The Urban Challenge

A SHORT GUIDE TO
THE URBAN CHALLENGE
EVENT SERIES

Urban
Design
Learning

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URBAN DESIGN LEARNING

Our mission is to help those who deliver, manage or influence places to recognise, aspire to and achieve high-quality, well-designed spaces that work for people.

UDL believes that the quality of places has a profound impact on individuals and societies at large; when designed well, they support productive, civilised, humane and healthy behaviours. We want everyone to benefit from inclusive, high-quality, well-designed places.

urbandesignlondon.com

Urban
Design
Learning

FOOTWORK

Our purpose as a charity is to identify and support local social innovators to turn their bold ideas into lasting positive change for people and places; and to harness the cumulative knowledge to raise awareness and educate those involved in placemaking.

It's our belief that living your life well means feeling you belong within a place; having strong relationships with the people around you; and being able to contribute to shaping the place where you live.

footwork.org.uk

footwork

URBAN GOOD

Urban Good CIC was established with the mission to improve life in cities and recycle profits into social and environmental causes. We have fun writing, researching, designing, and generally communicating good ideas. We help architects, planners, developers, local authorities and community projects to inform decision making.

And then we make maps too. Big, green city maps that celebrate open space, walking and natural heritage in cities.

urbangood.org

urban good

Preface

ESTHER KURLAND

We set up the Urban Challenge as an unfunded – but much needed – dialogue during the rapid changes that came along with Covid-19. It was clear some new ideas were needed urgently, but perhaps the past two decades of 'compact city' thinking were already getting tired.

So, why not ask some industry-leading voices to highlight the challenges ahead as they saw these, and invite new voices to share ideas that addressed them? In so doing, the structure of the sessions has evolved into something more impactful and longer-lasting: a new framework for thinking about urban policy.

Urban Challenge, as we present it here, is a framework to hang good ideas upon. The framework is built around four cores that reflect different scales we find in our cities, and how they all join up:
1) Buildings
2) Local Living
3) City Structures, and
4) Connectivity

These four need each other, none can be successfully delivered without the other three. The Urban Challenge provided a means to peer-review and test ideas to see how they fit into the bigger picture.

The bigger picture became the **Multi-timed city**. An output from all the collective thinking around the current and future challenges. This is the bedrock for more healthy, equitable and sustainable urban life and could present a fundamental shift in urban policy.

We look forward to sharing them with you.

January 2023.

There are so many great ideas for improving cities; what we need now is a **framework** to bring them together and point them in the right direction.

And that's for all the . . . communities, town planners, architects, landscape architects, property developers, landowners, transport planners, engineers, masterplanners, urban designers, investors and decision makers . . . who want to work together to make better cities.

Introducing the Urban Challenge

The Urban Challenge was a series of 10 events. The aim was to find innovative and robust ideas that would aid in the recovery of post-Covid cities. These ranged from design to planning, transport and policy. It was a chance to see if now was the time for an update of the 'compact city' — the default planning approach from the past two decades.

Over 500 attendees   **120 contributors**   **30 fresh ideas**   **10 online events**

Now was the time! Over 500 attendees engaged in our online events. We had 120 voices contribute to the programme: from established, senior figures to new voices with fresh thinking in their fields. In the end we heard, tested and mapped 30 fresh ideas into the new policy landscape we had created.

Inclusion & cohesion → Environmental responsibility → Heath & wellbeing → Economic vitality → **DRIVERS OF URBAN CHANGE**

The drivers to improving our cities have not changed for centuries, although health and wellbeing came into much sharper focus and prominence. So the challenges were aired in our first session, and by the time we hosted a series of ideas group meetings, the 4-part structure was born: **Buildings, Living Local, City Structures, and Connectivity.**

It's the structure and process of these sessions that emerged the hero. Having jostled to find a way to collect all the ideas into a meaningful whole, where connections could be made, and a relatable goal was at the core . . . Local Living emerged.

HOW DID IT ALL WORK?

The Urban Challenge set out in a structured way to investigate what ideas for a post-pandemic city will work.

SETTING THE CHALLENGE
The first meeting set out several challenges that UK cities are facing in the context of Covid-19 and also set the scene. Challenge setters were: Joanna Averly (Chief Planner, DLUHC), Philip Graham (Exec Director Good Growth, GLA) and Alex Williams (Chief Customer and Strategy Officer, TfL)

IDEAS GROUP MEETINGS
These idea sessions helped to brainstorm a future, from lessons we are learning now. Each idea was put through a 'stress test' with a panel to observe how it worked towards Living Local.

