

Traffic logic, state strategies and free speech in an urban park: The Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme, London, 1955–1962

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 October 2021

Received in revised form

23 June 2023

Accepted 26 June 2023

Keywords:

Traffic logic

Parks

Free speech

Strategical-relational state theory

Urban public space

ABSTRACT

'Traffic logic' draws attention to how civil rights in public space, such as free speech, are often compromised by officials in favour of expanding bureaucratic traffic codes, designs and plans. However, internal disputes among state departments about nascent traffic logic schemes will sometimes be strategically employed by social movements to campaign for civil liberties and rights in public space. This article explores these issues through the example of the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme in London, which was completed in 1962. The road scheme's purpose was to build new roundabouts at Hyde Park Corner and Marble Arch and convert a strip of land within Hyde Park and Park Lane into a dual carriageway. But this area in Hyde Park was also home to the famous place for free speech, Speakers' Corner. By looking in detail at discussions and disagreements about the road scheme within state departments and their partners, the paper shows how civil liberties campaigners and Speakers' Corner regulars used the strategic terrain carved out by these discussions to campaign for existing and new free speech entitlements and rights at Hyde Park.

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Introduction

For a number of years before the Second World War, there had been discussions between British government representatives, local London officials, and engineers about traffic volumes at the intersections at Hyde Park Corner in the south-east corner of Hyde Park, and Marble Arch corner in the north-east corner of Hyde Park. Traffic flows at these intersections were some of the heaviest in the whole of the UK.¹ Initial ideas were put forward to ease the traffic burden at these sites, but it was not until the mid-1950s that the then Conservative government, London County Council (LCC) and an assortment of other partners (see below), made concerted efforts to redesign the intersections. It was eventually decided that larger roundabouts at Hyde Park Corner and Marble Arch would be built alongside a new subsidiary roundabout inside Hyde Park Corner. Park Lane road was converted into a dual carriageway. The road scheme was eventually completed and then formally opened in October 1962. Fig. 1 is a map of the new road scheme near the north-east corner of Hyde Park.

The Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme was controversial at the time, not least because some land in Hyde Park was to be lost to the development.² Part of this controversy lay in the very history of Hyde Park as a democratic space in London. Hyde Park even today is home to an array of regulars and passers-by who attend the famous Speakers' Corner, located in the north-east corner of Hyde Park, to engage in popular expressions of free speech.³ One reason why this practice still exists is because of its socio-cultural and socio-historical identity, which is grounded in past democratic struggles at Hyde Park that sought to win the right and entitlement to exercise free speech in this urban space. As the article shows, a clash of sorts thus developed between the 'traffic logic' embodied in the Park Lane road scheme and the 'democratic logic' embodied in free speech struggles at Hyde Park.

Blomley argues that a traffic logic discourse seeks to convert democratic dialogue about certain 'rights' – for example, the right to practise free speech in particular urban spaces – into bureaucratic traffic codes and bye-laws – for example, a bye-law prohibiting jaywalking in cities.⁴ Civil rights in city spaces are

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¹ F. A. Rayfield and A. J. H. Clayton, Park Lane improvement scheme 2: planning and traffic engineering, *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers* 29 (1964) 319–340.

² The National Archives (TNA): T228/664.

³ See D. Cooper, *Everyday Utopias*, Durham and London, 2014.

⁴ N. Blomley, *Rights of Passage: Sidewalks and the Regulation of Public Flow*, London, 2011.

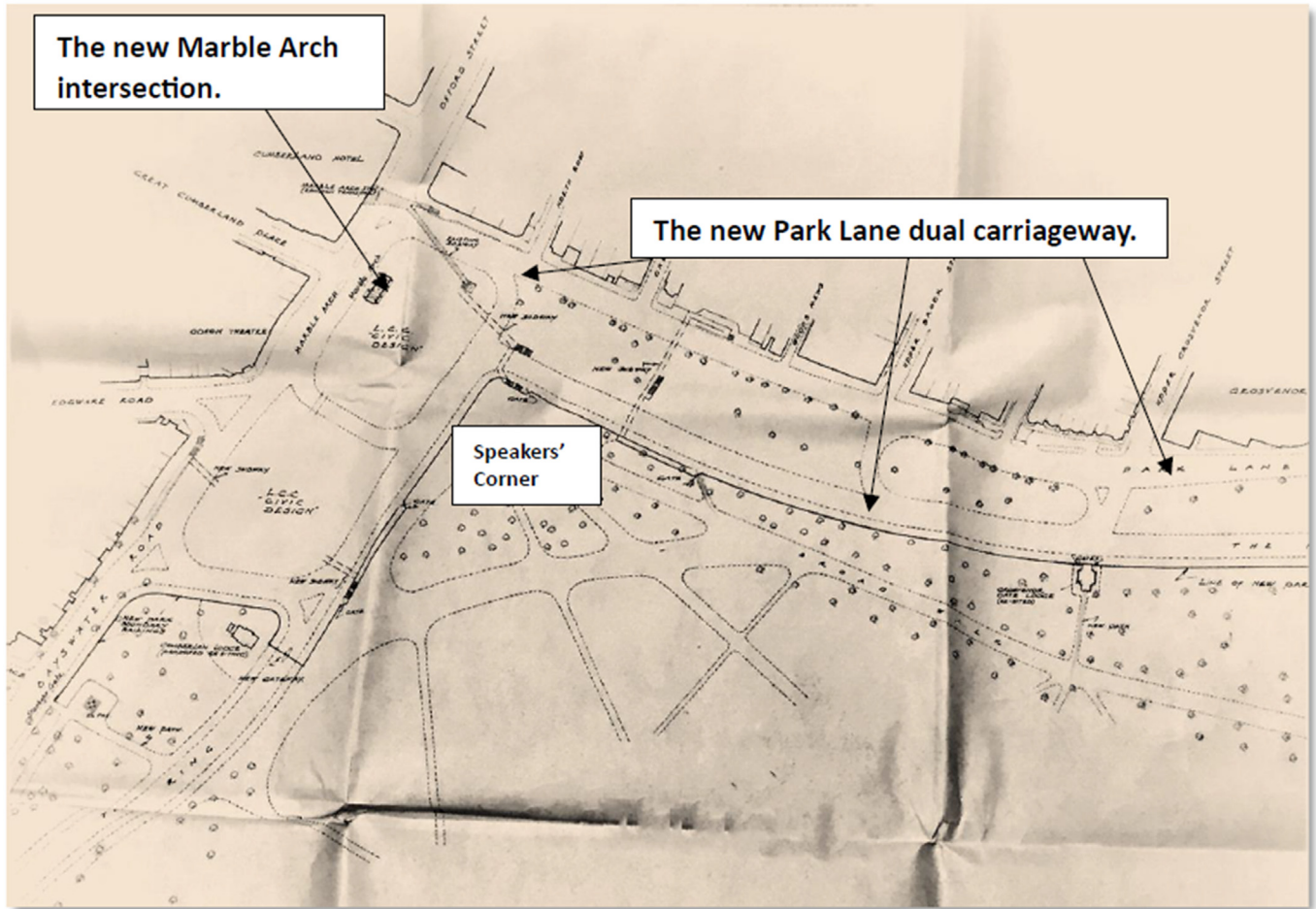


Fig. 1. The north-east corner of Hyde Park. Source: Used with permission from The National Archives, File no. HGL 79/961.

thus transformed by traffic logic discourse into the ‘right’ *not* to experience blockages or collisions in public space and, in particular, to eliminate where possible obstructions that might be caused by those exercising some sort of democratic claims in public space.⁵ But while providing perceptive insights, there are a number of further areas in need of greater explanation in accounts of traffic logic, especially in respect to discussion among public officials about how to establish new road and traffic schemes in cities. For example, to what extent do new road schemes lead to internal disputes between state departments about what might constitute an overly bureaucratic and technicist development of road schemes? To what extent do state departments clash over the imposition of new acceptable bureaucratic traffic codes on existing local amenities, such as local green spaces? And to what extent can some civil society organisations strategically use the dilemmas thrown up by such disputes to advance their own entitlements and rights in specific urban spaces?

