

THE NEED FOR URBAN TRAFFIC REDUCTION

Tim Pharoah

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 first and 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) 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. 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.

Reference

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

Summary of presentation at National Conference

"Why should we reduce traffic?"

Accommodating motor traffic in towns has led to transport chaos and a degraded quality of life. Concern is growing, but action is hard to find. Reversing the trend of traffic growth will encourage positive changes in the quality of urban life. The problem is clear, and the solutions are available. We now need to agree and implement a radical programme of action.

PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGO UNTIL MONDAY 22ND FEBRUARY 1993

CALL FOR THIRD LESS URBAN TRAFFIC BY YEAR 2005

A national target for a one third reduction of urban traffic by the year 2005 is needed to avert transport and environmental chaos. Meeting the target will be a major task for local authorities, and a national Government target, like the one for accident reduction, would provide a spur to action.

This message came from Tim Pharoah, consultant and lecturer in transport, speaking at a major national conference in London today. The conference is being held to raise awareness of the traffic reduction issue set out in the "Less Traffic Better Towns" report published by Friends of the Earth, and is organised with the Association of Metropolitan Authorities.

Arguing the case for less traffic in towns, author of the report Tim Pharoah said: "Traffic reduction is wrongly seen as a threat to economic vitality, yet degradation of urban life brought about by car traffic poses the greatest threat of all."

"More traffic means less quality of life in towns. We need to encourage 'travel-styles' which are not dependent on the private car. People will kick the car habit only when they see benefits from so doing. The task of government is to deliver these benefits, by promoting the 'green' modes of travel, reducing the need to travel, and investing in urban quality."

FOE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

(EMBARGO UNTIL MONDAY 22ND FEBRUARY 1993)

CALL FOR THIRD LESS URBAN TRAFFIC BY YEAR 2005

A national target for a one third reduction of urban traffic by the year 2005 is needed to avert transport and environmental chaos. Meeting the target will be a major task for local authorities, and a national Government target, like the one for accident reduction, would provide a spur to action.

Press statement on Tim Pharoah's contribution: (Can use either or both of these paragraphs)

Arguing the case for less traffic in towns, author of the report "Less Traffic, Better Towns" Tim Pharoah said: "It is often feared that traffic reduction would threaten the urban economy. To the contrary, urban vitality has never faced a bigger threat than that posed by private motor traffic."

"More traffic means less quality of life in towns. We need to encourage 'travel-styles' which are not dependent on the private car. People will kick the car habit only when they see benefits from so doing. The task of government is to deliver these benefits, by promoting the 'green' modes of travel, reducing the need to travel, and investing in urban quality."