BUILDINGS — **LIVING LOCAL** — **CITY STRUCTURES** — **CONNECTIVITY**

THE PITCH
Refined ideas were put to the 'stress testers' and group chairs and an audience of local authority officers and councillors. The original challengers (J Averly and P Graham) returned to hear responses.

NEW IDEAS FOR AN URBAN FUTURE
We have moved past the 'compact city' so what is the next blueprint for urban planning?

MIRO BOARD

A collaborative Miro board was used throughout the process so everyone had access to all the ideas and the framework as it emerged. It is well worth investigating, though this document attempts to simplify the wealth of information you can read there.

miro.com/app/board/o9J_lb6WNrE=/?invite_link_id=401432911041

OR tinyurl.com/5b7sfa3x
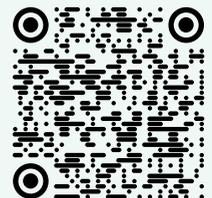
The journey of a pitched idea . . .

BUILDINGS
LOCAL LIVING
CITY STRUCTURES
CONNECTIVITY

The ideas came first, but didn't fit together neatly. The framework emerged to address this.

We heard new ideas from grassroots organisations and from more established organisations. We all talked together a lot, over many hours, focused on different topics and challenges. The success of the Urban Challenge is in large part down to to the openness with which it engaged voices beyond the 'professions' and brought them into the middle of the conversation.

As we collected these great ideas on our Miro board (see previous page), our structure began to take shape — using the four big topics on which to hang future sessions and organise our collective imagining, analysing and sharing.

Below, the Urban Challenge structure that all ideas were asked to consider in their presentation.
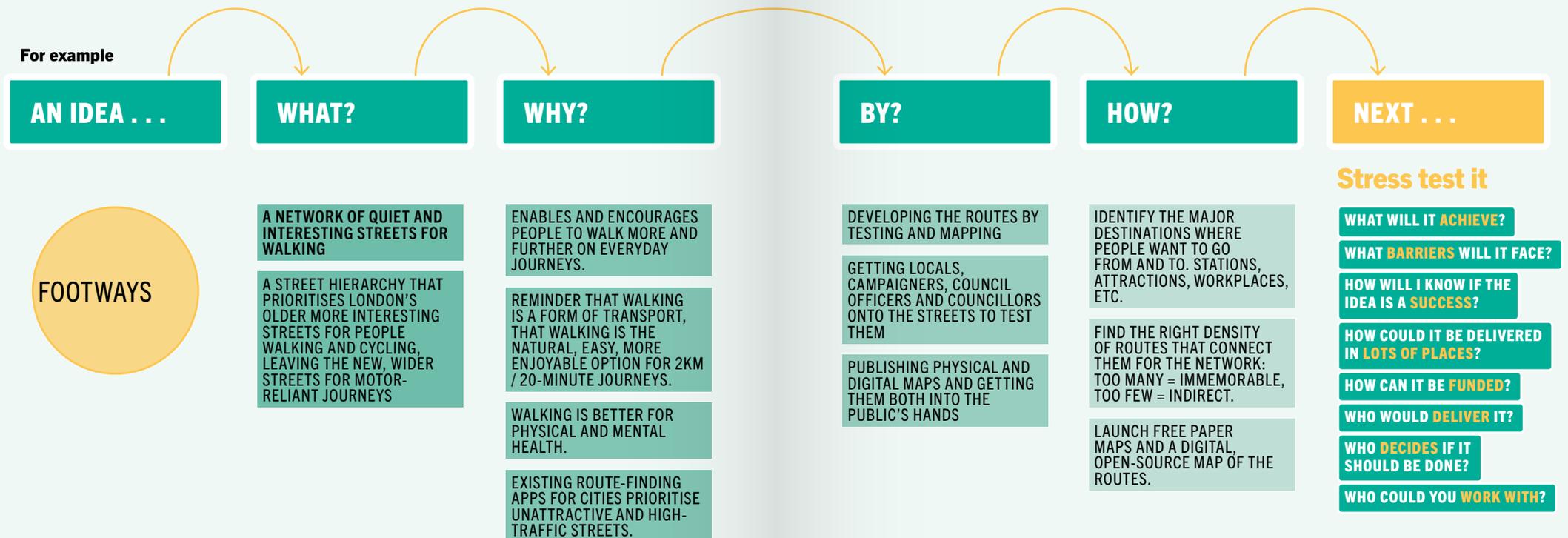
Let's use one idea to see how we interrogated each of them for relevance and impact. *Footways* is an idea that was proposed at one of our events in an ideas group for Connectivity. It is a routing and mapping project that can make walking an easier journey choice by being more attractive, safe, interesting and fun.

