

# Books

## Roads and Traffic in Urban Areas

*Institution of Highways and Transportation and Department of Transport, HMSO, November 1987. pp000*

For planners not directly involved with road and traffic planning, the procedures and techniques used by their engineering colleagues are often something of a mystery. Traffic planners themselves have until now also lacked a convenient source of reference on their subject. *Roads and Traffic in Urban Areas* replaces *Roads in Urban Areas* (1966) and *Urban Traffic Engineering Techniques* (1965) which have been the bible of municipal engineers for over 20 years. But it is much more than a replacement because it goes beyond mere engineering standards and attempts to set highway and traffic engineering in the wider transport planning context. This broader vision will be welcomed by all those interested in closing the gap between planners and engineers.

The hardback manual is arranged in six parts and 43 chapters. The first part examines urban transport planning issues, and in particular the inexorable growth of car traffic, and the role of road and highway schemes in solving the attendant problems. The effects of traffic on public transport, the environment, pedestrians, cyclists, disabled people and safety are considered, and a balanced approach is advocated – namely to avoid the extremes of full motorisation and severe restraint of cars. The legislative and statutory basis for road and traffic planning is set out in some detail, and chapters are

devoted to the principles of a functional road hierarchy, and alternative concepts of road capacity.

Part 2 gives a guide to the techniques of transport planning including data requirements, forecasting, evaluation and public involvement.

The third and largest part sets out the varied objectives and techniques of traffic management.

Part 3 deals with traffic and parking provision in new residential, commercial and central area developments, and planning procedures are also described.

Part 4 describes the procedures and design considerations for building major urban highways, and the 80 pages devoted to this reflect the importance to the manual's authors of the "roads solution". The photographs of urban decimation included in this section are, however, hardly a recommendation for this approach.

The final part gives a useful guide to the relevance of the various sections to the different circumstances in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Particularly useful are the references to all the various Government circulars, advice notes etc, which are otherwise difficult to locate. The cross referencing between sections makes the document easy to use, despite the lack of an index.

### UK lags behind

We are told that the new manual is "a guide to good practice" in the UK, but it will be a great disappointment to those looking for advice on the best available techniques of traffic

management, or integrated transport and land use planning. The problem is that the most exciting and far reaching developments are now to be found outside the UK, and the manual mostly excludes foreign practice.

Current UK practice is lagging far behind other European countries. For example in West Germany it is hard to find a city that has not invested heavily in rail based public transport over the past 15 years. In the UK it is hard to find a city that has. Urban road design in West Germany, Netherlands and Denmark now concentrates on 'traffic calming' to give greater priority to pedestrians, and to the environment and road safety. The French have implemented 50 demonstration traffic calming schemes, on different types of road, including trunk roads. In the UK we have only just managed to introduce the 'sleeping policemen' – a technique used in other countries for years, but now regarded as obsolescent. (Measures to reduce speeds occupy only 3 pages in the manual.)

So the current practice described in the manual may be 'good practice' by UK standards,

but much of it is miserable by European standards. These are not just my comments. At a conference held last year to launch the manual, speakers from the platform and from the floor voiced their disappointment. The general feeling was that the manual covered well the practice of the 1970s and early 1980s, but that a further manual to stimulate more modern and innovative practice would be desirable.

### Buchanan philosophy

For me, the manual is too firmly rooted in the philosophy of the 25 years old Buchanan report: the acceptance of growth in car traffic rather than living standards as the starting point for transport planning, the passive acceptance of declining public transport, the idea that we must choose between accessibility and environmental quality, and the rather spurious notion that economic vitality demands a certain level of access by car.

Despite all this, the manual contains a wealth of information in a convenient form, and no planning office will be complete without a copy.

### Tim Pharoah

## Housing and social change in Europe and the USA

*by Michael Ball, Michael Harloe and Maartje Martens. London: Routledge, 1988, £30.*

This book questions the traditional approaches to housing issues through the framework of a comparative investigation. The three basic assumptions which the authors consider limit the usefulness of most housing

- the changing role of social rented housing;
- owner-occupied housing: a tenure in transition;
- the revolution in mortgage finance;
- the international restructuring of housing finance;
- towards a new politics of housing provision.

The last chapter contains a range of ideas of new methods