

CREATING ENJOYABLE CITIES

LOW TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOODS



CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

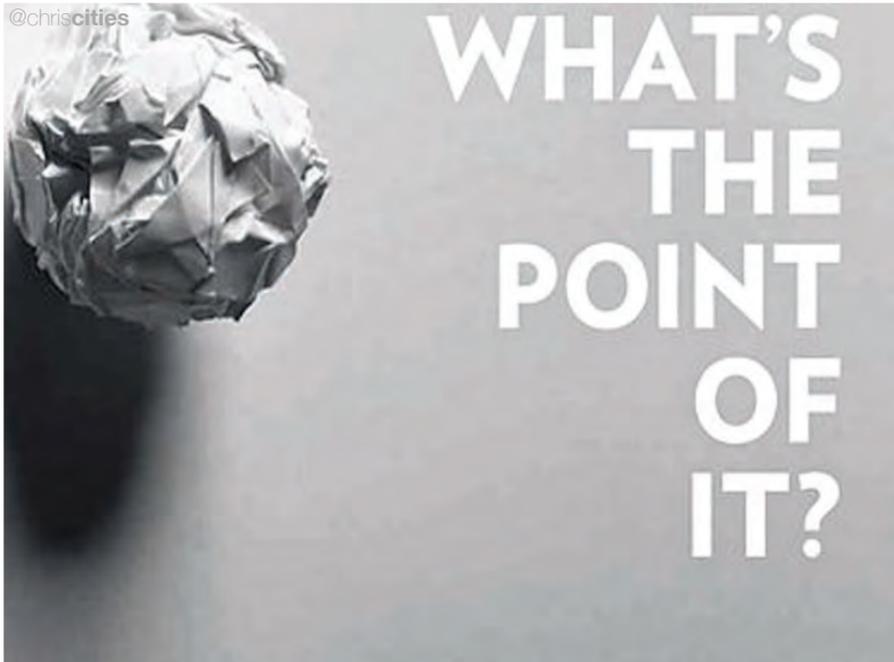


Image: Martin Creed

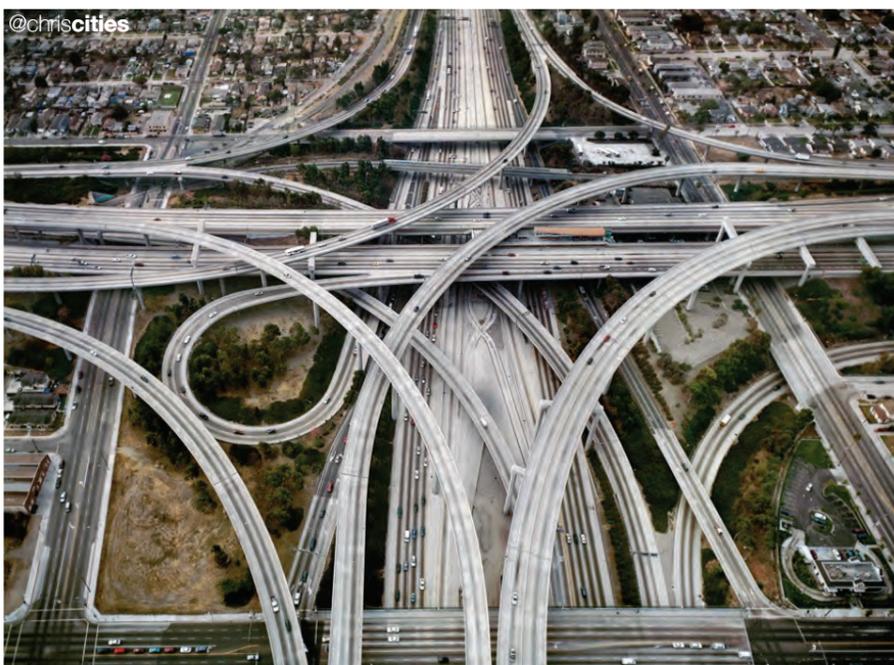
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“ Cities enable the collaboration that makes humanity shine most brightly.

