

**Main paragraphs from the evidence
given to the Public Inquiry in 1972
on the York Inner Ring Road
by Geoff Beacon**

SECTION 1.

Introduction and current strategy

1.0

In the discussion of these proposals for increasing York's internal Road Capacity, much has been said about the expected increase in the demands on the road system. There has even been some discussion of the possibility of suppressing some of this demand for certain categories of road user, but little has been said to either justify satisfying those demands or to justify suppressing them. My purpose in coming here is to point this out and to indicate why I think there may be a strong case for drastic traffic suppression in York. In this section I shall consider what I believe to be the fundamental mistake in the thinking behind this scheme.

1.1

The City Engineer in his evidence stated his position as follows: "In 1967 we were told by the Ministry of transport that the future growth of licensed vehicles was 2.77 times, or nearly three times, the number of vehicles licensed in 1965."(Para.3.2)

"People purchasing these cars will want to use them to their best advantage and a wholesale banning of their use within the whole of an urban area is not being contemplated in any city of similar size to York."

"It is therefore submitted that the only measures likely to have any real chance of successfully solving York's traffic problem must include an improved highway network"

1.2

One may perhaps paraphrase this point of view (1.2/1) as follows: "Since there is a demand by a large section of the public for mass motor car transport and we can infer a larger future demand from current car usage trends, we must satisfy that demand both now and in the future." This concept of planning by extrapolating the trends of what groups of people are now doing without necessarily attempting to understand why they do it is a very barren one. It is exactly this concept of planning which for some time was popular in architecture but in this field it is now being discredited. (1.2/2)

1.3

One immediate criticism that can be made of this view is that it fails to distinguish between technical means (in this context the different forms of transport available) and the human values (Like mobility, quietness, visual beauty and community spirit) which should be the aims of the planning process. This shows that this

method gives no clear way for the public to express itself about the aims to which planning should be directed. Yet, in so far as it allows any public expression at all, it only encourages an expression which is ill-formed in the highly technical problem of choosing the means to the ends.

1.4

From a knowledge of the increase in car sales or a knowledge of the increase in the traffic flow along particular roads how can the planner possibly deduce the qualities the public will want to find in the City of York in forty years time? Can you imagine a member of the public in York saying to himself " I want York to have the qualities of a town using a mass motor-car transport in 2020. so I'll buy a car to increase the car ownership level and traffic counts as my method of influencing the planning process."?

1.5

Even if it were shown that a large section of the public were demanding mass motor car transport, as such, (1.5/1) (rather than demanding the benefits that they think will result), the planning process should give this demand consideration in the context of other public demands. Indeed consideration should also be given to those aspects of the environment which affect the level of happiness in society which are not the subject of public demand either because the public are not aware of the possibility of the planning process changing those aspects (1.5/2) or because they are unaware of the importance in shaping a happy society. (1.5/3).

1.6

In the planning of the proposed ring road I see the application of a few simple rules of thumb. These mostly come from the Road Research Laboratory where they have been derived from a thoroughly simplistic philosophy which tries to hide behind technical jargon and enormously complicated but trivial calculations (1.6/1) the real human values in planning.(1.6/2)

1.7

In trying to solve urban planning problems from such a narrow base and in giving their results overriding importance (1.7/1), the traffic engineers have stepped right outside their speciality by preventing the possibility of modifications to their approach on social, economic or moral grounds (1.7/2) and these are grounds on which they have not shown themselves to be competent (1.7/3). In trying to limit the future possible development of York, or any other town for that matter, to one in which every family has two cars, with all it's implications they are preventing a whole range of possible developments (1.7/4) thus limiting not only personal freedom (1.7/5) but abrogating the prerogative of the politician (particularly at the local level) who is elected to balance the diverse needs of the community.

1.8

Quite apart from the methodological weaknesses of this traffic engineering approach there are now signs of what might be called empirical failure (1.8/1) in the public reaction to the consequences of similar previous plans(1.8/2). There are indications that more recent plans than the inner ring road, is a hangover from the early nineteen sixties, have taken account of this failure (1.8/3).

SECTION 2.

Analysis & Alternative strategy

2.0

The problem is that of designing an environment for people, who occupy a few square feet and need tens of square feet to move (2.0/1), which can also accommodate a large number of motor cars, which occupy hundreds of square feet (2.0/2) and need thousands of square feet to move(2.0/3). This has consequences for housing design (2.0/4) and for urban form (2.0/5). There are also other characteristics of motor cars which damage the local environment so that a large number of them in an urban setting has the effect of encouraging people to spread out spatially in trying to avoid the nuisances of heavy traffic (2.0/6).

2.1

The town designed and developed without the motor car has many advantages for people with a low vehicle use (2.1/1) and because they do not require large areas of transportation space (and there is less need to withdraw from traffic nuisance) they can be denser than towns developed for mass motor car transport for the same environmental standard.(2.1/1a). This brings, of itself, many advantages of accessibility of urban facilities (2.1/2). Further, these facilities can be grouped together in such a way to increase accessibility over that possible with the high vehicle use of mass motor car transport after the simple density effect has been discounted. (2.1/3)

2.2

Within a low vehicle usage town, whilst they are in a minority, individuals with a high vehicle use can benefit from the facilities generated by the low vehicle use structure (2.2/1) as long as they do not have to bear their external costs. Since, at present, this is the case, when the number of people with high vehicle use increases within such a town, the town is gradually reshaped to become one more suited to high vehicle use (2.2/2). This reshaping is a very painful process (2.2/3) and the public are not all happy with the end result (2.2/4) and a very high cost in resources will have been paid (2.2/5).

