

The Best Hope For Our Big Cities

LOIS BALCOM

IN NEW YORK'S Westchester County not so long ago, a man was arrested for walking to work.

It wasn't the principle to which the authorities objected. An intrepid pantryman, heading for the restaurant where he was employed, descended from a bus on the far side of the New York State Thruway and ventured across its several lanes on foot. The restaurant had been marooned on an "island" between the newly completed Thruway and a pre-existing parkway, and was left with no legal access except by private car.

Contrast the spectacle of "downtown," where people and cars jostle each other through the same narrow streets, indiscriminately jam the joint intersections, fight for *Lebensraum* along the same overcrowded curbs.

A generation ago one key to this urban dilemma was proffered by a architectural genius who at the age of forty-five was distinguished more for his radical ideas than for tangible attainments in city planning. The Swiss-born French architect Le Corbusier had only to fix a coldly discerning eye on the mounting stream of automobiles moving past his Paris studio to come up with a brand-new kind of planning for a world on wheels.

"I contend," he wrote in 1932, "that it is impossible to use the same roads for fast and slow moving traffic. . . . We are forced to . . . make a definite distinction between the pedestrian and the vehicle, which should never be allowed to meet."

Today one might suppose that this would be a commonplace. But after twenty-five years we have yet to give his theories a full-scale trial.

We have applied the principle of

"traffic separation" on the outlying highways—by almost complete liquidation of one of the interested parties, which was hardly what Le Corbusier wanted. But we haven't begun to apply it downtown, where the pedestrian stubbornly and inconveniently refuses to be liquidated. Such superficial devices as stop signs, walk lights, and miles of painted lines on pavements may keep him from charging directly into a stream of cars, busses, and trucks—and vice versa—but something more is called for. To separate cars and people means to make separate provision for their respective needs.

Are Pedestrians People?

Our attack on the problem of urban congestion has been almost entirely one-sided and concentrated on the motorist: We build parking lots—most of them eyesores; we widen streets and turn them into one-way arteries—often without so much as a safety island in the middle; we time our signal lights for maximum vehicle speeds and convenience—and leave the pedestrian to his own devices. One group of experts has solemnly proposed to remedy downtown deterioration by "treating pedestrians as people."

If "separation" is the key to our battle of the bumpers, then adequate and imaginative planning for both pedestrian and vehicle is the key to making "separation" work. Le Corbusier's solution was to put both buildings and motor roads up on stilts, leaving to the walker "the surface of the city, all the surface, the earth." "Put the pedestrian on the ground," he said, "giving him a network of avenues running in all directions in the midst of parks and lawns."



Such an expansive domain probably exceeds the desire of the most avid pedestrian, the appeal of walking in the city rarely being that of pleasure or exercise, which call for parks and lawns, but rather the convenience of discharging business without frustrating traffic delays and parking problems. We are willing to go about our errands on foot when it means a saving of time and nervous energy—a respite from the unequal conflict between motors and men to which most of our urban thoroughfares are now abandoned. Thus a "network" of small plazas or malls tucked between skyscrapers may serve the metropolitan pedestrian as well as or better than Le Corbusier's boundless green-sward.

Yet his more dramatic plan for sixty-story buildings with wide green spaces in between, linked by sixty-

mile-an-hour elevated motorways, reminds us that—if we could carry redesign far enough—we might accommodate as many people as we have today in our crowded city space with no traffic jams whatsoever. Perhaps Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle redevelopment is our closest approach to date to this ideal of the "skyscraper set in a park." Private grounds and a public park blend into a spacious openness between high-rise office buildings, modern apartments, and a hotel. Parked cars are gradually being banished underground and moving traffic to elevated expressways. Yet these are not allowed to disfigure or obstruct the surface level of Point Park. A sweeping view of the junction of Pittsburgh's rivers—historic "Gateway to the West"—is framed by a "gateway portal" beneath the elevated traffic interchange.

On a smaller scale, New York's Chase Manhattan project will demonstrate essentially similar planning—a sixty-story tower hoisted in part upon Corbusian stilts, underground levels utilized both for parking and for public banking functions, seventy per cent of the surface assigned to pedestrian amenities—a reallocation of surface space to the clear advantage of all concerned.