To find some answers, the next section continues the discussion of the term, ‘traffic logic’, and notes some of its analytical strengths. But the section further argues that a traffic logic

approach can be strengthened by incorporating three theoretical points. First, it is important to note that the theoretical differences between a traffic logic approach and a ‘right to the city’ approach are not as great as is sometimes suggested. Both indeed can be fruitfully brought together in historical geographies of mobility and urban planning. Second, it is vital to take note of any customary entitlements evident in public space and how these entitlements might collide with existing and new traffic logic prerogatives. Third, it will be suggested that a strategic-relational state theory can be drawn upon to understand how and why the state enters into strategically-selective dialogue within its own internal apparatuses and with selective partners in civil society about a road scheme, and how the strategic terrain carved around urban traffic developments offers up opportunities for counter-hegemonic and oppositional groups to assert their own democratic agendas.

The rest of the paper applies these points to explore strategic and spatial conflicts between the state, local authorities, certain state partnerships, and civil society campaign groups over the Park Lane Improvement Scheme and free speech at Hyde Park. The origins of traffic logic at this major urban development were not only embedded in dialogue between a number of state departments, local government and civil society organisations, but were also influenced to some degree by already established free speech entitlements at Hyde

⁵ N. Blomley, Civil rights meet civil engineering: Urban public space and traffic logic, *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 22 (2007) 55–72.

Park.⁶ Indeed, the article shows how the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme unintentionally provided a strategic opportunity in the 1950s for Speakers' Corner campaigners and regulars to mount a novel defence of further free speech entitlements at Hyde Park. To make these claims, the article draws on a range of primary historical material collected from the National Archives, London Metropolitan Archives, the British Library, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, and the British Newspaper Archive alongside secondary historical material.

Traffic logic, the state, and entitlements in urban space

According to some, the 'right to the city' is mediated through political struggles between capital's desire to transform public space into bureaucratic and commercialised exchange-value to realise profits and ordinary people's desire, often manifested through socio-political activism, to employ public space for everyday use-values, such as leisure, arts, exercise, community activities, and demonstrations.⁷ But this approach has been challenged in recent times. A case in point is that of 'traffic logic'. For Blomley, traffic logic operates according to a different rationale than the struggles highlighted by the 'right to the city' approach. Traffic logic is mistrustful of objects that disrupt what is considered to be the normal flow of life and objects in urban public space. Operating through bureaucratic mechanisms, traffic logic by-passes questions about people's access and rights to certain city spaces and instead sets out to regulate how people and other objects – bikes, cars, pedestrians, and so forth – circulate and flow in and around designated spaces in a city.⁸ Traffic codes, as Prytherch adds, form a principal mode of categorising flows in urban space. They can designate physical access to some groups and objects in urban spaces but not to others. At the same time, traffic codes generate territories within territories as well as establishing moral spaces of exclusions for some groups. The 'right' to public space in this regard is thus a 'right' to be mobile and to circulate – the 'right' to walk in particular streets and the right to drive through officially designated roads, for example – and these 'rights' therefore trump civil rights such as exercising free speech in public space. Circulation and traffic flows thus 'entitle particular mobile bodies the liberty or right to be in motion', and this implies that the 'right-of-way' in a city, 'and who must yield to whom', is a

way in which states convey certain power relations in urban space.⁹

While Blomley and Prytherch make a number of perceptive observations, it is nevertheless also true to say that the gap between 'the right to the city' school and what might be termed as a 'traffic logic' school is not as great as is sometimes implied.¹⁰ This is so in three respects. First, some key thinkers in the right to the city school are in fact not only attuned to the quirks of traffic logic, but their insights complement and add to the traffic logic perspective. According to Lefebvre, arguably *the* key thinker in the right to the city school, drivers are positioned by road engineers as an abstract and generic subject who read the same traffic codes and other visual signs that mark out the spatial content and 'plan' of a road system.¹¹ 'Rights' of mobility – walking and strolling in aligning streets – as well as types of socialising, consumer and leisure activity in shops, parks, hotels, and so forth, become the concrete and everyday expressions of these abstract traffic designs.¹² Yet, and this is a crucial element underplayed in some traffic logic perspectives, Lefebvre also embeds urban traffic issues within broader state hegemonic projects. Cars produced through mass production, for instance, were a 'durable consumer good' and an integral moment in the consolidation of the branded mass consumption of the postwar state.¹³

Second, it is important to understand how legal rights and customary entitlements located in specific urban spaces over time will impact on existing and new traffic issues. Certainly, as 'right to the city' scholars Mitchell and Staeheli note, law is both geographically and jurisdictionally complex in how it regulates rights in cities, 'with nested and sometimes overlapping hierarchies of territorial authority'.¹⁴ Some areas in an urban place can be owned and controlled by a quango, while another part of the same place can be regulated by a specific city authority, while another area might be owned by a private business. Each area of the same place is, then, 'accountable to different political constituencies, bound by different rules and norms', follow different 'logics', and often enact distinct rights.¹⁵ A traffic logic approach does not contend these points. Urban spaces can, however, also be bound up with customary practices and historically-inscribed entitlements that interact with but nevertheless remain relatively autonomous of legal rights. In this respect, 'entitlements' can be thought of as changing, everyday and often popular customs, which 'require ongoing negotiation with authorities, and are frequently characterized by uncertainty and ambivalence'.¹⁶ This adds an important supplement to the traffic logic perspective. According to Prytherch, 'traffic codes are the foundation from which street design and enforcement follow, and these share statutory assumptions that physical mobility (and not expression) is the encompassing purpose of the street'.¹⁷ Customary entitlements to other rights,

⁶ See J. M. Roberts, Assemblies, coalitions, and conflicts over free speech: from 'trespass' to 'encroachment' in urban space at Hyde Park, 1861–1962, *Antipode* 55 (2023) 916–934. There is also a rich stream of historical and geographical work on cities, parks and democracy. See for example: H. Acock, The geographies of protest and public space in mid-nineteenth-century London: the Hyde Park railings affair, *Historical Geography* 47 (2019) 194–217; H. Conway, *People's Parks*, Cambridge 1991; D. Mitchell J. Jönsson and J. Pries, Making the people's landscape: landscape ideals, collective labour, and the people's parks (*Folkets Parker*) movement in Sweden, 1891–Present, *Journal of Historical Geography* 72 (2021) 23–39; S. Parson, Parks, permits, and riot police: San Francisco food not bombs and autonomous occupations of space, *New Political Science* 37 (2015) 346–362; A. Smith, Sustaining municipal parks in an era of neoliberal austerity: the contested commercialisation of Gunnersbury Park, *Environment and Planning A* 53 (2021) 704–722; J. Stewart, *Public Speaking in the City*, London, 2009.

⁷ D. Mitchell, *Mean Streets*, Athens, GA, 2020, 100; see also J. P. Galvis, Remaking equality: community governance and the politics of exclusion in Bogota's public spaces, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38 (2014) 1458–1475; D. Harvey, The right to the city, *New Left Review* 53 (2008) 23–40; D. Mitchell, People's park again: on the end and ends of public space, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 49 (2017) 503–518; M. C. Rodríguez and M. C. Zapata, Community-led housing: between 'right to the city', 'actually existing neoliberalism' and post-pandemic cities, *Urban Studies* 60 (2023) 829–846.

⁸ Blomley, *Rights of Passage*, 2–3.

⁹ D. L. Prytherch, Legal Geographies – codifying the right-of-way: statutory geographies of urban mobility and the street, *Urban Geography* 33 (2012) 308. See also A. Amin, Collective culture and urban public space, *City* 12 (2008) 5–24.

¹⁰ See also D. Mitchell, Traffic logic and political logic, *Radical History Review* 114 (2012) 165–173.

¹¹ H. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. S. Rabinovitch, New York, 1971, 100–1.

¹² H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, Oxford, 1997, 313.

¹³ Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 101–4.

¹⁴ D. Mitchell and L. A. Staeheli, Permitting protest: parsing the fine geography of dissent in America, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29 (2005), 800.

¹⁵ Mitchell and Staeheli, Permitting protest, 799–800.

¹⁶ C. McFarlane and R. Desai, Sites of entitlement: claim, negotiation and struggle in Mumbai, *Environment and Urbanization* 27 (2015) 2.

