

I. MOVING AROUND CITIES: THE BASICS

When we think of cities, we often think of the places within them – the parks, businesses, schools, neighbourhoods and institutions that define particular points in the urban environment. But what about the pathways that connect these different places together and help us to move between them? In an average city a significant amount of space is allocated to corridors and arteries that enable us to move from one place to another and back again. Urban environments are shaped by the networks of sidewalks, roads, alleyways and other paths that link the city together. The ability to move through these pathways and to get around the city are defining elements in the very success – economic, cultural and social – of the city.

At the heart of this, is the notion of *transportation* – which is a word that comes from two Latin words: *trans-* which means "across" and *portare*, which means "to carry." In cities, transportation is comprised of two necessary ingredients – transportation **infrastructure** and **modes of transportation**. Infrastructure refers to the roads, rail lines, canals and fixed terminals (airports, train stations, etc.) that allow different forms of transportation to take place. The different modes of transportation are the basic means through which transportation takes place – car, bus, boat, bike, skateboard, foot and so on.

Mode and infrastructure combine to respond to our transportation needs – whether it's moving goods and services around town (think of the trucks that replenish your local grocery store), enabling people to get to work, or a host of other reasons. Because of the different needs associated with transportation, specialists also talk about levels of flow, or **transportation loads**. Most people experience these sorts of things as the difference between a rush hour commute and an early-Sunday bus or car ride.

CHOOSE YOUR MODE

Each mode of transportation has pros and cons attached to it. In an era of peak oil and global environmental concern, this fact is becoming apparent in new and different ways. Cars, which provide a greater range and freedom than the horse and carriage that they replaced, also come complete with different – and more intense – forms of pollution. Airlines, which have allowed movement between cities at an unprecedented rate, consume a phenomenal amount of polluting fuel. Trains, which allow for the movement of great quantities of freight cross-continent, do not allow for the same precision in delivery that is found in truck transportation. Bikes don't keep you dry during the rainy season, and are more challenging to navigate in snow.

The notion of "**choice**" plays an interesting part in people's participation in different modes of transportation. This is particularly true when dealing with those modes of transportation that enable personal movement around town – car, bike, and bus, as well as foot. And nowhere has the discourse of personal choice played so prominent a role as with the automobile.

When Henry Ford started producing his Model T, one of the business philosophies he promoted was the idea of paying his assembly line workers enough money that they could afford one of the vehicles. This push to "democratize" the automobile as a mode of transportation has had lasting effects on our relationship to transportation. Where once the majority of people used carriages and cabs that belonged to others, the assembly line approach utilized by Ford enabled people to participate in the world of mechanized transportation in an entirely different fashion: as personal car owners.

Since their inception, cars have enjoyed a form of a status that outshines all others. The result has been a "**car-culture**" defined by the notion that people should strive to have their own vehicle, that driving is a right not a privilege, and that it is a benign activity, versus something that has material, social and environmental consequences. To be clear, this is not to say that cars are all bad. Jane Jacobs herself argued that we blame automobiles for too much. The problem, she suggested, is not so much the automobile, as it is our tendency to privilege it in city planning – with an excess of widened roads (and shrunken sidewalks), parking space and highway corridors; all of which tend to result in an unending cycle of demands for more roads, parking and highway corridors.

GETTING AROUND BY ANY WHICH WAY?

Jane Jacobs's writing touches a great deal on the subject of transportation – either directly (such as with her writing on the role of automobiles in cities) or in a more indirect fashion (as in her discussion of the importance of small blocks as a way to provide many alternative routes around neighbourhoods). When she lived in New York, Jacobs was also an influential voice in the crusade against the Lower Manhattan Freeway Project – a plan that would have seen an extensive highway network plow through the city. In fact, Jacobs was so vocal inside city hall that she was arrested (along with others) and charged with criminal mischief (charges that were later dropped). Later, when she moved to Toronto, she was instrumental in leading the charge against the development of a similar highway project, the Spadina Expressway. She felt strongly that the push for more road space for cars had a negative impact on neighbourhoods and community.

Her critique of the role of automobile-centred infrastructure raises good questions about so-called “alternative” forms of transportation, and about the way that we imagine and plan for the need to move around the city. It also brings to the fore questions about how we design new urban areas – particularly those outside of the urban core (that is, the “suburbs”).

So why do people move around the city? In the simplest sense, people want to get from Point A to Point B, but their reasons for doing so are often quite different. Sometimes people want to get to work, take their kids to school, or go out for a night on the town. Other times, they want to transport material goods. Still other times, they just want to enjoy the experience of being out – moving more for the experience of moving than the destination (as in an afternoon stroll or a drive in the countryside).