Humans are an intensely social species that excel in producing things together, and when this happens we achieve much more than we ever could in isolation

”

Edward Glaeser



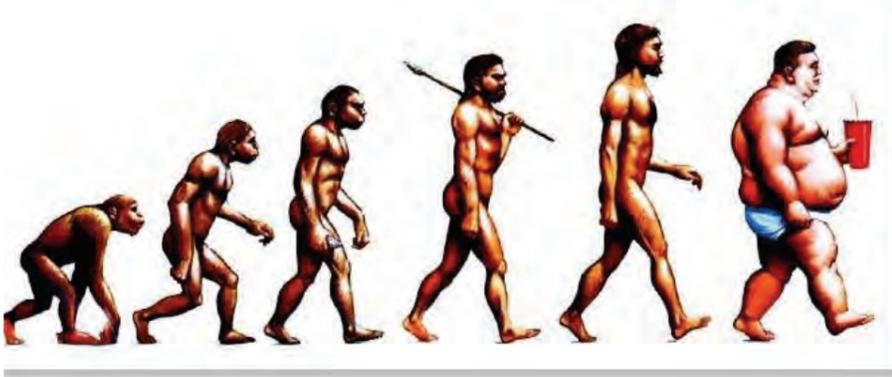
The following guide offers my thoughts on how we can better shape cities around communities and people, both in emerging cities where this issue is of critical importance, and in developed cities. All cities need to offer the advantages of urban living to more and more people, but have to do so in a way that is best for people, best for the city, and best for society as a whole. Shaping cities around low-traffic neighbourhoods is key to creating inclusive, sustainable, and enjoyable places.

So first things first, why we are bothering with all this? Essentially, as the words of Edward Glaeser point to, as human beings, towns and cities are really very good for us. They are at the cutting edge of whatever we choose to put our collective mind to, because they connect people together and so speed up innovation. Not only this, in terms of society they bring out the best in us, they are our seats of debate, learning, government, and reason.

This is why cities evolved, and continue to increase in size, to build on the success and innovation they create, and extend it to more and more people.

The key point here is people. Cities evolve and increase in size to allow more people to thrive, however it can be argued that we got a little carried away when increasing the size of cities. Instead of shaping cities around the very entity that makes them a success - which is people - instead, we have chosen to shape them around the car in order to deliver growth.

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Needless to say, this has caused us a few problems as human beings. It hasn't been good for our health, it hasn't been good for the environment, and it hasn't been good for society.

We have created places, that do not allow us to thrive. Instead of creating places that are catalysts for innovation, inclusion, sustainability, prosperity, and fun.

So how do we get back from this? How do we create places that offer people all the benefits of cities, and how do we unlock these benefits for people and society?

