#01

In the first of this series of sessions on the future of the urban environment, Monocle invites four experts to respond to a particular urban challenge: the street as an urban thoroughfare.

THE CHALLENGE

What is the future of the urban thoroughfare and how will travelling from A to B become a more pleasant and less of an anonymous experience?

The Singapore Sessions are a series of discussions bringing experts from diverse fields to the table, exploring the many and varied solutions that are possible when approaching various global challenges. In partnership with Monocle, each Singapore Session draws on the experience and expertise of leading urban thinkers, architects, policy makers and academics – scoping out the future of the global city.

This first session will explore solutions that find a greener, cleaner way to get from A to B, pointing towards a less anonymous and warmer urban experience. Transportation will be an area of focus, with new combinations of foot, rail and motorised transport threading through open and well-shaded streets. Key challenges such as transportation and environmental needs, population density as well as rising temperatures and emissions will be addressed.

Monocle has always supported passionate discussion on the urban environment, introducing a new international ranking system through our annual Quality of Life survey. The Singapore Sessions give us another platform to bring together the ideas that are shaping our cities.

singapore sessions

THE RESPONSE

Each of the following sessionist's responses offer a glimpse into our experts' visions of the future of the urban thoroughfare.

LIVEABLE STREETS
KEEPING CITIES ALIVE
ELLEN LOU, SAN FRANCISCO

Logic-defying though it may seem, transforming auto-overrun, downtown shopping streets into pedestrian/transit malls turns out to be far more likely to kill off active street-life than enhance it. The result is lifeless streets in increasingly lifeless cities. To paraphrase the character Gordon Gecko in the 1987 motion picture *Wall Street*, when it comes to urban street life, "messy is good". What lies behind this notion of "liveable streets" is that when people, activities and even motor traffic are given equal priority, it can often lead to a life-enhancing, if sometimes over-stimulated, whole. Traffic should be slowed and easy pedestrian crossing provided through the creation of mini-parks and narrower streets. "Bulb-out" curbs could provide engagement between street edge and public realm, as well as reserving places for outdoor seating. Pavement widths can even be tuned, as they are along Chicago's State Street, to create critical street mass and enhanced energy. The result can be a rich array that will engage people and make them want to slow down and even become part of the parade themselves.

PERFECT MIX
AN ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL ROAD USERS

Mixing slow-moving vehicular traffic with pedestrian packs, schools of bicycles, vans, trucks, cafés, shops, and kiosks, may not only be a good thing but possibly the best of all possible urban transportation worlds.

CITIES WITH MEMORY
LESSONS FROM THE PAST
MATTHEW SWEET, LONDON

Cars are a menace to the health and the lives of pedestrians – but carless streets have the graveyard atmosphere of the mall. I'd like the city of the future to contain cars (or car-like vehicles) but I'd like to put them in their place. I'd like to make drivers feel ill at ease in the city – as though they were making an incursion into a space that did not belong to them.

Many of the best features of 19-century cities are the product of capitalist self-doubt. Why do so many industrial settlements have beautiful public parks and gardens (and baths too, until recently)? Because industrialists knew that wealth doesn't earn respect. Giving land to your community, however, will ensure that your name is pronounced with approval for hundreds of years.

There should also be a strong link to the past as we look to the future – who wants to live in a completely new place? A city needs a history, a memory. Isn't there an argument for "slow" urban planning – for schemes that have missing pieces and fallow plots to allow the next generation to make their own choices and adaptations – so we're not always waiting for the next Year Zero?

FRESH AIR
PARKS AND GREEN SPACES

Green spaces and flexible planning allow cities space to grow and adapt, with a little more room to breathe rather than rigid and rigorous regulations.

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE
PEOPLE CENTRIC TRANSPORT
YAM AH MEE, SINGAPORE

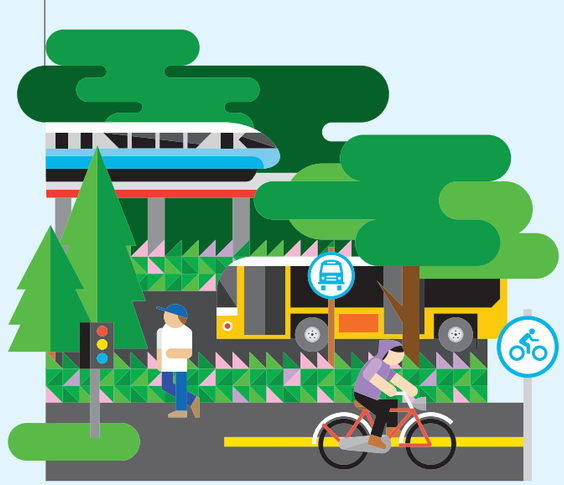
Infrastructure, technology and policy will all work together in enhancing mobility and accessibility, creating a people-centric urban thoroughfare that is easy and pleasant to get around. Reliable public transport will replace cars, which will be made available for discretionary trips, and pedestrian-friendly walkways and cycling tracks will provide healthy alternatives.

Road and rail systems can be integrated in a hub-and-spoke model. Feeder bus services bring commuters directly to major transfer hubs, where they seamlessly transfer to longer-haul bus or train services.

More wheelchair-accessible buses, barrier-free facilities and clear signs will help people, especially those less mobile, to move around. Covered walkways and underground passages linking transport nodes to one another or to nearby buildings will protect commuters from sun and rain.

Intelligent transport systems will also play key roles. Video traffic surveillance will provide real-time updates to motorists and public transport users, while the dynamic optimisation of traffic signals will minimise road congestion.

These solutions will help people to move around in a manner that is more comfortable, efficient and sustainable, contributing to the liveability and vibrancy of the city.



