

a manner accessible to everyone. Richard Harris' *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy* is a longer book with more depth and detail. UK, Australian or US folks might want to read the Harris and Larkham's edited book, *Changing Suburbs: Foundations, Form and Function*, to explore some of the same themes in an international and interdisciplinary context.

*Creeping Conformity* ends rather abruptly with the full-fledged corporate suburb and leaves us with the impression that the post-1960 suburbs are, in fact, as uniform as conventional wisdom would have it. There is much more to tell about sprawl, rural residential sub-divisions, New Urbanism, gated communities and our struggles with green belts and amalgamation, with rhetoric and with policies. I expect a sequel. But there is still more to tell about the early suburbs. What happened to their diversity? Where did the workers and self-builders eventually go? Did the immigrant families that froze through winters in tarp-covered basements sell out to developer barons to buy their dream houses with two-car garages? Did highways and urban renewal push them out? Were the neighbourhood transitions incremental or did they invoke community-empowering conflicts? Did the better suburbs filter to lower-income households as new suburbs pushed away the countryside? Did they hold their form? Did they gentrify? There may still be more history in Canada's early suburbs.

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## Still Stuck in Traffic: Coping with Peak-hour Traffic Congestion

ANTHONY DOWNS, 2004  
Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution  
455 pp. £13.25/US\$26.95  
ISBN 0 8157 1929 9 paperback

In 1962, Anthony Downs famously observed that modest increases in freeway capacity may fail to reduce the peak level of traffic congestion. Any initial increase in speeds due to greater capacity will result in some drivers switching to the freeway during the peak period—from alternate routes, from off-peak times or from other travel modes. That article in *Transport Quarterly*, entitled “The law of peak-hour expressway congestion”, was the basis for Downs' 1992 book *Stuck in Traffic*.

Downs' revised version of that book has arrived more than a decade later with seven new chapters and an additional 200 pages of material, including updated references to recent empirical literature. It is an encyclopedia of the traffic jam, listing dozens of causes of congestion both on freeways and surface streets, devoting ink to such arcane subjects as the differences between an accident, an incident and a disablement, and discussing the pros and cons of numerous policy responses to congestion.

As befitting a venerable Dean of American Traffic, who has testified before Congress on this topic, Downs employs an authoritatively blunt tone in describing how cities function, why they have traffic congestion and what sorts of policies are likely to be successful in making it better. His book is a *tour de force* but, as described below, rough spots sometimes make it a bumpy ride.

At the conceptual heart of the book are Downs' ‘four principles of traffic growth’. First is ‘triple convergence’, which is a restatement of his original law of congestion. The second is ‘dual swamping of growth’, in which attempts to reduce congestion by increasing road capacity are eventually thwarted by population and job growth—stimulated in part by that increased capacity. The third is ‘the imperviousness of growth to local policies’, caused by the fact that in the US municipal entities have jurisdiction over land use, but regional land markets exceed municipal boundaries, so that fragmented attempts to control growth through policy will simply shift it elsewhere. The fourth is the principle of ‘one thousand small cuts’, in which Downs argues that, since few policies have large influences on congestion by themselves, an approach combining multiple policies is the only hope of making a dent in congestion.

The main body of the book applies these principles, particularly triple convergence, in surveying numerous causes of traffic congestion and evaluating different policies that may mitigate it—including traffic management programmes, increasing road and transit capacity, road pricing (tolls) and land use policies such as densification, jobs–housing balance and transit-oriented development. At times, policies

are included despite the fact that they are primarily focused on other issues. For example, drunk driving reduction policies make the list—not because they reduce accidents, but because, in so doing, they reduce disruptions to traffic flows.

Downs is an engaging writer. The book's strengths inhere largely in his plausible and clear arguments which usually rely on easily understood back-of-the-envelope methods of analysis. These methods lead Downs to the conclusion that only peak hour road pricing and parking pricing are likely to have long-lasting effects on congestion reduction.

Downs' second major strength is his awareness of the pragmatic political and institutional factors that influence policy adoption. This leads him to conclude that road pricing and parking pricing will not be adopted on a wide scale, although in this revised edition, he notes that some promising experiments have been attempted. Downs argues convincingly that the political/cultural *status quo* tends to dominate meaningful change, while politically feasible policies do not have big effects and are hardly worth doing on an individual basis. Despite this somewhat bleak outlook, in the final chapter he gamely makes a series of policy recommendations.

Given the broad scope of the book, there are inevitably many omissions. For example, in the chapter on "reducing incident-caused congestion", Downs fails to consider the pedestrian and bicycle implications of road changes to make auto use safer, such as more and wider lanes and shoulders. The reviews of empirical work, although expanded from the previous edition, remain selective and incomplete and those knowledgeable with the literatures may take issue with the broad conclusions that Downs draws. The introductory chapters include a useful overview of the advantages and disadvantages of market-based and regulatory approaches to dealing with congestion. But in the chapters on land use policies, Downs focuses on new regulatory schemes to the neglect of market or deregulatory approaches. He also treats various land use policies as though they were discrete, but they are often intimately related and pursuing one often means contravening another. For example, lowering industrial floor–area ratios in order to get better jobs–housing balance decreases clustering to support transit and increases the urban footprint.

More broadly, three central critiques of the book can be made. First, when applying his principles of traffic growth to addressing whether various policies reduce 'peak hour traffic congestion', Downs is inconsistent. Sometimes reducing the duration of the peak counts as a reduction, but sometimes it seems

that it does not. Any capacity-increasing change should be subject to triple convergence, but Downs suggests that successful traffic management schemes would not be. It appears that Downs has numerous reasons for preferring various policies and that those criteria colour his ostensibly narrower analysis.