¹⁷ Prytherch, *Legal Geographies – codifying the right-of-way*, 308; see also K. Iveson, *Publics and the City*, Oxford, 2007, 151.

though, can be present in public spaces that serve to disrupt the implementation of traffic codes in a variety of ways. As Norton observes, traffic designers and engineers will invariably have to confront competing narratives from civil society groups and organisations about how embryonic traffic schemes will negatively impact on existing community entitlements and relations.¹⁸ Indeed, as the article will demonstrate, the history of democratic conflicts at Hyde Park is based in part on different people asserting their entitlements to free speech in and against the legally sanctioned right of ‘public address’ in the park *and* against new traffic codes.

Third, the traffic logic approach is attuned to conflicts and skirmishes between different state departments, local authorities, policy networks, governance bodies, media, and other bodies.¹⁹ But, and following on from the previous two points, we also need to know not only that states act to create relational networks between different people and objects in spaces, for instance, but also probe how and why certain state apparatuses act in particular ways during specific socio-economic and socio-political conjunctures, how and why they seek to create hegemonic modes of representation and visions to selective groups in civil society, and how these visions and narratives are challenged by counter-hegemonic groups.²⁰

A strategic-relational theory of the state is helpful in this respect because it views the state not as an intrinsic entity as such, but as a strategic ensemble that encompasses often competing class forces and social groups, along with their institutions, organisations, ideologies, their alliances, and their identities, in a battle between them to win hegemony for state projects during particular historical conjunctures.²¹ State departments can thus choose to selectively work with (for example) different charities, forces of law and order, community groups and civil society actors, local officials, non-state public bodies, businesses, and other state departments, to further certain hegemonic policy agendas in designated places and regions.²² Moreover, some state apparatuses endeavour to construct hegemonic visions around policy codes and policy programmes by sense-making through semiosis (e.g., affects, images, and imaginations) and meaning-making through language and other types of communication (e.g., specific words and policy documents).²³ Importantly, a strategic-relational state theory underlines both structural constraints on agents in civil society and conjunctural and strategic opportunities for them to modify these structural constraints over time.²⁴ Such opportunities open up spaces for civil society groups to try to push forward their own counter-hegemonic agendas, projects, narratives and visions in and against state policies and projects.²⁵

The next section applies these theoretical insights by, first, mapping out some of the historical geographies of the post-war welfare state and road building programmes, which provides a necessary background to more concrete discussions that follow.

The postwar welfare state and city traffic

After the Second World War, capitalists and governments across advanced economies invested heavily in accumulation strategies that tended to favour the interests of industrial capital, such as car manufacturing, transport systems, chemical plants, and the production of petrochemicals, steel, and electrical goods. The welfare state also embarked on large-scale investments in the transport and communication systems, urban renewal and suburban sprawls for those going into cities to work.²⁶ Government and public policy narratives regularly characterised these programmes of renewal through a lens of democratic consensus, harmonious class relations, expert knowledge, industrial might, housing developments, progressive gender relations, and by mapping landscapes to represent these new spaces of modernity.²⁷ Postwar reconstruction of cities was thereby characterised, in part, by spatio-temporal fixes formed through ‘the construction of large-scale transportation infrastructures such as highways, canals, ports, tunnels, bridges, railroads, airports, and public transport systems’.²⁸ In fact, an upsurge in debate and discussion about growing traffic congestion in major UK cities had been a stock feature of local administrations from at least the 1920s up until the 1950s.²⁹ Famously in 1943, Leslie Abercrombie and John Forshaw produced the County of London Plan that envisaged the construction of a series of inner and outer ring roads around the capital.³⁰ Public sector, managerial, administrative and technical middle-class occupations likewise grew during this period as did new types of urban accommodation.³¹ The New Towns Act 1946 empowered government to control this urban development, while the Town and Planning Act 1947 forced local authorities to gain agreement from central government for their respective redevelopment plans.³²

Planning powers of UK local authorities were also employed to promote the interests of commercial and private business interests in certain places.³³ Successive Conservative governments in the 1950s and early 1960s consciously sought to roll-back elements of the statist planning policies of the 1945 Labour administration for these very reasons.³⁴ The Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme fitted this new narrative of state and private expenditure on large

²⁶ D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, 1989, 132; see also J. Esser and J. Hirsch, The crisis of Fordism and the dimensions of a ‘post-Fordist’ regional urban structure, in: A. Amin (Ed.), *Post-Fordism: A Reader*, Oxford, 1994, 71–97.

²⁷ B. Short, D. Gilbert, and D. Matless, Historical geographies of British modernity, in D. Gilbert, D. Matless and B. Short (Eds.), *Geographies of British Modernity*, Oxford, 8–10.

²⁸ N. Brenner, *New State Spaces*, Oxford, 2004, 124.

²⁹ C. G. Pooley and J. Turnbull, Coping with congestion: responses to urban traffic problems in British cities c.1920–1960, *Journal of Historical Geography* 31 (2005) 78–93.

³⁰ M. Collins and T. Pharoah, *Transport Organisation in a Great City: The Case of London*, London, 1974, 38; D. Gilbert, London of the future: the metropolis reimagined after the great war, *Journal of British Studies* 43 (2004) 91–119.

³¹ G. Ross and J. Jenson, Post-war class struggle and the crisis of left politics, in: R. Miliband, J. Saville, M. Liebman, and L. Panitch (Eds.), *The Socialist Register*, London 1986, 23–49; O. S. Smith, *Boom Cities*, Oxford 2019, 37–41.

³² G. Ortolano, Planning the urban future in 1960s Britain, *The Historical Journal* 54 (2011) 477–507.

³³ A. Kefford, Actually existing managerialism: planning, politics and property development in post-1945 Britain, *Urban Studies* 58 (2021) 2441–2455.

³⁴ Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State*, 88; see also M. Goodwin and J. Painter, Local governance, the crises of Fordism and the changing geographies of regulation, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21 (1996) 635–648.

¹⁸ P. D. Norton, *Fighting Traffic*, Cambridge, Mass, 2011.

¹⁹ See also J. Allen, Powerful city networks: more than connections, less than domination and control, *Urban Studies* 47 (2010) 2895–2911.

²⁰ N. Brenner, D. J. Madden, and D. Wachsmuth, Assemblage urbanism and the challenges of critical urban theory, *City* 15 (2011) 230; K. Cox, Territory, scale, and why capitalism matters, *Territory, Politics, Governance* 1 (2013) 50–55; B. Heino, *Regulation Theory and Australian Capitalism*, London, 2017, 7–27; B. Jessop, *The State*, Cambridge, 2016, 53–90.

²¹ A. Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, London 1986, 12; N. Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, London, 1973, 110–112.

²² M. Jones, *Cities and Regions in Crisis*, Cheltenham, 2019; N. Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, new edition, London, 2000.

²³ N.-L. Sum and B. Jessop, *Towards a Cultural Political Economy*, Cheltenham, 2013, 3.

²⁴ B. Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State*, 2002; see also H. Lacher, Putting the state in its place: the critique of state-centrism and its limits, *Review of International Studies* 29 (2003) 521–541.

²⁵ J. Newman, Landscapes of antagonism: local governance, neoliberalism and austerity, *Urban Studies* 51 (2014) 3290–3305.

urban development schemes. During a parliamentary debate on the improvement scheme, the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation, Harold Watkinson, announced:

I am told that the number of commercial vehicles passing through Hyde Park Corner is next only in London to the number using the Vauxhall Cross and the Blackfriars Bridge approach. There is considerable commercial advantage in this work as well as the benefits which it will provide for bus travellers, private motorists, and coaches ... In commending the Bill to the House, I would only say that it is really an essential part of what, I believe, is at least a systematic series of attacks on the growing congestion of traffic in inner London; a congestion which, we all know, would, if allowed to proceed unchecked, in the end throttle our capital city's commercial and industrial life.³⁵

Motor cars were thus thought by some politicians to be key for the expansion of modern cities. In London, traffic flow had grown by over 40% in the years 1949–1958. By the 1960s, successive UK governments had embarked on programmes to build thousands of miles of motorways.³⁶ For its part, the London County Council (LCC) decided to divide local roads from through roads and invest in schemes to widen existing roads to free up vehicle flows across the network.³⁷

In many respects, the postwar state was breaking down barriers between civil society and the increasing automobility of urban life. Automobiles not only generated jobs through the mass production of cars, they also opened up opportunities for people to be mobile and travel between places at their leisure 'to form new socialities'.³⁸ Welfare state interventions thus helped to sustain demand for car consumption in the US, across Europe and beyond, while the state brokered corporatist deals between itself, car manufacturers and trade unions.³⁹ At the same time, there were various wrangles between the state, local authorities and other bodies about how best to develop and pursue the likes of new road-building schemes.⁴⁰ Councils, for instance, still retained some power to make design choices over specific local developments in order to bolster their own local socio-political agendas, but this would often cause tensions with strategic policies of government agendas.⁴¹ In postwar London, Labour Party councillors held a majority on the LCC from 1934 until its eventual disbandment in 1965. From its early days, however, the LCC employed the language of modernity and renewal in its various development plans, especially an emphasis on local civic design, civic pride, citizenship, and the need to market London.⁴² Unsurprisingly, the LCC therefore had a rather tense relationship with successive Conservative administrations. As we will now see, the relationship between central government and

the LCC often spawned disagreements between both about progress on major London developments.