2.3

There is the following important point to note: the two types of town never exist simultaneously; one being created from the other by external costs of people with high vehicle use, who paracitically use the facilities of the pedestrian town whilst helping to destroy them (2.3/1). Thus the public is never presented with a choice between a low vehicle use town with all its facilities and a high vehicle use town with the facilities it can provide.

2.4

Those people that realise that this is happening are often seduced into high vehicle use (at the expense of others (2.4/1)) admitting their part in the decay of the low vehicle use town, not being able to resist the lure of their own private gain when

they see others grabbing their share. Those people who are in ignorance of the process simply do things which are to their own personal advantage without considering the wider consequences.

2.5

In York's case there is an enormous reduction in the quality of life in the inner residential areas (2.5/0) due to heavy traffic. A considerable proportion of high vehicle use comes from the higher social and income groups, many of whom live outside the city and commute to York in their cars, thus imposing enormous external costs (2.5/1). There is also a considerable number of people aspiring to achieve a cheaper version of this suburban dream (2.5/2). I often wonder whether these people, in particular, are aware of the burden they place on the low vehicle use groups. York suffers from the mentality which I really must sadly call that of the Poppleton parasite and the aspiring Poppleton Parasite.

2.6

If a true choice were given between high vehicle use and all the consequences of its urban form and low vehicle use and the consequences of its urban form some will choose one, others the other. (2.6/1). The difficulty of providing for both of these groups in one homogeneous structure leads me to suggest a policy of separate spatial development.

2.7

In York, this policy could be effected by designating certain areas as areas of low vehicle use. These areas would, at first, probably be some of the older residential areas, which were built for low vehicle use. At present vehicle ownership is fairly low in these areas, especially amongst the stable population (2.7/1). In these areas, vehicle use, particularly of the private motor car, would be severely restricted; the justification for this being the high external cost of vehicle use in these areas (2.2/3). In other areas, more suited to high vehicle use, the external costs being lower, there would be less need for restrictions.

2.8

In this situation, if the tendency were towards an increase in vehicle use as a whole (2.8/1), then we should try to accommodate this change by changing low use areas to high use areas as they come up for natural redevelopment (2.8/2). This would also have the advantage of preventing the premature decay of some of the environment and housing stock of York's older residential areas.

2.9

This leaves the problem of treating those facilities which are jointly used by high vehicle use and low vehicle use groups. In this case it probably best to resort to cost-benefit analysis techniques (which must be used with great caution (2.9/1) to identify those activities such as commuter motoring, whose external costs exceed their net private benefits (2.9/2). This could be done by physical restraints, such as parking restrictions, or by making the external costs into private ones by some form of pricing (2.9/3).

2.10

I would, however, like to emphasise that many of the facilities generated by the accessibility within York depend on many people travelling to them using public transport, bikes or foot and whatever cost benefit analysis indicates we should (probably) not let the dispersive effect of the motor destroy them (2.10/1).

SECTION 3.

Design Implications

3.0

The first implication of adopting the strategy put forward in section 2 is that the level of traffic in the inner areas of York will be drastically reduced; not just for the future compared with the predicted levels but probably even below present levels. This means that the extra road capacity specified by the City Engineer is, in fact, unnecessary.

3.1

However, the burden placed on the inner residential areas is at present intolerable, particularly on the route of the unofficial ring road. This must be considerably alleviated without, if possible, lowering intra-urban accessibility. (This means finding a way of routing the road traffic that makes less intensive use of space, so the space taken, particularly near the centre, is as little as possible. (See footnote 2.1/3 and RRL 284)

3.2

From studies by Professor Smeed (3.2/1) the best road system for achieving this would seem to be an outer ring road with radial roads which (for certain restricted classes of traffic) only connect via the outer ring. This would have the effect of dividing the city into sectors for the restricted traffic. (3.2/2).

3.3

Since York is such a small and compact town a routing system such as this, or a variation of it, would not place too great a strain on the urban motorists (3.3/1). Indeed, when looking from the top of York Minster (3.3/2), it is difficult to see how anyone could conceived of putting a large road so close to the centre of town as the proposed inner ring road when open countryside is so close.

3.4

Some possibilities for the design of low vehicle use areas are the following:-

- Speed ramps every twenty yards on side roads.
- Bus, taxis and accredited delivery vans given lane priority.
- Closed roads and play streets.
- Planning restrictions on parking and garaging.
- Parking charges with revenue providing for local facilities (3.4/1)
- Nursery, Infant & Junior schools in site area.

- Encouragement of rationalised delivery service.
- Bicycle ways
- New transport technology (3.4/2)

3.5

- Possibilities for the design of the joint facilities are:-
- Car parks on outer ring road with rapid bus or new technology transport (see 3.4/2) to centre.
- Restricted high cost parking in centre.
- Road tolls.

3.6

High vehicle use facilities such as suburban office blocks and hyper markets should possibly be developed near the outer ring road car parks to give facilities to the high vehicle use groups. Development would be cheaper here and possibly prevent the necessity of a large scale motor car orientated redevelopment of the centre of York with all its inconveniences, architectural problems, future shock and expense. (see 2.10/1).

SECTION 4

Summary

4.0

In the plans for this inner ring road, traffic engineers have, working from the narrow assumption that the accessibility available to all classes of vehicle is the most important consideration, have enforced a benefit on one group at the expense of others.

4.1

In the technical presentation of their one sided case, they have obscured the broad and political nature of their plans so that local politicians have not been in a position to make proper judgements.

4.2

Their plans will increase an already intolerable burden on the inner urban residential areas. Also their general approach is now showing signs of empirical failure.

4.3

The present proposals should be rejected so that the scope of the planning process can be broadened and the political implications clearly shown to local politicians.

4.4

Most probably this course of action would lead to a solution in which the pressure on the inner urban residential areas by routing traffic away from them and by

suppressing of traffic to the city centre.