FAST AND EFFICIENT
DESIGN FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT USERS

Singapore's rail network will double by 2020, so commuters will be able to access a rapid transit station within five minutes' walk on average. At least 85 per cent of public transport commuters are expected to complete their journey in under an hour.

IN BALANCE
URBAN THOROUGHFARE
ALEJANDRO GUTIERREZ, MILAN

The urban thoroughfare should be part of a whole network of public spaces where life can flourish. Motorised travel will need to be low-carbon and enable low noise technologies so that air quality is much improved, and noise levels are such that you can have a conversation without shouting and being disturbed by noisy engines or horns. At the urban thoroughfare, access to digital, online information is commonplace, with touch-screen-based technology that is easily accessible, and user friendly interfaces.

These urban information networks can provide the latest transport information, weather data, availability of an appointment to your GP, local cinema listings, air quality monitoring, noise levels, recycling rates and carbon emissions of your neighbourhood and tips on how to improve your ecological footprint. There are plenty of open spaces for recreation, wide sidewalks, small pocket parks with play areas, others with quieter places where adults can meet to play chess, domino, "bochas" or any other urban sport. Above ground some shared surfaces for bikes and trams or low carbon buses are separated from the pavement by tall and mature trees. At the urban thoroughfare life is bustling in tune and balance with its own environment.

A PLACE OF THEIR OWN
PEOPLE-FRIENDLY CAR SOLUTIONS

At the urban thoroughfare cars are left just around the corner or in an underground car park where charging facilities for electricity or hydrogen are found.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
To comment on the solutions you see here, visit **SingaporeSessions.com/Transport**

singapore sessions

THE SESSIONISTS

Four figures – an architect, an urban designer, a transport chief and an academic – whose vision and expertise are informing and changing the way we look at city planning today.

01
ELLEN LOU
ARCHITECT

Ellen Lou leads the Urban Design and Planning at the San Francisco office of Skidmore Owings and Merrill architectural practice.

Set up in New York the 1930s, Skidmore Owings and Merrill is one of the largest architectural and engineering practices in the world. Run out of eight international offices, among its many achievements, SOM was responsible for masterminding the Burj Khalifa in Dubai – currently the world's tallest building. The firm's expertise also covers urban planning: in the 1970s, SOM worked on the entire overhaul and redevelopment of the transport system in Boston. Training at the University of Singapore, Lou joined SOM in 1986, and has since directed numerous urban design projects in the US and areas in the Pacific Rim nations.

Her expertise lies in the urban domain, including masterplanning new communities and town layouts, and brown field reuse for the public benefit. This includes the multi-purpose development in Pioneer Park, India and the 1,500 acre master plan for the University of Utah and the Hongtang bay resort in China. She also serves as a board member for San Francisco Urban Planning and Research, and has lectured at a series of universities, including Stanford and Berkeley.

02
MATTHEW SWEET
HISTORIAN & BROADCASTER

Matthew Sweet is an expert in historical urban planning who has paid special attention to design and transportation in historical city planning and its implications for today.

Matthew Sweet is a broadcaster and historian. He has written for Monocle on urban issues and on how the future of urban planning is rooted in the lessons of the past and introduces an authoritative academic perspective to broaden the debate. Sweet has been a columnist for *The Big Issue* and director's assistant at the RSC. He holds a doctorate from Oxford University, has contributed to the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* and edited an edition of Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* for Penguin Classics. He is film critic for the *Independent on Sunday*, a presenter for BBC Radio 3's Night Waves, a reporter for *The Culture Show* on BBC2, and a panelist for *Newsnight Review*. He was also the co-host of BBC2's *Edinburgh Show*, and is the author of *Inventing the Victorians*, producing a radical new perspective on the urban and urbane lives of one of the most important eras in British history.

03
YAM AH MEE
TRANSPORT CHIEF

Yam Ah Mee has been chief executive of the Singapore Land Transport Authority since 2005.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA) spearheads land transport developments in Singapore. As chief of the LTA, Yam has led major initiatives to promote public transport, optimise road use and expand community engagement programmes across Singapore, securing its position as one of the world's leading urban centres.

Among other achievements, the Singapore LTA has been recognised as a leader in green IT, with the IBM Green IT Leadership Award in 2009.

Yam was one of the driving forces behind the LTA's Land Transport Master Plan, published in 2008 as the blueprint for Singapore's land transport development initiatives in the next 10 to 15 years. Yam has overseen major new transport routes such as the Kallang-Paya Lebar expressway, as well as the circle line, a fully underground orbital line linking other mass rapid transit lines leading to the city.

Having studied at Harvard University, Yam has had an illustrious career both in the Singapore Armed Forces and in the civil service, and has received several awards in recognition of his exceptional leadership.

04
ALEJANDRO GUTIERREZ
URBAN DESIGNER

Alejandro Gutierrez is an associate director at Arup Urban Design, with an extensive background in urban planning.

Alejandro Gutierrez is currently leading several innovative projects including Low2no (a zero carbon project for a mixed-used development in Helsinki), a sustainable blueprint for Manifattura Domani and an ecological masterplan for 40,000 inhabitants in Santiago, Chile.

Gutierrez has led a range of urban development projects globally such as Dongtan Eco City-Shanghai, Wanzhuang Eco City-Beijing and the Port Regeneration Strategy-Copenhagen. He also is a guest lecturer at London School of Economics, Said Business School – Oxford University, UCL Bartlett School of Architecture, Universidad Iberoamericana, Universidad Catolica in Chile, Architectural Association-UK, RIBA. Before joining Arup he worked in Chile in a range of practices and projects associated with urban development, urban planning and regeneration. He is one of the most respected urban designers working today with the both expertise and vision to design the urban environments of the future.