Postwar traffic logic and local amenities in the Park Lane Improvement Scheme

From an early stage, there were notable disputes and disagreements among different state branches and respective state partners about nascent traffic logic embodied in the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme. These disagreements are noticeable in two reports from January and then in February 1955 that explored initial plans on the Hyde Park Corner section and were produced by the Road Research Laboratory (RRL). Established in 1933, the RRL was innovative in developing and using early computerised traffic models to map and stimulate urban environments and apply mathematical equations to traffic issues.⁴³ Among other things, the RRL employed these tools to study existing and proposed weaving sections between Marble Arch and Hyde Park Corner. In its January report, the RRL also drew on the definition of weaving produced by the Highway Capacity Manual, first published in 1950 in America. According to the Manual, weaving is 'the act performed by a vehicle in moving obliquely from one lane to another, this crossing the path of other vehicles moving in the same direction', while a 'weaving section' is 'a length of one-way roadway serving as an elongated intersection of two one-way roads crossing each other at an acute angle in such a manner that the interference between cross traffic is minimized through substitution of weaving for direct crossing of vehicle pathways'.⁴⁴ Or, in plainer language, weaving occurs when two different traffic streams heading in the same direction cross one another followed by an area where the roads can diverge from one another.⁴⁵ Different types of weaving sections can be constructed, but the general idea is that weaving sections can help to improve traffic flows in certain areas and reduce bottlenecks. The Highway Capacity Manual also claimed in 1950 that weaving sections in roads are practicable only when the total number of weaving vehicles do not exceed 1500 per hour.⁴⁶

The RRL made use of the Manual's calculations to guide its own investigations. Indeed, the RRL observed that information on weaving volumes was lacking for the proposed Park Lane scheme. RRL researchers therefore undertook their own surveys and examined a number of weaving sections during weekdays between 5pm and 7pm at Hyde Park Corner and along Park Lane. Fig. 2, taken from the RRL report, highlights how one design for the road scheme would convert East Carriage Road (also known as East Carriage Drive) and Park Lane into a dual carriageway between Marble Arch and Hyde Park Corner. RRL researchers found that the average weaving flow along this route was around 3800 vehicles per hour. They therefore concluded that none of the proposed weaving sections could accommodate increased capacity even if, as the LCC wished, a new roundabout was built near Hyde Park Corner and Constitution Hill.

The RRL also examined the LCC proposal to construct an underpass between Piccadilly and Knightsbridge – the so-called East-West underpass option – which would be 0.36 mile long. The rationale for the LCC in building this underpass was to free up space on the existing roads. In the opinion of the RRL, the proposed

³⁵ Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 579, 11 December 1957, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1957-12-11/debates/0661589d-a208-48c3-834f-47d2f885e947/ParkLaneImprovementBill> (accessed 6 April 2021).

³⁶ Ortolano, Planning the urban future in 1960s Britain, 488.

³⁷ S. Inwood, *A History of London*, London, 1998, 850–1. See also S. Gössling, Urban transport justice, *Journal of Transport Geography* 54 (2016) 1–9.

³⁸ M. Sheller and J. Urry, The city and the car, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24 (2000) 737–757.

³⁹ A. Walks, Stopping the 'war on the car': Neoliberalism, fordism, and the politics of automobility in Toronto, *Mobilities* 10 (2015) 402–422.

⁴⁰ See J. R. Gold, *The Experience of Modernism: Modern Architects and the Future of the City, 1928–53*, London, 1997; S. Gunn, People and the car: the expansion of automobility in urban Britain, c.1955–70, *Social History* 38 (2013) 220–237.

⁴¹ P. Shapely, Governance in the post-war city: historical reflections on public-private partnerships in the UK, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37 (2013) 1288–1304.

⁴² J. Keating, Approaches to citizenship teaching in the first half of the twentieth century – the experience of the London County Council, *History of Education* 40 (2011) 761–778.

⁴³ D. Rooney, *The Traffic Problem: Geographies, Politics and Technologies of Congestion in Twentieth Century London*, PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway, 2016, 243–4.

⁴⁴ *Highway Capacity Manual*, Department of Traffic and Operations Highway Research Board, US Department of Commerce, Washington, 1950, 14–18.

⁴⁵ X. Mao, C. Yuan, J. Gan, S. Zhang, Risk factors affecting traffic accidents at urban weaving sections: evidence from China, *International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health* 16 (2019) 1–17.

⁴⁶ *Highway Capacity Manual*, 47.

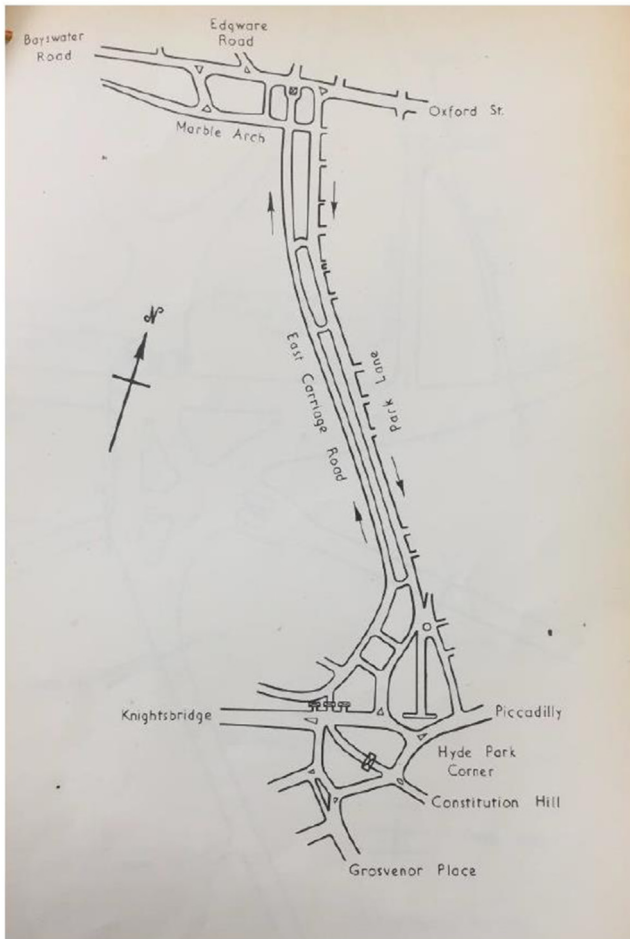


Fig. 2. Mapping the new dual carriageway. Source: Used with permission from The National Archives, File no. T 228/664.

underpass would certainly provide reserve capacity for cars in sections on a newly planned roundabout in the area – an increase of around 20% in traffic. However, the RRL felt that an alternative and longer North-South underpass from Hyde Park Corner to Grosvenor Place would be a more suitable alternative as it could have capacity for a 50% increase in traffic.⁴⁷ In its February report, the RRL further described how a modified layout that reduced entry widths for vehicles on the test weaves from 70 ft to 30 ft and from 60 ft to 40 ft decreased the average rate of vehicles passing through from 4210 to 3030. In its conclusions, the RRL stated that the LCC plans therefore contained serious flaws in terms of trying to increase the ‘flows’ and ‘weaves’ of traffic. As Fig. 3 indicates in relation to areas within Hyde Park Corner, the RRL was thus concerned with ‘numbers’ of vehicles flowing in units of space during measurable components of time. It thereby bracketed out from its considerations any issues associated with socio-political and socio-cultural amenities and other non-traffic factors.

