



## Briefing note, March 2014

# Liveable Cities

## A transport perspective



Tram in Montpellier, courtesy Sir Peter Hall

There are many pressing urban challenges, particularly regarding the needs of transport and mobility. In order to promote liveable cities, these challenges require progressive policies. This note summarises the outputs from a high-level impact seminar organised by University College London (UCL) in collaboration with the Department for Transport (DfT), in March 2014. The seminar presented recent academic research on the topic and considered its relevance for current policy debates.

### Main conclusions from the discussion

- **Mobility characterises a city's identity** and should be a pleasurable and exciting experience for users, in particular for pedestrians.
- **Local governments** should have the **autonomy** and political **maturity** to transition towards liveable cities.
- **Strong, determined and visionary political leaders** and stakeholders are key to create liveable cities.
- **Partnerships** between neighbouring local authorities are important in developing and delivering effective visionary plans.
- Public **control over the land** facilitates efficient and sustainable planning policies.

### Key messages from the presentations

- Mobility and transport systems should be designed to be adaptable and attractive, and should aim at promoting health, well-being, safety and accessibility.
- Transport is key to facilitating major urban regeneration.
- Urban planning in the UK should learn from successful examples in neighbouring European countries.
- Strong political leaders, and planning departments in cities and city-region administrations, should be given the financial and legal means to establish liveable cities.
- **Evaluation tools**, including appraisal methodologies, need to be rethought and adapted to current requirements.
- Sustainable urban planning involves making a **collective decision**, both top-down and bottom-up, about how mobility and transport can improve **quality of life, equity, safety and security**.
- Establishing **master plans** and **collaborating with the private sector** is a very efficient and effective strategy.

University College London Centre for Transport Studies  
 Contact: Professor Peter Jones, [peter.jones@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:peter.jones@ucl.ac.uk) or  
 Clemence Cavoli, [clemence.cavoli.09@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:clemence.cavoli.09@ucl.ac.uk)

**EPSRC**

Engineering and Physical Sciences  
 Research Council

# Summary Presentations

## “Re-Visioning the Engineering of Cities for Global and Societal Wellbeing” Early findings from the EPSRC “Liveable Cities research programme” Professor Brian Collins, Chair of Engineering Policy, Faculty of Engineering Science, UCL

The challenge faced by analysts is how to map a spatially ill-defined and moving hot spot. This requires assessing the risky places and times for crime and disorder on a dynamic and highly transient transport system.

The purpose of transport systems in cities is to:

- Move people and goods
- Give people choices of mobility methods
- Support economic, social and cultural activity

Constraints and opportunities include:

- Environmental protection
- Health protection
- Congestion and overcrowding avoidance
- Economic effectiveness
- Growth
- Attractiveness
- Liveability

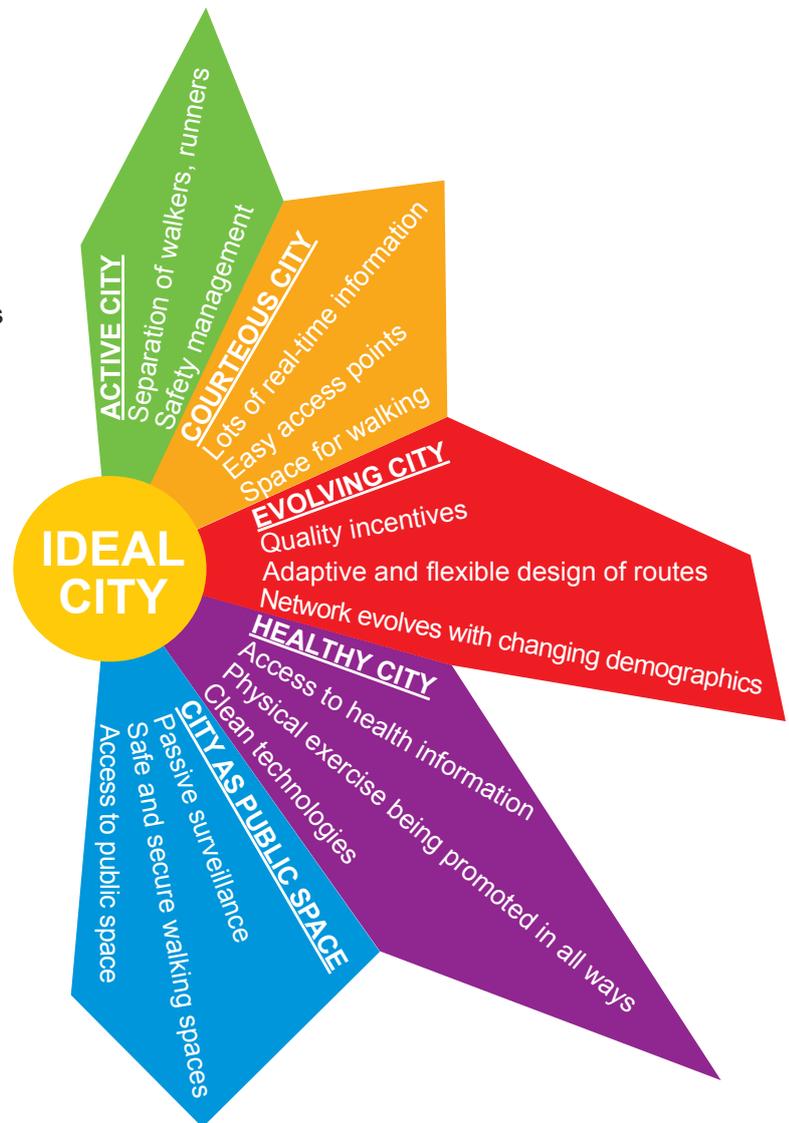
Whether the plan is to establish a bus, rail or pedestrian system, **a liveable city should be conceived in a holistic way**, and should include the following characteristics:

