Equality streets

• Martin Cassini

• mc@equalitystreets.com

• www.equalitystreets.com
Videos

- **Portishead** (5 min)
- **Poynton** (7½ min)
- **Poynton** (14 min)
The root of all evil on the road – priority
Priority v equality

• As a basis for road-user relationships, priority is a disaster. Anathema to civilised values
• “Get out of my way!” yells priority, as it denies infinite filtering opportunities and expressions of empathy
• “After you,” says equality, as it allows us to filter sociably
• In other walks of life, we take it in turns
• Imagine jumping a cashpoint queue. You’d cause a riot
• Why should it be any different on the road?
Priority and politics

- The iron rule of priority is totalitarian. It disenfranchises, depresses and oppresses us, turns us into delinquents.
- Maximises fuel use & emissions by a factor of up to 29*
- Produces a “need” for traffic lights – to break the priority streams of traffic so others can enter or cross.
- A vain, hugely expensive exercise in self-defeat.
- Average light costs £150,000. There are about 45,000 = £6.75bn in installation alone + maintenance, upgrades.
- Traffic (mis)management treats the symptoms, never the cause of our problems on the road – priority (inequality).
Politics of roadspace = inequality

- Traffic control – the last bastion of institutionalised inequality, and a huge source of *kind* spending cuts
- Although as I drove here today, I see that at last, work is starting at Frideswide Sq. What a delight to encounter free flow and no traffic lights
- It was in Cambridge in 2000 when I first really saw the light about traffic lights
Do traffic lights ensure safety? No!

- The latest safety audit from Westminster City Council shows that no less than 44% of personal injury “accidents” occurred at traffic lights.
- How many of the remaining 56% were due to priority? Compiled in the context of priority, the stats don’t tell us. Accidents stats are spurious, fail to identify true causes.
- I put “accidents” in inverted commas because most accidents are not accidents.
- They are events contrived by the rules and design of the road.
Blood on their hands

- Conventional roads policy has an under-reported hand in congestion, needless delay, avoidable “accidents” and environmental damage on a prodigious scale.
- Damages health (7m premature deaths worldwide from poor air quality), quality of life, degrades the public realm.
- The system licenses neglect and creates dangerous conflict, then we are blamed when things go wrong.
- The traffic authorities never own up or carry the can for the fallout from their own (misguided/diabolical) system.
Equality Streets

- With equality, pedestrians and cyclists are seen as fellow road-users
- Equality stimulates fellow feeling, mutual tolerance, relaxed alert, gentle speeds
- Equality enables self-control. As the videos show, and the evidence confirms, self-control is (infinitely) safer and more efficient than signal (state) control
- Journey times in Portishead have fallen by over half
- Accidents in Poynton have stopped happening
DEMOCRACY not AUTOCRACY

Removing traffic lights – the real WMD (weapons of mass distraction, danger and delay) – is a means to the end of making roads safe and fun for all road-users

Reassigning carriageway space to non-motor traffic & removing vexatious controls = civilised roads for all

Instead of being at daggers drawn on an unequal killing-field, forced to compete for gaps and green time, we make common cause and rediscover our humanity

Placemaking

• The aim is to make towns distinctive, safe, congenial places – for traffic on foot as well as on wheels
• The way to achieve a sense of place as well as authentic road safety is to shift the balance of power in favour of the vulnerable road-user
Roads FiT for People

- Misplaced deference!
- Drivers know not what they do. They need to unlearn the bad habits of a lifetime instilled by the anti-social rules of the road
- For two “accidents” on my bike in London, I don’t blame the drivers
- I blame the system which makes roads dangerous in the first place
Lights out, Clerkenwell Rd, London EC1
Lights out, Clerkenwell Rd, central London
Lights out, Goodge St, London W1
How do you get on when traffic lights are out of action?
• Cab driver: “You just have to be a bit more careful on the junction, that’s all.”
• Filter in turn - the peaceful anarchy that breaks out when traffic lights break down
• When signals fail, we are told to exercise caution, implying that when lights are “working”, we can revert to norms of neglect. One of many ironies in the fire
• If the law is an ass, nowhere is it more asinine – and lethal – than in the traffic arena
The functions of public space

- Too often, traffic engineering focuses exclusively on the movement function of public space. It leads to the false imperative of “keeping traffic moving”
- Shared space, or Equality Streets as I call it (partly to avoid confusion with shared surfaces), restores the balance between the movement and social functions of the space, a point made to me by the late Hans Monderman
Questioning traffic controls

• We are expected to accept them without question, but ...
• Why must we stop at red when no-one is using the green?
• Why can we choose when to go if we’re on foot, but not if we’re on wheels?
• Is it time to install traffic lights in stations and shopping centres, or time to start treating road-users as grown-ups?
• Who is the better judge of when - or how fast - to go ...
• … you and me at the time and the place, or lights and limits fixed by absent regulators?
Questions (cont.)

• If mobile phones are banned because they take our eyes off the road
• should traffic lights and speed cameras be banned for the same reason?
• We complain about the traffic, and blame other drivers, but could it be traffic controls that are the problem?
In my 2007 piece *No Idle Matter* for a traffic journal, I argued that the stop-start motion caused by traffic lights multiplied emissions and fuel use by a factor of 4.