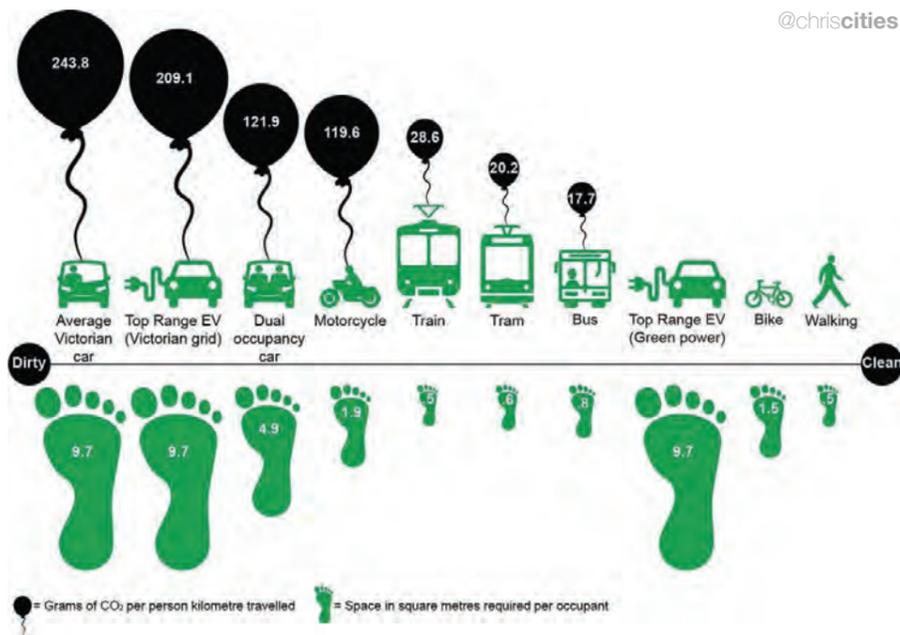
The solution as I see it is scale. The snapshot below is of two cities at the same scale. Florence on the left was built around the scale of people, which creates a place where people want to walk and cycle, and want to spend time, because it is interesting to be on the streets. The entire urban core of Florence fits inside one freeway junction in Houston, a city that was built at the scale of vehicles. You don't find many people walking in most of Houston. Because it isn't that much fun.

PLACES SHAPE OUR BEHAVIOUR,
AND BEHAVIOUR OVER TIME IS CULTURE.

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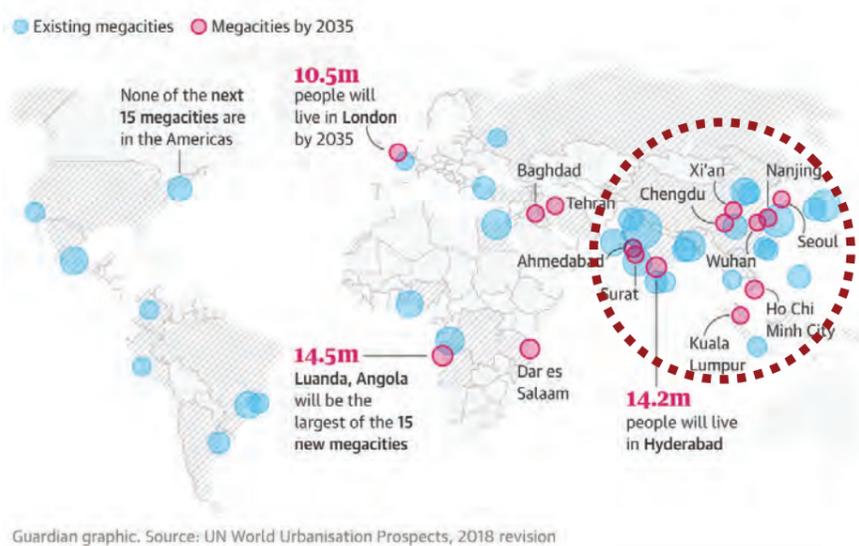


We need the right scale, to connect people together and drive innovation;
We need the right scale, to create dynamic, interesting, and fun places; and,
We need the right scale, to be able to provide viable mass transport, and create attractive low traffic neighbourhoods.