Urban Challenge tasked speakers to tell the audience about their idea in a systematic way (see the diagram below). A valuable level of detail was given, and later plotted on the Miro board. This allowed it to be readily compared to other ideas, making commonalities and links easier to find. Ultimately we started asking how they contribute to the big four topics.

For example

| AN IDEA . . . | WHAT? | WHY? | BY? | HOW? | NEXT . . . |

FOOTWAYS

WHAT?
A NETWORK OF QUIET AND INTERESTING STREETS FOR WALKING

A STREET HIERARCHY THAT PRIORITISES LONDON'S OLDER MORE INTERESTING STREETS FOR PEOPLE WALKING AND CYCLING, LEAVING THE NEW, WIDER STREETS FOR MOTOR-RELIANT JOURNEYS

WHY?
ENABLES AND ENCOURAGES PEOPLE TO WALK MORE AND FURTHER ON EVERYDAY JOURNEYS.

REMINDER THAT WALKING IS A FORM OF TRANSPORT, THAT WALKING IS THE NATURAL, EASY, MORE ENJOYABLE OPTION FOR 2KM / 20-MINUTE JOURNEYS.

WALKING IS BETTER FOR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH.

EXISTING ROUTE-FINDING APPS FOR CITIES PRIORITISE UNATTRACTIVE AND HIGH-TRAFFIC STREETS.

BY?
DEVELOPING THE ROUTES BY TESTING AND MAPPING

GETTING LOCALS, CAMPAIGNERS, COUNCIL OFFICERS AND COUNCILLORS ONTO THE STREETS TO TEST THEM

PUBLISHING PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL MAPS AND GETTING THEM BOTH INTO THE PUBLIC'S HANDS

HOW?
IDENTIFY THE MAJOR DESTINATIONS WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO GO FROM AND TO. STATIONS, ATTRACTIONS, WORKPLACES, ETC.

FIND THE RIGHT DENSITY OF ROUTES THAT CONNECT THEM FOR THE NETWORK: TOO MANY = IMMEMORABLE, TOO FEW = INDIRECT.

LAUNCH FREE PAPER MAPS AND A DIGITAL, OPEN-SOURCE MAP OF THE ROUTES.

NEXT . . .
Stress test it

WHAT WILL IT ACHIEVE?

WHAT BARRIERS WILL IT FACE?

HOW WILL I KNOW IF THE IDEA IS A SUCCESS?

HOW COULD IT BE DELIVERED IN LOTS OF PLACES?

HOW CAN IT BE FUNDED?

WHO WOULD DELIVER IT?

WHO DECIDES IF IT SHOULD BE DONE?

WHO COULD YOU WORK WITH?

Shaping the framework

The Urban Challenge framework has four big topics. During the sessions these were discussed, refined and edited into robust tenets that held up against all the testing and probing that came from the sessions. They acted as a structure within which to hang ideas for urban change, and to see how they relate to other ideas; how they relate to the bigger picture; how they might be delivered and by whom.

Most importantly the framework served to highlight that positive urban change — improving our cities for the challenges of today — can only happen if all four elements work together. Working across professional disciplines, across different scales but all towards a shared goal. It's easy to think in a silo when there is not a common focus between disciplines. The opportunity is to set a **new direction for policy**, with a clear framework to ensure everything works better towards the same end.

These four objectives need each other; none can be successfully delivered without the other three. We cannot achieve fewer miles travelled unless we have more complete neighbourhoods. We cannot bring neighbourhoods to life without more flexibility in how buildings are used. Without rebalancing activity levels across cities, and reducing the dominance of central business districts and activity zones, local high streets and economically active neighbourhoods elsewhere will struggle. Going full circle, without reducing the need for commuting within mono-centric urban structures we cannot achieve fewer miles travelled. As we show later, the **multi-timed city** concept helps us draw these objectives together.