What is clear is that sometimes the various needs that we associate with moving around the city do not rationally attach to the mode of transportation that we often use for getting around. For example, tens of thousands of people will commute into the city centre on any given day of the week. A large proportion of these people will sit in their own private automobiles, cursing the traffic jams that have become endemic to our culture (with the subsequent call for highway widening becoming more or less predictable).

At the same time public transit systems, which could alleviate much more of the commuter traffic congestion than they currently do, are unable to fulfill their potential because they are on the short end of the stick for government funding. The result is crowded and uncomfortable rush hour buses and trains – a different type of capacity shortage – and a resulting lose-lose situation for everybody. So what, if anything has changed since Jane Jacobs first started raising the alarm about the problems of car-centred transportation and the need for alternatives?

II. MOVING AROUND TODAY'S CITIES

In the previous section of this primer we asked if much has changed in our approach to transportation infrastructure and modes of transportation in our cities. Based on casual observation we might be tempted to conclude that the dominance of cars in our urban landscapes has not shown many signs of dwindling. But if we look a little closer what we find are many important developments designed to address transportation challenges. Some of these strategies are responses to the very same preoccupations that Jane Jacobs had about **protecting neighbourhoods, promoting walkability** and preserving precious opportunities for **social interaction** on our city streets and public spaces. These include some of the following:

(1) BUILDING CITIES THAT ARE MORE COMPACT

Compact cities – ones that feature an optimal use of space and high population density – encourage the development of shops, services and employment opportunities that are located within close proximity to residential areas. It is estimated that a population density of 100 to 125 people per hectare is a minimum threshold to encourage communities that are walkable. Enabling walking (and other forms of sustainable transportation such as cycling, roller-blading, skateboarding and more) is a way to cut down on the use of cars for short trips.

(2) ENSURING THAT CITIES ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

As the population of North American cities grows older (the median age in most cities has been steadily rising over the past few decades) more and more residents will be facing challenges getting around cities. Simple acts such as crossing at stop-lights, stepping off of a curb, and ensuring that transit options allow for mobility aids such as walkers and wheelchairs, will become increasingly necessary. Not only is this important for helping people to get from A to B safely, it is also important for ensuring that cities are socially inclusive of all residents.

(3) CALMING TRAFFIC

Slowing down traffic, as well as reducing overall traffic volumes is one of the keys to creating liveable communities. Traffic roundabouts, narrower streets, and the Dutch Woenerf concept (where cars on certain streets are only allowed to move at walking speed) are among the ways to revitalize neighbourhoods.

(4) MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR MORE PUBLIC TRANSIT

Financial allocations for buses, subways and Light Rapid Transit (LRT) lines often seem to be an after thought, compared to investment in highways. Often times, there are concerns expressed about the potential for negative impacts to arise as a result of increased public transit – a loss of business opportunities, the potential for community safety to be impacted and so on. It is important to recognize that there is actually a very strong business case *for* improved public transit. For example, a few years after the new Spadina streetcar line was installed in Toronto over a third of stores in the area reported that their business had improved – despite many fears to the contrary.

(5) ENHANCING PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Cities in Canada lag far behind their European counterparts when it comes to offering pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. The provision of extensive pedestrian-only, or pedestrian-priority streets, bike-lanes, bike-share programs, signals and bike-locking infrastructure, are among the ways that other cities have materially and symbolically raised the profile of non-automotive traffic. In Canada, cities such as Montreal and Toronto are in the beginning stages of bike share programs. Other cities are focusing on the development of bicycle networks. There is more work to be done on all fronts.

INTO THE FUTURE: NEW MANTRAS FOR MOVING AROUND CITIES

The fact that many of Jane Jacobs's original concerns about mobility in cities still resonate today shows the importance and continued relevance of her ideas. At the same time, we can identify a number of newer developments that are being proposed in response to more recent **global** challenges. These include **climate change**, an issue that we have come to recognize as having significant links to car congestion and high carbon emissions. Because climate change and other related issues transcend urban – and even national! – boundaries, they are inspiring international, collaborative innovations. This shows that changes are happening not only to the **types** of issues being addressed, but equally to **how** they are addressed.