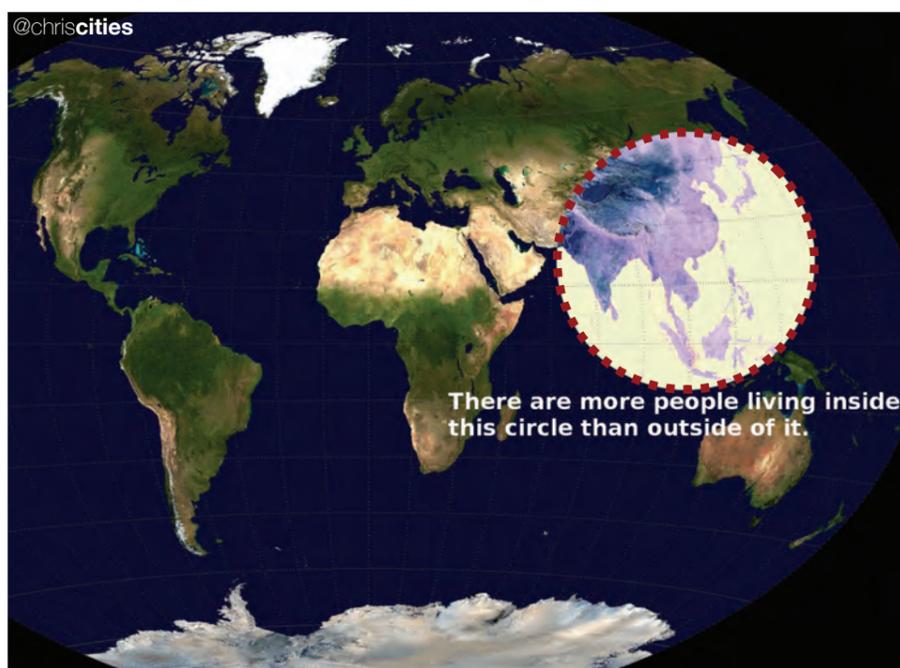


To deliver places that are at the right scale for people we need to prioritise space efficiency, and this understanding is increasingly important in cities. The image to the left highlights how much space different modes of transport take up, and how good they are for our environment. The modes that are space-efficient and better for the environment, have to be the ones we design our cities around if we are to deliver sustainable and enjoyable places.

By 2035 there will be 48 megacities with populations above 10 million

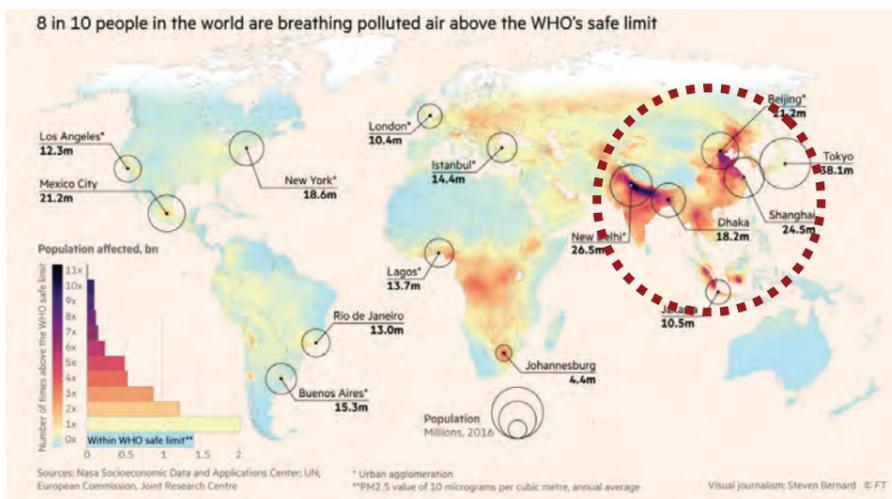


Moreover, we need to prioritise modes, that deliver benefits to people, in terms of inviting them to be more physically active going about their daily lives. We need to prioritise modes, that deliver benefits to the city, in terms of providing the greatest benefit for the economy. And we need to prioritise modes that deliver benefits to society, in terms of improving air quality, and addressing alarming issues associated with climate change - to name but two.



This is something that is of stark importance in rapidly urbanising countries, because the way we shape streets and transport in these cities will affect generations to come locally and globally. We know cities around the world are growing at a pace - and to a size - which has until now been unprecedented. Perpetuating car orientated development at this scale would simply be tragic for people, and for cities.