1) BUILDINGS
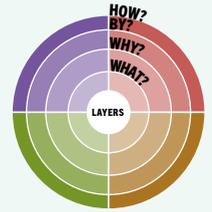## 2) LOCAL LIVING
3) CITY STRUCTURES
4) CONNECTIVITY

Above, the four corners that make up the Urban Challenge Framework, showing the groupings of sectors and scales. We can think about the framework as having layers like an onion that keep revealing more about each of the four parts. See overleaf.

BUILDINGS
1–5 minutes' walk
ARCHITECTURE | CONSTRUCTION | PROPERTY
We must allow for more flexible and efficient use of new and existing buildings.

LOCAL LIVING
Around a 15-minute radius
URBAN DESIGN | LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | MASTERPLANNING
We must value all neighbourhoods and local centres as the bedrock of our cities.

SCALE
SECTOR
GOAL

INTER-DEPENDENCY

CONNECTIVITY
Connecting all scales
TRANSPORT PLANNERS | TRANSPORT PROVIDERS | ACTIVE TRAVEL
We must support the increase of shorter journeys and use longer trips better.

CITY STRUCTURES
30–60-minute trips
URBAN PLANNING | URBAN GOVERNANCE | INSTITUTIONS
We must rebalance activity across cities and make the most of existing assets.

Layers of the framework

URBAN CHALLENGE	What?	Why?	By?	How?
BUILDINGS	We must allow for more flexible and efficient use of new and existing buildings.	» To introduce dynamism in places. » So building support successful communities. » So people can afford somewhere good to live and work. » Using the controls and levers to bring about change. » To reduce the need to travel. » To reuse and optimise what we have.	» Converting and reusing, wherever possible. » Use of intelligent infill and rebuild that ensures future adaptability. » Removing policy, financial and institutional barriers to flexibility and adaptability. » Creating buildings, that people value and want to spend time in.	a. Ensure more buildings are created and land value captured. b. Reuse buildings, to provide more and better places to work, live and be a part of a community. c. Better links between inside and outside of buildings that foster communities. d. Change design standards and approaches to promote flexible, adaptable, green and enjoyable buildings.
LOCAL LIVING	We must value all neighbourhoods and local centres as the bedrock of our cities.	» To future-proof communities whilst respecting their history. » To create places where people feel they have a stake and influence. » To cater for different lifestyles, and tackle isolation. » To support efficient services.	» Creating neighbourhoods that work together, providing choice, and a range of services. » Having more mixed land- and building-uses. Having more and better local green spaces, public realm and other facilities. » Enriching the experience using arts and culture. Supporting local organisations and social connections. » Providing better choice and tools for engagement. Having better digital and other connections. » Ensuring places work at all times of the day, week, season.	a. Improve the way we understand neighbourhoods. b. Require change to help create 'complete' neighbourhoods. c. Use skills knowledge of different 'players' better. d. Making public space the heart of the neighbourhood.
CITY STRUCTURES	We must rebalance activity across cities and make the most of existing assets.	» Because the status quo no longer works and change is needed. » To ensure cities are appealing and attract investment. » To promote resilient, polycentric city approach. » To optimise the built environment and transport network.	» Supporting unique city-centre offers that benefit from large catchments of people who get there less often, but more easily. » Giving city centres space to support thriving residential communities. » Enabling people to do or spend more overall as they have more choice across city. » Encouraging land-use changes in single-use areas to bring customers and providers closer together. » Managing viability to ensure the financially 'non-viable' is provided when needed.	a. Change the way we think about the role of different parts of the city. b. Rebalance planning and transport approaches to reduce central area dominance. c. Change the terms of the public debate. d. Change the definition of 'development viability'.
CONNECTIVITY	We must support the increase of shorter journeys and use longer trips better.	» To improve independence and access to opportunities. » To allow for agreement. » To make the most energy-rich trips. » To encourage small-scale economic activity and service-led retail activity.	» Consideration of the movement of goods and services, not just people. » Understanding and enhancing links and opportunities between adjacent neighbourhoods. » Land-use changes to bring facilities closer to home to reduce unnecessary trips. » Increasing the connectivity and usability of active travel routes. » Aiding mode-shift for short journeys and facilitating greener options for long journeys.	a. Plan and deliver better logistics hubs. b. Rethink how we value travel time, experience and accessibility. c. Design and manage streets in public spaces primarily for pedestrians. d. Harness apps and data to both replace and influence physical travel decisions.

These four objectives need each other; none can truly be successfully delivered without the other three.

BUILDINGS

We must allow for more flexible and efficient use of new and existing buildings.

The most popular of all the ideas we heard relate to improved efficiency and greater flexibility of our buildings. What does this look like?