Without doubt, the LCC was irritated by the approach adopted by the RRL. An internal memo from the Ministry of Transport noted that at a meeting held in February 1955, the LCC representative, a Mr Rayfield, the LCC Highways Engineer, was very ‘stand-offish’ about the RRL report. One point of annoyance for Rayfield was that, in his opinion, the RRL dealt mainly with producing ‘traffic statistics’, but they were less qualified to deal with broader issues around

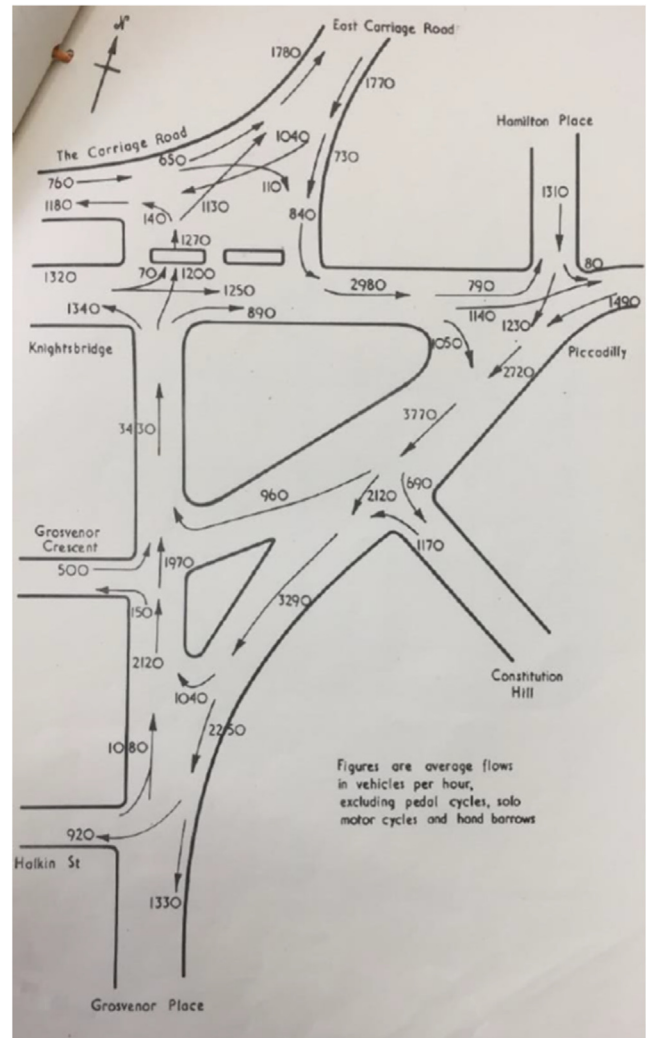


Fig. 3. The RRL measurement for average flows of vehicles per hour at Hyde Park Corner. Source: Used with permission from The National Archives, File no. T 228/664.

traffic ‘capacity’ or ‘engineering problems’ in urban spaces and highways. According to the LCC, the RRL had also ‘misinterpreted the figures for subsidiary parts of the traffic flow’ and that the figures in fact supported the LCC’s preferred underpass option.⁴⁸ The LCC also complained about the delay caused by referring the road scheme to the RRL in the first place.

Interestingly, dialogue about the road scheme was also tied up with further non-traffic concerns raised by other state departments. One concern in particular was anxiety expressed by the Ministry of Works about the impact of the scheme on local surrounding ‘amenities’. In July 1955, the Minister of Works, Nigel Birch, wrote to the Cabinet Home Affairs Committee to raise doubts about a version of the improvement scheme recommended by the Ministry of Transport and Aviation. For the Minister, the scheme would involve a loss of some amenities, including forfeiting land from Hyde Park, losing area from Speakers’ Corner, and possibly surrendering land from Buckingham Palace and Hamilton Gardens – an enclosed green space within Hyde Park. Birch noted: ‘Such a loss to the amenities of the Royal Parks could in my view be tolerated only if the proposed scheme had outstanding merits from

⁴⁷ TNA: T228/664.

⁴⁸ TNA: T228/664.

the traffic standpoint'. The Minister believed that any such merits could not be guaranteed and refused to support the proposals.⁴⁹ In a response dated September 1955, the Minister of Transport and Aviation, John Boyd-Carpenter, insisted the road scheme could in fact lead to an overall enhancement of local amenities. New large roundabouts would for example provide 'considerable scope for pleasing landscape treatment ...'⁵⁰

Strategic alliances among key players were soon built around these issues. One illustration serves to underline this point. A special Technical Sub-Committee on Amenity Aspect of the Working Party on the Improvement Scheme was established to investigate this particular concern over amenities. Their report was published in September 1955. Among other things, the sub-committee, comprised by members from the Ministry of Transport, RLL, the traffic branch of the Metropolitan Police, and the LCC, considered how the road scheme might be modified to minimise interference with surrounding amenities, 'without detriment to the traffic advantages of the scheme as now planned and without any material increase to the estimated cost'.⁵¹ The report ended by reinforcing the point that certain features of the proposed roadwork scheme would actually enhance local amenities. Even the proposed dual carriageway along Park Lane could be made 'attractive ... as a purposely designed parkway, and it could be enjoyed not only by persons on foot using Hyde Park, but by the occupants of vehicles'.⁵² Its conclusion, though, particularly angered the Ministry of Works. This is noticeable in an internal memorandum from the Ministry of Works dated 12 September. Detailing discussions that took place that morning at a Ministry of Transport Committee meeting, a Mr. Newis for the Ministry noted that those who wrote the sub-committee Report were 'speaking as traffic experts and without any question of amenities'.⁵³ For the Ministry of Works, then, the report was still immersed in an exclusive traffic perspective even though some of the report's authors consciously sought to move beyond the 'traffic statistics' of the RRL. The LCC, however, had formed a strategic alliance of sorts with the Ministry of Transport and Aviation to gain support both for the new road scheme *and* to wrestle it away from the pure traffic logic perspective of the RRL. In other words, the LCC, while critiquing what it saw as purely instrumental 'traffic statistics' from the RRL, nevertheless attached itself strategically to other state departments, apparatuses and partners in and against the agendas of state departments, such as the Ministry of Works.

There are two immediate observations to be made about the report from the sub-committee. First, it shows how the roadwork scheme was intimately tied to broader issues and objects beyond that of a pure traffic logic, especially its impact on aesthetic and practical issues of surrounding amenities. Second, different government bodies and departments viewed the relationship between traffic plans and local amenities through often separate agendas. Taking account of the disagreements among different state apparatuses and other bodies, one further pertinent question arises. To what extent did critical voices in civil society exploit these strategic dilemmas within the state to their own advantage in the post-war period? We now turn to providing answers to this question.

Historical geographies of state partnerships and 'public address' at Hyde Park

From 1945 to the 1970s, it was common in the UK to construct local development schemes through partnerships between central government departments, local authorities and other non-state organisations such as architects, planning consultants, developers and construction companies.⁵⁴ But postwar public-private partnerships, like those more familiar today,⁵⁵ were also comprised by voluntary and non-commercial organisations. This is a crucial point to make in respect to the traffic logic embedded in the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme. Around the same time that the RRL produced its reports, different state bodies were consulting with other partners affected by the road scheme. These partners included the Artillery Association, which had links with some memorials affected by the road scheme, and the Victoria and Albert Museum and Seventh Duke of Wellington, who both administered Apsley House near Hyde Park Corner.⁵⁶ Another non-business partner brought into consultative networks about the road scheme was the Royal Fine Art Commission. Established in 1924, the Commission's remit was to enquire into questions of public amenity or of artistic importance, and to report their findings back to the government.⁵⁷ In mid-April 1955, the Royal Fine Art Commission initially refused to support the LCC's version of the road scheme on the grounds that too much land would be lost from the Royal Parks⁵⁸; a view that was subsequently backed by the Prime Minister, Anthony Eden.⁵⁹ Two years later, the Commission was still arguing that the road scheme represented 'the largest encroachment ... ever suggested' on the Royal Parks.⁶⁰

Notably, there was also another partnership network that the state was compelled to link up with, which included the National Council for Civil Liberties and other free speech advocates. Why was this the case? The north-east corner of Hyde Park had been home to the most famous popular place for free speech in Britain, namely Speakers' Corner. In many respects, this small space represented a history of how the voices on the 'margins' move over time into the centre of public consciousnesses through the likes of performances, images, words, passion, and leaflets in order to generate a world-famous place for free speech. From the twelfth century up until 1783 Hyde Park was the home of the most notorious hanging tree in Britain, namely Tyburn hanging tree, where felons were allowed to give 'last dying speeches'.⁶¹ Throughout the nineteenth-century, Hyde Park was also employed by radical social movements to demonstrate and campaign for greater democratic rights.⁶² By 1872, several political organisations were meeting in London to defend 'free speech' in

⁵⁴ Kefford, Actually existing managerialism; Shapely, Governance in the post-war city.