Set in the midst of Wall street's narrow canyons, its esplanade and arcaded walkways will be enlarged by closing off a cross street that now divides the two-block site. In return the bank has ceded to the city a strip around all four outer sides of its property for the widening of surrounding streets. The exchange creates at one stroke a net gain for vehicular traffic and an inviting oasis for workers and walkers in a chaotically overcrowded neighborhood.

Pack Them In!

More often we have relied on the giant motorway alone to take care of the rising tide of traffic. Although these structures are designed solely to remedy vehicular congestion, their introduction into the heart of downtown has been anything but an unmixed blessing.

More lanes, more levels, more expressways! Unfortunately these oversized highways are self-defeating

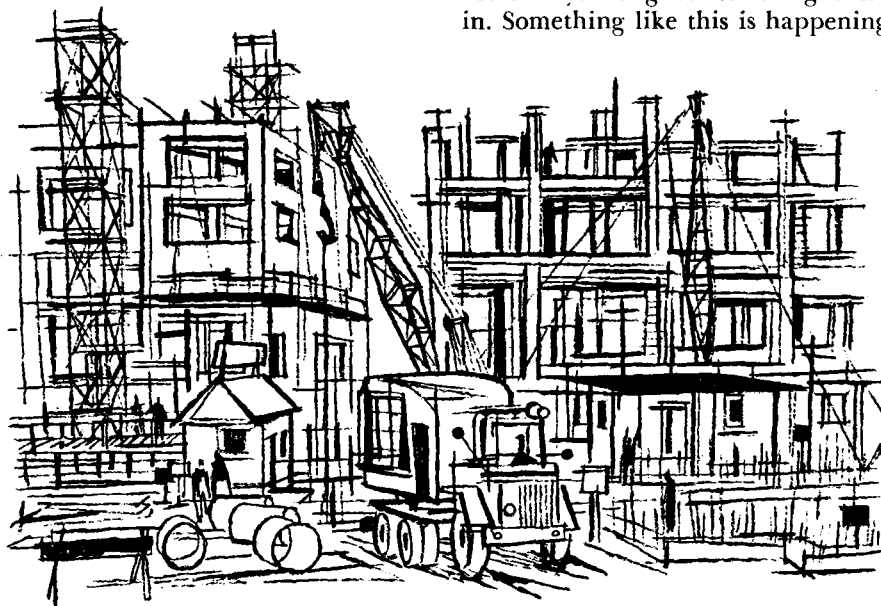
when allowed to strike right through what should be essentially a pedestrian center. Not only do their size and efficiency serve to generate more traffic, so that they are forever unable to keep up with the loads imposed upon them, but their very presence ruthlessly destroys those amenities which are uniquely characteristic of downtown.

Sometimes the destruction is painfully specific. San Franciscans, with an affection for their historic Ferry Building, were appalled by the prospect of a two-level fifty-foot-high expressway along the Embarcadero directly in front of the sixty-one-foot landmark with its higher clock tower. Twice in a year, an aroused citizenry and press undertook desperate last-ditch actions to bring about a relocation of the motorway, but the traffic experts won and now have the two-level motor road under construction.

The problem is not always so clear-cut. "Downtown" itself is a somewhat amorphous term having different connotations in different cities—or indeed to different groups

But to planners, "downtown" embraces the whole central district or "core" in which the greatest concentration of employment and business enterprise is to be found. "Downtown" created itself in the first place simply because having certain activities close to each other is good for business, for sociability, for cultural exchange. But when the city is sliced up into ever wider and higher expressways, with their complicated entrances and exits, their ramps and loops and cloverleaf intersections, intimacy and compactness are things of the past. With downtown stretched apart, everybody suffers—except, ironically, the "through" drivers who have no business there in the first place—from increased surface congestion and lengthened walking distances. The natural reaction is to get out of "downtown" altogether, and the vicious circle of decentralization and deterioration begins.

