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RECLAIMING OUR CITIES AND TOWNS: BETTER LIVING WITH LESS TRAFFIC

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Engwicht, David. RECLAIMING OUR CITIES AND TOWNS: BETTER LIVING WITH LESS TRAFFIC. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1993. 190 pp. US\$12.95 paper ISBN: 0-86571-283-2. Partially recycled paper using soy ink.

As did many people, David Engwicht once viewed new highway construction as a part of progress -- the price paid for living in an automobile-dependent society. However, when a main road running through his own suburb in Brisbane, Australia, became the site of a proposed upgrade in 1987, Engwicht soon changed his way of thinking. He found himself deeply involved in a community action group that not only successfully stopped the upgrade, but also began to look for solutions to the long-term problem of traffic in cities. This book is Engwicht's record of his evolving understanding as he traveled the world and contemplated the role of transport in modern society.

Engwicht begins by examining the reasons he believes cities exist -- to maximize opportunities for exchange by concentrating people, goods, and facilities within a limited area. Transport should enhance exchange opportunities, but Engwicht finds that it sometimes does the opposite. Consider what often happens as traffic volume increases. First, new roads are built, or existing roads expanded, to accommodate the heavier use. Next, more space is designated for parking and housing the growing number of cars. As more space is taken by cars, opportunities for exchange, whether in the form of the corner store, the local playground or park, or someone's backyard, are soon affected. Stores move to the suburbs, children are transported to sports facilities to play, and people restrict their socializing to a smaller area of their neighborhood. Finally, with the distance growing between exchange opportunities, public transport becomes less feasible and, as a result, many people, particularly the poor, the disabled, and the elderly, are denied access to these opportunities.

How can we change our auto-dependent behavior and correct the auto-induced injustices? Engwicht offers many suggestions, from conservative to radical. For example, city planners could be required to spend 10 to 25 percent of planning time with those their planning will affect. Employers could make the distance that a potential employee would commute to work by car a part of the selection criteria. Drivers could pay an equivalent public transport fee for each journey they make in a car. In writing this book, Engwicht seeks to challenge our current way of viewing transportation, and he certainly succeeds in doing so.

Appropriate for public and academic libraries.