⁵⁵ See M. Flinders, The politics of public-private partnerships, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 7 (2005) 215–239.

⁵⁶ TNA: Work 16/1999.

⁵⁷ M. Carmona and A. Renninger, The Royal Fine Art Commission and 75 years of English design review: the first 60 years, 1924–1984, *Planning Perspectives* 33 (2018) 53–73.

⁵⁸ London Metropolitan Archives (LMA): LCC CL/HIG/02/109.

⁵⁹ TNA: HGL 79/961.

⁶⁰ 'Encroachment' threat to Royal Parks: Fine Art Commission's fears, *The Times*, 20 December (1957).

⁶¹ P. Linebaugh, The Tyburn riot against the surgeons, in: D. Hay, P. Linebaugh, J.G. Rule, E.P. Thompson and C. Winslow (Eds.), *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, London, 1975, 65–118; See also V.A.C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770–1868*, Oxford, 1994.

⁶² See for example J.M. Roberts, Spatial governance and working class public spheres: the case of a Chartist demonstration at Hyde Park, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 14 (2001) 308–336.

⁴⁹ TNA: Work 16/1856.

⁵⁰ TNA: T228/664.

⁵¹ TNA HGL 79/961.

⁵² TNA HGL 79/961.

⁵³ TNA Work 16/1857.

the parks of the capital, and Hyde Park was seen as the key site for this struggle.⁶³ As a result, the government passed the 1872 Act for the Regulation of the Royal Parks and Gardens, otherwise known as the 1872 Parks Regulation Act.

Intriguingly, the 1872 Act did not mention the right to exercise free speech in Hyde Park as such, but the right to make a 'public address' as embodied in the supplementary 'Rules for Hyde Park'. The 'Rules' were important because by the last quarter of the nineteenth century Hyde Park was now firmly recognised where, as a writer noted at the time, 'one-sided meetings, more or less orderly ... (are) held on almost every subject, social and political'.⁶⁴ The Rules for Hyde Park thus sought to create certain sense-making narratives and representations about Hyde Park (e.g., affects, images, and imaginations about the green spaces in Hyde Park) and generate meaning-making through other types of communication (e.g., specific policies about where one might walk in Hyde Park).

The 1904 Rules for Hyde Park serve to illustrate these points. Some Rules ensured 'flow' was maintained at Hyde Park. Rules 1 to 6, for example, were devoted to explaining in detail which vehicles, and at which times, were allowed to enter Hyde Park. Other Rules stipulated how people should behave in Hyde Park. Rule 16 stated that fishing in the Serpentine Lake at Hyde Park was not permitted, while Rule 17 said that boating was only allowed in accordance with the instructions set out by the Park boating house. In terms of governing the 'flow' of public speaking, Rule 11 stated: 'No such public address shall be delivered in any place where the assemblage of persons to hear the same may cause obstruction to the use of any road or walk by the public, or to the use of the Park by the military or volunteers ... And no such obstruction shall be wilfully caused by any person forming part of any assemblage which may have met to hear any such address'. Rule 13 added that, 'no assembly of persons is permitted in the Park unless conducted in a decent and orderly manner'. Rule 15 noted: 'No idle or disorderly person, rogue of vagabond, or person in an unclean or verminous condition, shall loiter or remain in the Park or lie upon or occupy the ground or any of the seats thereof, and it shall remain lawful for any park keeper to exclude or remove from the Park any person committing any breach of this Rule'. Importantly, the sense-making encapsulated within these Rules was thereby one that constructed an image of an ever-present threat of 'indecent' and 'verminous' people contaminating Hyde Park, especially for the purposes of giving an 'obscene' public address.⁶⁵

Hyde Park regulars, however, often evaded the Rules. Throughout 1904, ongoing correspondence occurred between the Home Office, Ministry of Works and the Metropolitan Police on the subject of 'loafers' and 'verminous' persons going in an 'unauthorised procession' to the 'public meeting' area of Hyde Park who then might cause 'trouble'. Yet, the authorities were unsure how to proceed on this matter, especially since the Rules were not clear as to whether 'particular classes' might be excluded from Hyde Park.⁶⁶ Four years later in 1908, concern was expressed by the Metropolitan Police to the Ministry of Works that increasing numbers of platform speakers at Hyde Park were obstructing the park's public footpaths and thereby impeding flows of people. One Works official, though, felt that 'moral suasion' to platform speakers to move to alternative speaker pitches in the park was a better solution to this issue than an 'attempt at any compulsion in the matter'.⁶⁷ By

the mid-1950s, Park Regulations had changed, but they nevertheless still contained a lengthy set of 'prohibited acts' in Hyde Park. Number 30, in particular, prohibited, 'a public speech or address the use of language ... which is obscene, insulting, blasphemous or threatening'.⁶⁸ But how did free speech campaigners and regulars in the 1950s nevertheless creatively employ the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme to mount a public fight to protect and indeed develop the entitlement to free speech at Hyde Park?

Free speech sense-making and meaning-making in postwar Hyde Park

Jessop observes the state has 'a differential impact on the ability of various political forces to pursue particular interests and strategies in specific spatio-temporal contexts through their access to and/or control over given state capacities ...'.⁶⁹ Due to the unique history of free speech entitlements at Speakers' Corner, it is perhaps unsurprising that the state included a discussion about the impact of the road improvement scheme on Hyde Park space for 'public address'. Even so, state apparatuses would often adopt different discourses on this issue. In late February 1955, Mr Newis from the Ministry of Works invoked the historical culture of Speakers' Corner when it noted: 'we shall want to keep a careful eye on the effect of the scheme on Speakers' Corner where, as you know, there are certain *traditional characteristics* which must be preserved'.⁷⁰ For the Police and Treasury Solicitor, however, there were concerns that the road scheme would cut away the legal boundaries of some parts of Hyde Park, which would then mean that Park Regulations could no longer be applied to these spaces.⁷¹

In some respects, it was the ambiguity among state apparatuses about the relationship between the road scheme and Speakers' Corner that presented a strategic spatial opportunity for campaigners to create novel sense-making discourses on protecting free speech in Hyde Park. One notable spatial strategy revolved around campaigners exploiting an already existing public narrative on the importance for Britain's democracy of the cultural and social history of Speakers' Corner. An article for *The Evening News*, published on the eve of the Second World War, declared that during this period in history, one unique British 'symbol and stronghold of liberty' should be celebrated because it highlighted the importance of free speech for a democratic nation: Speakers' Corner. 'Ridicule', the article continued, 'is often heaped on the variety of platforms from which speakers wax eloquent every Sunday' in Hyde Park. These speakers included, 'atheists, vegetarians, the Salvation Army, anti-vivisectionists, anti-Imperialists, Communists, anti-Communists'. Yet, 'the fact remains that great open forum ... stands for freedom of speech and assembly; if ever the day comes when these Hyde Park meetings are forbidden, or the outpouring of the speakers censored, it will be a bad day for this country'.⁷² By the 1950s, these discursive sentiments still existed among many in London. In fact, during this period a number of social and political groups, ranging from religious groups like the London Methodist Mission and Catholic Evidence Guild, to far left political groups such as The Communist Party of Great Britain, to single issue political groups like the Kenya Committee for Democratic Rights for Kenyan

⁶³ TNA: HO 45/9490/3239.

⁶⁴ J. Ashton, *Hyde Park: From Domesday-book to Date*, London, 1896.

⁶⁵ An Act for the Regulation of the Royal Parks and Gardens with Rules for Hyde Park (1904).

⁶⁶ TNA: HO 45/10256/X58056.

⁶⁷ TNA: Work 16/914.

⁶⁸ TNA: Work 6/609.

