

“Los Eslabones Perdidos” en las Ciudades y los Centros Urbanos. “Missing Links” to Town and City Centres.

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Resumen / Abstract

Esta ponencia trata sobre los "eslabones perdidos" entre los puntos de llegada y las atracciones de los centros urbanos. Está basada en un proyecto llevado a cabo por Llewelyn-Davies para el Foro Nacional de Planificación Comercial del Reino Unido y el Departamento de Transporte, Gobierno Local y Regiones, que fue publicado bajo el título "Ir a la Ciudad" en mayo del 2002.

Las ciudades y los centros urbanos son la clave del tan cacareado programa de revitalización urbana que está siendo promovido en el Reino Unido y en otros países. El acceso a dichos centros es de suma importancia para su vitalidad y competitividad, y la fase final de todos los trayectos, ya sea desde la estación de autobuses o tren, o desde el aparcamiento, suele realizarse a pie. Sin embargo, aún son numerosas las ciudades que, desafortunadamente, descuidan las rutas entre los puntos de llegada y los principales establecimientos y atracciones. De aquí en adelante nos referiremos a las mismas como los "eslabones perdidos". En demasiadas ocasiones, tenemos que caminar por zonas, áreas de servicio y aparcamientos poco atractivos, o bien tenemos que cruzar concurridas circunvalaciones, viéndonos así frecuentemente obligados a usar el metro o un puente. A menudo, nos encontramos con que los mismos puntos de llegada están mal diseñados o conservados.

La experiencia que tenemos a nuestra llegada produce un gran impacto en nuestra percepción de la ciudad. Si esta experiencia es negativa, los visitantes podrían optar por marcharse a otro sitio, en detrimento tanto de la comunidad como de su vitalidad económica. Tanto es así que el 75% de las autoridades locales británicas coinciden en que los "eslabones perdidos" constituyen un punto clave para sus áreas.

Asimismo, se analizarán los orígenes históricos de los eslabones perdidos y los nuevos obstáculos que suponen para el desplazamiento del peatón las circunvalaciones y autopistas situadas alrededor de los centros urbanos. Con frecuencia, la propiedad y la gestión de las instalaciones de transporte público y de los aparcamientos es independiente de la de las carreteras y las aceras. Los encargados de la gestión y el mantenimiento de calles y aceras suelen ser diversos departamentos dependientes de las autoridades locales, mientras que los centros comerciales suelen incluir espacios de propiedad y gestión privada. Este hecho ha acarreado una situación en la que raramente se planea o se coordina el espacio urbano en función de un "recorrido sin interrupciones". Esto es particularmente cierto en zonas "límite" situadas entre los núcleos de los centros urbanos y su periferia.

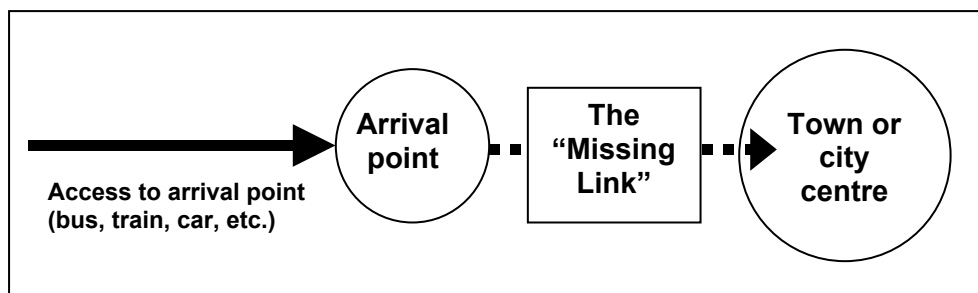
La ponencia nos hablará de cómo se pueden superar los "eslabones perdidos", por ejemplo, por medio de una planificación que responda a las necesidades del peatón, del análisis del "recorrido completo", y de la modificación de las prioridades del tráfico en lugares clave. Se exponen soluciones innovadoras, ofreciéndose ejemplos de las mejores prácticas que se están aplicando en diversas ciudades europeas y australianas. Se describirán diferentes medidas, incluida la mejora de los puntos de llegada, y su conexión con la red peatonal del centro urbano, y un esfuerzo coordinado para mejorar las rutas peatonales que lleven al centro y discurren por el mismo. Se analizarán otras soluciones, tales como desplazar los puntos de llegada a zonas más cercanas al centro, ampliar las actividades de los centros urbanos hasta los puntos de llegada, así como proveer a los ciudadanos de un servicio rápido y continuo de autobuses, tranvías y otras ayudas mecánicas, en los casos en los que las distancias o las pendientes sean importantes.

