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## Freedom in an Urban Framework

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- ▶ **No other strategy for speeding up progress is as promising as:**
  - giving every family the freedom to move to an urban area that offers more types of interaction with other people; and
  - establishing a framework for urban life that encourages the good interactions that density and connection allow whilst limiting the bad interactions
  
- ▶ **This strategy - freedom in a framework - creates a paradoxical dynamic**
  - In a city like New York, freedom can sustain rapid change along most dimensions
    - The types of structures built on private land can change
    - The uses for these private structures can also change
      - from manufacturing to university laboratories around Washington Square Park
      - from office space to residential space around Wall Street
    - We use unanticipated types of vehicles to move around on the public space surveyed and claimed for Manhattan in 1811
    - Recently, we have even shifted the use of the public space away from cars to
      - buses
      - bikes
      - plazas
  - But the freedom that allows rapid change along all these dimensions relies crucially on a framework of public space that cannot change
    - For political reasons, most cities will never be "Hausmanned" as Paris was in the 18th century

- Even in 1811, city leaders in New York could not add public space around Wall Street, because development there had already taken place
  - The public space there remains largely as it was then
- ▶ **In an urban area, a successful strategy based on freedom in a framework will support growth and mobility. It will give every family**
  - the freedom to move into a city of its choice
  - and the freedom to move about and interact with all other residents once they arrive
- ▶ **A city can promote the general strategy based on growth and mobility using different tactics during the two main phases of its growth**
  - In the early phase when most of its growth comes from increases in the built area, a good framework defines and protects a generous allocation of public space that will eventually be used to build the arteries of the transport and utility systems
  - In the later phase of intensive growth, a good framework ensures that the public surface space, which becomes inevitably becomes relatively scarce, is not allocated to low-value uses
- ▶ **If there is no formal framework, a dysfunctional informal framework will emerge that will be equally hard to change**
  - In Manhattan, the formal plan of 1811 set aside 30% of the land as the public space that we use today for streets and sidewalks
    - Counting parks too, public space accounts for 36% of the land
  - In other cities, informal development in favelas and slums allocate as little as 5% of land to public space, typically with none at all for parks
- ▶ **This means that a good formal framework has to be established in conditions of extreme uncertainty**
  - In 1811, the planners who set aside the public space for Manhattan could not possibly have imagined how we would drive cars on it today
- ▶ **Because of uncertainty and long lead times, good frameworks should create options**
- ▶ **To create options, a framework that manages a physical resource should start with excess capacity, with the understanding that this will gradually evolve into an ever increasing relative scarcity**
- ▶ **Ironically, the options created by excess physical capacity can limit future choices by establishing a dysfunctional framework of perceived rights**

- In most cities, the default informal framework gives every car owner a perceived right to drive on any street at any time
  - Worst of all, perhaps even the right to park a car on public space
- In the early stages of development, a generous initial allocation of public space relative to private activity, this framework of rights causes little harm
- As population and economic activity increase, public space becomes ever scarcer and more valuable, and congestion costs start to increase very rapidly
- Voters motivated to defend their rights may then vote to limit growth and density even though the efficient strategy would be to use the public space more efficiently
- To protect mobility, they limit growth

▶ **Economists frequently propose congestion prices to encourage efficient use of public space**

- Like any departure from free access to road space, it may be politically unacceptable if it is proposed too late, after the right to free access is well established
- It may also conflict with other parts of a social framework
  - E.g. it could conflict with an affirmation of democratic equality that commits a city to the principle of equal access to public space

▶ **Before a majority of citizens own a car, strategies other than congestion pricing might better prepare a city for the challenge of efficiently managing public space**

- For example, a city might require that a driver buy an annual permit that grants the right to drive a car in the city
  - The government could establish from the beginning that it limits the supply of permits but that it is ones fellow citizens who eventually start to drive up the price
- Experience in Singapore and Shanghai shows that eventually, the market price for a permit that grants unlimited road access can be very expensive
- The principle of equal access might be well served by creating a portfolio of permits that give access during restricted periods of time
  - E.g. a permit that gives access only on Monday or only on Tuesday
  - Or only during the hours of 10 am to 2 pm
  - Compared to "even-odd" restrictions based on license plate numbers, such a system would avoid the wasteful purchase of extra cars when someone is willing to pay for access every day

- Someone who wants to be able to drive any day of the week need only purchase 7 all day permits, one covering each day of the week
- Such a system might even allow for universal access by giving everyone with a car a permit to drive on a specific day of the week, Saturday perhaps or Sunday
- This kind of permit system might achieve the goal of giving everyone who aspires to ownership of a car a type of equal treatment and a form of free mobility
  - This goal could be met by tolerating some congestion, but only on one day each week

▶ **We should critically reexamine every proposed tactic for managing urban mobility to verify whether it is realistic and whether it truly supports:**

- the specific strategy of urban growth and mobility
- the more general strategy of freedom in a fixed (or at best, a slowly changing) framework

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