COALITIONS OF CITIES FOR BETTER MOBILITY

In recent years, coalitions of cities have started to work together on urban challenges such as transportation. A good example can be found in the **Aalborg Commitments**. The Aalborg Commitments (named after the Danish city where they were first proposed in 2004) are a set of pledges made by over 550 European local governments to create cities and towns that are inclusive, prosperous, creative and sustainable, and that provide a good quality of life for all citizens and enable their participation in all aspects of urban life. The Aalborg Commitments are the most recent incarnation in a series of collaborative approaches that date back to the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Among the 10 Aalborg Commitments is “**#6: Better mobility, less traffic.**” This commitment states that local governments:

... recognise the interdependence of transport, health and environment and are committed to strongly promoting sustainable mobility choices. We will therefore work to: (1) reduce the necessity for private motorised transport and promote

attractive alternatives accessible to all; (2) increase the share of journeys made by public transport, on foot and by bicycle; (3) encourage transition to low-emission vehicles; (4) develop an integrated and sustainable urban mobility plan; (5) reduce the impact of transport on the environment and public health.

Of course, these commitment alone do not guarantee change. But they do provide a strong structure of mutual accountability, along with concrete tools for setting targets that are appropriate for each participating city, and supports for achieving them.

MOBILITY & HEALTH

Another notable change that we can see in strategies such as the Aalborg Commitments is a renewed focus on the connections between **urban planning, transportation and public health**. Historically, urban planning and health concerns were tightly linked with the aim of preventing outbreaks of infectious disease and addressing concerns of sanitation and waste disposal in cities. The late twentieth century saw a weakening of this link. However, renewed attention is now being cast on the connections between planning decisions and health outcomes including, in particular, transportation and mobility choices in all of their twenty-first century incarnations. For instance, we now know that there are conclusive links between urban sprawl and increased rates of preventable diseases that limit people's full participation in the social and economic life of their cities.

These and other concerns have led global organizations such as the **World Health Organization (WHO)** to launch their **Healthy Urban Planning Program**. The "**Transport and Health**" component of the Program recognizes that in modern times, people must often travel unprecedented distances, not only to commute but also to gain access to the facilities, goods and services they need. The result is that transportation choices have major implications for the health and well-being of citizens through social, environmental and economic effects.

MOBILITY & RIGHTS

Another recent development is a resurgence of notions of "rights" and "citizenship" in relation to issues such as transportation and mobility. Of course, rights and citizenship are ancient preoccupations in relation to cities. Indeed, the very meaning of "city" refers to the collective body of citizens. With more focus on participatory, inclusive participation in local decision-making has come a "return" of concerns over rights and citizenship. So what are some of the tools that are helping this become a reality? Among the expressions of renewed commitments to enshrine citizens' rights at the local level are Municipal Food Charters, Women's Charters and Pedestrian Charters. Where mobility is concerned a good example can be found in the **Citizens' Statement: Move Together Towards a New Culture for Urban Mobility** (2008), a manifesto signed by representatives of 27 European Union countries. It states:

We are citizens and regular users of urban transport both public and private on a frequent basis. We seek to encourage ourselves and others to pay continuous attention to our collective health and well-being in relation to urban transport. This also means paying due attention to fostering genuine partnership with other stakeholders regarding mobility decisions and quality of life in the city.

Although such manifestos are not binding legislation, they often serve as powerful citizen-based tools that have proven to be effective catalysts for change and citizen engagement.

FURTHER LINKS

The Aalborg Commitments (<http://www.aalborgplus10.dk/>): A great resource that links to the list of signatories, the Aalborg Commitments document in 18 different languages, Baseline Review reports, Articles, signing procedures etc.

Move Together Towards a New Culture for Urban Mobility. "Citizens Statement" (<http://www.move-together.net/>). An excellent manifesto that advocates for the notion of

“mobility freedom” – the need to boost walking, cycling, public transportation and the integration of these with the movement of cars and trucks.” Published online at:
<http://www.move-together.net/docs/Move%20Together%20Citizens%20statement.pdf>

World Health Organization (2006). *Healthy Cities. Transport and Health*.
(http://www.euro.who.int/healthy-cities/UHT/20050201_4).

GET INVOLVED

Develop a Pedestrian (or Cyclists) Charter

<http://www.toronto.ca/transportation/walking/charter.htm>

Toronto is one of a few cities that have a Pedestrian Charter – guaranteeing the rights of pedestrians in the city. Search out this and other examples and talk to your local government. If you don't have a charter, consider lobbying for one.

Carpool

www.carpool.ca

Carpooling is a simple way for individuals to take part in the climate change challenge while saving money, reducing congestion and conserving energy along the way. This neat service will help to link you up with rideshare opportunities in your community.

Join the Discussion on Public Transit

<http://www.cptdb.ca/>

Public Transit needs informed advocates – and this discussion board is an excellent way to connect with both professionals and interested members of the community. There are also a number of advocacy organizations that exist around the country – including the Rocket Riders (Toronto), Better Environmentally Sound Transportation (Vancouver), Edmonton Trolley Coalition and High Speed Rail Canada – all of whom could use a hand with their activities.