La ponencia demuestra que los diferentes tipos de pueblos y ciudades requieren la adopción de diferentes soluciones.

Ponencia / Paper

What are the missing links?

Town and city centres are the key to the much-vaunted urban renaissance agenda being promoted in the UK and throughout the European Union. Access to these centres is vital to their vitality and competitiveness, and the final stage of all journeys, whether from the rail or bus station, or from a car park, is made on foot.



Yet in many towns and cities, the routes between arrival points and the main shopping and other attractions are sadly neglected. We can therefore refer to them as the “missing links”. Too often, people find themselves walking through unattractive spaces, service yards and car parks, or having to cross busy ring roads, often being forced into subways or onto bridges. Often the arrival points themselves are poorly designed or maintained and give the visitor an immediate negative impression of the place.

Why is it important to “fix” the links?

The arrival experience affects how people perceive a city. If the experience is bad, visitors may choose to go elsewhere, to the detriment of both the community and business vitality. In order to encourage better practice, a report has been prepared for the British Government and the National Retail Planning Forum in the UK entitled “Going to Town”. This paper draws largely on the work undertaken for that report, published in 2002.

A survey of British local authorities found that 75% of them agreed that “missing links” were an important issue for their areas. Route audits of access links undertaken in more than 40 cities found a catalogue of problems facing people as they make the final part of their journey into town on foot. Amongst these were major barriers presented by ring roads (affecting more than one in five cases), poor connections to other parts of the pedestrian network; inconvenient road crossings; poor quality footways; poor quality or even dangerous environments (especially after dark); and a lack of signing, information and other facilities along the routes.

How did the neglect come about?

In some cities the arrival points (especially railway stations) were historically located away from the main destinations. In more recent history, the area just beyond the city centre core used to include industry, wharves, railway goods depots and the like. Many of these activities have now gone, leaving semi-derelict areas close to the town or city centre. This area, because of its fractured and incoherent townscape is sometimes referred to as the “shatter zone”, illustrated in the diagram below.



The shatter zone is now often taken over for ring roads, bus stations and car parks, creating poor quality environments through which people have to pass on their way into the centre.

Today, the missing links are often perpetuated by a lack of overall responsibility for the routes which people must take to reach the town centre. Ownership and management of public transport facilities and car parks is often separate from that of roads and footways. Streets and footways are often managed and maintained by several departments within local authorities, while shopping centres often include spaces that are privately owned and managed. This has led to a situation where the urban space is seldom planned or co-ordinated to provide for a “seamless journey”. In particular this is true of “edge” areas that lie between town centre cores and their hinterland.

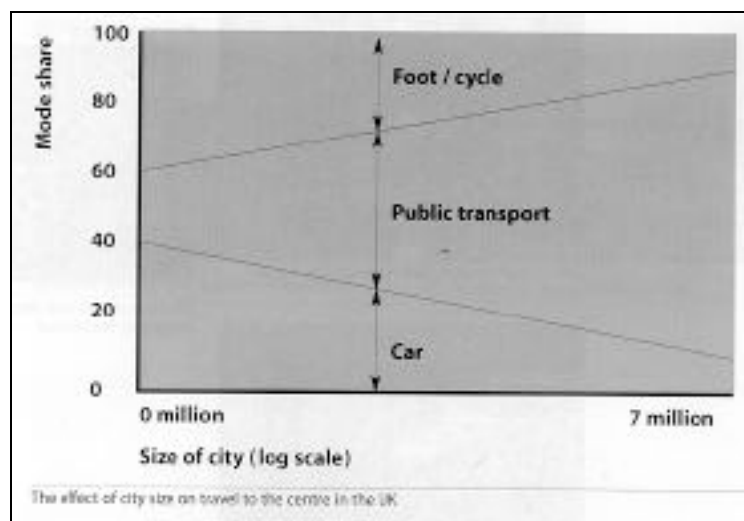
Urban improvements often focus on the town centre core, and many now boast high quality pedestrian only areas. There may also be showcase regeneration projects of inner residential quarters. Railway and bus stations also themselves are often the subject of major improvement. But still the paths and spaces that link these elements together are often forgotten about. Or at least they are not planned or coordinated in order to provide a positive experience of arrival. There is a need to perceive and plan for the “whole journey” into town, and the final link on foot deserves much greater attention.

What can be done?