HORDES of potential frequenters of downtown are heading out, moreover, by the same convenient motorways designed to bring them in. Something like this is happening



within the same city. Thus to planners, "downtown Manhattan" consists of the entire nine-square-mile region south of Sixtieth Street, while to New Yorkers the Wall Street area is "downtown," Thirty-fourth to Forty-second may be designated "midtown," and the Fifties, as far as retail shopping, galleries, and concert halls are concerned, are "uptown."

in Los Angeles, where high-speed arteries, crisscrossing in layers, straddle the downtown sector. But does it make sense to spend millions of dollars on hundreds of miles of freeways only to feed traffic out to competing communities?

In the heart of California's boomland, Los Angeles is retaining less than fifteen per cent of its region-

al retail business. The vehicle is left in possession, but there isn't much "downtown" left to possess.

The bitter fact is that accommodating more and more cars just so more and more cars may take their places does nothing to solve the dilemma of downtown. Gigantic facilities undeniably lend themselves

ping centers when they designed Northland, which spreads over 163 acres just outside Detroit. They created a landscaped pedestrian island within its cluster of more than one hundred stores and shops, then a route for motor traffic around the periphery, and finally integrated the two by strategic location of nine sep-

dens. Yet since the whole is actually enclosed, it is completely air-conditioned "indoors and out," summer and winter.

Moreover, Southdale's motor access is every bit as convenient as Northland's. It has its own one-way belt road with no less than twenty-two points of entrance and exit to surrounding streets. Landscaped strips shield parking from thoroughfares and make the entrances inviting. The main parking facilities are divided between the two sales levels; all truck deliveries, services and storage are consigned to the basement, which also contains some sales space—and a live zoo for the youngsters. Here we have vertical "traffic separation" superimposed upon the horizontal layout pioneered at Northland.

SUBURBAN successes behind them, Victor Gruen Associates next turned to the challenge of the tightly built-up urban "core." They were called upon to prescribe for a typically "sick" central retail district, and had the courage and vision to apply the "pedestrian island" concept to the whole of downtown. Fort Worth, Texas, is the happy "patient." By 1970, the target year for completion of a long-range redevelopment plan, it will boast a pedestrian paradise not to be outshone by any of the new suburban wonderlands.

In the Gruen organization's design the one-way, multilaned motor road will come into its own, even though located in the central part of the city, because it is laid out to encircle a pedestrian area. The essential feature is access; parking and bus-and-taxi terminals will be located on the inner rim of the belt highway. The maximum remaining distance to any building from its nearest "parking penetration" will be only a two- or three-minute walk—six hundred feet, as compared with the seven hundred feet New Yorkers have to travel just to get around Columbus Circle.

As in Southdale, various levels above and below the surface of the circumscribed island are utilized. Deliveries of incoming goods to stores, of taxis to hotels, and of shoppers' parcels to garages will be by underground tunnel. The six



to "traffic separation," but the gain to the motorist fails to compensate for the disadvantages to motorist-turned-pedestrian unless provision is made for pedestrian needs after his downtown destination is reached and he gets out of his car.

"Downtown's" slowness to recognize this simple requirement helps to explain the "flight to the suburbs" that is worrying planners, municipal officials, and businessmen. But suburbia, with its proliferating shopping centers, has been quick to exploit the widespread belief that only relatively open country can produce the particular vehicular and pedestrian amenities demanded by our era.

Victor Gruen's Northland

This nonsense has been emphatically denied by a vigorous team of architects and planners called Victor Gruen Associates, who permit neither the seductions of the suburbs nor the complexities of downtown to limit their creativeness. Working first in one sphere and then in the other, they have demonstrated that the appeal of the modern shopping center does not depend on where it is but on what it is. It depends not on acreage but on the old familiar separation of pedestrian, services, and automobile traffic.

This group set a pattern for shop-

parated parking lots around the "ring," or peripheral, road.

Crowds flock to Northland by the thousands, even on Sunday afternoons. "The stores are closed, so what are they doing there?," asks Mr. Gruen, and answers himself: "Looking for open space. They window-shop and stroll through the gardens and sit on benches and soak up the sun and enjoy the fountains and sculpture."