The places where we live, work, learn and play need of course to be fit for purpose. There are two strands to this approach: what to do with the buildings we already inhabit and what to do with the ones we are about to build. Existing stock will need to be made more energy efficient and more comfortable. Retrofits or extensions can work towards this, alongside renewable or ultra-efficient energy sources. To build new buildings that do not conform to the highest environmental standards, in their embodied energy and their operational energy, should be inconceivable.

Allowing for flexibility of use needs a new, creative approach too. How to reuse existing buildings to create great shelter and facilities for all life? Some specific ideas were presented to this end (see opposite). Wherever possible, we should be reusing before destroying and rebuilding. There are policy push and pulls that could work to this goal such as taxes, regulations and investment models for retrofit. In short, we need to end the mono-use building culture.

Individuals and communities have more agency than they perhaps realise, and supporting them and signposting to available resources will help. After all, it is people that use these spaces day to day in a myriad of ways.

How do we get where we want to be?

1. Reuse buildings: to provide good-quality local places to work or live; for easily accessible local services and community use.
2. Better links between inside and outside of buildings that foster social interaction and encourage walking or cycling.
3. Reform design standards and approaches to promote flexible, adaptable, green and sociable buildings.

Some ideas presented during the Urban Challenge sessions

Reusing town centre buildings for school classrooms, workshops and/or delivery hubs

Reusing and converting shopping malls for recreation, sport and education

CHANGING NEW HOME DESIGNS TO INCREASE FLEXIBLE USE

CREATING KITS FOR ADAPTING EXISTING HOMES

Pattern-book home extension offers

Consider planning policies that factor in the impact of uses on neighbours, not simply the land use.

Housing estate regeneration should consider the community aspect of the open space, formerly car parks

Greening roofs and façades and balconies

Include 'Neighbour space' - perhaps shared by a handful of households - they can choose and decide the use of the extra space.

LOCAL LIVING

We must value all neighbourhoods and local centres as the bedrock of our cities.

This idea was widely discussed and emerged as particularly important having lived with the pandemic and the radical restructuring of daily life. This is perhaps the key to unlocking all four of our themes, allowing the other goals of connectivity, city structures and buildings to work most effectively.

We heard the '15-minute city' talked about a lot during the pandemic, which is a helpful concept to make sure people live within walking distance of the facilities they need day to day. There are a number of ways we can work towards these 'complete' neighbourhoods. First, by seeing if there are ways to make the 15-minute catchment area physically bigger through increasing or improving walking routes. Simply unlocking a park gate or fixing the lights under a bridge might help do this. Second, by investigating ways to bring more people and activities into the catchment area. This could be through planning briefs/codes or site assembly work to encourage appropriate new housing or other development. Or it could be through supporting more flexible, possibly temporary, activity in underused buildings and spaces. Third, we can look to make the neighbourhood more attractive, developing its unique identity, character and relevance for the local community. Last, we need to help people know what they can access within their neighbourhood and support those offers practically.

Of course, none of this is easy, and retrofitting mono-use suburbs or similar into complete neighbourhoods is a hard task. But if we don't pull together across all built environment sectors and aim for the same outcomes, we will never get there.

How do we get where we want to be?

1. Improve the way we understand neighbourhoods.
2. Require change to help create 'complete' neighbourhoods.
3. Use skills knowledge of different 'players' better.
4. Make public space the heart of the neighbourhood.

Some ideas presented during the Urban Challenge sessions

Prioritising local active journeys over through traffic

New and improved local parks with more entrances

MORE CORNER SHOPS

PROTECTING AND SUPPORTING SMALLER SHOPPING PARADES

LOCAL WORKING HUBS

Supporting social connection and organisations that facilitate this

Supporting special something offers

Encourage commons, areas own and managed by non-profits

PED SHEDS - calculating and planning for the actual walking distances (say 800m) not a simple radius as the crow flies

CITY STRUCTURES

We must rebalance activity across cities and make the most of existing assets.

The goal here is to move away from the default, concentric urban planning mode that leads to hyperactive city centres during business hours, and dormitory suburbs. The move towards polycentric cities supports the right uses in the right places for the right people. This way one area should not starve another area of its life and vibrancy, but share it.

It was strongly felt during the discussions that all the urban areas that make up a city or town remain competitive and attractive places for people and investment. The legacy of inherited transport networks will make up the backbone of many decisions around where to place activity or intensity, but should not therefore leave the less-connected suburbs out of this re-think. Indeed perhaps it is where the best and most creative thinking is needed today.