City authorities should establish projects to fix the missing links into town. There be a range of problems that need to be tackled, and a series of route audits are necessary to understand these from the user viewpoint.

The problems encountered will often vary according to the size and character of the town. For example, the larger the town the greater will be the proportion of people arriving at the centre by public transport, and the smaller will be the proportion who walk all the way (see diagram).

Other characteristics will be important. For example a city with a thriving evening economy particularly requires links that are safe and secure after dark, and which are supported by late-running trains and buses.



Cities that attract a lot of tourists and visitors need to pay special attention to signing and information, not only about the routes into town, but also about the places and attractions on offer.

Route audits

Route audits can be undertaken in a structured way to maximise objectivity of analysis. For example, routes can be broken into 4 main elements:

- The arrival (and departure) facility – the quality of the facility itself be it a car park, a bus or railway station, or a cycle parking area;
- The interface between this facility and the town pedestrian network – is there space to “catch one’s breath”, to rest and to orientate oneself?
- The route (or routes) into town;
- The quality of arrival at the centre or at key attractions such as the main shopping street.

Improving town centre access links

There are a range of measures to improve the access links. Usually the different concepts will need to be combined to provide an effective solution, but it is useful to illustrate the different elements of route improvement, and these are briefly discussed in turn below.

- **Move arrival nearer to the centre**

Perhaps the most effective way of improving a link is to reduce it or remove it altogether by moving the arrival point closer to key attractions.

- Move bus stops to locations within or close to key shopping streets. There may however be a trade-off between the convenience of bus users and the environmental impact of buses within a town centre;
- Extend rail system to provide stops (or stations) within the centre (examples being the conversion of suburban rail lines to light rail operation, with street running in the city centres, as in Croydon, Manchester and Karlsruhe);



Karlsruhe trams serve the region and the centre

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- Relocate car parking closer to main attractions. This can sometimes be achieved by providing multi-storey or underground, as in many cities in continental Europe;
- Configuring entrances and exits of stations and car parks to minimise the distance to the town centre attractions.
- **Moving or extending the centre**

Redevelopment opportunities can be taken to create more activities on sites that lie between the arrival point and the established town centre attractions.

An example is Gloucester Green, Oxford, where a new public square with shops, restaurants and flats has been created between the (rebuilt) bus station and the main centre. In Reading, by contrast, the "centre of gravity" of retail activity has been shifting away from the railway station.
- **Providing a shuttle or mechanical aid**

Where the link cannot be shortened, and where there are significant obstacles, a mechanised link can be provided.

In Lincoln (GB), while the main retail and other town centre activities lie at the foot of the hill, the cathedral and historic part of the town are about a kilometre away. This means that people visiting the cathedral can only visit the shops if they are fit and have plenty of time. Likewise, shoppers cannot easily include a visit to the cathedral area. To overcome this, a shuttle bus (called "walk and ride") was provided on a trial basis in the summer of 2001, and this could become a permanent feature.



Lincoln "walk and ride"

Sometimes barriers to pedestrian movement can be reduced or overcome by the introduction of mechanical assistance. This can take a number of forms. British seaside towns with steep cliffs often installed lifts (Bournemouth, Folkestone, Hastings, for example).



Freiburg: underpass escalator



Hong Kong: Street escalators

In many German cities, escalators are provided to assist (and encourage) the use of subways under major roads (Freiburg, Cologne) or bridges over main roads (Hamburg). An extreme example can be found in Hong Kong, where a series of escalators take shoppers more than one kilometre back to their homes on the steep hillside.

When shopping centres are particularly large, mechanised links can help. A street tram operates in Shanghai's Nanjing Road - the longest pedestrian shopping street in the city. Sometimes dramatic changes of level call for public lifts as in Lisbon, Portugal and Genoa, Italy.

- **Removing or reducing road barriers**

Road barriers severely affected the quality of about a fifth of the access routes surveyed in Britain. Typically, this occurs where the arrival point lies the "wrong" side of an inner ring road or other major road, that can only be crossed using inconvenient or unpleasant subways, bridges or "cattle pen" surface crossings.

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Fort William (Scotland): You can see the town centre, but how do you get there?

In recent years there has been a move to change the design of such roads where they separate a town centre from its hinterland, and to introduce convenient surface crossings. The downgrading of the Birmingham Inner Ring Road is perhaps the boldest and best known example in Britain. But there are numerous smaller-scale examples, as in Horsham (below) where a new bridge links the centre to the station.