With the growing popularity of the outlying shopping center, "downtown" has begun to think about borrowing back some of the amenities that the suburbs first adapted from Main Street. But Gruen contends that the outlying center still has more to learn from downtown than the other way around. To demonstrate, he has produced another pace-setter in Southdale, near Minneapolis, which, as a result of two shopping levels and basement all under one roof, achieves a compactness reminiscent of that traditional heart of the city that the crowds have been fleeing.

To emphasize this feature, Southdale is patterned upon the market square, with little "side streets" leading to a central plaza. Decor and lighting are carefully planned to contrast the indoor feeling of the shops with the outdoor feeling of the "streets," sidewalk cafés, and gar-

parking facilities, which will begin as surface "lots" on the inner rim of the access highway, will grow with demand to multiple-decked garages served by escalators and moving sidewalks. The surface between buildings, as well as an occasional elevated link from one structure to another, will have gardens, walkways, covered malls, little shops, and kiosks—"the salt and pepper of a city," in Gruen's words.

Of course this new Fort Worth is going to cost money. But deterioration and loss of business to rival cities costs more—and building monstrous structures that provide only temporary relief costs even more. The Texas city's expenditures will be large but entirely realistic in the light of immediate and tangible benefits. For example, the underground delivery tunnel estimated at \$20 million is no small item—but the land reclaimed for productive use through rearrangement of surface spaces represents a gain of \$30 to \$40 million. Although the ground area of the central district will be smaller in 1970 than it was before reconstruction began, its productive capacity will be enormously increased; retail land use alone is expected to be nearly tripled.

'It Will Never Work . . .'

Inevitably so bold a venture has its critics. "Visionary!" they cry. "It will never work"—and go out into their own Main Street to install another light, assign another traffic cop, tack up another "No Parking" sign. Meanwhile the motorist travels no faster and the pedestrian walks no more safely.

New York City has twice received the American Automobile Association's award for the best pedestrian safety record of any city above one million population. This achievement has been cited as an argument for individual freedom and justification of Manhattanites' incorrigible jay-walking habits.

A recent report in the *Times*, on the other hand, offers a grim rebuttal. It stated that seventy-four per cent of the city's fatal accidents in a ten-month period involved pedestrians, and quoted Police Commissioner Stephen P. Kennedy on some of the sins that contribute to the awesome total: crossing in middle of

block, fifteen per cent; from between parked cars, twelve per cent; and against lights, eight per cent. In turn an alert reader—of ambulatory habit, no doubt—was quick to point out that these official figures totaled only thirty-five per cent of the number of fatalities in which pedestrians figured, and seemed to leave "an impressive and terrifying balance of



65 per cent mowed down while crossing with the green light at the intersection."

Obviously a city the size of New York cannot separate its vehicles and pedestrians as completely and luxuriously as Fort Worth is doing. But it is still possible to apply the "pedestrian island" principle to various types of "superblock" development. This does not mean the simplest "superblock," which merely combines several small city blocks into one big one—and builds up the enlarged area as solidly as local zoning ordinances permit. It refers to the more imaginative superblock design which creates a relatively self-sufficient "island," which entails varied functions within its own encircling belt road. There is no reason why several such superblock islands within the metropolis should not eventually be linked by a whole network of ring roads and mass transit routes with their cross connections.

To date perhaps the commonest example is the "civic center," made up of public buildings or combinations of public and private buildings. Any number of U.S. cities have projects of this kind on the drafting boards. In general, community center designs are more expansive than they used to be; instead of

incorporating all functions within one mammoth building or a solidly built-up single block, they are relating a cluster of buildings to each other—with a place for people somewhere in the middle. Tulsa, Oklahoma, plans an eleven-building group that will include a county courthouse, civic auditorium, exhibition hall, city hall, art mu-

seum and library, municipal theater, a national oil museum (for the "oil capital of the world"), and a state office building. Traffic will be routed around the periphery and parking will be provided for in two subterranean levels. In between the buildings and visible from all directions through the open esplanade beneath the central structure are the gardens, courts, plazas, pools, outdoor cafés, and play areas.