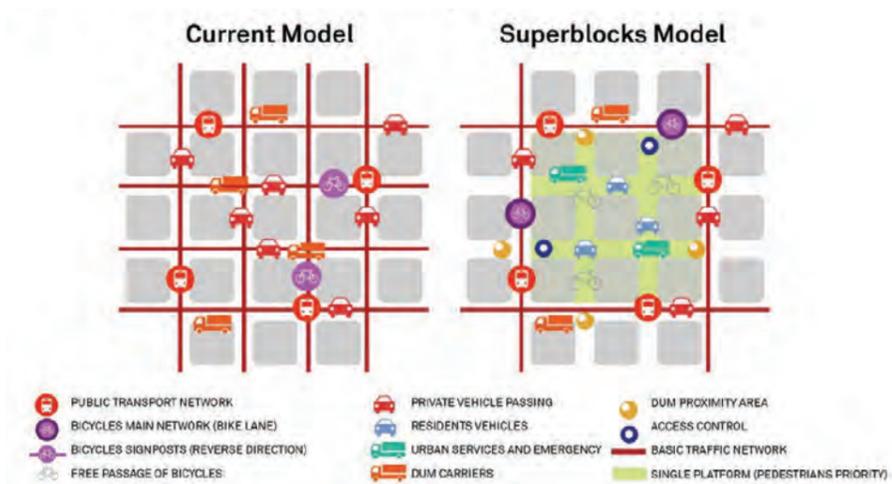
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The red circles here are showing us where the concentration of emerging megacities is. And by extension where the highest concentration of people is. But also globally, where the worst air quality is. We have to focus our attention on established and emerging cities, and deliver cities and transport at a scale that benefits people, cities, and society collectively.

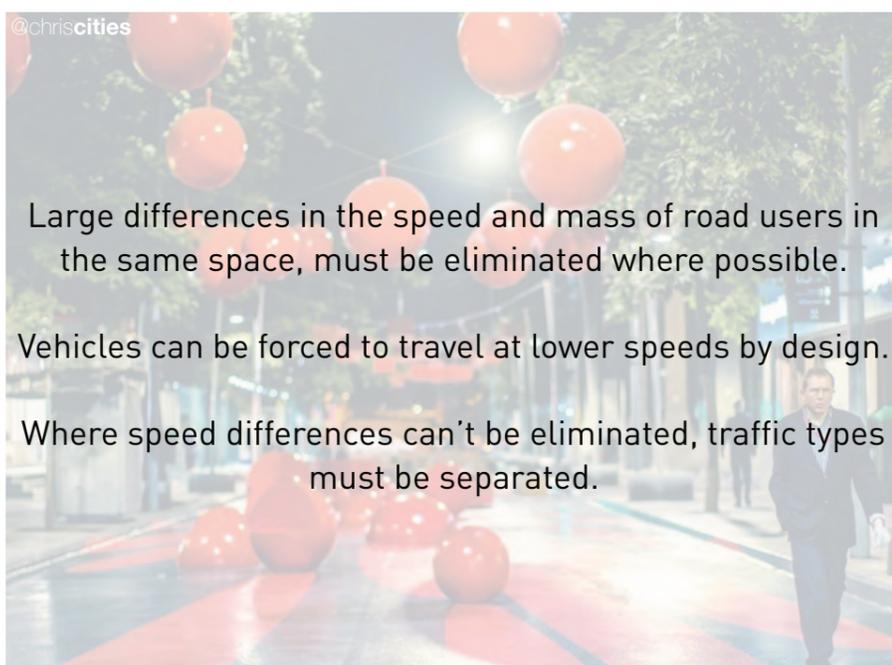
So step one. On the path to creating low traffic neighbourhoods, delivering the right scale is the first step.

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And when we have this scale, we start to see that prioritising space-efficient modes can be relatively straightforward (in principle) - and the SUPERBLOCK model to the left is a great illustration of this. Removing through-traffic in residential neighbourhoods, and prioritising walking and cycling, delivers huge benefits for a community. And by improving the trafficked streets at the edges, and connecting these neighbourhoods with good quality crossings over these streets, we can deliver wide-reaching benefits for cities.

