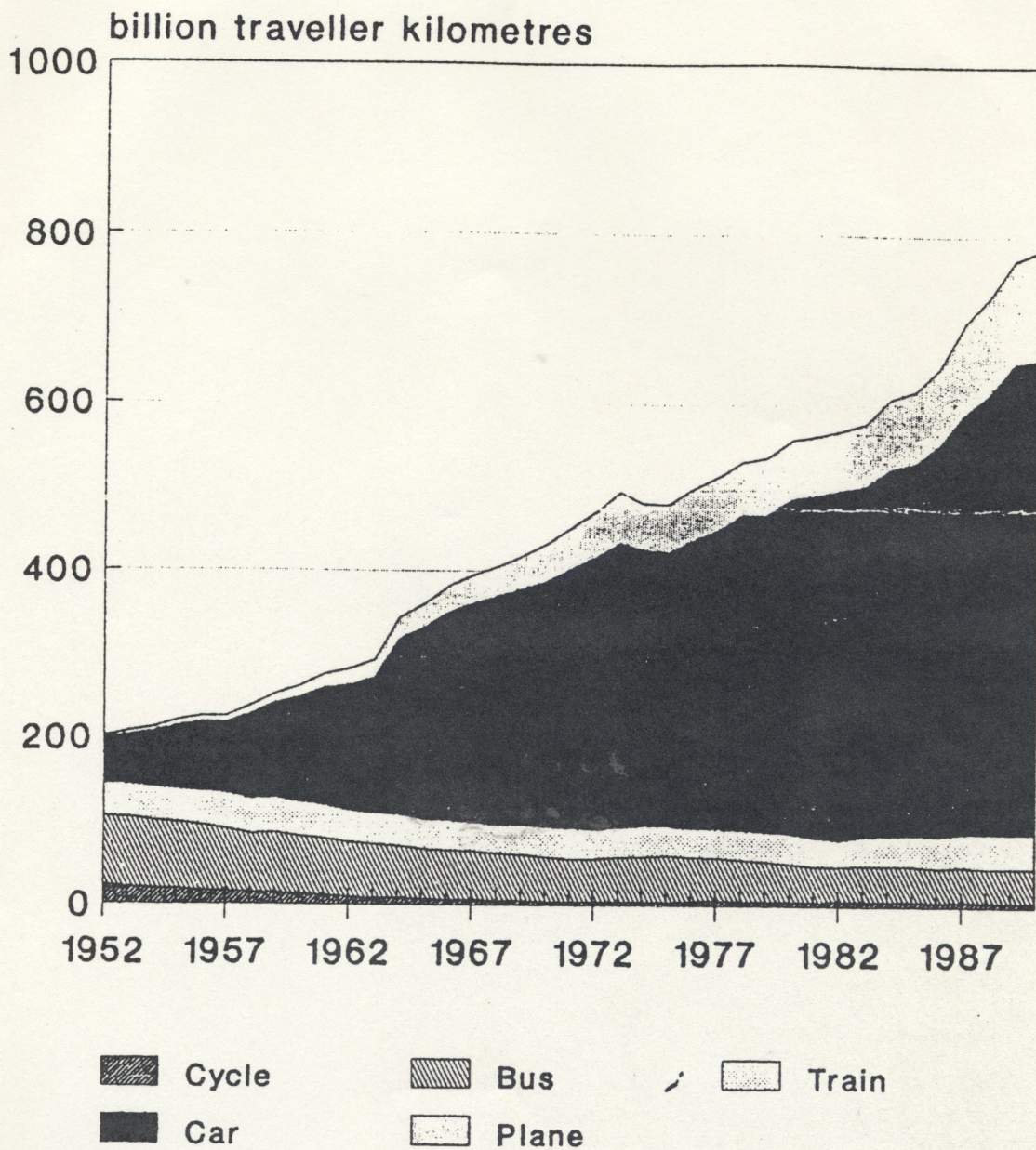
FORECAST MOTOR TRAFFIC

Index 1990 = 100

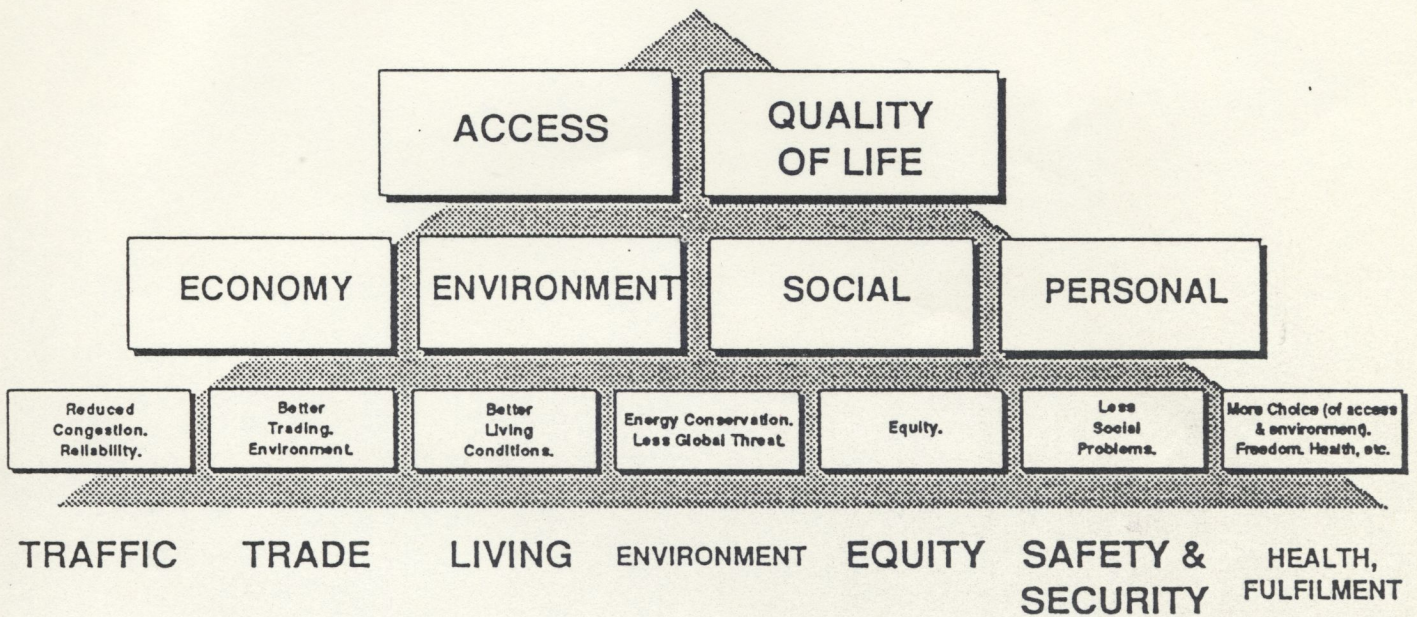


Source: Transport Statistics 1991
Based on National Road Traffic Forecasts 1989
Rebased to 1990. 100 = 408 Billion Vehicle Kilometres

Travel by Britons by cycle, bus, train, car and plane

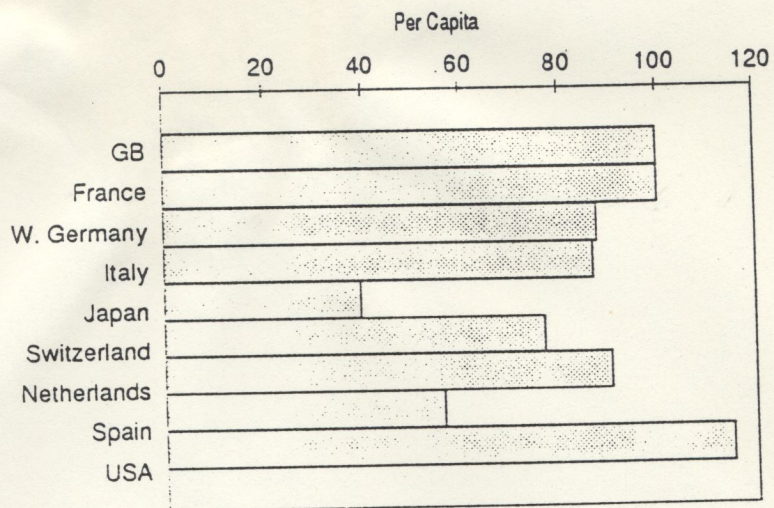


OBJECTIVES PYRAMID



Note: These objectives are not in conflict. The trade-off is not between Access and Environment but between both of these and unrealistic car use.

Figure 4: Car kilometres per unit of GDP, per capita, 1989. (Index, Britain = 100)



Source: Calculations from data in DTp 1991

Figure 4: Distribution of 38 German cities according to retail turnover and car use

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Growth in Retail Turnover 1978-85 (1)

	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Below Average	1	6	10
Average	1	7	2
Above Average	3	6	2

Source: Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik, Berlin 1991

Notes: 1. Retail growth trends in inner city

2. % of customers and visitors arriving by car, in relation to average for city size