

THE ROAD TO RENEWAL



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TAMING THE URBAN MOTORWAY

We must reclaim London's Inner Ring Road and make new pedestrian places, argues Farrells partner John Letherland

The pattern of new urban growth in London: 'Backlands' to 'Frontlands'

London is growing, possibly by another million people by 2031, and it must continue to evolve to sustain itself as a world-class city. To avoid continued sprawl at its edges, London's growth is of necessity primarily focused on the transformation and intensification of the post-industrial 'suburbs' that once inhabited the perimeter of the city centre. Recent regeneration plans for historic districts such as Paddington, Kings Cross and Nine Elms exemplify this pattern of renewal. These inner London districts are growing in importance as vibrant places to live, work and play and we now consider them integral parts of the city centre.

Outgrowing the ring road: it's the CENTRE not the EDGE

As London's centre continues to transform and grow through this process, however, we are once again wrestling with the conflicts between people and the motor vehicle. London's Inner Ring Road, a route that once delineated the outer edge of London's core, and was therefore appropriate to move traffic in large numbers, is gradually being absorbed into London's redefined and expanding city centre. This same road forms the outer edge of the Congestion Charging Zone, which increases the already heavy traffic load.

Many of London's recent regeneration initiatives sit astride this urban motorway and will bring vast numbers of people who will live and work alongside it. Yet keeping a free flow of traffic remains top priority, and we have yet to reconcile our need to create more of 'liveable' London with the desire to keep pushing increasing

numbers of vehicles through it.

Thus our urbanity remains adulterated by gyratories, one-way systems and dangerous contra-flow cycle lanes. We are struggling to reconcile the traffic flow with the need to create 'places' out of our post-industrial landscape.

Traffic in Towns: Revisiting Buchanan

Attempting to live with the motor vehicle is something we have been wrestling with for years. Colin Buchanan's pioneering work commissioned by Macmillan's post-war government was a thoughtful attempt to improve the road network and relieve congestion, taking advantage of the rebuilding of our bomb-damaged cities in the aftermath of World War 2.

Buchanan emphasised the widely-held expectation that 'progress' would see an increasing dependency on the private car. His prediction that 40m vehicles would be registered by 2010 (or 1.3 vehicles per household) proved surprisingly accurate – in September 2012, 37.7m vehicles were registered, of which 28.8m are private cars (or 1.3 vehicles per household).

The legacy: London's 'lost' town centres

In the process of accommodating growth, the Inner Ring Road destroyed town centres at Paddington, St Pancras, Vauxhall, Spitalfields and Elephant and Castle. Flyovers, underpasses and gyratories sliced through communities, isolating people from their local high street or park, from neighbours, friends and jobs.

We now consider the Inner Ring Road to be an inhospitable urban motorway. Indeed, the present-day