- Evolving
- Courteous
- Active
- Healthy
- A public space

Professor Collins highlighted that providing mobility for low-carbon liveable cities involves addressing the following questions:

- How to minimise the high carbon mobilities of people and objects – including food – without compromising people’s wellbeing?
- How to optimise low carbon mobilities and immobilities of people, information, ideas and objects – including local food – without compromising people’s wellbeing?
- How to optimise alternative socio-technical systems and social practices of (im)mobility that can:
  - challenge the lock-ins of the dominant mobility regimes, and
  - enhance people’s wellbeing

Social cohesion from the pedestrian system...



Key elements that need to be taken into account in establishing a 'liveable' city and pedestrian system

- How to balance all factors in a city’s transport governance, planning and financial regime such that decisions are made and progress achieved?
- How to understand where city externalities constrain outcomes?

### Key challenge questions:

- How can we learn from city transport legacy issues to improve on standard approaches?
- Can we monitor how liveability factors change over a period of time and how transport contributes?

## Summary Presentations

### “Good Cities, Better Lives: An urban planning perspective” By the late Professor Sir Peter Hall, UCL Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment

Professor Hall argues that since the late 1960s, we have progressively lost our ability to plan. We have demolished the regional planning structures that formed the base of the system, and have again left it to random private initiatives to make the master plans for the places in which we live.

The predictable result, just as half a century ago, is a near-meltdown of public policy. We are experiencing massive regional imbalance, whereby London and its surrounding region is detaching itself from the rest of the UK economy. We are building fewer new homes than in any peacetime year since the 1920s: just two in five of the new homes we need.

The irony is that while in the UK we have been steadily sinking, our neighbours have overtaken us. The brilliant new developments, visited by admiring tour groups of British planners, are now in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, France and Germany.

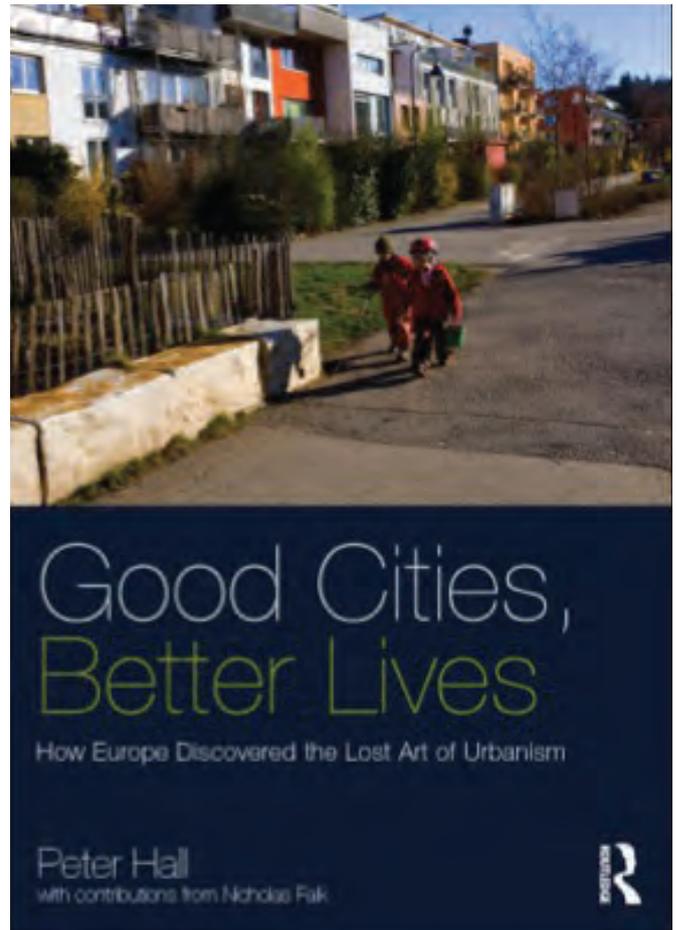
### Lessons

#### The ‘What to do?’ question

- Create sustainable neighbourhoods with homes, jobs, shops, schools and services within easy reach on foot or by bicycle, connected to the rest of the city and the region by good-quality public transport.
- Build high-quality transport systems, in advance of development, to ensure that new housing areas are connected to jobs, shops, schools and services
- Conserve resources and recycle waste.
- Create places where people want to live and where they feel good about living.