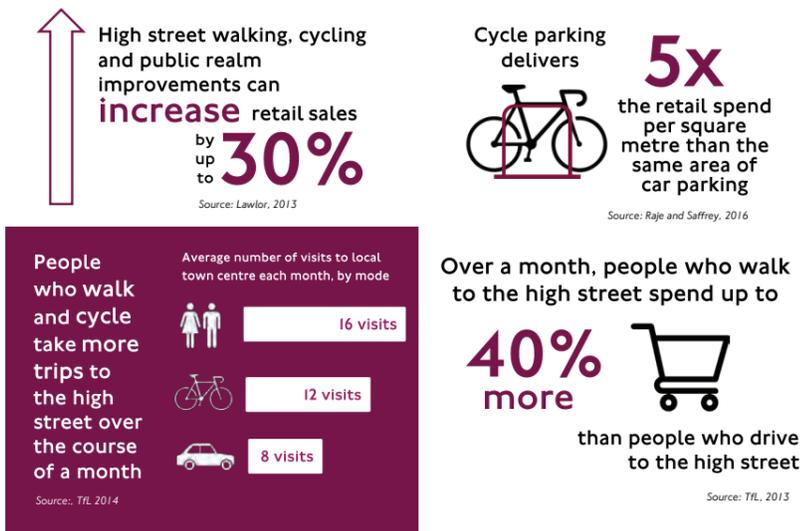
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Put simply, to deliver low traffic neighbourhoods we need to follow a transport strategy like this.

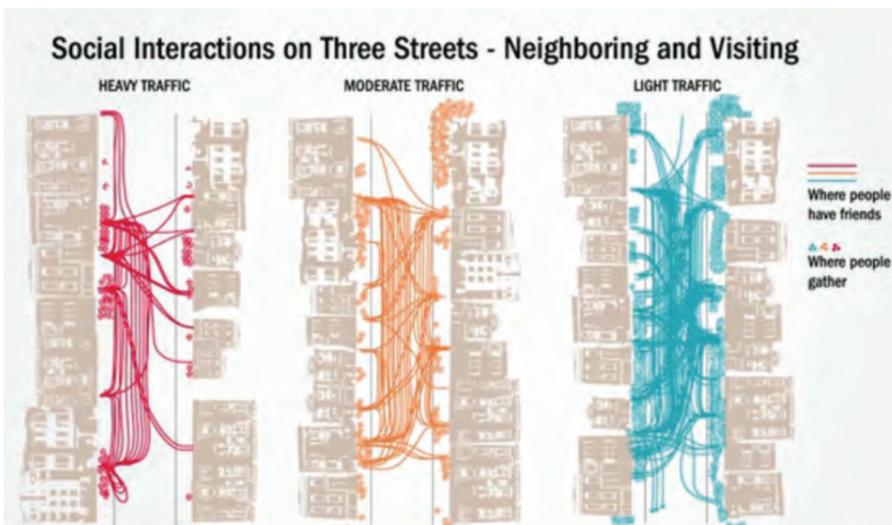
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HIGHER SPENDS



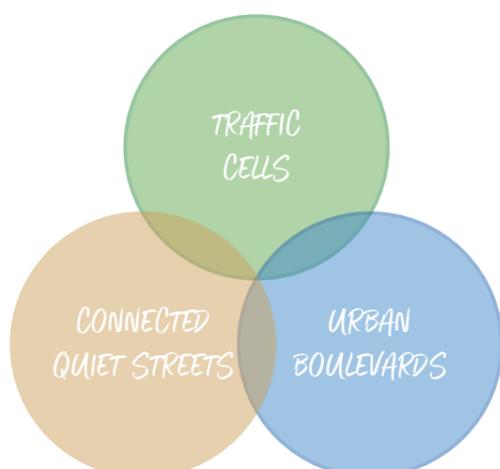
And this is off course underpinned by a great deal of evidence. If we increase the number of people walking and cycling it directly benefits the local economy, as people walking and cycling have been shown to visit local shops more often, and spend 40% more over the course of a month. As well as this, as Donald Appleyard demonstrated if we reduce the number of vehicles on residential streets, we create stronger and more inclusive communities, we can reduce urban loneliness, and we improve people's mental health. Not only this, if we increase the attractiveness of walking and cycling as part of people's daily routine, we can directly benefit our health because inactivity is one of the biggest killers of human beings. And if we shape the trafficked streets, so they have an inherent design speed that is very low in urban areas, we create safer streets for people, with drivers that are far more aware of their surroundings and can read situations that unfold ahead of them more easily.