A Truly Balanced Community

A more adventurous type of big-city superblock is one designed to turn the vast residential project into a self-contained neighborhood—once more with vehicular traffic consigned to the rim and the center scaled to pedestrian use. After several years of vicissitudes, Detroit's seventy-seven-acre Gratiot Area redevelopment has finally got under way. Under the sponsorship of private developers who have entrusted its design to the famous Chicago architect Mies van der Rohe, the neighborhood has been renamed Lafayette Park and the first lofty apartment is under construction. The population will eventually be seven thousand, divided among several twenty-two-story apartment towers and clusters of one- and two-story houses, all arranged around dead-end streets that from all direc-

tions push in from the peripheral traffic route. Even with a four-acre neighborhood shopping center contained within its boundaries, Lafayette Park will still have twenty-seven acres, combined with school and playgrounds, left to make the park a reality—and this entire greenbelt “village” is located only three thousand feet from the heart of downtown Detroit.

Mies van der Rohe put Chicago's Lake Shore apartments up on stilts and is reintroducing the feature in Detroit's Lafayette Park. The recessed ground floors of the high-rise apartments will contain further neighborhood services—a commissary, barbershop, and beauty shop—to supplement the shopping center. But the best feature of all, perhaps, is the opportunity Lafayette offers for a wide range of living arrangements and a truly balanced community life. “Lafayette Park,” observes *Architectural Forum*, “will not be an all-alike settlement of young married couples, each with two children and a dog.” Neither will it be an all-alike settlement of childless and petless older adults whom “downtown” apartments more commonly harbor. In more ways than one, it is destined to be an “island” dedicated to humane living.

THE MOST interesting of all in some ways, because the most highly diversified while still confined within the larger metropolitan pattern, is Boston's scheme for Back Bay, where “the world's largest integrated business, civic and residential center”—so advertised!—is about to make its appearance. Like Detroit's Lafayette redevelopment, the Back Bay enterprise has undergone many trials and tribulations. Only recently a plan prepared by a group known as the Boston Center Architects was finally shelved in favor of another, less distinguished architecturally but more immediately realizable, that is to be sponsored by the Prudential Insurance Company. This is to be an “entirely unsubsidized urban renewal project.” If this is the case, perhaps it may be only reasonable to make due allowance for the inevitable compromise with economic realities.

First of all, New England's tallest building—a fifty-story tower—will rise

at the hub of the new Prudential Center. To the west and south of the tower will be a thousand-room hotel, an auditorium-convention hall seating six thousand to be erected by the city, and an eight-hundred-seat circular restaurant. To the east, only about a block from Copley Square and the Back Bay railroad station, will be a group of buildings combining high-rise and low-rise apartments and space for retail shops. Underground, in the cavity formed by the present railroad yards, will be two or possibly three levels devoted to parking the impressive number of five thousand cars. And around the rim of the whole island will be the now familiar ring road for motor access. Only about ten acres of the thirty-two-acre plot will be covered by buildings, leaving plenty of open space for a landscaped mall and plaza within which the structures will be connected by glass-covered walkways, their setting enhanced by garden courts. Once again we see more than seventy per cent of an island site in the heart of a densely populated metropolis dedicated to the pedestrian.

The Pedestrian's Dilemma

What pedestrian? Statistics pour from the press: 100 million vehicles by 1975! Two cars in every garage! Automobiles multiplying five times as fast as the nation's population! Is it any wonder if the new concept of setting aside choice areas for foot traffic sounds downright absurd to many of us? Who is going to walk anyhow? Why reserve the heart of any place for the pedestrian, a little guy who's already practically extinct?

But in the heart of downtown, if nowhere else, everybody is a pedestrian. With or without special approach facilities, the private and public conveyances that bring us into the downtown area are already serving the function of access only. Most of them, at any given moment, are on their way in or on their way out or unhappily looking for a place to park.

Oddly, the average driver seems to have little awareness of his own dual role. Or if he does recognize it, he is much more alert to the danger of a curtailment of his role as motorist than he is gratified by extension of his part as a downtown pedestrian. Though he appreciates “traffic separation” in his suburban shopping center, he bristles at the suggestion of a vehicular ban that would turn downtown into a comparable Elysium.