⁶⁹ Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State*, 40.

⁷⁰ TNA Work 16/1856, added emphasis.

⁷¹ TNA Work 16/1995.

⁷² Who Is for Liberty? The Importance of Personal Freedom, *The Evening News*, 8 June (1939). On specific examples of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist speakers at Hyde Park in the 1930s, see also S. Legg, *Round Table Conference: Constituting Colonial India in Interwar London*, Cambridge, 2023, 305–310 and Roberts, *Assemblies, coalitions, and conflicts over free speech*, 927–928.

Africans, the London Peace Council, and Anti-Partition of Ireland League, to trade unions like the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers, and different charities, went to Speakers' Corner as part of their broader activist and campaign work.⁷³

Speakers' Corner advocates, however, also refracted the 'history of free speech' sense-making discourse through a novel 'green' sense-making discourse. This latter discourse suggested the road scheme would lead to an 'encroachment' on Hyde Park and other green spaces. Between 1947 and 1964, for example, the LCC spent £10 m on buying new green spaces.⁷⁴ And yet in 1957, the road scheme was estimated to negatively affect 21 acres of parkland.⁷⁵ In terms of the 'history of free speech' sense-making discourse, Colin McCall, the Secretary of the National Secular Society, wrote in late April 1957 to the Ministry of Works about the impact of the road scheme on Speakers' Corner. McCall informed the Ministry that the National Secular Society had heard that the improvement scheme was likely to interfere with the speaking pitches at Speakers' Corner. But he continued: 'At a time when mass propaganda methods tend to restrict freedom of expression to the "big battalions", Hyde Park still offers the opportunity for presenting unpopular as well as popular opinions. And history affords many instances of the unpopular ideas of one period becoming accepted at a later date'.⁷⁶

The National Council for Civil Liberties then joined together the 'history of free speech' sense-making discourse with the 'green' sense-making discourse. Formed in 1934 to monitor what was perceived by some legal practitioners and activists at the time as anti-protest policing,⁷⁷ the National Council for Civil Liberties had by the postwar period started to champion a broader global human rights agenda. Even so, they still tended to filter these concerns through national and local issues.⁷⁸ In May 1957, Elizabeth Allen, General Secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties, wrote to the Ministry of Works to ask for a draft copy of the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme plan because she was anxious to ensure that the 'privileges enjoyed by speakers and their audiences' at Hyde Park were not interfered with by the roadworks.⁷⁹ Over the months, the National Council combined this representation of free speech 'privileges enjoyed' at Speakers' Corner with a green public narrative. On the February 25, 1958, for example, *The News Chronicle* reported that Elizabeth Allen had complained that the road scheme had already taken away some of the speaking area, so that people were now standing on 'muddy grass' during free speech meetings. 'Another thing is the noise', she continued. 'The corner must be clear of the noise of the traffic so the speakers can be heard'.⁸⁰ 'Encroachment' by the road scheme into parkland was subsequently combined with a potential of increased noise pollution that might then drown out free speech voices at Hyde Park.

The National Council campaigned further to alter the discursive 'meaning' of the road scheme on Speakers' Corner. In particular, it sought to influence the official mapping of Speakers' Corner and ensure that adequate space for the exercise of free speech at Hyde

Park would still be maintained despite the redesign of the area. Such was the success of this struggle to retain and develop the entitlement of free speech at Hyde Park that by March 1958, the Ministry of Works not only told campaigners that a new Speakers' Corner area in the park of at least comparable size to what was already there would be provided, but also invited representatives from the National Council to discuss different plans for the redesign of Speakers' Corner.⁸¹ Fig. 4 was the finally agreed design between all parties for Speakers' Corner. It highlights the new boundaries of Speakers' Corner, the Park Lane dual carriageway and Marble Arch intersection, which are all marked out in a red line. It also shows the space at Speakers' Corner that would be lost to the road scheme, which includes much of the areas beneath the yellow border, but also newly designed speaking areas (for example, around the orange segment in Hyde Park) to replace the vanished ones.

Concern about the impact of the road scheme on entitlements to free speech was nevertheless still voiced by some Hyde Park regulars. The Revenant Dr Donald Soper, a Methodist minister, was arguably one of the most well-known Hyde Park speakers. A Christian socialist and pacifist, Soper first stood on a Hyde Park platform in 1942 and carried on speaking there and in other public spaces into his old age. It is estimated he addressed three-quarters of a million people throughout his free speech meetings.⁸² In November 1960, Soper wrote to the LCC complaining that public meetings at Speakers' Corner were being forced onto the asphalt because of the roadworks, 'with the difference that the total area is now about a quarter of what it was, but the number of meetings are still more or less the same. This means a good deal of congestion and consequently bad temper'.⁸³ In their reply to Soper, the LCC argued that while Speakers' Corner was a matter for the Ministry of Works, the LCC was led to believe that the speaking area, 'after the completion of the improvement, will be rather more than the start of the works'.⁸⁴ Two years later in May 1962, representatives from the LCC did eventually meet with Soper at Speakers' Corner to discuss these issues. They noted that from his 'very substantial experience of speaking', Soper 'is of the opinion that the facilities here could be very greatly improved by some minor alterations to the layout of the grassed area'.⁸⁵

But while some speakers enjoyed an opportunity to discuss their entitlements to free speech in the city with the authorities, other complaints from Hyde Park regulars rumbled on. Just a mere one month before the official opening of the new road development, the National Council for Civil Liberties wrote to the LCC in September 1962 to report that Park Regulations prohibited literature being sold in the Royal Parks and so Hyde Park regulars had therefore traditionally sold it instead to passers-by near the Marble Arch monument next to Speakers' Corner. Due to the roadworks, reported the National Council, these spaces had all but disappeared. The National Council complained that those selling literature in alternative nearby-by spaces were now frequently being moved on by the police.⁸⁶ For their part, the LCC simply referred this matter to the City of Westminster. Importantly, these examples highlight a real sense by Hyde Park regulars that the expansion of urban traffic was still negatively affecting their rights and entitlements to free speech.

⁷³ Work 16/1836.

⁷⁴ M. O. Hannikainen, London's green spaces in the late twentieth century: the rise and fall of municipal policies, in: P. Clark, M. Niemi, and C. Nolin (Eds), *Green Landscapes in the European City, 1750–2010*, London: 2017, 37–53.

⁷⁵ LMA: LCC/CL/HIG/02/110.

⁷⁶ TNA: Work 16/2004.

⁷⁷ J. Clark, Sincere and reasonable men? The origins of the National Council for Civil Liberties, *Twentieth Century British History* 20 (2009) 513–537; K.D. Ewing and C.A. Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties*, Oxford, 2000.

⁷⁸ C. Moores, From civil liberties to human rights? British civil liberties activism and universal human rights, *Contemporary European History* 21 (2012) 169–192.

⁷⁹ TNA: Work 16/2004.

⁸⁰ Speechless, *The News Chronicle*, 25 February (1958).

⁸¹ TNA: Work 16/1999.

⁸² B. Frost, *Goodwill on Fire: Donald Soper's Life and Mission*, London, 1996, 5.

⁸³ LMA: LCC CL/HIG/02/112.

⁸⁴ LMA: LCC CL/HIG/02/114.

⁸⁵ TNA: Work 16/1836.

⁸⁶ LCC CL/HIG/02/112.