#### The ‘How to?’ question

- Strong city planning departments (or city agencies) with planning powers, to take a positive lead, through master plans as a framework for development or regeneration of specific areas.
- Cities working cooperatively (often through strong political leaders) with neighbouring local authorities, either formally or informally, for strategic planning and transport, across entire city-regions.
- Strong city-region administrations with independent financing, to build urban transport infrastructure unlocking new development and regeneration opportunities.



- Planners equipped with real competence and skills across all aspects of their profession.
- Willingness, or even eagerness, to engage with the private sector, or with citizen groups, in the detailed development process - but from a position of strength through their control of the master planning process.
- Free the cities from the dead hand of central government, fundamentally decentralize the structure of government so that it more closely resembles that in every other democratic country – including our European neighbours.

### What can we learn?

- Free the cities.
- Stimulate city leaders to grow city-regions
- Invest adequately in urban transport and urban quality.
- Work to achieve a broader policy framework that will allow and encourage these policies to happen.

# Summary of the discussion

## Cities' charm:

- Mobility represents an important part of a **city's identity**. Transport and mobility should be a **pleasurable experience** and should not be reduced to just a means of moving.
- **Design** is very important and people should be excited about using transport infrastructures.
- Evidence suggests that for, a city to be liveable, key services should be at a **walking distance** from people's homes.

## Progressive governance:

- **The local governance structure** needs to be mature enough to facilitate the transition towards sustainable cities.
- The government needs to **give 'permission'** to local authorities to do more for their mobility systems.

## Leading the way:

- There is a need for **strong political skills and leaders**.
- Strong **determined cities** with **political willingness** become liveable more easily.
- Creating a **clear vision** in the political dimension is a key start to establishing a sustainable urban transport system.

## Increased collaboration:

- Getting all the relevant local authorities together to establish a **joint transport project** is key, as well as establishing broader partnerships.

## Administrative issues:

- Model liveable cities often **own a lot of land** whereas the less advanced cities have sold a lot of it to developers.
- Resources for sustainable urban planning are linked to **control over the land** (e.g. to recapture added land value to leverage project investments).
- **Local Enterprise Partnerships** currently lack funding and statutory powers to foster a significant change towards future sustainable cities.

## Rethinking evaluation:

- Current **evaluation tools** for projects, such as cost-benefit analysis, are incomplete and biased and inhibit the establishment of liveable cities.
- There is a need for a better suited **appraisal methodology**.

## Improved planning

- Sustainable urban planning requires making a **collective decision** that local government is willing to invest in **public transport and spaces**.
- Planning policies have to be realistic, within the political constraints, but have to satisfy the core objectives: **quality of life, equity, safety and security**.
- Good planning requires a combination of **top-down brave and charismatic leadership and bottom-up processes** that encourage people to get involved and do things (e.g. crowd sourcing),
- Sustainable **master plans** are very important to create liveable cities,
- **Combining private sector participation and guiding master planning** is proving effective.

## Background

This seminar is part of a programme of activities funded through an EPSRC 'Impact Acceleration Award'. The initiative aims to create bridges between senior researchers, key policy makers and practitioners working in transport to ensure that significant research outputs are rapidly absorbed into policy making and practice, and have practical impact.

This seminar was an opportunity for key policy makers to hear about recent academics' findings and to discuss with the researchers concerned their relevance to policy making and practice.

The following institutions were represented:

- Department for Transport
- HM Treasury
- Department of Health
- Office for Low Emission Vehicles
- Department for Business, Innovation & Skills
- Transport Committee –UK Parliament
- Transport Systems Catapult
- Greater London Authority
- Transport for London
- Thames Valley Berkshire LEP
- Living Streets
- Campaign for Better Transport
- URBED (Urbanism, Environment and Design)
- Transport Research Laboratory – TRL
- Volterra Consultants
- Royal Town Planning Institution
- Ekosgen Consultants
- UCL

## References

Hall, P., 2013. "Good cities, better lives: how Europe discovered the lost art of urbanism". Routledge.

Liveable Cities's website: <http://liveablecities.org.uk/>