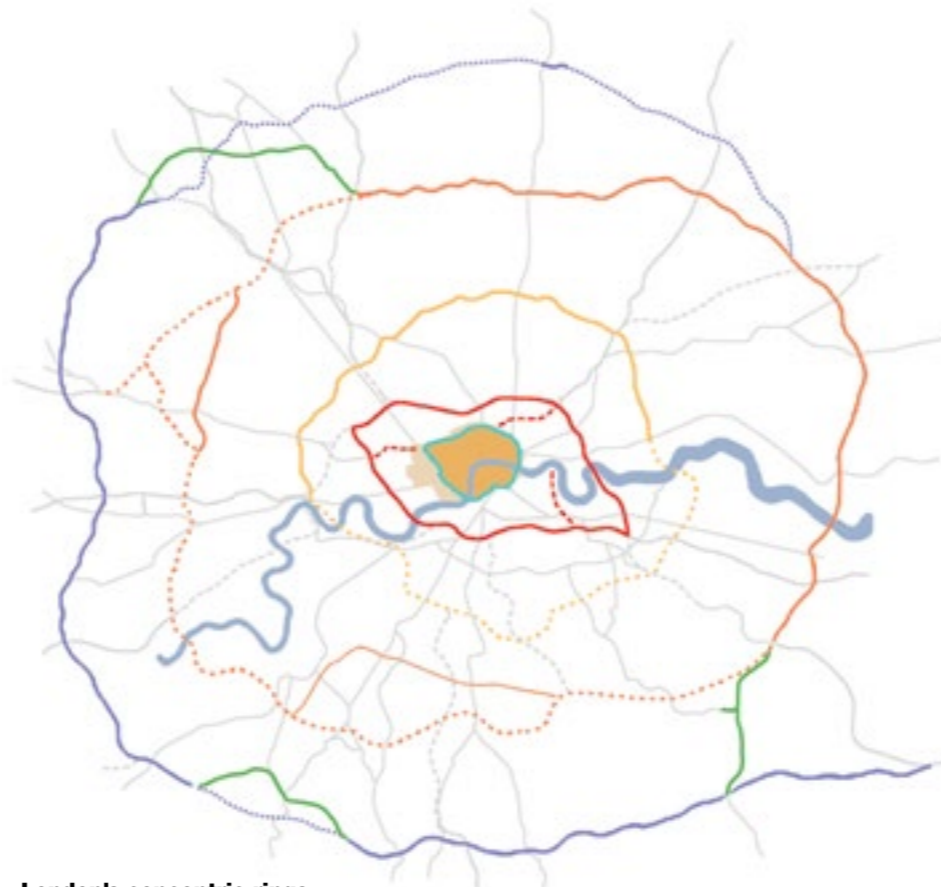
'It is impossible to spend any time on the study of the future of traffic in towns without at once being appalled by the magnitude of the emergency that is coming upon us. We are nourishing at immense cost a monster of great potential destructiveness, and yet we love him dearly. To refuse to accept the challenge it presents would be an act of defeatism.'

Professor Sir Colin Buchanan, *Traffic in Towns*, 1963

road map of London describes it is a combination of the A5, A202, A302, A3024, A3, A201, A100, A1202 and A501. Perfectly valid and perfectly place-less... Yet the names of the streets which constitute the ring road are far more familiar, romantic even, as you find yourself on a real-life Monopoly board – Marylebone Road, Edgware Road, Park Lane, the Angel Islington, Pentonville Road and Euston Road.

'The result...has often been a disjointed system where oases of urbanity, constituted by pedestrian-friendly local streets, are marooned in a desert of car-oriented distributor roads. It has also meant that there is no place for traditional street types such as arterial streets or boulevards, which were once considered dysfunctional, but which now are considered to be potentially useful types catering for a variety of transport modes and a mix of urban functions...In doing so, this was in keeping with the Modernist aversion for the traditional corridor street, which Le Corbusier had famously determined to kill off.'

Dr Stephen Marshall, *Building On Buchanan: Evolving Road Hierarchy For Today's Streets – Oriented Design Agenda*, 2004



London's concentric rings

- Ringway 4 built as planned (M25)
- ... Ringway 4 planned but not built
- Ringway 3 built as planned (M25)
- ... Ringway 3 planned but not built
- Ringway 3 alternative route
- M25 linking sections
- Ringway 2 (North Circular)
- ... Ringway 2 (South Circular)
- Ringway 1 planned but not built
- Ringway 1 built as planned
- Inner ring road
- Other main roads

Celebrating the dysfunctional: specialism vs. complexity

Buchanan's work led our transport engineers inexorably toward a notion of hierarchy and specialisation in our street network which still pervades transport engineering; our streets became regarded as part of a 'system' in which some became 'traffic distributors' whereby their urban function was removed, whilst others were designated as streets within an environmental area and through traffic was inhibited.

Time for re-appraisal

With the Mayor's Roads Task Force due to publish its findings this spring, the time is ripe for a reappraisal of the Inner Ring Road and how it might serve the needs of London today. Perhaps it is more about changing our attitude and preconceptions? Evolution not revolution is what is required, to ensure that celebrated and historic parts of London are civilised once again without the need for radical plans or *grands projets*. How might we tame London's urban motorway and what can we learn from elsewhere? It seems ironic that the Champs Elysee in Paris and the Diagonal in Barcelona can cope with twice the traffic volume of London's Inner Ring Road and yet can still be highly valued as people places.