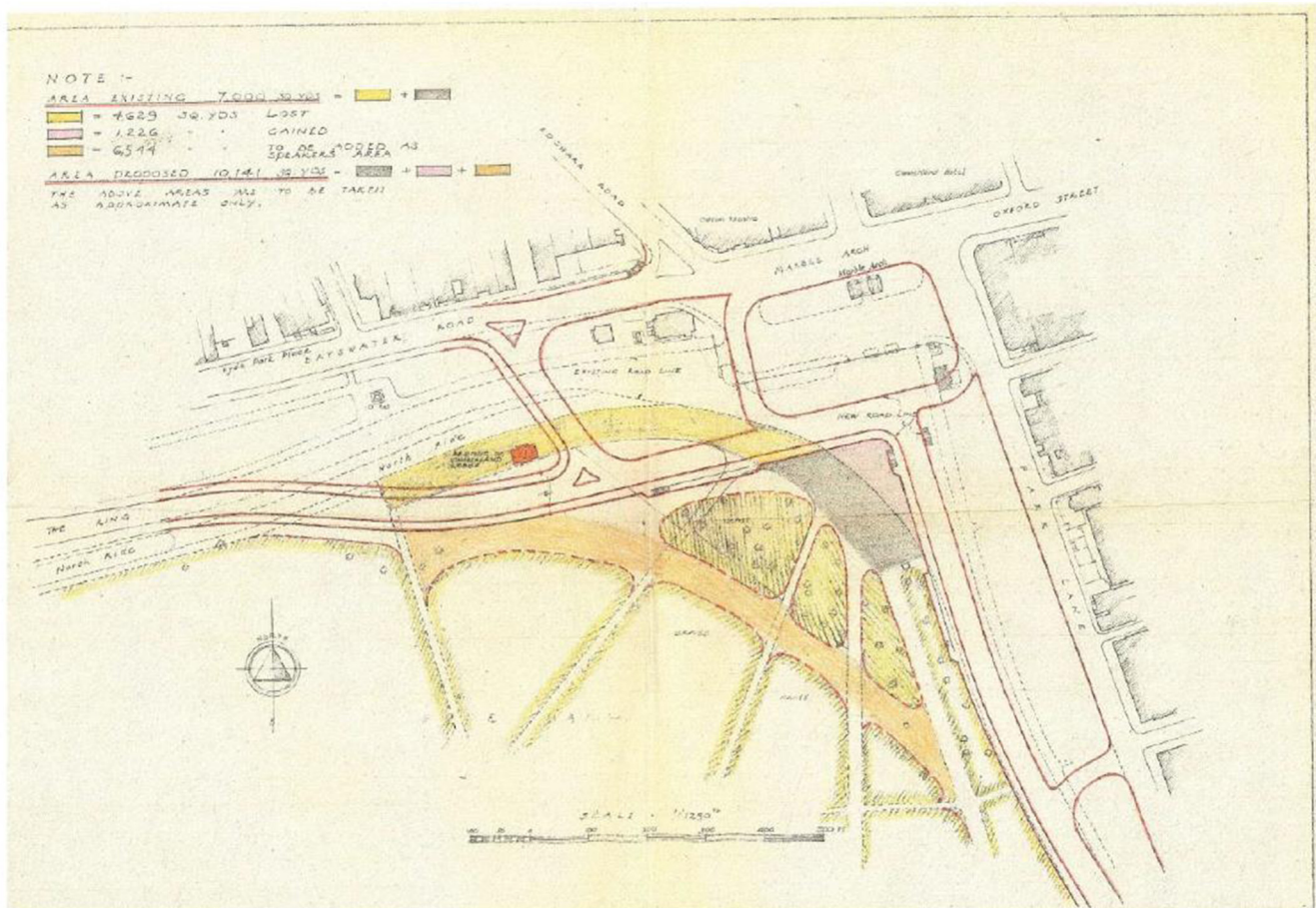


Fig. 4. The new design for Speakers' Corner, April 1958. Source: Used with permission from The National Archives, File no. Works 16/2004.

Conclusion

Blomley notes that rights to the city can be reframed by local bureaucrats, 'as collisions between forms of traffic'.⁸⁷ While this is true, the paper demonstrates that it is also the case that on occasions campaigners can in fact transform policy narratives about the rights of traffic and their codes back into a dispute about rights and entitlements to free speech in urban spaces. Duff, in this respect, usefully argues that we need to focus on how rights open up opportunities for people to 'do' things. 'This suggests that one should never ask what the right to the city is ... rather one should ask what it does. What particular set of affective and performative enactments does it enable?'⁸⁸ This paper similarly shows that free speech in urban space is mediated through specific socio-political entitlements, histories, narratives, material objects and representations, which enable people to 'do' free speech at Hyde Park. At the same time, the paper also grounds these processes in a strategical-relational theory of the state. Bureaucratic coding of traffic flows and movement in these specific London urban spaces were thus also filtered through the strategic spatial terrain of competing state apparatuses, departments, and civil society partners and actors.

Strategic opportunities thereby opened up for civil society groups at Hyde Park to develop and assert their own innovative and novel entitlements and customary rights for free speech.

This latter point is also noticeable in another way in relation to the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme. The LCC visualised its own postwar road-building programme as being part of its broader counter-hegemonic project to use local state resources to promote popular socialist policies to Londoners. Indeed, this was also the case before 1945. When the Labour Party took control of the LCC in 1934, there was a conscious effort by some of its leaders, such as Herbert Morrison, to use this opportunity to build a type of municipal socialism in the capital. Transport, in particular, became a key LCC strategy to pursue this project.⁸⁹ Such policies were carried forward after 1945 into a whole host of other areas. Architectural planning was a case in point where Labour Party control of the LCC was used to deliver socialist utopic buildings for Londoners. The Royal Festival Hall, built in 1951, was a notable experiment in constructing 'an egalitarian, spatially extravagant modernist public building' in the capital.⁹⁰

In the case of the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme, we also know, however, that LCC transport policies clashed with Hyde Park free speech campaigners. For many regulars at Speakers' Corner, the road scheme would encroach on and thereby pollute free speech. But for the LCC, such critical voices were being unduly

⁸⁷ Blomley, *Civil rights meet civil engineering*, 64.

⁸⁸ C. Duff *The affective right to the city*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42 (2017) 516–529; see also A. Latham and J. Layton, *Publics and their problems: notes on the remaking of the South Bank, London*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 43 (2019) 1148–1167.

⁸⁹ O. Hatherley, *Red Metropolis*, London, 2020, 62–8.

⁹⁰ Hatherley, *Red Metropolis*, 74.

pessimistic. According to Richard Edmonds, Chairman of the LCC Roads Committee, the £5,800,000 improvement scheme had been an outstanding success. Edmonds chastised some sections of the press – or ‘prophesies of doom’ as he called them – who had consistently raised doubts as to the practical usefulness of the road scheme in alleviating traffic problems. From a policy point of view, Edmonds was triumphant:

I think the ... Road Improvement has a special place in modern road building history. It is in many ways unique in character, and apart from providing a better road pattern in the heart of London, it is a metropolitan improvement in the grand tradition, massive in scale, with layout in keeping with the natural beauties of the scene, and in keeping also with the fact that between Marble Arch and Buckingham Palace is London’s historic processional way. The use of top-quality materials has I also submit set the pace for other schemes.⁹¹

Fast forward thirty years to the release of the 1992, *Review of the Royal Parks*, headed by Dame Jennifer Jenkins, and opinions about the road scheme were though decidedly bleaker. The *Review of the Royal Parks* had originally been established by the Conservative Government to consider whether the role and use of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens met the needs of society and the demands of the future. The starting point for members on the group was ‘the concept that the parks as places where people enjoy the open air ... and that any changes can be reconciled with traditional activities’, such as ‘nature conservation’.⁹² The report is detailed both in its survey of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens and in its final recommendations. But one particular damning observation stands out. Reviewing the spaces in and around Marble Arch and Speakers’ Corner, the authors insisted these areas were in desperate need of ‘a complete overhaul’. They continued:

The splendid arch stands in miserable isolation on a soulless traffic island. Speakers’ Corner presents a triangle of bleak, windswept, noisy asphalt deserted by the speakers for whom it was so carefully laid. They now squash into railed corridors where people can, if they find room, hear their passionate predictions and cures for society.⁹³

The authors also noted that increasing traffic noise from the surrounding roads only helped to reproduce this image of a forlorn landscape. In an important sense, then, the Speakers’ Corner campaigners were finally vindicated in their belief that the Park Lane Road Improvement Scheme would eventually ‘pollute’ free speech in Hyde Park.

Declaration of interests

I would like to thank the Leverhulme Trust for awarding me a Fellowship grant (RF-2020-387), which allowed me to carry out research for this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous referees for their comments. I also appreciate the support given by Janet Stewart to this project. I am very grateful to the Editor-in-Chief Stephen Legg for his excellent suggestions. I would like to thank the Leverhulme Trust for a Fellowship grant (RF-2020-387), which allowed me to carry out research for this article. The usual disclaimers apply.

⁹¹ LMA: LCC CL/HIG/02/112.

⁹² *Royal Parks Review*, 5 February, London: Department of Environment (1992), 6–8.

⁹³ *Royal Parks Review* (1992), 26.