



The Art of the Possible: Best practice vs received wisdom

This is a talk about transport planning, resistance to change and the importance of experiments. Humans are the most innovative species in the world, yet we're suspicious of anything new. From hand axes to carbon nanotubes, it's inherently human to invent things, while encountering doubt at every step. What does this mean for progress in transport and planning?

It's easy to dismiss new ideas and plead exceptionalism. Why copy examples from Europe, for example? Everyone knows that every city in Europe is old, dense and unchanging. How can this be relevant to the New World? Similarly, Australia is too rich to copy, while other countries are too poor. Surely New Zealand's planning history is unique?

The reality is different. Cities all over the world changed dramatically in the 20th century, with wholesale reshaping to favour private motor traffic. More recently, some cities have moved in the opposite direction, taking bold steps to recreate the city as a place for people. This has, in all cases, been difficult, controversial and contentious. Cities evolve, but change is difficult on any continent.

This talk unpicks received wisdom around transport planning. Travelling from New Zealand to the UK, we learn about a long-term initiative to transform travel behaviour through design. Back in New Zealand, we see how pilot schemes are essential for problem solving and tackling received wisdom. By better understanding the art of the possible, we can shape successful cities.