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So delivering a Low Traffic Neighbourhood, in my mind, comes down to these three elements.

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Urban Boulevards are the primary through-traffic streets that link a city up. Traffic Cells are a network of streets, that really vehicles do not need to use unless they are accessing somewhere within it. And Connected Quiet Streets, are the streets that act as convenient and attractive links between these cells for people walking and cycling.

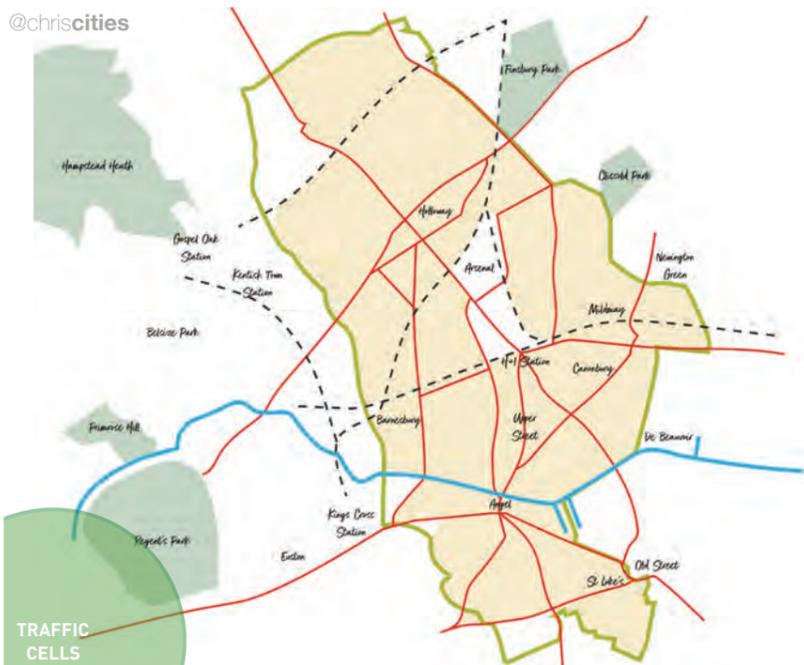
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In terms of the technical process there are some key steps we need to go through, which for the sake of example I have applied here to Islington.

First of all, we need to examine the area and identify the main routes for through-traffic, as well as the notable barriers such as railways and canals. And by way of illustration, we all know what these main through-traffic streets often look like - places for vehicles - at the expense of people and city life.

