## The Urban Scene

**The Accessible City.** WILFRED OWEN with the assistance of Inai Bradfield. Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1972. x, 150 pp., illus. $6.50.

In 1956 Wilfred Owen, in his pioneering study *The Metropolitan Transportation Problem*, wrote, "Neither economic analysis nor transportation history suggests a return to public transportation on a scale that would be decisive." He called for improved planning of highways and the integration of highway planning into community planning, saying, "Only a total network of controlled access expressways and parking facilities can provide a skeleton that will support the giant metropolis of the future."

Those words were written at the start of the massive federal interstate highway program. Sixteen years later, in *The Accessible City*, Owen returns to the urban scene with a significantly different theme: Rational planning of urban transportation systems that rely heavily on automotive transportation will not be sufficient to solve the "metropolitan transportation problem." The time has come to restrain the private automobile. "If we opt for unplanned cities and unbridled use of cars, the traffic jam will be absolute and the environment intolerable."

Owen's message is communicated in his typical hard, fast, telegraphic style of writing. The reader is treated to a breathless tour of the world's traffic jams and new transit systems in the first 50 pages of text. Statistics abound, and one is left with the feeling that one has just attended a slide show where the operator changed the pictures a bit too fast.

The subject then changes, though not the pace of the writing. The ultimate cure for the transportation problem lies in the planning of new and the rebuilding of old cities in ways that reduce the need for trips or provide for better harmony between transportation facilities and land use. Another trip around the world reveals instances of spectacular new cities or land developments where people have rediscovered the art of walking.

Finally, Owen offers a $60 billion plan which would simultaneously improve the urban transportation systems of the United States and the environment. One-third of the money would go to public transportation systems and the remainder to improvements in streets and parking.

Owen is at his best when his evangelical prose highlights some critical misconceptions: "The traffic jam, we discover, is present even where automobiles are absent. . . . Cities with the most public transit can suffer the worst congestion. . . . Making it easier to move often adds to the causes of crowding. . . . Congestion is not necessarily eliminated by rapid transit" (Owen unintentionally documents this last truth with a photograph showing the opening day of Boston's new Quincy line, when free rides were given).

But the book has some disconcerting weaknesses. There is little discussion of the important forces that have motivated urbanites to flee the central cities. One looks in vain in the index for the words "drugs," "crime," or "schools." There is a beautiful photograph of a section of Philadelphia titled "restored for living." What is not treated is the painfully slow process of rebuilding Philadelphia or the graffiti plague that infests the inner city.

People and politics are likewise neglected. Owen emphasizes the ends, not the means, in his exhortation. For example, he notes, "If these programs of the Department of Transportation and the Department of Housing and Urban Development were combined, together they could supply all the ingredients for large-scale redevelopment and new city building: transportation, land acquisition, housing, community facilities, and economic development, together with center city slum clearance and renewal." True in theory, but what of the realities? Responsibility for urban mass transportation was once in the Department of Housing and Urban Development. It was transferred to the Department of Transportation. Now there is pressure to put it back into Housing and Urban Development. Will formal organizational changes plus $60 billion do the job? Owen's answer, implicitly affirmative, is perhaps simplistic. What is needed is a more precise statement of political strategies designed to combat the myriad economic, ideological, and sociological forces that inhibit the rebuilding of our cities.

In 1956, Owen called for high-quality public transportation supported by pricing that would make high standards possible. In 1972, he supports free public transportation on the grounds that improved transit patronage would reduce street congestion and parking problems. But there is evidence that the demand for public transportation is more responsive to service than to price. Nor does Owen explain why the affluent suburbanite working in the central business district should receive free transportation as a reward for fleeing the central city. Finally, one wishes that he had given more attention to the ultimate solution to the urban transportation problem—telecommunications replacing trips.

In summary, Owen's latest book provides an excellent overview of the urban transportation problem for the layman, but transportation specialists and other professionals may find it less satisfactory.

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## An Energy Source

**Tidal Power.** Proceedings of a conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, May 1970. T. J. GRAY and O. K. GASHUS, Eds. Plenum, New York, 1972. x, 630 pp., illus. $28.

Tides have been used as a small-scale source of energy in coastal regions for several hundred years. The only commercial use of tidal motion in the generation of electricity at the present time is on the estuary of the Rance River near Saint-Malo, France. This station, completed in 1966, contains 24 turbine units located in a barrier separating the inland tidal basin from the sea. The turbine is designed to generate power with flow from the basin to the sea or from the sea to the basin. The power output, rated for a peak power production of 240 megawatts, is variable and must be integrated into a large power grid for efficient utilization. The description of the Rance station is one of the 25 papers from these published proceedings of an International Conference on the Utilization of Tidal Power.

As a result of the "energy crisis" and concern with environmental effects of thermal power plants, the possibility of utilizing the ocean's tidal power is again being considered. As would be expected from the location of the conference, many of the papers are concerned with the tidal power potential of the Bay of Fundy. The keynote paper, by F. L. Lawton, reviews the history of tidal power projects in the Bay of Fundy and the engineering aspects of various types of tidal power generation. The emphasis is on all-Canadian schemes as opposed