

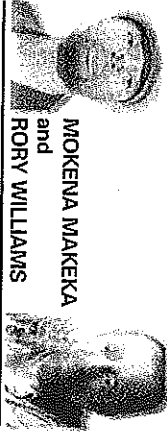
We need fewer roads, for cars and more streets for people

WHAT transport interventions would help achieve the city we want? This question was asked at a recent UCT seminar held by the African Centre for Cities, where there is ongoing debate about what an improved Cape Town might look like. The answer probably is not what the questioner was hoping to hear.

We tend to think of roads and public transport systems as conduits connecting people, goods and services. They allow relationships between places that are physically separated. The factory doesn't need to be close to its suppliers, or to the buyers of its products.

It's this ability of transport to create virtual connections across the city that allows activities to be spread around and influences the shape of the city. This leads to the question of whether a different transport system could encourage developers to locate their shops, offices and buildings where they have less of an impact on the city's infrastructure budget and on the spread of the city into farmland and environmentally sensitive areas. It is often assumed that an improved

MEN ABOUT TOWN



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mass transport system will encourage denser growth and multifunctional areas in Cape Town's CBD and along transport corridors.

There is little to show for the years of planning, design and negotiations over transformation, but let's say we do get the infrastructure and buses, a safer and more convenient train service, and taxi operators who thrive on being part of an integrated system. Will that change the priorities of people who decide where to locate a new building?

There are transport hubs that appear to be ripe for development. Phillippi railway station is the second-busiest station in the city, located in one of the densest residential areas, and yet there has been

no investment in the area beyond partially successful interventions in support of informal traders.

We can speculate that developers are scared away by crime and uncertainty over the adjacent Kosovo informal settlement, so consider Mowbray and Wynberg stations, which are in established areas and are important transfer hubs involving buses, trains and taxis. These too have been avoided by investors who could stimulate regeneration. It's hard to see how stations for the new integrated rapid transit system will attract investment when established stations have failed to do so, unless the planning process itself is overhauled.

Clearly transport influences investment, since the movement of goods and people is critical to urban life. But that's only part of the equation. Woodstock is experiencing renewed investment by the private sector, with no change in the transport system at all. What's happening in Woodstock requires business confidence that the area is not on a downward spiral. Business owners need to feel that

the physical environment in which they operate will attract employees and customers, and if this is to be achieved in a way that enhances the urban environment, the influential role of streets needs to be recognised.

They can divide communities, or they can actively draw people together. As long as traffic engineers see a road as bitumen, markings and kerbstones - a monofunctional space for moving vehicles - the quality and character of the urban realm will be diminished.

We need fewer roads, more streets. Spaces where revolutions and business deals are made, where culture is celebrated and the rich are comfortable rubbing shoulders with the poor. The width of street, setback of buildings, transition space from public to private - even tree canopies for shade and the design of benches can encourage people to interact. Community interaction already happens in township streets, where private space is at a premium, despite inappropriate design. Residential streets in other countries have been designed to encourage

activity, downplaying the role of cars. Commercial centres can also be treated this way and the Cape Town (is far ahead of Durban and Johannesburg in creating streets that are ripe for social integration. Long Street closed for the World Cup draw, providing space for restaurants and other venues to spill out into public space. The same happens for the annual ObzFest Observatory. Imagine such events taking place all over the city on a regular basis. It might feel like organised chaos, but where the city comes to life.

If we are guided by the goal of improving quality of life, we should be able to create attractive environments for investment, and to provide appropriate transport systems. There is no magic trick, no single transport project for creating a better city, but a multitude of small interventions that can encourage positive transformation. The key is leadership, not only in government, also in civil society.

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