If this balance of activity, destinations and facilities is achieved, it will ultimately allow for a reduction in miles travelled that can ensure lower carbon emissions and take pressure off the longer-distance network for higher-value trips (for instance to a major cultural institution).

One litmus test to see if this is working would be if city centres can also support thriving residential communities alongside business and culture.

How do we get where we want to be?

1. Change the way we think about the role of different parts of the city.
2. Rebalance planning and transport approaches to reduce central area dominance.
3. Change the terms of the public debate to ensure local knowledge and voices are at its core.
4. Change the definition of 'development viability'.

Some ideas presented during the Urban Challenge sessions

Change planning policies that promote Central Activity Zone as centre for agglomeration activities.

Rethink public transport charging systems to support less regular central visits

OPEN UP OPPORTUNITIES FOR 'QUARTERS' TO RE-EMERGE IN CITIES TO SUPPORT INDEPENDENT SHOPS/BUSINESS AND CULTURE ETC.

Develop viable local shared mobility delivery systems

Support or encourage local agglomerations of activity

Improve visitor experience in best-connected places to support high-value trips from large catchment

DEVELOP ORBITAL PUBLIC AND SHARED TRAVEL FACILITIES

Don't densify suburbs without changing their land use and movement structures

Don't densify suburbs without changing their land use and movement structures

CONNECTIVITY

We must support the increase of shorter journeys and use longer trips better.

Groups discussed the aim for more active journeys and reducing the number of vehicular journeys is key, with obvious benefits to individuals' health and wellbeing and urban-wide emissions and safety. It also fosters greater support for local economies, spending time and money closer to home.

To get this to work, our daily facilities need to be easily accessible. By making short-distance car journeys relatively harder (as the Low-traffic neighbourhoods have done) we can encourage vehicle users to question making short trips by car, if walking or cycling is now more convenient. Increasing the connectivity and usability of active travel routes will continue to make walking or cycling more attractive options for residents.

Transport planning will need to question one of its primary focuses for the past decades: namely moving more people longer distances in shorter times. Instead, it needs to focus on many more shorter journeys that require the help of the other three topics (Buildings, Local Living, City Structures), not just the engineered interventions of the past — though much can be done to improve the accessibility, attractiveness and uptake of active travel modes. Segregated bike lanes and well-planted streetscapes are just two such means.

How do we get where we want to be?

1. Plan and deliver better logistics hubs.
2. Rethink how we value travel time, experience and accessibility.
3. Design and manage streets in public spaces primarily for pedestrians.
4. Harness mobile apps and data to both replace and influence physical travel decisions.

Some ideas presented during the Urban Challenge sessions

- New forms of responsive shared mobility offers and hubs helping people move between inner and outer city.

- Live feedback on journeys

- 800-METRE WALKING RADIUS 'PED-SHEDS' THAT SHOW REAL DISTANCES AS THE FOOT FALLS, NOT AS THE CROW FLIES

- Link the end of tube or train lines with onward travel extensions (easy-use rapid bus etc) to allow for inter-suburb links

- LTNs LIMITING RAT RUNNING AND THROUGH CAR MOVEMENT WITHIN NEIGHBOURHOODS

- New planning policies that protect local shopping parades and allow for a mix of use.

- Locations for destination uses that allow for multi purpose trips

- Coordinated small town centre retail delivery systems

- Local working hubs

Evolving into the multi-timed city

In the wake of listening to, discussing and stress testing so many ideas, our framework morphed into the idea of the 'multi-timed city'. This pulls together the four Urban Challenge themes, explaining the role of each at different spatial scales.

HOME CIRCLE

BUILDINGS

We must allow for more flexible and efficient use of new and existing buildings.

NEIGHBOURHOOD

LOCAL LIVING

We must value all neighbourhoods and local centres as the bedrock of our cities.

CITY LIFE

CITY STRUCTURES

We must rebalance activity across cities and make the most of existing assets.