Secondly, Downs could spend more time carefully discussing the social costs and benefits of congestion and congestion-reduction efforts, and less time focusing on the difficulty of institutional and political change, trenchant and compelling as such observations may be to anyone who views congestion as an evil. The lack of a more systematic cost–benefit analysis means that much complexity of the urban system is ignored and congestion reduction programmes may be undesirable even when heeding the good advice in this book.

Thirdly, and most strikingly, Downs fails to address sufficiently the opportunity costs of congestion policies, despite a new chapter on the benefits of congestion. Such policies (such as building roads) use resources (such as land) that can be used to other productive or desirable ends. As a result, some traffic congestion at peak hours is in society's best interest and, in some plausible scenarios, allowing congestion to get worse increases social welfare. Instead, Downs avers that it is 'not feasible' to get rid of congestion. This is an important conceptual omission for any text treating transport and land use relationships, particularly a text used so frequently in graduate-level courses on transport and land use.

Finally, a few technical notes about the organisation of the book are apposite. A disappointing change from the previous edition is that the chapters evaluating various congestion-related policies are not explicitly categorised into demand- and supply-oriented strategies. The current chapter organisation is unclear, as some of the new chapters and sections appear to have been inserted willy-nilly. Also, the book would have benefited from some judicious copy-editing and reorganisation and could easily be 50 pages shorter. Anecdotal information, statistics and arguments are repeated almost verbatim from chapter to chapter. Lengthy digressions on the causes of accident reduction, transit policies and the sub-optimality of low-density development could be dropped. The new chapter on congestion and congestion-reduction efforts in the international context would have been better folded into the rest of the book in the appropriate places.

*Still Stuck in Traffic* remains essential reading for the master's-level student of transport and for practising transport planners, providing a very good overview of the urban system in which traffic

congestion arises, as well as the clearest and most comprehensive evaluation of policy efforts to make road use more efficient.

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### **Private Views: Artists Working Today**

Judith Palmer (Ed.), 2004

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It may not be a surprise to learn that 2004 was the 'Year of the Artist'. With Robert Hughes' return to the small screen in his provocative *The New Shock of the New*, a warehouse fire igniting the debate over what was worthwhile modern art, a thought-provoking Turner Prize shortlist where a Langlands and Bell video of an Afghan warlord could not be shown for legal reasons and the storm over Gupreet Kaur Bhatti's play *Behzti* being just a few of the arts-related events to hit the headlines, 2004 heralded an unsettled period for the art of today. The actual 'Year of the Artist', however, is sadly, a less well-publicised venture co-ordinated by Arts2000 which aims to promote the individual artist, celebrate creativity and show the diverse ways and places in which artists work. During the year, £5million was spent directly on artists' projects and *Private Views: Artists Working Today* was commissioned to 'build upon the achievements' of that year. Thankfully, the editor—the writer and broadcaster Judith Palmer—refrains from presenting a celebratory summary of the highlights and instead uses the opportunity to provide a much more original insight into the experience of being an artist in contemporary Britain.

Although echoing the aims of the 'Year of the Artist', Palmer places greater emphasis on the difficult and sensitive issues of how artists cope with solitude, the media and market pressures, exposing a private creation to public scrutiny, the loss of works and the presence of nagging self-doubt. There is an overarching aim to debunk the notion that being an artist is not a 'proper job'. This approach places the book in a strong position in a field that has seen Sandy Nairn's *Art Now: Interviews with Modern Artists* published early in 2004 and looks forward to Phaidon's forthcoming *PressPLAY: The Complete Phaidon Interviews with Contemporary Artists, 1995–2005*. The artists in Nairn's text read like a 'Who's Who'

of contemporary British art with Howard Hodgkin, Antony Gormley and Rachael Whiteread being amongst those who make contributions. Nairn introduces the book (to be one of a series) with an overview of contemporary art and, although the interviews touch on the creative process and issues surrounding it, the overall feel is one of a survey. What can be expected from Phaidon remains to be seen, but it is being promoted as bringing together interviews with the world's most significant artists to make an accessible survey of contemporary art. Palmer's text differs significantly. Her witty introduction makes it clear from the outset that the book does not provide an explanation of the artists' work. Furthermore, 'art' is not taken to be a term restricted to the realm of the visual arts; instead, writers, poets, playwrights, musicians, composers and novelists are placed alongside more visual media ranging from printmaking and painting to interdisciplinary work. By focusing on 'Artists Working Today', rather than those who may be pigeonholed as specifically 'contemporary', the ages of contributors range from those in their twenties to their eighties. This attitude rightly emphasises the genuine contribution experienced and established artists make to the artworld and subtly highlights the media's—and in some places the market's—neophilia and focus on the fashionable. Having said that, at the other end of the scale, it would have been useful to read more about the experiences of more 'up-and-coming' artists, as those included are well recognised within their respective fields. The younger, yet-to-be-recognised voice perhaps deserved to be heard.

The book has two main sections: Essays and Interviews. In contrast to the normal academic essays, however, those here are creative explorations by some of the contributors into the reality of life as an artist. Poet Selima Hill describes the tension between the private creative process and the revelation of the end-result to the public; her notebooks are a private room and when her work is published it is "like having people rushing in coming to find out where I was hiding". Moreover, in the headings throughout her narrative, she places herself in everyday situations—'Poetess in the Day Room', 'Poetess in the Kitchen Again'—which reiterates another theme to flow through both sections, that of balancing the creative process with everyday life, families and in some cases, part-time or full-time employment. Meanwhile, artist Louise K. Wilson gives a valuable insight into the experience of doing residencies by comparing her work with that of two other artists who kept diaries whilst working on projects and also touches upon the competitiveness and yet