My solution was to reform the traffic control system.

In a recent research report, lecturer in engineering at the University of Surrey, Dr Prashant Kumar, says the increase in dangerous pollutants at junctions can be 29x!

In reply to my email, he wrote, “Your numbers are still valid if we compare the average with the average. I read your interesting piece and fully agree with your solution.”
Equality accommodates all modes

- If we sensitise drivers, who are also pedestrians, to the equal rights of other road-users, there will rarely be a need to exclude or limit motor traffic from urban streets.
- The way to influence driver behaviour is through street design that expresses equality and a social context.
- At a stroke, relationships between road-users become sociable and peaceful.
- Proviso: redesign needs combining with re-education and culture change; we need to unlearn those bad habits.
- Let there be an end to driver domination of roadspace!
Widemarsh St, Hereford
2004 TMA (Traffic Management Act)

- The 2004 TMA requires LTAs (local traffic authorities) to explore all options for improving road safety, congestion and air quality
- Shared space or Equality Streets, increasingly recognised, should be included in any traffic consultation worthy of the name. Too often it is ignored, misrepresented or misunderstood. Many cases in point: Cambridge, London, Brighton, Bristol, Braunton, Totnes, Oxford (Hudspeth)
- There is no legal requirement for priority or signal control
- and there are no liability issues
I hate lollipop men and women

• Nothing personal, but they symbolise a system which puts the onus for road safety on children, when it could and should be the other way round
• In the context of my core reform – equality instead of priority – speed limits, like traffic lights and lollipop men, become obsolete
Current rules of road discourage empathy

• When I’m driving, I want to give way to others who were there first, especially mothers with prams
• But the anti-social, priority-based rules of the road tell us to keep going – even in a 20mph!
• The rules encourage neglect. Empathy is irrelevant to the dubious imperative of keeping traffic moving
• If traffic officers really want to keep traffic moving – at gentle speeds – let them get rid of traffic lights!
• More often than not, traffic engineering is part of the problem, not the solution
WATCH YOUR SPEED
30m.p.h. LIMIT
Do we need 20mph?

- Not if streets are designed to express a social as distinct from traffic engineering context
- “Speed kills!” goes the hue and cry
- No, it’s inappropriate speed that kills, or speed in the wrong hands
- Who is the better judge of appropriate speed – you and me at the time and the place, or limits fixed by absent regulators?
- A 20 limit licenses motorists to drive at that speed, but even 20 can be too fast and therefore inappropriate
The optimum guide to action: context

• Would you want to be hit by a bus doing 20?
• 6 year-old Ben Alston was
• Speed limits neglect the vital clue to appropriate speed: context
• Instead of driving by numbers, we should drive according to context
• BRAKE! would claim that freedom to exercise judgement based on context is a licence to drive carelessly
• On the contrary, it’s a blueprint for driving with true care and attention
Credit us with some intelligence

- Giving people responsibility and harnessing human nature will achieve what coercion never will: compliance without resentment
- THE DRIVING TEST!
- No-one should be able to get a driving licence without first passing cycling proficiency and getting a motorbike licence
- Not only would it teach drivers better road sense, it would sensitise them to the experience of cycling and riding
- Then they could ditch the pathetic THINK! “campaign”
The grammar of traffic engineering is alienating. It dominates the streetscape.
Spontaneous order

- There is a misconception that without control, people will act recklessly
- No. My interest in avoiding collision with you mirrors your interest in avoiding collision with me
Spurious road safety ad

- A classic piece of public disinformation is the ‘road safety’ ad where the film is reversed and the dead girl, bones cracking, comes back to life
- The message is that she would have survived if the driver had been doing 30 instead of 40
- But look closely: it was shot in a residential cul-de-sac where 30 is equally inappropriate, as indeed is 20
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeUX6LABCEA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeUX6LABCEA)
Engineered crime

- Cars approaching a green light are travelling at speeds that could kill
- But if you cross red after checking there is no conflicting traffic, you are proceeding cautiously with heightened awareness
- So it’s safer to cross red slowly than green at speed
- Yet the safer option is a crime
Death toll

- The roll-call of dead cyclists is an indictment not of lorry drivers but of roads policy and design
- Thumb signals
- Does anyone know the number of KSIs (killed and seriously injured) on UK roads every year?
- 25,000
- Every year
- About 2,500 are deaths
- Many of the rest face a lifetime on life support
- And this is peacetime!
For years I’ve been pitching a documentary to TV/radio.
Several times I’ve been within a gnat’s crotchet of a commission, but commissioning editors seem more interested in making cupcakes than saving lives.
Just as traffic authorities are failing in their duty to our time, health, quality of life and the planet, are the broadcasters failing in their duty to air new ideas?
I’m toying with the idea of a demo at Parliament Square with banners such as “NO LIGHTS, EQUAL RIGHTS”
Contact me if you’d like to join in
Legal case

- For corporate manslaughter?
- Corporate man’s laughter
- Briefed two Roads Ministers. Do they act? Do pigs fly?
- Current one, Robert Goodwill, spends millions on signage, eg THINK!
- Signage is a sign of failure to design roads in a way that stimulates empathy and egalitarian space-sharing