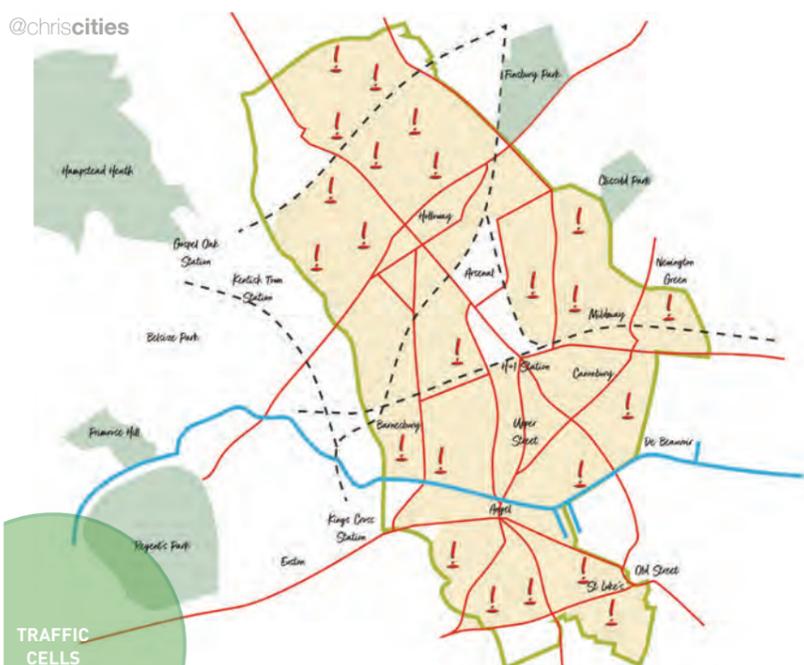
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So purely by identifying the main through-traffic streets we see the emergence of potential traffic cells

Key now is working closely with the community. We need to gauge the level of interest - and support - for a potential traffic cell, and we can do this through a short questionnaire.

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After this where we have good levels of community participation and support, we need to hold a full day community workshop at the weekend to gain an understanding of the community's issues and discuss potential solutions. These need to be led in a sensitive and productive manner, with all issues and recommendations being logged and a consensus for a solution being sought.

Key to these solutions is the identification of what we need to do in order to reinforce these cells. And this point about reinforcing the nature of these potential cells is crucial. We cannot simply pick currently quieter streets and neighbourhoods - we have to create them.



And there are plenty of examples of this kind of filtering in London. They can be retrofitted fairly economically, as was the case for the poster child that is Goldsmith's Row.

They can have a little more money spent on them, using trees rather than bollards, and upgrading the pedestrian environment as well as is the case in Shoreditch here. Or we can design them in from day one, incorporating SuDS, bike parking, and seats for example.



Only when we have done this, will we start to see the emergence of traffic cells. This idea has been applied to quite large areas in Barcelona and this is increasingly a common sight, but it means we can then start to repurpose some of the space that was before provided for vehicles to move through. Instead, creating spaces for children or adults to play, and places for people to sit and relax.

And again this can be done temporarily and cheaply, and then as time goes on and appetites develop we can formalise these, to create places for the community like this, and of course this - in Van Gogh Walk.



So we have come a long way. But now we need to think about how we connect these quiet traffic cells. What are the attractive connecting streets that enable people of all ages and abilities to walk and cycle between the cells? This is where co-creating with the community is of course invaluable, as people who use the streets everyday know the answer to this already.



And we know what these types of streets look like. Mapping these quiet and attractive walking and cycling streets, we need to focus on where they interact with the main through-traffic routes, and make sure that we deliver attractive and safe crossings at these points to ensure that everyone continues to feel safe and invited to walk and cycle whatever they come to.



These crossings are fundamental to creating low traffic neighbourhoods, and depending on the scale of the street that is being crossed, these crossings can be un-signalised crossing points - like this one in Lower Clapton that was upgraded recently to open it up to more users, or signalised crossings when we need to give people the confidence to get over bigger streets.

But it isn't over yet! As a final step, we need to identify which of these main arterial routes need to be upgraded into urban boulevards, which move traffic, but are also attractive to walk and cycle along, spend time on, and are thriving local centres in their own right.



When we have identified these, we need to shape them into attractive places for people - attractive to spend time in through creating inviting places to sit; attractive to walk and cycle along, through creating dedicated and clear space in which to do so; and attractive to do business in, through creating attractive places that support business and create a destination that people want to visit.



So there we have it, this trilateral approach to create Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods, can help cities to start shaping places that unlock the benefits of cities for people. By doing this, we will start to see healthier, and more relaxed communities. We start to see more enjoyable, more inclusive places for children, adults, and the elderly. We start to see more prosperous and successful communities. And we start to unlock space for people and communities to come together and enjoy themselves.