Changing perceptions of the urban motorway: London's best connected street...?

In his 2003 study of the Marylebone-Euston Road – a component part of the Inner Ring Road – Sir Terry Farrell argued that, far from being an urban motorway serving only through traffic, the Marylebone-Euston Road is London's best connected street with a rich and varied history. More a manifesto for change than a design proposal, this study set out to change perceptions that the Inner Ring Road is nothing more than a through route, but rather a place where people live, work and play, with many residents and businesses, shops, bars, restaurants, rail and tube stations, listed buildings, parish churches, hotels, universities, hospitals and tourist attractions.

Evolution not revolution: pragmatism is London's way

London today has many different layers of human activity – cultural, political, economic and social – both shaping it

and interacting with the 'fixed parts' of its infrastructure. With this level of complexity, it is not surprising that change happens in small, sometimes uneven and pragmatic steps rather than as a result of grand planning.

Today, after decades that favoured devastating change with little sensitivity for context or history, there has been a shift toward a more concerned urbanism, one that is not dominated by grand projects but one that takes what is there and adapts, working with the grain of the place.

This is London's way; our indispensable Circle Line was the sum of pragmatic responses to the location of our rail stations, rather than a grand plan. Even the inner ring road is not one big plan, but a collection of very different roads that was gathered together in a very English way.

Change is already happening: working examples in more enlightened times

We are more enlightened now; at Kensington High Street, Daniel Moylan has shown what can be achieved when place-making and plain old-fashioned common-sense is applied to a major road and the dominance of motorist over pedestrian is re-balanced; it looks like a street again.

Our own work at Euston Circus has the same simple ambition; make it function like a piece of city again instead of an urban motorway. Streets will become two-way again, guardrails and island 'refuges' are being removed, the existing 15 staggered crossings will be replaced by 4 straightened pedestrian crossings, signage will be decluttered and unnecessary traffic paraphernalia will be removed, more trees will be planted and street lighting will replace motorway floodlighting.

Perhaps most surprising is that this is being achieved without inhibiting traffic; in fact it will improve the time it takes for buses to cross the junction which has meant funding from TfL. That's what can be achieved when urban designers and transport engineers work together instead of in isolation.

Summary and conclusion

The lesson is that it is not an issue of traffic volume but of traffic speed and vehicle dominance. If we are to grow and cherish our public realm, then the pedestrian has to be king.

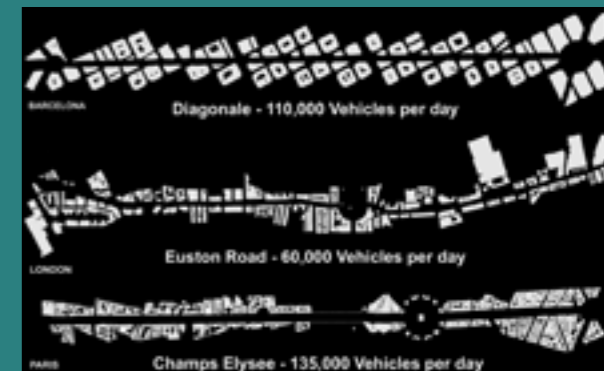
LONDON'S 'NEW' PLACES



Abercrombie Plan, 1943



In north London mainline stations sit on the outside edge of the inner ring. In south London they push up to and over the Thames



Barcelona and Paris manage to make their major streets pedestrian-friendly - why can't London?



- 18th Century built form
- Current built form
- Lost and endangered town centres

CASE STUDIES



Top: new pedestrian links at Hyde Park Corner.
Above left: former underpasses at Marble Arch.
Above right: new pedestrian surface routes

HYDE PARK/PARK LANE/MARBLE ARCH PUTTING PEDESTRIANS ON TOP

During the 1960s, because of the extra traffic volume generated by increased car ownership (as posited by the Buchanan Report), the view was that either new wider roads had to be built, or radical re-prioritisation and ‘surgery’ carried out on existing roads and junctions. Roundabouts, vehicle over- and underpasses were constructed and even straight sections of roads were widened and upgraded. All this happened opportunistically and intermittently in those locations where land might be assembled and a scheme implemented, not as an integrated, city-wide system intended to produce consistent traffic flow.