Join a Critical Mass Ride

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_Mass

In cities across North America, cyclists gather on the last Friday of every month to “reclaim the streets” in a mass bike ride around the city.

Plan a car-free day

<http://carfreedays.com/>

<http://www.worldcarfree.net/wcfd/>

<http://www.carfreevancouver.org/>

Car free days are organized events with the common goal of taking cars off the streets of a city or some part of a city or neighbourhood for all or part of a day. The goal is to give people who live and work there a chance to consider how their city might look and work with a lot fewer cars. Car free days are often planned as street parties – an even better reason to get one started in your city!

Join a local transportation group

<http://cyclingfunmontreal.blogspot.com/2008/05/cycling-advocacy-montreal-vs-toronto.html>

<http://www.torontoenvironment.org/actioncenter/volunteer/rocketriders>

www.best.bc.ca

<http://bikecalgary.org>

Groups like Montreal's Cycle Fun Montreal Sometimes their focus is on a particular type of transportation, while other times its more broadly-based. Either way, joining a transportation group can help you to connect with like-minded people and work to advocate for better transportation options in your community.”

III. EXERCISES: MOVING AROUND YOUR CITY

As we have seen, the choices we make about how we move around our cities have important social, environmental and health implications. This brings us to the question: **how do you move around your city?**

As a walk leader, it will be your challenge to bring different dimensions of mobility to the attention of your walkers. The ways that you move around *your* city, whether you must drive from place to place, whether you can safely – and enjoyably – walk or ride your bike, whether public transit is accessible and affordable, will provide you with lots of opportunities to connect the ideas we’ve talked about in this primer with the theme of your own walk. Here are two exercises that you can consider:

- **EXERCISE 1: RE-THINKING TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE**
- **EXERCISE 2: PONDERING MODES OF TRANSPORTATION**

Keep in mind that a great way to get people thinking is to ask good questions without necessarily providing the answers! Your job is to help people “see” and experience their city differently. A good way to do this is to engage your walkers directly in the exercises by asking them to share their own perspectives on mobility.

EXERCISE 1: RE-THINKING TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

In the first section of this primer we learned that transportation infrastructure refers to the roads, rail lines, canals and fixed terminals (airports, train stations, etc.) that allow different forms of transportation to take place. For this exercise, pre-select a pit-stop on particular part of a city block, laneway or busy thoroughfare, preferably at a site where there are at least two different types of transportation infrastructure within reasonable proximity. Transportation infrastructure might include:

- Roads
 - Sidewalks
 - Bike lanes
 - Dedicated bus lanes or carpool lanes
 - Subway lines or streetcar rails
1. Conduct an on-the-spot survey of your walkers as to the type of transportation infrastructure they used to get to your walk. Ask your walkers to reflect on what they think was the best part of the infrastructure they used (was it easy? pleasant? good exercise? convenient? accessible? affordable?). What about the worst part (was it crowded? polluted? expensive? slow? inefficient?).
 2. Ask your walkers what they would change about the transportation infrastructure in and around your pit-stop if they could. Who do they think would benefit from the changes? How would it change the city? Why do they think the changes haven’t happened?
 3. Ask your walkers what they observe as the general characteristics of transportation infrastructure around the pit-stop. For instance, how much space is set aside for pedestrians? How much for cars? How much for bicycles and other uses? Ask them what difference they think this makes the general ambiance of the area.
 4. If there are people on your walk from cities in other parts of the world, invite them (if they are willing) to share their perspectives from their home city. Ask them how the transportation infrastructure you are examining compares to their home city. What kind of infrastructure would that person see in a similar type of “pit-stop” in their city? What are the differences? The similarities?

EXERCISE 2: PONDERING MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

As you will recall, modes of transportation are the basic means through which transportation takes place – car, bus, boat, bike, skateboard, foot and so on. For this exercise, pre-select a pit-stop on particular part of a city block, laneway or busy thoroughfare, preferably at a site where there are a number of types of modes of transportation within reasonable proximity. Some modes might include:

- Cars
 - Freight trucks
 - Public transit (buses, streetcars or light-rail transit)
 - School buses
 - Scooters
 - Bicycles
 - Skateboards
 - Pedestrians
1. Take a few moment at your pit-stop and ask your walkers how many different modes of transportation they can identify in the immediate vicinity. Ask them what difference they think this makes the general ambiance of the area.
 2. Ask your walkers what they think works best about the mix (or lack thereof) of modes of transportation. Ask what they think are the biggest challenges?
 3. Ask what your walkers to reflect on who is using the different modes of transportation. Who might have trouble accessing different modes of transportation and why?