

Specialist's call for end to 'car habit'

TRANSPORT SPECIALIST Tim Pharoah has urged Britain's planners to help "break the car habit" and called for a new approach to tackling the problems of traffic throughout the country.

Speaking yesterday at the 1994 Town and Country Planning Summer School at St Andrews University, he identified links between motorisation and urban decline and deprivation.

A reader in transport and urban planning at South Bank University in London, Mr Pharoah told delegates there was a "new wave" of traffic growth based on the spread of car ownership among women and older people, as well as other social and economic changes leading to alterations in traffic patterns.

He argued that increased travel did not necessarily mean an increased quality of life and claimed that by comparison with other countries, the amount of traffic in Britain appeared to be greater than could be justified by economic output.

He singled out common misconceptions in current transport and planning policy, including the view that improving public transport would automatically reduce car use and that restraining cars commuting into town centres would reduce road traffic.

In addition, he also questioned the value of

traffic impact assessments, widely used by local authorities in determining planning applications for large new developments.

However, he made it clear that he believed that local authorities, despite being hampered by insufficient powers, had the scope through the existing planning system to make progress towards limiting car use and travel.

Mr Pharoah urged local authorities to launch publicity campaigns to encourage alternatives to car use and called for the protection of existing features such as compact settlements which reduce the need for car travel.

He also proposed the promotion and enhancement of areas accessible without cars and the lowering of standards of parking at all locations to compel developers to take account of non-car transport and to favour sites accessible by public transport.

"Traffic reduction is needed to achieve a wide range of social, economic and environmental objectives. The Government has made the first tentative steps by recognising that car growth should be limited and that land use planning has a role to play.

"Local authorities are mostly keen to accept and apply the new approach, but the planning practice is not changing as fast as policy rhetoric," he concluded.