Marble Arch and Hyde Park became giant roundabouts with continuously flowing traffic and no stops at junctions, as did Hammersmith, Aldgate, Holloway and Elephant & Castle. Park Lane was widened to four lanes by taking land from Hyde Park and adding a northbound carriageway. The outcome was dire. The need to keep traffic flowing continuously in order to cope with a theoretical increase in volume meant that there could be no pedestrian crossings or traffic lights. The indiscriminate and sweeping response was to build pedestrian underpasses, accessed by ramps and stairs, and erect continuous railings along roads and around roundabouts to prevent ‘jaywalking’.

Underpasses were dark and dangerous, intensely confusing for wayfinding and orientation and take the pedestrian on a much longer journey. Thankfully they have been eliminated and replaced with surface-level pedestrian crossings. Re-use of the abandoned underpass spaces for art galleries, restaurants, wine bars, internet cafes, office storage and so on, now needs to be our focus.

John Letherland – Farrells

EDGWARE ROAD RESTORING THE PEDESTRIAN REALM

Over the last two decades Farrells have been taking a fresh look at the Marylebone-Euston Road, which is not only a major through-route in London, but also one of its best-connected streets. Simple research showed many times more people were walking along and across this street than were driving along it. Farrells suggested a fresh look be taken at the balance of space and priorities along this important civic street.

Working incrementally, and in co-operation with relevant stakeholders, Farrells have been able to suggest many areas where small changes to the public realm can achieve big effects. At Paddington Green, a new surface crossing of the Westway has just been completed, re-connecting streets severed by the Westway in the 1960’s.

At the Edgware Road/Marylebone Road junction, Sir Terry Farrell was instrumental in re-opening surface crossings to continue pedestrians’ natural patterns of movement up and down the Edgware Road. This has seen some of the economic activity south of the junction and flyover extend into this area of Edgware Road, and has produced a much clearer, legible place for pedestrians to move around. Work is on-going with Westminster City Council to reclaim and inhabit the spaces below the flyover, to further reconnect this road as a place in London.

Neil Bennett – Farrells



A new pedestrian reality for Edgware Road is being created



Above: creating a new high street at King's Cross.
Left: King's Cross in Victorian times

KING'S CROSS/ST PANCRAS NOT A VEHICLE-DOMINATED ROUTE, BUT A NEW HIGH STREET

At King's Cross/St Pancras there is an opportunity to form an important new pedestrian-friendly ‘High Street’ at the heart of Camden’s new and emerging town centre.

Contrary to the conventional perception of the Euston Road as a route dominated by the motor vehicle, the Euston Road at Kings Cross/St Pancras should be a memorable, striking new urban place, which engages all who visit, attracts pedestrians and creates somewhere to linger.

A coordinated plan could deliver rationalised carriageway widths to make crossing the road easier, wider pavements (particularly on the sunnier north side, and a central meridian for pedestrians and cyclists – achieving the ‘boulevardisation’ of the Euston Road.

A coordinated landscape plan would encompass new pedestrian crossings at grade, a new station entrance and concourse on the south side and bigger, wider, brighter underpass accessing the new Crossrail 2 Station.

A new welcoming front door to international travellers would lead to improved north-south connectivity for pedestrians as well as better east-west links ‘one street back’ from Euston Road, giving easier access to local green spaces and squares and encouraging continuous active frontages along the south side of the Euston Road.

Duncan Whatmore – Farrells

REGENT'S PLACE/ EUSTON CIRCUS SCULPTURAL ENTITY AND URBAN EVENT

The masterplan for Regent's Place seeks to change perceptions that the road is nothing more than a through route, but rather a place where people live, work and play, with many residents, workplaces, restaurants, listed buildings, universities, tourist attractions and transport links to Europe and the world.

Regent's Place is at the meeting point of four quite different city settings: 1960s estate; lively shops and restaurants; an urban space containing listed buildings; and the urban highway of the Euston Road. The big masterplan move is the creation of a new street to create a new east-west route forming a pedestrian link between Regent's Park and Drummond Street, one block north of the Euston Road protected from traffic noise and pollution.

