Street Design and Streetscape

Definitions

A street is a multi-functional space, providing enclosure and activity as well as movement. Streetscape refers to the appearance or view of a street.

Context and Policies

Streets are the most common feature of towns and cities. A clear distinction can be drawn between streets and roads. Roads are essentially highways whose main function is accommodating the movement of motor traffic. Streets are multi-functional spaces, providing enclosure and activity as well as movement. Their main functions are:

- circulation, for vehicles and pedestrians;
- access to buildings, and the provision of light and ventilation;
- routes for utilities;
- storage spaces, especially for vehicles;
- public spaces for human interaction and sociability

Most streets perform all of these functions, and often the balance between them will vary along the length of the street. Ideally, all these functions can successfully coexist, but historically, the design of streets has reinforced the dominance of vehicle movement to the disadvantage of all other uses. The other main function of streets is to provide conduits for utilities, above and below ground (drainage, water, gas, electricity and telecommunications).

Issues

The quality of streets is often compromised by the rigid application of highway engineering solutions. This is especially true in developing countries where hardly any guidelines or manuals exist to cater for multi-function street design. The multi-function guidelines that are being developed for many North American and European cities are, for the most part, irrelevant for developing country city situations. There is an urgent need to develop guidelines and associated legislation that is appropriate for the range of activities that co-exist in African, Asian and Latin American cities. This is especially important for accommodating street traders.

Actions

The UK Department of Transport Note "Traffic Management and Streetscape" (see Key Documents, below) provides an evaluation checklist to examine, record and evaluate the streetscape attributes of traffic management schemes. The evaluation checklist provides a tool to assist designers in scheme planning and with 'before and after' evaluation studies.

Photo credits: A multi-function street in Pune (India)

Resources

Documents

- **Arterial Streets Towards Sustainability**, Stephen Marshall and Ian Plowright, University of Westminster (UK)
- **Civilised Streets**, 2008, Stuart Reid, CABE (UK)
- **Complete Streets Best Practices**, 2005, Sacramento Transportation & Air Quality Collaborative (USA)
- **Manual for Streets**, 2007, Department for Transport (UK)
- **Paved with gold: The real value of good street design**, 2007, Colin Buchanan, CABE (UK)
- **Paving the way: how we achieve clean safe, and attractive streets**, 2002, David Taylor, David Orr, Robert Thorne and Jaimie Ferguson, CABE (UK)
- **Streetscape Design Guidelines**, 2007, City of Tshwane (South Africa)
- **Traffic Management and Streetscape**, 2008, Department for Transport (UK)

Media

- **People Friendly Design in London**, 2009, Alice Shay, StreetFilms.org (USA)
- **Rethinking Streets**, 2009, Elizabeth Press, StreetFilms.org (USA)
- **The Street Life of Havana**, 2008, Nick Whitaker, StreetFilms.org (USA)

Presentations

- **Complete Streets Workshop**, 2008, Kevin Tilbury, Gresham, Smith and Partners (USA)
- **Introduction to Complete Streets**, 2009, National Complete Streets Coalition, (USA)

Recommended Links

- **Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE): Streets** (UK)
- **Livable Streets Initiative** (USA)
- **Living Streets** (UK)
- **National Complete Streets Coalition** (USA)
- **Streetfilms** (USA)

For further information
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