Seeing the city as it radiates from anyone's home life. We need to consider this bigger picture that brings in all the different time scales to see how interlinked and part of a whole they are.
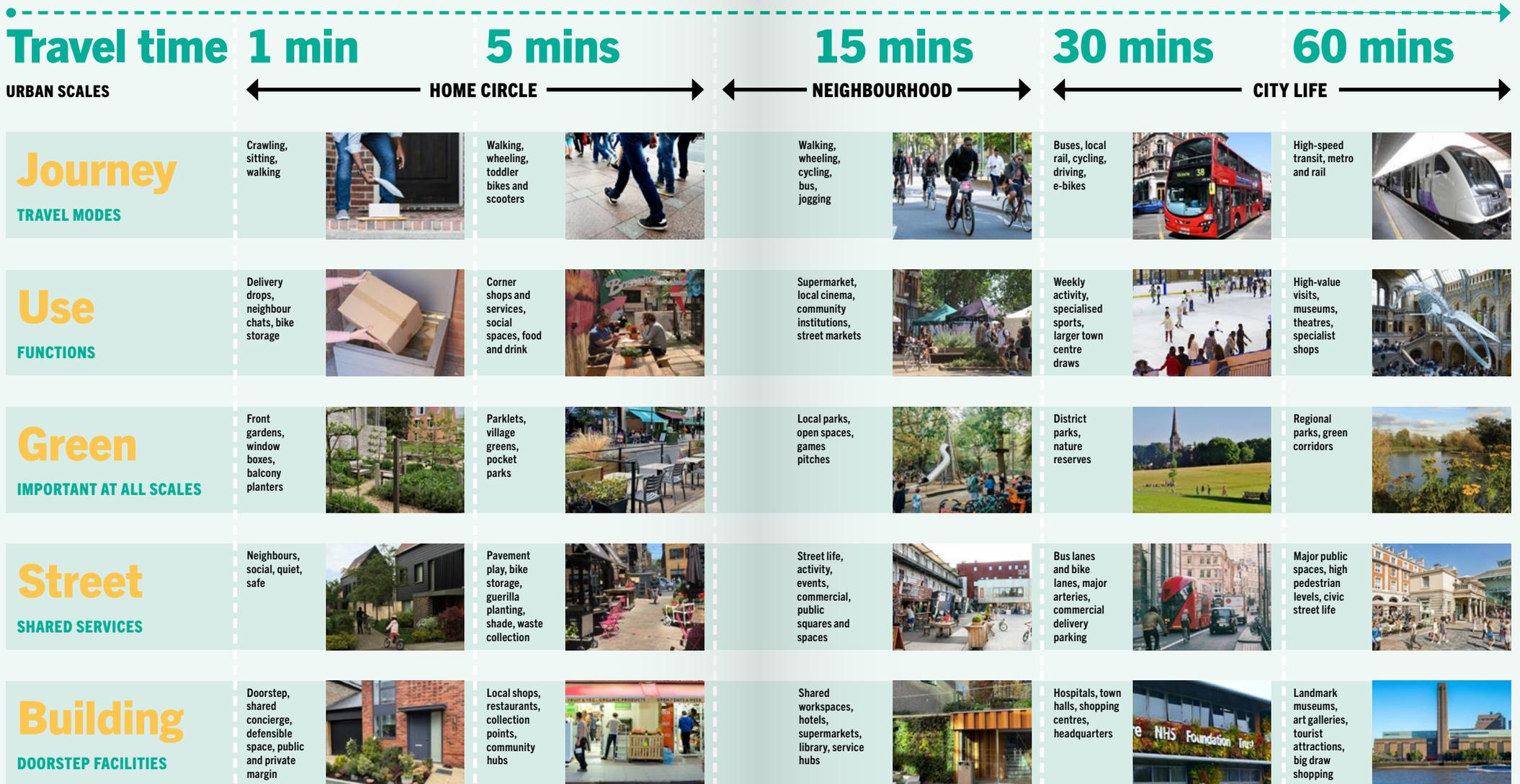
TRAVEL

CONNECTIVITY

We must support the increase of shorter journeys and use longer trips better.

A **multi-timed city** puts people at the start of thinking about ideas for cities, then we can think how the city is shaped and adapted around them.