As a critical component of the Euston-Marylebone Road, the revitalisation of the Euston Circus underpass will transform the main front door to Regent's Place for pedestrians through significant improvements to the public realm, and improvements to connectivity between Regent's Place and Warren Street station.

Motorists and pedestrians should benefit from the new design of Euston Circus; an opportunity to create a memorable and striking new place which engages all those who pass through it. Contrary to the conventional design perception of a major road junction, Euston Circus should be a strongly sculptural entity and an urban event that can keep traffic moving and be enjoyed by pedestrians.

Duncan Whatmore – Farrells



Top: Farrells' proposal for Euston Circus, now being implemented.
Left: existing junction.
Above: Regent's Place

VAUXHALL CROSS PEOPLE MAKE PLACES

Since designing the MI6 Headquarters building at Vauxhall Cross, Farrells have been intrigued by the area. Strategically located on the south side of Vauxhall Bridge and therefore at the heart of the emerging proposals for the transformation of the Vauxhall/Nine Elms/Battersea regeneration area, Vauxhall Cross is one of London's most significant centres for renewal. The area has been shaped by the way roads and rail have carved up this important part of London. The challenge now is to address and resolve the issues and obstacles that have led to the loss of place here.

The first step to establish the 'Place' is to develop an accessible and legible environment that overcomes existing physical barriers. At its heart, Farrells plan proposes a High Street, shared between vehicles and pedestrians, linking the Albert Embankment to the north with the newly proposed linear park at the heart of the emerging proposal for Nine Elms.

The emergence of Vauxhall as a town centre will redress the imbalance between the pedestrian and the motorist and the needs of pedestrians and cyclists will be given much higher priority in the design of the public realm. Farrells set out a vision for how Vauxhall could develop and evolve, and a framework in which local landowners and stakeholders can contribute their part to a successful new town centre and therefore a sustainable future for the area. This vision has now been adopted within the Supplementary Planning Document for the area.

Rebecca Holmes – Farrells



Above: A new Vauxhall town centre.
Left: Proposals for Vauxhall, Nine Elms and Battersea



The new Braham Street Park and Aldgate plan

ALDGATE DEMISE OF THE GYRATORY

Public realm improvements were made at Aldgate as a result of a development scheme by Tishman Speyer with Transport for London, Tower Hamlets Council, Design for London and the London Development Agency. Works started in 2008 with the removal of the Aldgate East gyratory and the conversion of Whitechapel High Street to two-way working.

A link between Whitechapel High Street and Lemn Street was created which broadly aligned with the former Colchester Street. Subways were removed and new pedestrian crossings were installed at the junction of Mansell Street. The greatest improvement was the removal of the western section of Braham Street and its conversion into a park in 2010.

The City of London is also developing a schedule for removing the gyratory system to the west.

Vaughn Sutton, Alex Gardner – Arup

ELEPHANT AND CASTLE TAMING THE ELEPHANT

In the challenge to balance London's growth and ease of movement and quality of life for the local community, Elephant and Castle is the poster child.

Once nicknamed the 'Piccadilly of South London', with a vibrant maze of streets, shops and homes, WW2 bombs provided a clean sheet to be fashioned into the '60s modernity that has defined The Elephant ever since. Fifty years on, the area is undergoing a second transformation with over £1bn's worth of regeneration transforming the district, bringing 5000 jobs, 4000 homes, and retail.

A critical link in London's road hierarchy, the area is also a bustling Zone 1 transport interchange. Every year 44.5 million people board or alight buses at The Elephant – making it busier than Charing Cross, Euston, Paddington, and King's Cross.

Its busy roads also illustrate the dramatic increase in cycling, with shoals of cyclists daily taking their chance at London's biggest accident blackspot. How we balance growth and the demands on the area, with the strong belief that we have a 'once in a generation chance' to right the current wrongs, is the subject of intense study and discussion across the public and private sector alike.

The shared vision is the vital importance of shaping a place where people, not cars, have status.

Patricia Brown – Central



Cyclists take their chances, while pedestrians struggle through at the Elephant