

# TRANSPORT WORKS FOR YOU; you shouldn't work for transport

Switching our mindset on what it means to move freely will help us to embrace 15-minute cities, explains Christopher Martin

**M**OMA in New York has a black-and-white film of streets in Manhattan shot in 1911. If you watch it you'll notice everyone wearing lovely hats, but also that the streets are just packed with people. There was the occasional streetcar or Model T, but no one really looks out for them because early traffic laws made cars super slow – in the 8-to-10 mph range. And that fact is important, because if you can outrun a car, you're probably not going to buy one. This undoubtedly troubled big motor companies, and naturally their shareholders. To try to break this deadlock, car companies lobbied against laws restricting automobiles, and for laws restricting pedestrians. And this was how the crime of jaywalking was born.

A final victory for motor companies was a psychological one aimed at children. By the mid-1920s, the top funder of school safety education was the American Automobile Association. They took over safety patrols and helped kids cross the street; seemingly a nice thing to do, but in doing so they told children that "streets are for cars". When these children grew up, it was central to their ideas that streets were for cars – and the job was done.



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So, we are where we are today because we were made to think that we needed to buy something to move about freely; we were made to think something was good for us, when it wasn't. And be sure we have seen this in other sectors throughout the history of big business. My GP isn't recommending me Lucky Strike anymore, but it used to happen, and I imagine not simply because they were thought to be good for me by my GP.

Because of such lobbying pressure our streets and transport have fiercely resisted change, yet what we need from cities has changed greatly, as more and more people call cities home, with space becoming scarce and more expensive. This has sparked a realisation in planners and city dwellers that cities need to become healthier places to live throughout your life, and not just as places of business; as well as if, for example, 80% of public space in London is streets, then we need to use that space pretty intelligently, to yield a public good.

One way we have sought to make transport a servant to



CREATING MORE CHOICE AND FREEDOM FOR ALL - NOT CONNECTING FREEDOM TO OWNING A CAR



live in cities longer. In parallel, our understanding of the influence – good and bad – that investment in the public realm can have is also changing.

All this points to using the asset of the public realm for public good and not only private or individual gain. Streets, public realm and neighbourhoods

quality of life of late is looking to remove traffic that is only offering negative consequences to areas. So, traffic that is moving through a place and not stopping yet offering road danger, pollution and social segregation. Low traffic or liveable neighbourhoods are some of the terms we're using to describe these measures, and the 15-minute city concept (by no means a new concept) takes these ideas as part of a larger urban planning concept to provide more things to more people locally.

If we can provide more things to more people locally, it means that to visit the shops or do the school run I don't *have* to drive. Don't have to drive, because it's close by. And if I don't have to drive these journeys then there's a couple of trips a day that I don't have to drive, so there are fewer cars on the road on average, meaning streets and neighbourhoods are healthier and safer. I can save money by walking or cycling should I wish, and importantly we are able to set aside more space in cities to tackle some of the many challenges we face.

What these ideas aimed at making transport work for me (rather than me

work for transport, or rather for global company's profits) *don't* mean is that I expect to have a MoMA in every neighbourhood within a 15-minute walk, or that I cannot leave the neighbourhood should I wish to, or have to, drive. You would be forgiven for thinking that they do mean this, however, if you've been reading the charge sheet against 15-minute cities of late – mistakenly calling them "socialist", or even "Stalinist" attempts to

control the population by actively preventing citizens from straying more than 15 minutes from their homes.

This is of course just like having the doctor tell me smoking is good for me; but yes, if travelling by car, the 15-minute city might make the journey to leave the neighbourhood longer, as

the public realm shifts from car dominance to a more equal distribution of space. This is because we are creating more choice and freedom for all – not connecting freedom to owning a car.

In short, what we need from cities has changed since the early 1900s, and is changing everyday, as more people choose to

need to be convivial, safe, and human, if cities are to respond well to the changes we are asking of them; but they, we as urban planners, and especially politicians, also better believe that people have self-interest and when told they're losing out, by whatever forces, the innate reaction is fight.

Responding to this self-interest, we need to make sure that the measures we propose to deliver a public good from the public realm are an absolute *ball*. Measures need to be rooted in place, responding to local issues and the local population, and they need to give people choice, and those choices better be compelling.

To get us there, the theory of Hedonistic Urbanism is making what is good for the planet, good for society, and good for cities, the most enjoyable, the most fun, and the most self-indulgent option so people queue up for it. This is how we need shape cities and conceive ideas of change.

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**CHRISTOPHER MARTIN**

Christopher is an influential urban designer and planner working all over the globe to help communities improve their public spaces; as well as supporting cities and governments to develop strategy, change policies, and make great places possible. He is co-founder and director of Urban Strategy at Urban Movement; a trustee of the UK charity for everyday walking – Living Streets; vice chair of the UK Urban Design Group; and is a member of the United Nations Planning and Climate Action Group.

[urbanmovement.co.uk](http://urbanmovement.co.uk) @ChrisCities