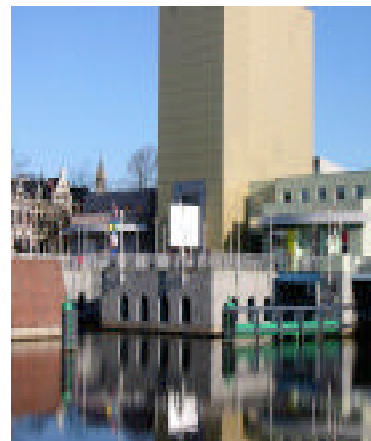
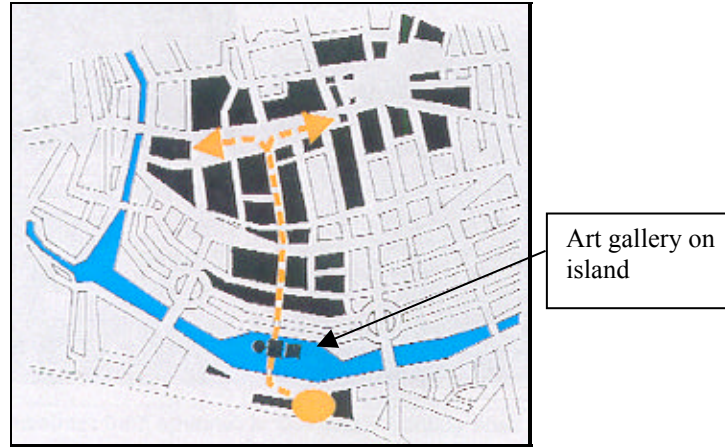


Horsham (GB)

- **Overcoming other barriers**

Sometimes other features hinder movement between a centre and its hinterland, including man-made barriers such as canals and railways, or natural barriers such as steep slopes or rivers.

In Groningen (Netherlands) a spectacular solution was chosen to the canal which separated the bus and rail stations from the city centre. A new pedestrian and cycle bridge was built over the canal. It is not just an ordinary bridge, however, it links both canal banks to an island, on which has been built a museum of modern art. The bridge solves a practical access problem, but at the same time has contributed a new cultural facility to the town.



The new bridge and integrated art gallery in Groningen

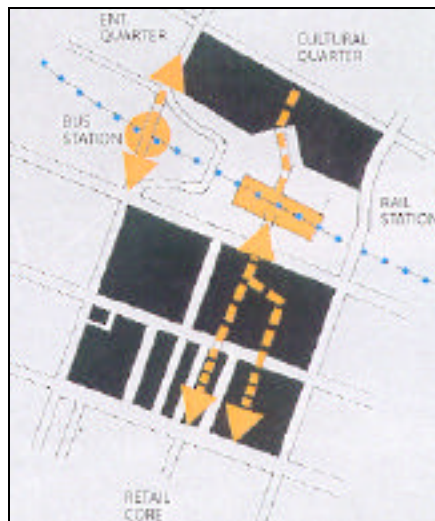
▪ **Improving the link quality**

Templates can be devised for judging the quality of each of these elements. Taking the route as an example, pedestrian movement quality in Britain increasingly is judged according to the “Five Cs” criteria, which are that the route should be:

- Connected
- Convenient
- Comfortable
- Convivial, and
- Conspicuous

- **Integrating the link with the wider network**

In some cases the link from an arrival point to the town centre is a "stub end" which is unconnected (or poorly connected) with the rest of the walking network. There may be benefits in extending the link to generate greater connectivity. While the benefits may be primarily for other parts of the town, the extra foot traffic will assist in achieving 24-hour security through use and improving the vitality of the link throughout the day.



Perth (Western Australia): New pedestrian links (in orange) link across the railway to join the main retail area with the entertainment and cultural quarters on the other side of the tracks. Direct access to the station platforms is provided off these links (see photo).

- **Reinforce the link with other modes**

Basingstoke has a clear link between the railway station and the main shopping mall. Within this linking space are bus stops (serving both centre and station) and major car parking facilities also gain access from the same area. This is clearly a principal interchange and access point for the town centre (see photo below).

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Basingstoke (GB)

- **Create better arrival facilities**

Sometimes the link itself is good, but the overall experience is let down by the poor quality of the arrival/departure facility itself. Ideally the facility should celebrate arrival. A good example is the Lisbon (Portugal) Expo interchange station: a light and airy public space which sits directly opposite the new shopping centre (see photo below).