It is impossible to appraise the influence of such an attitude, or of any aspect of citizen reaction, in the highly complicated business of replanning our cities for greater effectiveness. But the least to be expected of the general public is an understanding that the pedestrian and the vehicle cannot occupy the same space at the same time. A workable formula for downtown's future must provide semi-isolated “islands,” laid out to pedestrian scale within which various urban activities may be concentrated; efficient motor facilities—with the accent on access—by which each “island” may be readily approached but not invaded; and strategically designed peripheral interchanges at which the man on foot can easily and comfortably become the man in the vehicle.



The Army Looks Good To Johnnie Lawrence

DAVID HALBERSTAM

SERGEANT 1st Class Johnnie Lawrence, RA 53028233, is typical of the new professional American soldier. He is twenty-eight years old, a Korean War veteran, married, and father of three children. He is also a Negro.

The simple fact of this no longer surprises Johnnie Lawrence, who has been a soldier for nine years and took basic training in a segregated company at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, the very training center where he now teaches integrated trainees; nor does it surprise his white colleagues who have been in the Army for comparable years. It surprises only the new recruits—who like most civilians were unaware of the Negro's constantly increasing importance within the Army. At the first trainee orientation, a soldier looked at the chaplain, a Negro ma-



jor, and said to me: "That man up there is a Negro and he's also a major, but I still don't believe it."

"I guess it does catch them," Lawrence said, "but you take Tank Hill [Fort Jackson, an infantry training

center]. I figure between forty and fifty per cent of the platoon sergeants and instructors are colored. It's been growing and growing since I've been in. It's a fact now: The Army opened up to Negroes, and more and more are staying in."

Lawrence himself is noncommissioned officer in charge of Charley Company in Fort Jackson's fourth battalion, and also sergeant of the first platoon. The first platoon is generally acknowledged as the company's best, mostly because Lawrence is in charge. On the Hill he is widely known as "a hell of a sharp soldier," or more simply, "a soldier."

A native of New York, he is a slim, wiry man, an instructor with a chronic inability to pronounce the names of his pupils ("Look here, Hammolsan"). His pride in his own abilities is perhaps best reflected in a remark I have heard him make frequently: "I don't have to go around *telling* people I'm a good platoon sergeant." Among his extracurricular accomplishments are boxing ("I was in Germany looking for a soft job to keep me out of the field") and playing the guitar ("Some things come naturally and are always there and you never sweat them"). He also has a fine sense of the dramatic ("No one ever takes a picture of me smiling," he tells the trainee with camera). He embodies the professional soldier's strong hate and love for the Army. Unforeseen changes in defense policy discounted, he will be a twenty-year man in April, 1968.

"I ESCAPED into the Army," he says. "I ran away from home in New York when I was seventeen and joined up in North Carolina. I've forgotten what town it was—all I remember was that I found an old lady there and paid her ten dollars to sign a parental-permission slip. I think I always wanted to be a soldier. I wanted to prove that no one



had to take care of me, and I guess I also thought of the security."

Lawrence was one of the first Negro troops moved into integrated combat situations. "I was in Japan when the Korean War broke out and I was quickly switched into the 24th Division—I think I was the first Negro in the outfit. I felt a lot of pressure then. This was something new—not like it is today, where you see it all the time. The feeling was that the average Negro soldier hadn't fought too much during the Second World War, and I think a lot of people were watching us. So I felt I really had to make it—I never felt on the spot like that before.

"I think I did prove myself—I made squad leader the hard way. We were with a recon platoon and I volunteered for all sorts of assignments, the hardest ones they had. I wanted them to know I could soldier and that they could count on me. When I made squad leader, at first every man in the squad did what I said because of the authority, the stripes; but then I made it with them, and I think every one of those men would have given his life for me because of respect. You know I got medals over there, but that feeling meant more to me. Try to imagine what it means—how uncertain I was whether I could actually do it when I first entered that unit and then to make this test. Do you know how I felt when I first joined that unit? I thought I might get it both ways—from behind or from the front."

Lawrence did get it twice from the