Seeing the multi-timed city

This grid illustrates the type of elements urban areas need at different scales of distance and intensity of use from our home circle all the way to the major urban institutions within our city.

| Travel time	1 min	5 mins	15 mins	30 mins	60 mins
URBAN SCALES	HOME CIRCLE		NEIGHBOURHOOD	CITY LIFE	
Journey TRAVEL MODES	Crawling, sitting, walking	Walking, wheeling, toddler bikes and scooters	Walking, wheeling, cycling, bus, jogging	Buses, local rail, cycling, driving, e-bikes	High-speed transit, metro and rail
Use FUNCTIONS	Delivery drops, neighbour chats, bike storage	Corner shops and services, social spaces, food and drink	Supermarket, local cinema, community institutions, street markets	Weekly activity, specialised sports, larger town centre draws	High-value visits, museums, theatres, specialist shops
Green IMPORTANT AT ALL SCALES	Front gardens, window boxes, balcony planters	Parklets, village greens, pocket parks	Local parks, open spaces, games pitches	District parks, nature reserves	Regional parks, green corridors
Street SHARED SERVICES	Neighbours, social, quiet, safe	Pavement play, bike storage, guerilla planting, shade, waste collection	Street life, activity, events, commercial, public squares and spaces	Bus lanes and bike lanes, major arteries, commercial delivery parking	Major public spaces, high pedestrian levels, civic street life
Building DOORSTEP FACILITIES	Doorstep, shared concierge, defensible space, public and private margin	Local shops, restaurants, collection points, community hubs	Shared workspaces, hotels, supermarkets, library, service hubs	Hospitals, town halls, shopping centres, headquarters	Landmark museums, art galleries, tourist attractions, big draw shopping

Explaining the multi-timed city

The concept of the 'multi-timed city' refers to the idea of planning and designing cities with different areas and amenities that serve the needs of people within a certain distance from their home.

The 1-minute city refers to the immediate area around a person's home, including the entrance to the home and shared spaces in the surrounding area. Good urban design in this area should prioritise ease of access and use of front doors, as well as creating a sense of activity and safety on the street through the use of windows and buffer zones such as front gardens. However, the 1-minute city should also consider the increasing need for home deliveries and the need to manage waste and encourage active travel options.

The 5-minute city, also known as the 'neighbour space', is the area within a 5-minute walk of a person's home and is important for promoting community cohesion. This area should prioritise active travel and shared mobility options, as well as providing facilities for doorstep play, shared delivery and storage, and amenities. Access to nature, comfortable microclimates, and natural climate resilience measures such as sustainable urban drainage should also be included in the 5-minute city. This area is particularly important in higher-density areas where outdoor shared living is an important part of life and should be flexible to allow for the needs of the community.

The 15-minute city aims to provide everything people need within a 15-minute walk from their home, measured as the distance someone would actually walk, not as the crow flies. This includes routes that are safe and easy to use.

The 30-minute city refers to the town centre or other amenities that require a larger catchment area, such as a swimming pool or larger park. These amenities may be accessed by public transport or by car, and may be visited less frequently than those in the 15-minute city.
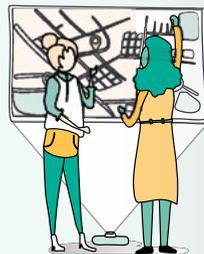
The 60-minute city is last. It is vital to success at all other scales. It represents the big-ticket draws, the things people will happily travel for an hour to reach such as major museums, concert venues, specialist shopping areas, the trendiest nightclubs or historic attractions. Ideally these should attract lots and lots of people, but they should not use them very often. Train travel is perfect for this kind of catchment area and the attractions tend to be clustered around major stations.

Overall, the concept of the multi-timed city promotes the idea of designing cities that meet the needs of people within a certain distance from their home, with a focus on promoting community cohesion and sustainability.

The benefits of the multi-timed city are numerous. By meeting the needs of individuals and communities within a certain distance from their home, this approach can create more efficient use of land and transport resources, support healthier and less stressed lives, and reduce unnecessary commuting. To fully realise these benefits, it is essential that all sectors working in the built environment — including architecture, planning, transport, and environmental design — adopt a holistic approach that takes into account the ideas of the multi-timed city. By working within a shared framework, these sectors can help transform cities so that they meet the diverse needs of all who live, work and play within them.

The multi-timed city is an idea to help ensure the places we plan, design, build and manage can support environmental, social, health and economic objectives. That is, that they facilitate resource-responsible lifestyles and economies, community cohesion and the health and wellbeing of all.

The Urban Challenge project concluded by calling for policy across all built environment sectors to aim for:

1. Fewer miles travelled but not fewer journeys.

2. More flexible and adaptable buildings where the impact of uses, not their existence, is managed.

3. Local living, encompassing the 15-minute neighbourhood concept.

4. Polycentric cities with all areas reaching, but not exceeding, their natural carrying capacity for economic activity.

A short guide to the Urban Challenge work and the 'multi-timed city' framework that emerged — to be read by all built environment professionals.

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