Lisbon Expo interchange station

▪ **Improve the interface between arrival facility and network**

The arrival facility should relate well to the surrounding pedestrian network. This is perhaps easiest to achieve when building a new town, as at Almere (Netherlands) where a public square has been created outside the station (see photo below).



Almere, Netherlands

▪ **Improve information for visitors**

"People should be able to understand their city (or other people's cities), its basic layout, public functions, and institutions; they should be aware of its opportunities. An authentic city is one where the origins of things and places are clear". Allan Jacobs and Donald Appleyard, *Towards an Urban Design Manifest*, American Planning Association Journal (1987)

Information about route options can make a big difference to the perceived quality of a place, and it needs to be well planned and maintained, both on and off site.

Some points to bear in mind are:

- Information is particularly important for one-off or infrequent visitors (not just tourists, but business visitors, people passing through the area, people prospecting for places to live, work or shop).
- Even for regular visitors, information can be useful in updating their knowledge of the town's facilities, and for promoting special events. Residents of the town may be encouraged to spend more time (and money) in their centre if they are fully aware of all the different attractions on offer.
- At access points (stations, car parks, bus stops etc.) information should be clear for

both arrivals and departures. For those arriving, information is needed on the range of facilities and activities available in the centre, and the various options for getting to them. For those departing, information is needed on the destinations served by public transport, together with timetables, ticket information and real-time service information. At car parks, information is needed on routes out of the car park to various destinations, routes or areas. Information on payment methods also needs to be very clear, while the payment systems themselves should be as convenient to use as possible. Pre-payment for a specific amount of time, for example, is inappropriate for town centre car parks because it places a constraint on people's length of stay.

- Routes between access points and town centre attractions also need to be comprehensively signed. Where options are available, the relative merits should be indicated.
- Information on public transport services has traditionally been confined to the stations and stops from which services operate. Real-time information technology now allows information to be displayed anywhere, and screens showing service departures are increasingly being installed in shopping centres, hospitals, colleges, and other places where people gather

And finally:

Keeping traffic in its place

The possibilities for improving the pedestrian links are often determined by the extent to which they are interrupted by or dominated by the presence of fast moving or heavy vehicle traffic.

The principle should be followed that as roads approach the town or city centre the design speed should be reduced, and measures taken to influence driver behaviour so as to be progressively more compatible with the city centre environment. Big roads with multiple lanes of fast moving traffic should not be present in or adjacent to the centre.

Recognising the damaging effects of such roads, an increasing number of cities are taking measures to downgrade the traffic importance of ring roads to give more priority to those on foot. Dortmund (Germany) and Perth (Western Australia) are examples, see below.



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Dortmund (left): Outside the main station the ring road was reduced from 6 to 4 lanes, and a broad pedestrian crossing provided (replacing subways).

Perth (right), in similar fashion a broad crossing of the ring road now leads directly to the rail station from the main shopping area.

R L Stevenson said that "it is better to travel in hope than to arrive". Towns and cities will benefit, however, if people enjoy their arrival sufficiently to want to stay in the town, and on other occasions to return.

END

CURRICULUM VITAE

Tim Pharoah trabaja como asesor de Llewelyn-Davies y también de forma independiente.

Sus tareas abarcan la planificación y el transporte, desde el punto de vista de la política y el diseño. Anteriormente ha trabajado en Europa, en los EE.UU. y en Australia, así como en el Reino Unido.

Fue asesor en la consulta del Gobierno británico sobre la movilidad a pie en el año 2001.

Sus más recientes estudios para el Gobierno británico incluyen: Accesibilidad, Aparcamiento, Acceso Sostenible y Evaluación del Transporte. Ha participado en la planificación peatonal de Londres y en diversos estudios en ciudades de menor entidad del Reino Unido.

Entre sus libros podemos destacar "Pautas para Aliviar la Congestión del Tráfico" (1991), "Menos Tráfico, Mejores Ciudades" (1992) y "Conceptos sobre el Transporte en las Ciudades Europeas" (1995).

Tim Pharoah is a consultant working for Llewelyn-Davies and independently.

His work spans planning and transport, both policy and design. He has experience in Europe, the USA and Australia as well as the UK.

He was advisor to the UK Government inquiry into walking in 2001.

His recent UK Government studies include: Accessibility, Parking, Sustainable Access, and Transport Assessments. He has been closely involved with planning for walking in London and with a range of studies in smaller UK cities.

Books include "Traffic Calming Guidelines" (1991), "Less Traffic, Better Towns" (1992) and "Transport Concepts in European Cities" (1995).